

RATIFICATION OF THE NATO TREATY IN THE U.S. SENATE: LESSONS LEARNED

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In the spring of 2004, Lithuania, along with the other six Vilnius Group countries, have become full-fledged members of NATO and the European Union. These two equally important foreign policy achievements mark the recognised progress that the country has made in terms of its economic and democratic development. Without a doubt membership in both organisations also comes as a result of the decade-long process of developing and realising Lithuania's bilateral relations with member countries of the Euro-Atlantic community. Not minimising in any way the importance of such cooperative relations with many European NATO and EU members, this article will focus on the role of the United States, more specifically of the U.S. Congress, in the process of Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic integration.

The U.S. influence and political as well as military weight in the decision-making of the North Atlantic Alliance has always been and remains very significant. This has been equally true with regard to NATO enlargement. The U.S. has played a leading role both in terms of its engagement with other allies and non-members on the issue as well as in terms of its practical support for the NATO candidate countries. Those who closely followed the evolving discussions that were taking place in NATO-member capitals over the last two rounds of NATO enlargement clearly observed that internal public debate in the U.S. was much more visible and vocal than that conducted in the other NATO countries. Moreover, unlike in many European allied countries where decision-making on NATO enlargement was predominantly driven and influenced by the executive branch of government, the debates in the U.S. involved a much broader range of players. These included a wide number of non-governmental think-tank organizations, but most importantly the U.S. Congress, which played a very significant role in the process.

This article attempts to provide an insight into the specific role played by the U.S. Congress in the process of the U.S. policy formulation vis-a-vis Lithuania's successful road to ultimate membership in NATO. What are the main observations and lessons to be learned from the process that led to the historic May 8, 2003 vote of the U.S. Senate by a margin of 96 – 0 to ratify the Protocols to the North Atlantic Treaty of 1949 on the accession of Lithuania and six other European democracies?

THE ROAD TO NATO MEMBERSHIP: REACHING OUT TO THE HILL

For the last several years, reaching out to the U.S. Congress has been one of the pillars of Lithuania's NATO accession diplomacy in the United States. Understandably so, since any favorable position on NATO enlargement that was being promoted by the Administration and supported by informed non-governmental audiences would require, at the end of the day, a two-thirds majority vote of the U.S. Senate.

It was evident that a designed strategy was needed to help achieve the desired result, namely the strongest possible support for Lithuania's case in the Senate. Such a strategy evolved over time. The most valuable experience for Lithuanian diplomacy was the Polish campaign that resulted in a strong vote of support in the Senate for the accession of Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary. The latter campaign showed the importance of the role that was played by the Polish-American Community and later the so-called NATO task force uniting representatives of ethnic communities from the Central and Eastern European Coalition.

THE ROLE OF BALTIC-AMERICANS

It was already more than evident in the mid-1990's that the Lithuanian-American Community, working closely with other ethnic diasporas of Eastern and Central Europe, was going to be at the center of Lithuania's efforts in working both with the U.S. Administration and obviously with Congress. Indeed the Baltic-American communities contributed to the shared effort of the three Baltic States in many important ways. As voters - Democrat, Republican or Independent - they made known their positions to their elected representatives in the U.S. Congress in Washington D.C. But even more importantly, they spared no effort in creating wider support by informing the local public through interaction with local media and organisations that had an interest in foreign affairs. Some of the most important activities at the State level included seeking passage of NATO resolutions by State legislatures, organizing fund raisers for members of Congress and holding seminars at colleges or universities on the topic of NATO enlargement. All these activities greatly helped to raise awareness of Lithuania and the other Baltic State's foreign policy objectives and their rightful wish to join the Euro-Atlantic community. Every single letter by individual members of the Baltic-American communities sent to their representatives made an impact.

As a result of this active contribution by ethnic communities, the case of Lithuania and the other Baltic States was much better understood, which in turn helped Baltic friends on the Hill to establish so-called Baltic Caucuses. Congressmen John Shimkus from Illinois and Dennis Kucinich from Ohio opted to co-chair such a group in the House of Representatives. Similarly, in the Senate the Baltic Caucus was formed and co-chaired by Senators Richard Durbin from Illinois and Gordon Smith from Oregon. In many respects, the two Caucuses helped the Baltic States to present their NATO case on the Hill.

CONGRESSIONAL VISITS

A second pillar of the strategy of reaching out to the Hill was finding the ways and means to get congressional members to travel to Lithuania and the other Baltic States. Obviously, first-hand experience always helps a great deal in understanding the real needs of a country as well as its policy posture, and helps evaluate achievements and identify the challenges faced ahead.

I very well remember the numerous bilateral meetings between Lithuanian officials and members of Congress when to a very common question asked by a congressman or a senator: "What can I do for you, Mr. Minister", we would respond with: "Come and visit Lithuania". Given the extremely busy congressional schedule, it was not an easy task to get members of Congress to go overseas, despite their genuine interest and wish to do so. In such circumstances, we realized the importance of congressional staff. Their role and influence as well as professionalism clearly indicated to us a truly effective way of communication with Congress. The first group of staffers representing the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services committees as well as the Speaker of the House of Representatives office visited Lithuania in August of 1998. The visiting delegation met with the President of Lithuania, the Chairman of Parliament, members of Parliamentary Foreign Relations and National Security Committees and Foreign and Defense Ministry officials. But most importantly, the staffers also had a chance to travel across Lithuania and make first-hand judgments of the process of democratic development in the country. Looking back from today's perspective, the visit opened an important new chapter in the Lithuanian-U.S. congressional agenda. It helped communicate the message to the right people, who passed it further on to the most important decision-makers in the U.S. Congress.

Other visits quickly followed. In the fall of the same year a delegation of eight Senators headed by the late Senator William Roth of Delaware visited Lithuania. In the period from 1999 through 2003 Lithuania hosted more than 60 members of Congress travelling with various CODEL's (Congressional delegations) either on a bilateral basis, or in the context of NATO Parliamentary Assembly visits to Europe.

Lithuania also entered into a very productive relationship with the Potomac Foundation – a non-governmental organization which helped organize four congressional staff trips to the Baltic States. All these visits were most instrumental in helping present Lithuania's progress in both economic and defense reforms as well as in getting highly appreciated feedback from the U.S.

side. Moreover, these visits provided the best opportunity to establish professional parliamentary member-to-member and staff-to-staff working relations between the two countries.

Such an emerging active parliamentary cooperation prompted Vilnius to appoint a senior diplomat to the position of Congressional Liaison at the Embassy in Washington, D.C. His function was largely to ensure that contacts between the Embassy and congressional staff were maintained on a daily basis. Having a person in charge of the relations with the Hill was also appreciated by people in Congress, for having a “one stop shop” contact on matters related to Lithuania. His function also included close coordination with congressional liaison officers of the other NATO-candidate countries, though not all of them appointed one.

In summary, the second important element of the so-called “Hill strategy” was the continuous networking with important congressional staffers, which in turn helped to attract the attention of congressmen and senators to Lithuania. As a result, their support for membership of the Baltic States in NATO was steadily growing. The Vilnius Group was a third critical factor that helped attain support on the Hill for NATO enlargement.

THE VILNIUS GROUP: ADVANTAGES OF JOINT ACTION

After Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined NATO in 1999, the United States and other member states of the Alliance began to consider the next round of enlargement. At the time the conventional wisdom was to invite one or possibly two states to join NATO, despite the interest expressed by nine Central European states. On May 19, 2000, however, a major conference was convened in Vilnius by nine East and Central European aspirants to NATO. Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Albania, Macedonia, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria announced that they would work together cooperatively to gain membership in NATO. This cooperation soon became known as the Vilnius Process, which later became the Vilnius Ten Group after being joined by Croatia.

These ten countries entered an unprecedented process of cooperation, which produced numerous joint statements and helped convene to date fourteen meetings on the level of presidents, prime ministers, speakers of parliament and foreign or defence ministers. Nowhere was this cooperation as active and structured as in Washington, D.C. In many instances the Embassy of Lithuania played a leading role in organizing almost monthly consultations among Vilnius Group ambassadors aimed at working out a structured plan of cooperation.

One of the unprecedented events took place on May 1, 2002, when all ten Vilnius Group ambassadors testified at a hearing before the House International Relations Sub-Committee on Europe. This hearing represented the most visible opportunity for Lithuania and other candidate countries to present their case in the U.S. Congress. Even though the House of Representatives did not have a formal role in the ratification process (ratification of international treaties is the prerogative of the Senate), it was always crucial to keep congressmen informed and involved in the debate because of their important role in forming a broader public opinion throughout the States.

It is important to note the immense support by the Committee on NATO – a bipartisan group of NGO representatives, which counselled the embassies throughout the process. Indeed, the Committee on NATO was the first to outline the architecture for the second round of NATO enlargement that included the seven candidate states that were most ready for membership, thus creating the logic and mechanism for what became the American policy of pursuing a Europe, whole and free. At the end of the day, the so called “Big Bang” approach to NATO enlargement became official U.S. policy, and was adopted by NATO at the Prague Summit in November 2002 at which Lithuania and the other six Central European states were issued an invitation to join the Alliance.

After the Prague Summit, the focus of the Vilnius Group fully diverted to the U.S. Senate in view of the upcoming ratification process that would have to amend the Washington treaty with the inclusion of Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. On January 8, 2003 the Embassy of Lithuania drafted the so-called „Senate Ratification Strategy and Action Plan”, which was presented by Ambassador

Vygaudas Ušackas to his colleagues from the other six invited countries. The strategy suggested that the seven should continue active work with the strong NATO enlargement proponents in the Senate and House of Representatives, especially with those members of Congress that had been selected to be in control of the floor during the ratification debate. Another important task was to help gather support for ratification from newly elected senators as well as those members of the Senate that were undecided or for various reasons opposed to the Vilnius Group membership in NATO.

The ambassadors also agreed upon certain important aspects of cooperation, namely to coordinate all of the activities as much as possible to avoid duplication of the congressional meetings in Washington. There was a common sense agreement and encouragement among the Senate staff and Administration that visits by high-ranking government officials should occur in groups and not individually. If visits still took place individually (which was unavoidable and not to be discouraged), all agreed to coordinate that they did not occur in the same week, let alone the same day. On the other hand, the ambassadors agreed to share the information of and to coordinate their appointments with senators in D.C., as well as sharing their travel plans to states. It was desirable to strive for group calls (with three, four or seven present, as appropriate) when meeting senators. It was also quite helpful to include cities outside of Washington and New York for these visits. Senators respond to their constituents and they appreciate bringing foreign leaders to their states. The states to be targeted included those represented by members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the leaders of the Senate Armed Services Committee and the Senate leadership. A prerequisite for the successful implementation of such a strategy was, of course, trying to be as flexible as possible, which the group indeed managed to be. In implementing the above strategy, the coordinated meetings of the Vilnius Group were intensified and also included officials from the U.S. State Department.

All in all, the jointly coordinated action by the Vilnius Group turned out to be a manageable exercise. But most importantly, working together, sharing information, talking to each other and jointly approaching members of the U.S. Congress had a much greater impact than by each country doing it on its own.

ENLARGEMENT DEBATE: ISSUES AND POSITIONS

One would be not mistaken if observing that the nature of the debate over the second NATO enlargement was different compared to the one when Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary joined the Alliance. It was much less polarised in terms of views, and therefore carried a rather positive tone. Some of the heavily-debated issues in 1996-1999, such as the financial cost of accession, NATO-Russia relations, or fear of creating a new division in Europe, turned out to be non-issues in 2000-2003. Furthermore, the whole international security environment in the aftermath of the September 11 events provided completely different points of departure for the debate on new NATO members.

The U.S. position on NATO enlargement

NATO enlargement has always been a bipartisan issue in the United States. Both the 1994 Republican “Contract with America” as well as the Clinton Administration supported NATO enlargement. On the campaign trail in 2000, both Presidential candidates supported further NATO enlargement in 2002. All the official statements were in favor of new countries joining the Alliance.

The most vocal statement, however, first specifically supporting the Baltic States’ membership in NATO came from Senator Jesse Helms. In his speech at the American Enterprise Institute on January 11, 2001, he said:

“...Just as we never recognised the Soviet annexation of the Baltic States, we must not repeat the mistakes of the 1940’s today by acknowledging a Russian sphere of influence in what Russian leaders ominously call the “near abroad”. These nations’ independence will never be fully secure

until they are safe from the threat of Russian domination and are fully integrated into the community of Western democracies.

I intend to work with the Bush Administration to ensure that the Baltic States are invited to join their neighbors Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic as members of the NATO Alliance. This is vital not only for their security, but for ours as well. [...] That means taking the next step in the process of NATO expansion, by issuing invitations to the Baltic nations when NATO's leaders meet for the next Alliance summit planned for 2002".

Similarly, in the hearings before the House International Relations Committee on March 7, 2001, Secretary Colin Powell testified that:

"[...] NATO is still alive and well, and that's why nine more countries are standing there waiting to see if they can join this great Alliance. Why do they want to join? Is it to become a partner with their other European friends? Yes. But the real reason? They want to join so that they can have that connection with the bastion of freedom, and that's here in North America, represented by the United States and Canada. That's why they want to be part of NATO, and that's why we have to keep letting this Alliance grow.

[...] three of those countries in particular, there is a unique set of sensitivities – the Baltic States and our relationship with Russia. But Russia will never be given a veto as to whether or not they come in or not come in."

While in Lithuania on March 23, 2001, the Speaker of the House, Dennis Hastert, when addressing Lithuania's Parliament said:

"[...] I pledge to you that if Lithuania invests the resources necessary to meet the requirements of NATO membership, I will do all in my power to bring Lithuania into the Alliance in 2002.

I intend to work side-by-side with President Bush, Vice President Cheney and Secretaries Powell and Rumsfeld to make this a reality..."

On April 5, 2001, seventeen U.S. Senators wrote a letter to President Bush urging his Administration to "ensure" that NATO invites qualified European democracies to begin accession negotiations at the 2002 Summit in Prague. Resolutions were introduced in both the House (Shimkus Resolution HCR 116) and Senate (Campbell Resolution SCR 34) singling out the three Baltic countries, praising their substantial progress and in the House supporting their accession to NATO.

The strongest signal that the United States was about to make a positive decision to enlarge NATO was sent by President Bush on June 15, 2001 in Warsaw, Poland. At that time he said to the world:

"It is time to put the talk of East and West behind us". "The partition of Europe was not a fact of geography, it was an act of violence. Wise leaders for decades have found that the hope of European peace is in the hope of greater unity."

He went on to say:

"NATO, even as it grows, is no enemy to Russia. America is no enemy to Russia." "We will not trade away the free European peoples. No more Munichs, no more Yaltas."

On October 24, 2001, Senator Jesse Helms introduced the Freedom Consolidation Act (S.1572), which reaffirmed support for continued enlargement of NATO. It also authorized specified amounts of security assistance for Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. The bill was passed on May 17, 2002 by a vote of 85-6. President Bush signed the bill into Public Law 107-187 on June 10, 2002.

In August 2002, a report by the Republican staff of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee recommended that seven European democracies be invited to join NATO at the Prague summit if they continue to carry out political, economic and military reforms. The report stressed the importance of the Membership Action Plan (MAP) during the ratification process in preventing backsliding on reforms among the invitees, and that the MAP process would also help to implement policies announced in Prague to fight the threats of terrorism and weapons of mass

destruction. NATO members preliminarily endorsed the expansion of the Alliance at a November 2002 summit in Prague, setting in motion a process to expand NATO for the fifth time since 1949.

Indeed, as was recognized by Senator Richard Lugar, Chairman of the Senate Foreign relations Committee, the Bush Administration and the Senate had been in constant dialog on NATO enlargement policy for two years. This consultation was admitted to be a model of how the two branches should cooperate in exercising their treaty-making power.

Non-Issues

The Cost of NATO enlargement was an important, and at times contentious, issue when the Alliance was considering the membership of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. In the debate leading up to the 1999 Senate vote ratifying enlargement, cost estimates for the United States and for the new member states varied wildly. Unsurprisingly, those opposed to enlargement reckoned the costs much higher than those who supported it. Estimates ranged from \$27 billion to \$110 billion in total. In fact, the cost of bringing in the three countries appeared to have been relatively modest. After their admission to NATO, Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic began making payments into NATO's three common budgets and the prorated contributions of the other member states fell accordingly.

The budget issue almost disappeared from the discussions of the current round of enlargement. The seven countries under consideration for membership presented a different set of issues militarily. Rather than dollars and cents, policymakers focused this time around on military capabilities, with emphasis being placed not on how long it would take for new members to become interoperable with current NATO members, but rather on what their militaries would be able to offer. Hence the seven countries were advised and began to concentrate on developing "niche" capabilities that NATO could draw on to fulfill its new missions. There was also a growing recognition of the value of having countries pool their resources to develop so called "big-ticket" procurement items such as strategic airlift.

On April 28, 2003, a report by the Congressional Budget Office (CBO) estimated that integrating seven countries into NATO would cost the 19 current NATO members about \$2.7 billion over the 2004-2013 period; the U.S. share of that amount would be about \$650 million and would be subject to appropriation action. In addition, the seven prospective members could incur significant costs to upgrade and modernise their militaries. The United States might help those countries in that process through the use of foreign military financing (FMF) and other assistance. However, according to the CBO report, such assistance would be discretionary and probably not significantly larger than current levels of aid to those countries.

U.S.-Russia relations were one of the issues debated by the opponents of NATO enlargement in 1997-1999. One vociferous critic was Michael Mandelbaum, who argued that "NATO expansion is the Titanic of American policy, and the iceberg on which it will founder is Baltic membership". Likewise George F. Kennan, the famous architect of U.S. containment policy towards the Soviet Union, and one would have thought an unlikely source for such sentiments, condemned NATO enlargement as "the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-Cold War era." Indeed, while there was a tendency among opponents during the last round of enlargement to lay every problem in the U.S.-Russia relationship, and every example of Russian misbehavior at the doorstep of NATO enlargement, there have been few such examples during this round of enlargement.

In comparison to the Russian government's caustic rhetoric during the last round of NATO enlargement, Moscow's message has softened. There are a number of factors that have contributed to this softened position.

Firstly, in the three years that Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic have been NATO members, there have been no aggressive moves toward Russia, and Russia has seen that enlargement to Europe's east is not directed against Moscow's interests. Secondly, the applicant countries have adopted responsible and cooperative policies towards Russia aiming at good neighbourly relations based on pragmatic bilateral agendas. Lithuania, among other cooperative

initiatives involving Russia in regional frameworks such as the Council of the Baltic Sea, in 1999 proposed to the Russian Government a package of bilateral Confidence Building Measures that enhanced military-to-military cooperation and lowered the ceilings of the Vienna CSBM's to be applied between the two countries. It is worth noting that during the visit of President Adamkus to Moscow in March 2001, President Putin agreed to make a joint statement that said:

“... The Parties recognize the right of each and every state to choose its security arrangements, committing at the same time not to strengthen their security at the expense of the security of other states.”

Later that same year during his visit to the United States, President Putin said the following on National Public Radio:

“[...] I am not opposed to it [Baltic States' NATO membership], [...] We of course are not in a position to tell people what to do. We cannot forbid people to make certain choices if they want to increase the security of their nations in a particular way [...].”

Thirdly, it is possible that President Putin now views a unified front against terrorism, in part due to Moscow's ongoing conflict in Chechnya, as more important than potential divisions with the West over enlargement.

Fourthly, and I think most crucially, the U.S. other NATO member states, as well as candidate countries have been able to consistently convey a common message, which at the end of the day is appreciated by Russia. The message being that NATO enlargement and the development of a cooperative NATO-Russia relationship are not mutually exclusive, but they are complementary and reinforcing; the enlargement of NATO, a defensive alliance comprised of democratic nations, does not threaten any country in Europe; all of Europe benefits from the existence of NATO, including Russia. The latter message was supported by an important practical arrangement. In December 2001, NATO and Russian Foreign Ministers announced their intention to create a NATO-Russia Council, on the principle of “NATO at 20”. In May 2002, NATO and Russian leaders meeting in Rome signed the “NATO at 20” agreement, in which Russia and NATO members participate as equals on certain issues. This replaced the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council that had been initially established in 1997. Spurred by the tragic events of September 11, 2001, this decision demonstrated the shared resolve of NATO countries and Russia to work closely together as equal partners in areas of common interest and to stand together against common threats and risks to security.

Enlargement and NATO's Transformation

While neither of the above discussed issues – the cost of enlargement and the Russian factor – turned out to be problematic in the debate on the current round of NATO enlargement, the focus of the discussion between Congress and the Administration was the North Atlantic Alliance itself and its transformation in order to meet new threats.

At the November 2002 Prague summit, NATO Heads of State committed to transform NATO with new members, new capabilities and new relationships with its partners. By inviting Lithuania and the other six democracies to start accession talks, the Alliance considered the membership of these seven countries as part of its transforming role for the 21st century.

In this context, a number of key questions were examined during the numerous hearings in the Senate Foreign Relations and Armed Services Committees as well as during the full Senate floor debate.

First, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks on the U.S., the Alliance must adapt and be ready to respond to the very ripe threats of terrorism and weapons of mass destruction. In this regard, Americans and Europeans together need to strengthen NATO's role in meeting threats outside of Europe, which in turn means becoming a more capable and useful force to respond to the array of asymmetric threats. Against this background, will the seven new nations enhance the military effectiveness of the Alliance? How will their entry into NATO affect the growing

“capabilities gap” between the United States and many of the other NATO members that the Alliance has been facing for years?

By and large these issues are equally relevant to both old and new members of the Alliance. To address them effectively, NATO’s leaders at the Prague summit in November 2002, decided to launch the Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC) and to create a NATO Response Force (NRF). Through the PCC, NATO members agreed to spend smarter, pull their resources and pursue “niche” specializations. The NRF is intended to enhance NATO’s ability to undertake out-of-area military operations with capabilities relevant to today’s threats. The Response Force is envisioned to be a highly- ready force of approximately 25,000 troops with land, sea and air capability, deployable on short notice and able to carry out missions anywhere in the world. The seven new members fully associated themselves with these initiatives. Each of them is engaged in the process of military reform, upgrading its secure communication systems, improving training, logistical support and personnel capabilities and establishing military spending at a minimum level of two percent of gross domestic product. Each of the seven invitees has provided direct military support for the global war on terrorism, acting as *de facto* allies by contributing transit and basing privileges, military and police forces, medical units, transport support to U.S. and coalition efforts, and/or airspace rights.

The Senate Foreign Relations Committee Report, which was submitted to the Senate on April 30, 2003 by Committee Chairman Senator Lugar, presented the following conclusion regarding the qualifications of the seven candidate countries:

“In considering the qualifications of the seven countries, the Committee has examined the degree to which each has satisfied the Membership Action Plan (MAP). The Committee believes that Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia have overcome obstacles to their candidacies. And of the seven aspirants, the Baltic States have made the most progress in meeting MAP requirements”.

The second group of questions that were raised in the debate on NATO were concerning the so-called “consensus rule” by which NATO operates. Should NATO consider changing its operating procedures so that it is not, in all cases, bound to act by consensus? Hence, does NATO need a process for suspending the membership of a nation that is no longer committed to upholding NATO’s basic principles and values?

Some Senators were concerned that the divisive debate at the end of 2002 over planning for the defense of Turkey in the event of war with Iraq demonstrated that achieving consensus in NATO had become more difficult. Agreement was reached only by moving the discussion out of NATO’s political body (the North Atlantic Council, or NAC) and into its Defense Planning Committee (DPC), in which France does not participate. This, according to some Senate Armed Services Committee members, slowed decision-making and constrained operations. They also argued that achieving consensus was likely to become even more complex as NATO enlarges its membership. Therefore, the consensus rule must be reexamined to ensure that NATO will remain an effective military organisation.

Regarding the issue of a suspension mechanism, some Armed Services Committee members were concerned about the lack of a mechanism to suspend a NATO member if a member no longer complies with the fundamental tenets of NATO – democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law.

These views, however, found support neither in the Administration, nor in NATO’s North Atlantic Council. In fact, in his letter to the Senate Armed Services Committee, dated April 21, 2003, Under Secretary of State Marc Grossman underscored his belief, shared by all NATO member states, that the consensus rule works more in favor of the U.S. than against it, and that compromise and persuasion, and use of the Defense Planning Committee, remain effective tools to enable NATO action. The letter also asserted that NATO has ways other than expulsion to deal effectively with allies that “go bad”, for instance, isolating them or excluding them from sensitive NATO discussions.

One should note though that questions about the consensus rule and expulsion were not raised directly in relation to the new NATO members, but rather reflected emotions stemming from the debate and division among the U.S. and certain other NATO allies over whether to use military force against Iraq. In January 2003, Bush Administration officials applauded the decision of

Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia to sign a letter that endorsed the U.S. position on Iraq. At the same time the Administration criticised France, Germany and Belgium for blocking NATO efforts to provide preliminary assistance to Turkey in the event of an attack by Iraq.

Moral and Strategic Imperatives of Enlargement

Even though the questions that have been discussed above were by and large at the center of the debate on the latest round of NATO enlargement, the two major arguments that led the ratification of the accession of the seven new members to a successful result were moral and strategic imperatives of enlargement.

The moral imperative called the U.S. to help new democracies, formerly subjected to the yoke of tyranny, consolidate and secure their own freedom and sovereignty. The strategic imperative suggested that a united Europe of common values would help avoid the major wars as experienced in the 20th century. A united Europe would be a better partner to the United States in dealing with world affairs. A united Europe would provide a context of security that would encourage reform in Ukraine, Russia, Caucasus and even Belarus.

Of course recognising these two imperatives, the basis for a positive decision in the U.S. Senate was the sound reform of each aspiring nation – including military reforms of national strategy, secure communications systems, upgrading infrastructure and procedures to NATO standards, improved training, logistical support and personnel and military spending at a minimum level of two percent of gross domestic product.

After the September 11 terrorist attacks, each of the seven aspirants declared its determination to act as an ally of the United States in the fight against terror. Since then all seven countries have provided support for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom, and have contributed to both operations. At a May 1, 2002 hearing of the Senate Foreign relations Committee, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Mark Grossman and Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Douglas Feith said that enlargement was needed to extend the zone of security and stability in Europe through the expansion of a united Euro-Atlantic community based on democratic values. Grossman asserted that enlargement was still relevant in the wake of the September 11 attacks because “if we are to meet new threats to our security, we need to build the broadest and strongest coalition possible of countries that share our values and are able to act effectively with us.”

CONCLUSIONS

Summarising all it up the four observations might be drawn:

First, working with the U.S. Congress on the issue of NATO enlargement, and specifically on Lithuania’s case in that process, required a number of commitments. Establishing a network of working relationships with members of Congress and their staff, both in Washington, D.C. as well as on the State level, proved to be essential. Three important elements helped achieve that objective: 1) effective work on the grass roots level by the Lithuanian-Americans and other ethnic communities, 2) exclusive focus by Lithuania’s government on its diplomacy efforts on the Hill, and 3) joint action by the Vilnius Group working together with the Committee on NATO. An additional feature that helped maintain a vibrant and lively agenda on the Hill was being flexible in dealings with members of Congress.

Second, the experience of the process of the previous (1999) NATO enlargement ratification (even though it was a different process in its nature of debate and circumstances) served as a good background for both the new candidates and the congressional experts as they prepared for the ratification debate in 2003. The Polish experience in this context was particularly helpful to Lithuania’s diplomacy in Washington, D.C. and indeed throughout the rest of the United States.

Third, the NATO enlargement ratification debate in 2001-2003 did not encounter visible opposition, as was the case with the previous enlargement. Most of the current debate focused on

NATO's transformation in the aftermath of the September 11 events, and what role the new members would play in the Alliance. Since the question of membership qualifications of the candidate countries was dealt with mostly through the Membership Action Plan program, the congressional debate centered on more general moral and strategic arguments for NATO enlargement.

Fourth, members of the Senate came to vote on May 8, 2003 having a broad agreement that an enlarged Alliance of democratic states with improved capabilities and interoperability, joint defence and operational planning and realistic training will be better able to fulfill the Alliance's main purpose: to increase the security of its members and provide for common defence against terrorism and other threats.

It is important to recognise that the U.S. decision to support the enlargement of NATO to include Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, was not a reaction to any single event or threat, rather it was a strategic opportunity for the expansion of a zone of peace and democracy in Europe. This is the best proof that Europe remains of vital interest to the United States.