

EMIGRATION AND THE GOALS OF LITHUANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to convey a few messages. First of all, it aims to present a short overview of the historical role of Lithuanian emigrants in the period of the re-establishment of Lithuania as an independent state in the international arena. The principal issue which so far has been insufficiently addressed by both historians and political scientists, and which should be the constant focus of Lithuanian foreign policy-makers, is the current situation of Lithuanian diaspora in Western countries, the emigrants' position in respect to their homeland and their eventual behaviour in the performance of the diplomacy mission at the community level. Taking into account the traditional examples identified by historians of the political behaviour of Lithuanians world-wide, and by analysing political trends in the USA, Great Britain and other countries – the destinations of Lithuanian immigrants - it is possible to paint a clearer picture of the expectations resulting from the relationship between diaspora and the interests of Lithuania's foreign policy.

PAST EXPERIENCES

Migration has become a characteristic feature of modern history. There are researchers tackling the problems of social history and comparative civilisations who consider the 20th century the century of emigrations and exile¹. Although emigration has been predetermined by a complex of economic, social and political factors, the effects of emigration and the formation of different national diasporas in major Western states have always been key factors impacting international relations and diplomacy processes.

In the 19th – 20th century, the processes of emigration, the resurrection of nations and the birth of national states in Central and Eastern Europe were closely interconnected and impacted one another. The French bourgeoisie revolution, the Napoleonic war campaign, uprisings in Poland and Lithuania, the Hungarian revolution, the Balkan wars, the establishment of Bulgarian and Romanian states – all these events were linked to the movement of political emigrants.

In the middle of the 19th century, the Big Emigration Wave from Poland and Lithuania, where anti-Russian uprisings were suppressed, moved to France. Throughout nearly the entire 19th century, Polish and Lithuanian immigrants were actively involved in French foreign policy, and vice versa in the fights for freedom in Poland and Lithuania emigrants provided decisive support and contributed to self-awareness in the international setting, acting as an important political tool in negotiations with eventual partners.

From the beginning of the 20th century, the number of immigrants from Central and Eastern Europe in the USA began to rise dramatically. During the First World War, diaspora participants put a lot of effort into the welfare of their nations' resurrection to a new political life. It can be maintained that at that time, movements of Lithuanians in the U.S. as well as the active involvement of their leaders were among the key factors leading towards Lithuania's liberation. Although the U.S. was slow in recognising independent Lithuania of the 16th of February, the diplomatic support of Lithuanian nationals in immigration was of great importance.

These developments from the past have a rather vast historical record. Studies by Alfred Erich Senn, Eberhard Demm, Alfonsas Eidintas, Raimundas Lopata and others have outlined key links between the birth of the modern Lithuanian State and the actions of emigrants. The scope and the tasks of this article do not allow a detailed study into the whole complex of historical records, therefore, it would be good to mention just a few of the most recent works which provide a

¹ V.Kavolis. *A Vague Man and Historical Ambiguity*. Metmenys, 1966, No.12, P.85

generalised picture of international policy and diplomacy at the beginning of the 20th century, and the key role of Lithuanian immigrants in these processes. The book *The Immigrant as Diplomat*² by an American historian Gary Hartman is of primary importance. It uses a coherent approach in disclosing the importance of emigration in the history of Lithuania as well as in the period of Lithuania's recognition as a young independent state. The author makes the point in revealing characteristics relevant to the actions of the Lithuanian diaspora as a result of the assumed national mission.

Attention should be drawn to yet another book³, whose author – a historian Juozas Skirius, takes a different approach to the problem in focus. Instead of analysing the identity of the emigrants and tracing their input in shaping the destiny of their homeland, he goes deep into the issues of U.S. policy towards the Baltic region.

The emigration factor involved in Lithuania's liberation processes includes scarce but politically active groups of Lithuanian emigrants in Western Europe. During the turbulence of the First World War, Switzerland was the best shelter and diplomatic base for the activists from Lithuania and other states. With respect to historical studies of the Lithuanian political movement in Switzerland, it is worth mentioning a book published a few years ago by diplomat Alfonsas Eidintas about Juozas Gabrys-Paršaitis – the most active figure in that political environment⁴. With these publications in mind, there can be no doubt that the foreign policy of the Republic of Lithuania was not only closely linked to emigration abroad, but in most cases was a continuation of work that had commenced prior to the re-establishment of the state.

It must be also noted that during the First World War participants in the Lithuanian national movement in Switzerland and France did not link their work to the expectations of the diaspora; nor did they take care of the future survival of the exiled community. Instead they considered themselves to be the direct re-establishers of the Lithuanian state, who because of the international circumstances had to carry out their mission in places where the destiny of post-war Europe was being shaped. E. Demm provides a clear illustration of such work in the biography of the mentioned J. Gabrys-Paršaitis. The author calls this active leader of the Lithuanian national movement a pioneer of protodiplomacy, who was a frequent visitor in the chambers of Western states where serious decisions of international policy were made⁵.

Really, the 20th century challenged Lithuania with numerous trials through occupations, wars, repression and resistance movements. This dramatic historical period was entirely marked by the active presence of emigration and Lithuanian diaspora world-wide. Without them we would not be able to comprehend the processes leading to the current situation.

EMIGRATION: WITH AND WITHOUT THE STATE

While trying to identify the mission of Lithuanian diaspora in the arena of international relations of the mid 20th century we are confronted with a very important factor. In the period of battles for independence and defence against foreign dangers, a country's approach towards emigrants was of one kind. When an independent state started targeting its own foreign policy goals, different challenges and expectations were associated with the emigrants abroad.

In the 20th century, the political leaders of the 1920's and 30's were very well aware of the importance of the role of the emigrant, and not only in the fulfilment of political goals or fighting Poland in the conflict over the Vilnius region. The national political agenda of that time consciously emphasised the issue of regulating (if not supporting) emigration from Lithuania. The conception by Prof. Kazys Pakštas advocating the significant role of Lithuanian colonies was

² Gary Hartman. *The Immigrant as Diplomat: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Shaping of Lithuanian-American Community, 1870-1922*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Centre, 2002.

³ Juozas Skirius. *U.S. Government Policy Towards Lithuania, 1920-1922: Recognition of Lithuanian Independence*. Chicago: Lithuanian Research and Studies Centre, 2000.

⁴ Alfonsas Eidintas. *The Secret Lithuanian Diplomat*. Vilnius: State Publishing Centre, 1991; also see an elaborate study by the same author *Lithuanian Columbuses: Historical Study of Lithuanian Emigration*: Vilnius, Mintis, 1993.

⁵ Eberhard Demm. *Nationalistische Propaganda und Protodiplomatie als Ethnisches Geschäft: Juozas Gabrys, Die „Union des Nationalites“ und die Befreiung Litauens (1911-1919)*. Litauisches Kulturinstitut, 2001.

earning increasing popularity. Sometimes the emigration of impoverished Lithuanians to South America was clearly seen as a strategic hint at reducing social pressures.

Lithuanian authorities encouraged their countrymen in the USA to give their assets back to the homeland, but this odyssey either resulted in numerous bankruptcies in independent Lithuania or nationalisation of the assets after the Soviet invasion. Another very important factor affected the relationship of Lithuanian foreign policy and American Lithuanians – the majority of Lithuanians in America were manual workers. Principles of socialism and communism gradually superseded national sentiments. The nationalistic ideas fostered by the autocratic Smetona regime formed a negative attitude among the leftist Lithuanians in the U.S., and communistic Lithuanians could hardly have been advocates of Lithuanian foreign policy in their relations with the U.S. Administration. On the other hand, historical records have not clearly formulated uniform opinion on this issue.

After independence was lost in 1940 the political importance of emigrants once again increased. President Antanas Smetona while abroad, and later during his short stay in the U.S., attempted to formulate goals for the future which vitably involved international relations. The outcome of the Second World War, however, did not provide Lithuania with the opportunity to exploit the benefits of victory over the fascist coalition. It would be better said that Lithuania was left hostage to the Soviets by the winners of this global conflict.

Long decades under Soviet occupation in particular distinguished the importance of Lithuanian diplomacy in the West. First of all, it had a symbolic mission of continuing the existence of the occupied state. Stasys Lozoraitis, a standing chief of the diplomatic corps, maintained that Soviet occupation was the only factor evidencing the situation of the Lithuanian state to the world. Such an opinion meant that in the case that certain motivations made the Soviets withdraw from Lithuania the majority of the Western states would automatically recognise our sovereignty. Historians have prepared substantial works tackling the period of Lithuanian diplomacy after the Second World War. The recent study by Laurynas Janušauskas⁶ focusing on the Lithuanian diplomatic corps in exile reveals the factors that predetermined not only the symbolic diplomatic representativeness of occupied Lithuania but also the context in which foreign policy guidelines of the re-established Lithuania were brought forward. Although the diplomatic corps of that day wasted a lot of time in tackling everyday material shortages and vying for competencies with the Chief Committee for the Liberation of Lithuania (VLIK), at the same time it made a considerable contribution to the common future visions fostered by political emigrants from the Central and Eastern European States under occupation or communist regime.

The conflict over Vilnius and the future relationship with Poland were certainly among the most serious problems of the inter-war Lithuania. It can be maintained that over several decades the prospect of Polish and Lithuanian political dialogue was being fostered among emigrants⁷. A significant input to the elaboration and harmonisation of the conceptual future foreign policy between the two nations was made by Stasys Lozoraitis Sr, as well as his son and successor Stasys Lozoraitis Jr. They succeeded in finding appropriate dialogue partners on the Polish side. A breakthrough in the vision of Poland's future Eastern policy was achieved thanks to the immense efforts of Polish political emigrants united through the magazine *Kultura* - published in Paris - and its editor Jerzy Giedrojc. It can be said that the ability of the political structures in re-established independent Lithuania and those of post-communist Poland to deal away with historical barriers, originally stemmed from emigration and came as a surprise to political observers and experts on international relations.

Liberation from Soviet oppression and the first steps of the independent state on the international scene were reinforced not only through symbols preserved by the diplomatic corps of the first Republic of Lithuania, but also through the wide support of Lithuanians around the world. Up to this day neither historians nor political scientists have properly estimated the contribution of the Lithuanian community abroad to the country's fight for freedom. On the other

⁶ L. Janušauskas. *Led by Fate: Work of Lithuanian Diplomatic Corps in Exile, 1940-1991*. Vilnius: Genocide and Resistance Research Centre of Lithuania, 2003.

⁷ For details see: Egidijus Aleksandravičius. *Realities and Marginalities of Political Facts (Issue of Poland among the Lithuanian Emigrants)* *Darbai ir Dienos*, No.30, 147-166.

hand, the restored future vision of the Lithuanian state, foreign policy guidelines, and membership in NATO, perceived as natural processes by most Lithuanians, is the merit of Lithuanian emigrants, in particular the Lithuanian community in the U.S., through their actions and relationship with their native land. The emigration factor promoted pro-American sentiments, and the U.S. was seen as a close neighbour by Lithuanian nationals.

CHALLENGES OF LITHUANIAN FOREIGN POLICY: THE OLD AND NEW EMIGRANTS

The current lifestyle, disparities of globalisation and the emigration from Lithuania which has been on a rapid increase over the several years of economic developments are of vital importance and as such influence the targets of Lithuanian foreign policy. On the other hand, certain phenomena of the migration processes and characteristics of the newly established Lithuanian emigrants distinguish subtle parallels between domestic and foreign policy goals.

Today's concerns about the changing relationship between the new Lithuanian emigrants and their homeland are quite reasonable. These concerns, however, are associated mainly with domestic policy and the prospect of economic and social processes. We can, of course, support the opinion that all of this has no effect on foreign policy and that Lithuania's key strategic interests in the international arena should not depend upon such secondary circumstances as the great number of Lithuanian colonies in the USA, Great Britain or Spain. However, is it possible that when the economic integration of Lithuania is Western-oriented, that the priorities of Lithuania's foreign policy be directed to the East? Apparently, such a situation is hardly plausible.

The role of Lithuanian emigrants in the development of the country's foreign policy has been predetermined by several factors. First of all, the most efficiently organised and operating Lithuanian diaspora is situated in the U.S., a state with strong influence in the arena of current international relations. In the period of liberation from the Soviet regime, the same as during the strengthening of Lithuania's positions on the political scene, Lithuanians in the U.S. have been and continue to be representatives of popular diplomacy or simply lobby groups. Lithuanian sentiments promoted throughout America make Lithuania more noticeable, natural, close and attractive. This time-tested mission, like the very community of American Lithuanians, should follow the same path. Lithuania's inability to exploit this situation would be a great failure and a fatal foreign policy mistake.

Today certain expectations should be associated with Lithuanians in Great Britain, the number of which in recent years has become quite impressive contrary to their poorly-expressed sentiments for the motherland, perhaps with the exception of basketball. The core of British Lithuanians comprises new economic immigrants, the majority of which will remain illegal workers likely to escape open cultural and organisational contacts until Lithuania becomes a member of the European Union. The economic potential of this diaspora segment is very low, therefore a more significant effect in the policy of their new place of residence has little credibility.

Old Lithuanian emigrants with rich experience in public works, well-organised and maintaining regular institutionalised relations with the Lithuanian Seimas and national administration are rationally predictable. In the meantime, new Lithuanian emigrants, although much more numerous than post-war political emigrants, are still in the process of developing the principles of community co-existence and national relations with the homeland. These processes entail an important factor which should impose an obligation on Lithuania's foreign policy-makers, relating to the changing legal situation in the immigration countries. The harmonisation of dual citizenship, information on newly-established emigrants, their involvement in discussions about Lithuania-related affairs and improvement of voting availability can not progress without the approval of the Foreign Affairs Office.

Attention must be drawn to the current programme by U.S. President G. Bush for giving illegal employees amnesty. Once implemented this U.S. Administration policy will open new legalisation opportunities in the country where the majority of new Lithuanian emigrants

established themselves a decade ago. It allows the assumption that once the newly-established post-Soviet emigrants are out in the open they may partly restore the lost national self-esteem, drop the habit of concealing their cultural identity and establish more open and frequent contacts with Lithuania. Similar processes could be expected in Western Europe, where the majority of Lithuanian nationals, far from their homeland, will gradually have to undergo legalisation procedures.

THE DESTINY OF DIASPORA IS A CONCERN OF LITHUANIA'S POLICY

Besides the obvious fact that emigration issues are linked to foreign policy priorities, and foreign policy consequently affects the socio-economic prospects of the state, a few more issues should be mentioned. Anxiety over the future of Lithuanian diaspora expressed by the political structures of our state also stems from economic and political interests.

Lithuania's economic interests with respect to emigrants can be illustrated case in point by the Irish. Experts who have analysed Ireland's economic breakthrough have noticed that the success of the Irish in attracting global capital of Irish origin has been the key reason behind this phenomenon. Records reveal 35,000 Irish nationals who have moved or transferred their businesses to the Promised Land. The Lithuanian Government have made a few steps in this direction but these political attempts were far from becoming strategic priorities. In most cases the emigrants are underestimated and promotion of the investment environment by means of national sentiments to this point has been very inefficient. Involvement of the emigrants in the social and economic progress of the state has potential for increase, first due to membership in NATO. However, the leaders of Lithuania's foreign policy have to exploit the available resources to encourage their return to the motherland, at least through a virtual relationship.

Today it is still too early to compare the economic capacities of the new emigrants from the post-Soviet period with those of the old layers of diaspora. But due to irregular and frequently seasonal migration, very close relations with relatives and a certain habit of moving funds earned abroad back to Lithuania, considerable financial injections into the current Lithuanian economy are already noticeable. It is a well-known fact that in inter-war Lithuania, the amount of money sent by emigrants to their homeland accounted for almost one-tenth of the national budget of that time⁸. Contrary to the situation in the 1920's, today even the most general economic forecasts of the approximate amounts incoming from emigrants are not available, although these sources are certainly contributing to the economic phenomenon of the "Baltic tiger".

What changes is the Lithuanian administration likely to confront in this field? What aspects should be monitored? Policy experts claim that the decision by U.S. President Bush regarding the amnesty of illegal workforce is by no means an expression of affection for immigrants. On one hand, terrorism fears lead to the increased control of migration flows. On the other hand, there are many legitimate voters among the twenty million Mexicans residing in the U.S. Support from immigrants is a top task of the Bush team.

Tens of millions of people work unlawfully in the U.S. of which at least 100,000 are Lithuanians. The prospect for legalisation seems very tempting for tens of thousands of Lithuanians employed in the care of the elderly, in repair work or in restaurants. At last they will no longer be afraid of repression or deportation, and of course will have to pay taxes to the American treasury authorities. The remaining dollars will be allowed to be taken back to the homeland without any restrictions, and national authorities will have to adhere to the double-taxation treaty. What comes next? One assumption: migration back and forth will increase as there will be no apprehension that upon coming home, having violated visa regimen requirements, a migrant will be prevented from a subsequent departure overseas in search for work. Another assumption: a more balanced relationship between the newly established American Lithuanians and their homeland will be secured.

⁸ Linas Saldukas. *Lithuanian Diaspora*. Vilnius: Vaga publ., 2002, p.35; Alfonsas Eidintas. *Lithuanian Columbuses*, p.66.

This consequently leads to consideration of the very important political circumstances that affect emigrant concerns about the destiny of their native land, as well as the prospects of Lithuania's foreign policy and the Lithuanian state as such. Lithuanian nationals who are living and working abroad certainly can not be excluded from the discussions on furthering liberal democracy and promoting Western orientation in our state.

If radical anti-Western forces fail to destroy Lithuania's European integration, and if the prospects for legitimate work in Western Europe increase, it is quite conceivable that as early as this summer many Lithuanians formerly illegally employed in Great Britain will visit Lithuania. Earlier they frequently dismissed the idea of coming home because of fears of being refused entrance by British immigration services upon return. Unrestricted movement in Europe will also allow our citizens to escape the overly scrupulous formalities of our border officials. The question of how much money a pizza cook from London takes with him across the Western border of Lithuania will gradually become irrelevant. The traffic over this border will certainly become heavier, whereas displeasing procedures and large or small bribes will disappear over time.

There is of course a strong probability of Lithuanians streaming to the West in search of the easy money of their dreams, nevertheless, it can also be expected that such money making will entail its own weaknesses. However, citizens of Lithuania working worldwide either virtually or factually will increasingly become a common practise.

Let's consider the common points of migration and Lithuania's political life and whether foreign policy strategic leaders can completely ignore them. In my mind, there is a direct link. The decreasing number of voters and the changing social and intellectual patterns of the electorate have primarily originated from the outflow of several hundred thousand voters from Lithuania. More mobile, earnest, braver, and sometimes more clever Lithuanian nationals distance themselves from voting booths and leave a contrasting situation in the native land, with society splitting into two opposing groups, one of which embodies educated, well-off persons of upper social levels who have earned a better life through their intellectual abilities and hard work. The other group comprises individuals of lower social standing, tired of changes and failures, angered, disappointed and keen on social revenge rather than further progress.

I assume that emigration mostly undermines the formation of a Western-oriented middle social class. In the years ahead, if ever, emigrants are not likely to leave for Russia in search of work. Therefore, the electorate in emigration can be expected to be a very important social support promoting liberal democracy in the homeland. Thus, Lithuania's governmental authorities face the very important task of ensuring voting booths for Lithuanians in Western states, starting with the USA and Great Britain. Lithuania can enjoy the immense benefits of emigration provided it does not focus on the numerous growing demands of customs officials.

If Lithuanian politics is able to properly balance international and domestic affairs, we can be sure of the increasing importance of the emigrant factor in foreign policy. Globalisation is spreading so fast that we can have no doubts about the mobility of the workforce (and the electorate as well). Lithuania's foreign policy and modern international relations in general face serious challenges stemming from this mobility as the essential feature of the new life style. Timely reaction and proper preparations for the future play the key role in this process.