

LITHUANIA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY *

Acting President of Lithuania (2004, April – July)

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Nearly a decade ago, President Algirdas Brazauskas outlined during a meeting at Vilnius University three priority goals of Lithuania's foreign policy: membership of the European Union, membership of NATO and good neighbourly relations.

Today Lithuania is a member of the European Union and a member of NATO. NATO fighters safeguard our peace. Our minister is working in Brussels as a member of the European Commission. In a few weeks the people of Lithuania will go to the polls to elect their first representatives to the European Parliament.

These are the results that we have managed to achieve in fourteen years.

Membership of the European Union and NATO has become a reality only because we did not hesitate to undertake challenging and often painful reforms, which changed in principle the economic relations within our state and the structure of our society. We have succeeded only because our people and our politicians were working hand in hand. This is a lesson that should be remembered.

I am certain that we will continue working hand in hand and each of us will act responsibly and deliver his contribution in building the State of Lithuania.

Today we can work on our economic and social tasks in a qualitatively new environment. Yet not all citizens of our state can reap the benefits of reforms. This causes certain social tension and makes us search for non-conventional solutions. Reforms should bring tangible benefits to every citizen of Lithuania.

These are my departure points for our discussion about the guidelines for our new foreign policy. The discussion about the need to develop these

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guidelines has been going on for several years and I believe that we have reached a principle agreement on a number of points. All of us agree that Lithuania should be a prominent, active and influential member of the European Union and NATO. All of us agree that we should make Lithuanian people take pride in their country and secure their support for foreign policy pursued by the state.

But where do our current priorities lie?

Our two ultimate national goals of attaining security and well being have so intricately intertwined today that it is difficult to draw a clear line between domestic and foreign policy. Sometimes we hear that with NATO membership Lithuania has solved its key security issues and therefore could redirect its efforts towards building a welfare state. However, the 21st century has brought new security challenges. They are not visible at first sight since they emerge in economy, financial system, communications and easy to target framework of society and governmental institutions.

These problems should also be addressed as otherwise the system of well being which we have been labouring on might disintegrate at a certain moment.

Today we discuss Lithuania in twenty or thirty years. In my view, that much time will be needed to catch up with the old members of the European Union. This catching-up policy will most probably be in the focus of our attention in the near future. Indeed, we need to integrate in a short time into the transport and energy systems of the European Union and upgrade our energy sector. We need to revive our rural areas and strengthen the agricultural sector. Then the support received from Structural Funds will benefit our culture. We need to join the euro zone and the Schengen area, if we want Lithuania to take full part in the Union's economic and social life.

We need to strengthen Lithuania from within in order to get ready to withstand the threats of the 21st century.

But will it be sufficient for Lithuania to become a prominent and influential member of the European Union and NATO? Is the ambition to “catch up” and “surpass” the other members of this elite club and reach the present level of development of at least 15 EU members our top priority goal?

Economic motivation and aspiration to a higher quality of life are equally important to both domestic and foreign policy. True, it is easier for an affluent state to act in the environment of global competition and defend its citizens and their legitimate interests.

Money helps in seeking fame, recognition and influence, but money does not provide all those things automatically. The world, be it rich or poor, has not only interests but also values. The stronger are the values on which a state is based, the more successful is its domestic and foreign policy.

Therefore Lithuania, which is much stronger today, should look not only after its well being. Certainly, anchoring in the European Union and in NATO is a highly important goal for our state, but we should also promote and safeguard our values. Defending these values requires using all our knowledge and experience, and the possibilities of membership of the European Union and NATO.

Today one-fourth of the world suffers from armed conflicts. Free democratic elections are still to come to half of the world nations. Even three quarters of the world nations are qualified as less developed than Lithuania in terms of democracy, economy and social security.

Does this cause the concern of Lithuania - a member of the European Union and NATO?

I believe it is our moral duty to develop and promote together with partner nations such forms of international engagement, which we ourselves could take pride in and use. We should strengthen international institutions and take an active part in their work. We should not abandon our efforts to develop the principles of solidarity and good neighbour relations and to promote a dialogue between cultures and civilizations.

Only an active, responsible and creative policy can help our state get anchored in a modern Europe and the world.

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The past decade has changed not only Lithuania, but also the European Union and NATO. Today NATO is no longer only the defence alliance of shared values standing in the guard of the corner stones of Western civilization: freedom, democracy, human rights and other democratic principles. Today

other missions and tasks are proposed for its future agenda. NATO is seen as a prevention instrument, which can be used in fighting terrorism and aggressive regimes that have no regard for international norms.

The European Union is also rapidly developing its new identity. Ten years ago there was neither euro nor common security policy; there were no talks about the Constitution for Europe, the post of the European foreign minister or joint defence forces. Today the European Union changes its political, cultural and even geographic identity, and searches for new forms of economic and political influence.

Lithuania is also engaged in all these processes. Our soldiers conduct missions in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. Our representatives in the Union's institutions contribute to the discussions about the European security, constitutional framework and foreign and economic policy.

We have the vision of a wider, stronger and more open Europe, which is committed to transatlantic links and is building peace, stability and well being.

Today we should rather ask whether we are ready for such European integration. Will we be ready to delegate more powers to the European Union and NATO when the situation requires it? Do we have sufficient creative capacity to survive in a complicated and multifaceted network of joint institutions and collective decision making systems?

Our goal is to survive as a nation as it is defined now, in the 21st century, and not only as it was defined in the 19th century. We need to build such identity and develop such forms civil co-operation, which will help us remain strong after a qualitative transformation of the state. This is the goal that our foreign policy and our relations with the EU and NATO members first of all should target.

If we earn respect in these organizations and make our voice heard in them, the people of Lithuania would be able to take even greater pride and have more trust in their state. If we have a focused foreign policy and muster broad public support, it would be easier to achieve the desired results in Europe and defend the interests of our nation in the world.

Lithuania cannot afford a passive and responsive foreign policy. If so, Lithuania, which is just a tiny spot on the world map, might remain unnoticed even while deciding issues of vital importance to its future.

Lithuania should pursue an active and productive foreign policy. We should make public our goals and our interests, and defend them. We should make use of all our advantages. We should forge alliances with like-minded partners to make our voice well heard in the world.

This policy helped us regain independence and become a member of the European Union and NATO. This should be our policy while defending Lithuania as a subject of European and international policy.

What are the advantages of Lithuania as a member of the European Union and NATO?

First, our geographic location and experience of living at a crossroads of regions and civilizations. It opens up most probably the first opportunity in history to bridge the East and the West and make Lithuania a centre of gravity in a geographically and culturally diverse region.

We should speak more openly and loudly about regional challenges. Wherever you go, fragmentation is shocking. Industry and trade suit only narrow needs of each nation and lack a clear vision of economic interface. Differences are evident in the level of economic and social development, and in standards of democracy and civil liberties. We even have no highways running from border to border and from capital to capital. We do develop our infrastructure, but each to his own.

If we do not change this situation, we might become a God forgotten place which is visited only in case of absolute need or when the diplomatic protocol requires so.

Today the European Union is discovering “new” to it but old to us neighbours and seeks to forge closer co-operation with them. The EU-Russia partnership is marked with special dynamism. Today the EU and Russia are engaged in a dialogue on energy issues, tomorrow they may discuss common trade area and then the time may come for a visa free regime. This is a natural development. We should be at the forefront of these processes in order to defend our national interests and to avoid a situation where we are made an item of trade or other states pursue their interests at our expense.

But can we translate our ambitions for the EU's Eastern policy into serious practical steps when very few students in our universities choose to do a graduation paper on the East? How can we start a discourse on our policy in the East without a European level centre for strategic studies dedicated to Eastern policy analysis?

Internal dynamics of the European Union makes us review our relations with traditional partners and evaluate the established forms of co-operation. Many of them we would like to preserve. Some of them, including our relations with the United States, we would like to reinforce. However, while working in these directions we should not undermine the interests of the European Union or shatter the unity of its member states.

We live in Lithuania, but we are Europeans. Therefore we should look at the world through the eyes of the European Union. We should turn to those who live in extreme poverty on just a dollar a day. We should concentrate on environment pollution, abuse of human rights and unbalanced development of the world regions.

Several hundred thousand litas that Lithuania contributes today to aid and development policy, i.e. to solidarity, which we expect to get from others, is a modest contribution compared to millions channelled by the old members of the European Union. It is difficult to talk about these issues without emotions because poverty problems still persist in Lithuania. But we must talk about them. We must take more responsibility. Our politicians and our Government should address this conundrum without damaging the balance between our national needs and our international commitments.

Lithuania's new foreign policy should address all these issues.

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Membership of the European Union, membership of NATO and good neighbourly relations which Lithuania declared as its three key goals at this university a decade ago, have become a doctrine, on the basis of which our state has been shaping its national policy.

Today I propose a new and wider foreign policy doctrine. My vision of Lithuania is that of a country which through the quality of its membership of the European Union and NATO and good neighbour policy has become

a leader of the region. I have a vision of Lithuania as a centre of the region, with Vilnius as a regional capital, which:

- develops old political initiatives and generates new political ideas;
- enjoys strategic partnership with Warsaw;
- proposes to the European Union practical steps for broader engagement with the East;
- is a hub of Baltic and Nordic Europe, and
- facilitates opening up Kaliningrad region and through it the whole of Russia to Europe.

This Vilnius would be a shortcut to Minsk, which is again a part of the region and of Europe.

To achieve these goals we need to pool all our resources, take on board the EU and NATO instruments and build on our experience of developing good neighbourly relations.

First, we need to review our national security policy and adapt it to the needs of the 21st century. This adaptation would help us identify our most sensitive areas requiring adequate steps. These areas are clear:

- strengthening of civil society;
- consolidation of national elite;
- reinforcement of analytical and prognostication capacities of our national security bodies;
- sustainable economic development, and
- enhancement of social cohesion.

These are the areas that shape fundamental national interests which will have a decisive impact on the tasks of Lithuania's foreign policy.

First, full integration into the European Union structures and full engagement in all formats of political, financial, economic and inter-institutional co-operation. We need to integrate in the shortest time possible into the European transport and energy networks and external border control system and to make use of all advantages offered by the common market. Membership of the European Union should help us accelerate our

economic and social growth and contribute to our cultural and intellectual development.

Second, strengthening of the Euro-Atlantic Alliance and reinforcement of the EU-NATO interface. It is especially important for Lithuania that NATO remained an effective security and defence organisation. As regards security policy, NATO and the European Union should enhance close co-operation and avoid duplication. Lithuania will seek that the United States continued to play a key role in the European security architecture.

Third, active engagement in the EU-Russia political and economic co-operation, promoting at the same time our national interests and reducing exposure of our economy and society as well as avoiding undesired influences and advancing carefully with pragmatic neighbourly policy.

Fourth, co-operation with Poland and development of relations with the Union's neighbours in the East. Our co-operation with Poland in this area would open up new possibilities and facilitate taking a broader role in the EU-US relations with Eastern European nations.

Lithuania's strategic partnership with Poland could strengthen in the future and transform into the nucleus of Nordic, Central and Eastern Europe.

Fifth, strengthening of the Baltic-Nordic solidarity and exploiting it actively in forming a deeper integrated and wider Baltic region.

Sixth, promotion of closer ties between the Kaliningrad region and Europe, and their symbiosis in order to ensure economic and social progress of this region. In this process Lithuania should seek playing the key role.

Seventh, active support of efforts that would help Belarus become a predictable, democratic and independent European state; promotion of closer ties between Belarus and the European Union and NATO in order to advance security, stability and democracy further to the East.

Eight, we see Ukraine as inseparable part of the region, of Europe, and of the European Union and NATO. We will continue to support its efforts in this direction and seek to secure greater European and transatlantic support to political, economic, social and institutional reforms in Ukraine.

Ninth, setting and pursuing ambitious goals in the United Nations, OSCE and other multilateral forums.

Tenth, finding effective ways for acting jointly with the new and the old Lithuanian émigré.

This is a long-term vision of Lithuania's foreign policy. Its implementation should start from taking very concrete steps. In other words, we should put a reviewed and renewed foreign policy on the right track.

First, we should find ways and means to influence as much as possible the taking of decisions in the European Union and NATO. Our aim is not limited to simple voting. Our goal is to take part in the development of decisions, in particular when they concern issues which are important to Lithuania. We should generate ideas and seek active participation in areas where the European Union and NATO engagement is especially strong.

Second, we should actively exploit the mechanisms of co-operation between neighbours and adapt them to our new foreign policy. The existing bilateral institutions could be transformed into trilateral forums to unite, for example, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine. Contacts should be developed not only between the heads of state, but also between business people, scientists and students. Therefore, again and again I want to stress the critical importance of the highway connection between Vilnius and Warsaw, and further with Berlin and the rest of Europe.

Third, we should reinforce the capacities of the governmental institutions which are engaged in the shaping, development and implementation of the national policy vis-à-vis the neighbouring states.

And fourth, we should strengthen the analytical capacity of our state and initiate projects and studies on the key issues of our foreign policy. Lithuania needs at least one strong centre of international standing for strategic studies, which would monitor events in neighbouring countries and developments in the Euro-Atlantic area and translate positive ideas into strategic and tactical instruments.

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These are the tasks that demand our immediate action. To address them we need more human, intellectual and financial resources.

We have a clear vision of our new foreign policy. We have considerable experience of implementing our policy along the lines, which should become priority lines following the accession of Lithuania to the EU and NATO. We also have the human resources, and not only here, in Lithuania, but also

in the West, the destination of emigration in the past decade, where the old émigré are still active. We all know very well that only through the concerted effort of all Lithuanian émigré across the world did we manage to achieve so rapidly the foreign policy goals in which today we take such pride and which we consider an accomplished fact. The “new” foreign policy goals and priorities, which I have outlined, can be accomplished only if we further take vigorous action and pool our efforts.

Thus, we have a vision of the country and the world in which we want to live. And it may seem that it takes just a clear understanding of the goals and tasks of the foreign policy that we implement and further work. Consistent and devoted work so that the dream of our Grand Duke Gediminas of Vilnius and of Lithuania, prominent, active, recognised and respected among us and in the world, once again comes true.