

## **LITHUANIAN FOREIGN POLICY: CONCEPTS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND PREDICAMENTS**

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The results, achieved in the Lithuanian foreign policy since the restoration of statehood in 1990 and the Lithuanian interwar foreign policy achievements do not lend themselves to easy comparison. The declaration of independence in 1918 led to a gradual recognition of the Lithuanian state by the world community. However, the basis for its existence was frail. What made Lithuania vulnerable in terms of security and international standing was the long-running dispute with Poland over Vilnius, which was finally returned to Lithuania in 1939. Despite the fact that the recovery of Vilnius topped the interwar agenda of the foreign policy, few rejoiced when the task was eventually accomplished. The deployment of Soviet troops on Lithuanian territory was understood as the imposition of restraints on sovereignty. It was obvious to any pundit that the transfer of Vilnius back where it belonged meant the overture of the transfer (occupation, annexation) of the whole Lithuanian state to the Soviet Union.

The conflict with Poland impaired Lithuania's attempts to maintain good relations even with its closest neighbours such as Latvia and Estonia. Lithuania was practically isolated in Europe and had no allies. Neither the League of Nations nor the "Baltic l'Entente" could be relied upon as security ensuring organisations.

The international situation Lithuania found itself in after the restoration of its statehood in 1990 was no better than that of 1918, and in certain cases, it was even worse. Recognition was a slow process; therefore Lithuania was exposed to the threat of destruction for about a year and a half, as Soviet troops were deployed on its territory for over two years.

It was only in 1991, after the August coup in Moscow, that Lithuania was recognised by the majority of states all over the world. It took another two years before Lithuania unconditionally fulfilled all the criteria of an

independent state, i.e. it (its government) exercised full control over its territory and enjoyed international diplomatic recognition.

After the withdrawal, Lithuania faced another important foreign policy problem, which was metaphorically called a “return to Europe”. It had to be diplomatically ensured. The Europe of the end of the 20th century was not ridden or front-line-partitioned, but peaceful, integrating with the identity being strengthened not so much by the heritage of Western Christianity or Antiquity as by successfully developed European institutions, given rise to during the post-war period.

Having taken its first steps towards Europe, Lithuania decided to clearly define its foreign policy priorities. They were laid down in the concept of the Lithuanian foreign policy and have consistently been followed by Lithuania since 1994. There were the following three priorities: membership in the EU, membership in NATO and good relations with neighbours.

The priority targets set by Lithuania were essentially achieved in 2004. It became a full-fledged member of NATO and the European Union. However, its good relationships with its neighbours should be treated with certain reservations. The best ties have been maintained with Poland. Considering the fact that at the end of 1991 then President of Poland Lech Wałęsa called the relationship between Poland and Lithuania as being “on the verge of crisis”, the progress achieved since then has been really impressive. Lithuania’s relationship with Latvia and Estonia in 2004 had not improved much since 1994. Ties with Russia, irrespective of some important positive moves – such as signature and ratification of the Border Agreement – have been vulnerable, to put it mildly. The same applies to the relationship with Belarus.

Yet, the implementation of at least two of the three strategic priorities of the Lithuanian foreign policy gave rise to the question: what comes next?

The question would raise few eyebrows. But answers, obviously, would not be uniform. In principal, however, this question may be ignored if we agree with the Estonians, who tend to maintain that the independent Estonian foreign policy in the EU, in the strict meaning of the word, is superfluous, since from now on the Estonian foreign policy is going to be shaped by the EU.

In Lithuania, this position seems to have few supporters, except several high-ranking officials representing certain foreign policy institutions, who

have long been maintaining that it would be best for Lithuania to become a placid province of the EU with low publicity but a comfortable life. Lithuania, as a small state, should focus on domestic, primarily on economic and welfare issues.

Certainly, the provision of favourable conditions for welfare development is one of the major eventual targets of foreign policy. Still, there is another target of no less importance. It is national security. Does membership in NATO and the EU automatically ensure security, especially when it is understood not only in the military but also the modern or wider meaning of the word? It seems that the Russian threat of not only military but also economic and political nature and the growing trend of authoritarianism has still remained an issue for the Lithuanian security, as the membership in the aforementioned organisations has not eliminated it, but, paradoxically, added to its escalation. Active, and not only reactive foreign policy and good contacts with the USA could mitigate the situation. On the other hand, active foreign policy can obviously largely help not only to address national security but also public welfare problems.

There are other reasons of local character justifying the need for a more independent foreign policy. First of all, the so-called Kaliningrad problem. Kaliningrad can be labelled as a “geopolitical hostage”. As the legacy of WWII, it seems to continue giving Lithuania headaches. Another issue of concern is Lukashenka’s Belarus, which has a common border of several hundred kilometres with Lithuania causing problems to Lithuanian foreign policy. These two aspects of the Lithuanian geographic position alone justify the claim that Lithuania cannot refuse active foreign policy as yet.

Thus, we should welcome attempts to revise the Lithuanian foreign policy as ten years have passed since it was adopted in 1994 and two of the priorities have been accomplished. As a matter of fact, the concept of 1994 has never been made public. However, it was approved by the Government, and its major principles were outlined in a speech by then President Algirdas Brazauskas delivered at Vilnius University. They were later followed as guidelines for foreign policy related decisions.

The 2004 concept has not been publicised either. However, its basic provisions have been outlined in several important speeches by statesmen, as well as in certain documents. The following should be mentioned: 1) The

resolution of the Parliament on foreign policy guidelines of the Republic of Lithuania, having become a full-fledged member of NATO and the EU, adopted on 1 May; 2) The speech “New Lithuanian Foreign Policy” by Arturas Paulauskas, Acting President of the Republic of Lithuania, delivered at Vilnius University on 24 May; 3) The speech by President Valdas Adamkus at a meeting with diplomatic heads of foreign representations accredited in Lithuania, made on 14 July; 4) The agreement on foreign policy priorities and objectives 2004-2008, signed at the President’s office on 5 October between representatives of thirteen political parties; 5) the resolution on continuity of foreign policy guidelines, adopted by the newly elected Seimas on 16 November.

Artūras Paulauskas seemed to be most thorough in detailing the priorities of the foreign policy. He defined ten basic trends. First – full integration into the EU organisation. Second – reinforcement of interaction between the Euro-Atlantic alliance, the EU and NATO. Third – active involvement in EU-Russia co-operation, seeking to promote pragmatic neighbourhood policy with Russia. Fourth – co-operation with Poland with a view of strengthening strategic partnership which could become “a nucleus, uniting Northern, Central and Eastern Europe”. Fifth – reinforcement of Baltic-Nordic co-operation, seeking to create a more integrated Baltic Sea region. Sixth – bringing the Kaliningrad region closer to Europe. Seventh – “active support for Belarus in its effort to become a predictable, democratic and independent European state.” Eighth – full support to Ukrainian reforms and its aspirations regarding the EU and NATO. Ninth – active involvement in multilateral forums. Tenth – more efficient use of the support of old and new emigration for Lithuanian international activities.

The provisions identified in Paulauskas’ speech were based on the principles of the foreign policy concept of 1994 and seemed to have taken account of the changes in the national geopolitical situation. This speech, as well as other texts, has given rise to new ideas enabling us to speak about the “new” Lithuanian foreign policy. This policy, at least theoretically, seeks to be active and influential, instead of passive and reactive; it also raises a new objective of achieving the level of the old EU members in 15 - 30 years, thus becoming an important and visible state within the EU and NATO, able to encourage dialogue between cultures and civilisations, striving towards

a larger, stronger and more open Europe, which would maintain positive ties with the US. The most important aspect of this novelty, however, is the aspiration to become “the regional gravity centre”, “regional leader” or to put it simply - “regional centre”.

Basically, the majority of the provisions laid down above are acceptable, except certain things which raise some doubts. One of the concerns, formal as it might seem on the surface, is really significant. An important advantage of the 1994 foreign policy conception was the fact that it set three priorities, two of them being very specific, i.e. the aspiration to become a member of NATO and the EU.

In foreign policy, the implementation of only two specific priorities of equal importance can cause enough problems in terms of required focus intensity, let alone ten. Having ten priorities (the Parliament resolution of 1 May 2004 goes on to specify as many as 22) means having none. It also means that the new foreign policy loses its backbone. To avoid this, the order of priority needs to be clearly defined. Otherwise, the Lithuanian foreign policy might lose focus and become void.

The second reproach with regard to the new guidelines of the foreign policy would be their abstract and indefinite nature. In this respect, they are similar to the third priority of the foreign policy in 1994, which read as follows: “to have or maintain good relations with neighbours”. It has already been mentioned that this priority has failed to be achieved in its entirety.

This statement cannot be called specific either. “Good relations with neighbours” is a less defined concept than, say, membership in the EU. Besides, there is a lot of space for subjective reflections while measuring the degree of goodness of the relations. How can it be gauged? Based on a number of acting interstate co-operation institutions? In this case, Lithuanian-Latvian and Lithuanian-Estonian relations are as good as Lithuanian-Polish relations. Or is it the number of presidential visits paid that defines a certain degree of goodness? In this case, Poland is the best. Its significance for the foreign policy of Lithuania throughout the last 8-9 years may be highlighted by the definition “strategic partnership”, which has been successfully exploited by both countries. Nevertheless, many practical problems in connection with economy, transport and energy, irrespective of the number of co-operation institutions and forums in place, have not been sorted out. This also relates to the activity

of interests groups, blocking the construction of a power bridge to Poland, red tape problems, but above all, the fact that Lithuania, due to demographic and other differences, is not considered an equal partner to Poland.

Let us move on to the most ambitious idea of the new conception, i.e. the aspiration to become regional leader, centre or gravity centre. These words were used by Paulauskas in his speech when defining Lithuania's role in Europe. The Parliamentary resolution of 1 May 2004 reduces the ambitions to: "becoming one of the regional centres that has an influence on the neighbourhood policy of the EU". But the agreement on foreign policy goals and priorities 2004-2008, signed between the political parties on 5 October, 2004, puts Lithuania again in a more ambitious position in the context of Europe: Lithuania has to become "an active and attractive interregional co-operation centre, uniting cultures and civilisations" and the foreign policy objective formulation 2004-2008 aims to become the centre for cultural exchange, with Vilnius as a centre of international conferences and initiatives.

Active foreign policy is advantageous. The state is better off in carrying out its national interests, ensuring security and public welfare. It becomes more visible globally. Its image has a direct relation to the symbolic capital, which later can turn into a real capital contributing to overall investment and GDP growth. The latest illustration of an active, successful and internationally recognised activity has been the successful mediation by the Polish and Lithuanian presidents in solving political problems in relation to the rigged elections in Ukraine.

The role of both leaders was predetermined not only by the old common and frequently problematic history of the three states, or the positive disposition of Ukrainian people towards the Lithuanians, but above all, by active regional policy, consistently pursued by Lithuania for about a decade. The idea of trilateral co-operation between Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine has been promoted in Lithuania since 1997 after it was acknowledged that it had many advantages in comparison to the idea of co-operation between the Baltic and Black Sea states. The actual co-operation – mostly at the Presidential level – goes back to 1998. Thus the invitation of Valdas Adamkus and Aleksandre Kwaśniewski for resolution of the Ukrainian crisis in 2004 by Leonid Kuchma was naturally consequential.

The events in Ukraine and the inert reaction from the EU again prove that the defence of our own interests should remain as a cornerstone of foreign policy for Lithuania – not only outside the Euro-Atlantic borders, but also within them. Lithuanian attempts to make the EU and NATO pursue “open door” policy, including with regard to eastern neighbours, is not merely a statement. The matter is that many old EU member states see the prospects of EU development in a different light compared to Lithuania and many other newcomers. Partly due to geographic as well as other reasons, Turkey, to old member states, seems more important than Ukraine, which has been devoid of EU attention until now. Javier Solana’s role in Kiev was less important than that of Adamkus and Kwasniewski because some EU states did not see a reason to contribute to the Ukrainian crisis resolution. They did not take into account the geopolitical significance of Ukraine and/or, as usual, were effusively concerned about the possible Russian reaction to the EU initiatives in this country. Thus, the Lithuanian foreign policy priority should be to shape the emerging CFSP, in co-operation with other newcomers, so that it meets the position of the Eastern member states. These members tend to understand the interests of the enlarged Europe better than the old member states, who, at least psychologically, view Ukraine now and obviously in the future as part of Russia. In my understanding, compared to Turkey, Ukraine is a more European state in all respects and its potential to become a full-fledged member of the EU, as a matter of fact, is better than that of Turkey. Moreover, it could be said (this is not the official position of Lithuania) that the CFSP is considerably deformed and geographically unbalanced. It is obvious that Eastern Europe has not been given adequate attention and it was basically looked upon from the Russian perspective. The hope is that Vladimir Putin’s failure in Ukraine and Viktor Yushchenko’s success will serve as the basis for revision of the EU policy in this regard and will possibly encourage the EU to make conclusions regarding the policy absence with respect to Belarus.

However, does Lithuania have to try to become a “regional centre” while actively implementing its foreign policy? If we put the question this way, we must first define the region. Those who speak about Lithuania as a regional centre are unable to give a more specific reply. The problem of Lithuanian regional identity is important and interesting. The author of this article

happened to defend the opinion, which at that time looked heretical to some people. Lithuania, in its efforts to establish regional identity, should turn to the Baltic Sea region, instead of Northern or Central Europe. But Lithuania will never become the centre of this region and not because it has not been a sea state for many centuries, but because it is too poor in its demographic, economic and other potential.

Nor can it become the regional centre of Central Europe. So what is in store? Asked about the geographical borders of the region that Lithuania would claim to become the centre of, one of the participants of one of many conferences on the deliberation of the new concept of Lithuanian foreign policy, held at the end of summer 2004, gave a really witty reply saying it would be a triangle, including Kaliningrad, Seinai and Vilnius. Co-operation with the Kaliningrad region, aiming for its faster integration, would be really relevant, as would be caring about the Seinai Lithuanian community, but I do not think that these are the most important tasks of the Lithuanian foreign policy.

The idea of being the leader of a somewhat wider area than the above-mentioned triangle seems quite realistic. The latest economic development rate lends the idea of Lithuania becoming a leader and, further, it could be maintained that Lithuania (at least in 2003) succeeded in leading Europe. But the last statement reveals another thing as well – the idea of a leader needs to be defined more specifically (just like regional boundaries) for this ambition to be laid down as the major goal of the Lithuanian foreign policy. Still, a more important Lithuanian foreign policy goal in defence of its interests is not a somewhat megalomaniac aspiration to become a “centre” or “leader”, but strengthening co-operation with its neighbours, especially within the EU. Lithuania has to focus more on becoming an active, visible and influential European state than on the idea of “regional” or “interregional” centre. To this end, it has to develop an even more specific approach to the processes, forms and ways of integration happening in Europe today. This, to my mind, should make up an integral part of the Lithuanian foreign policy conception.