LITHUANIAN DIPLOMACY
1990-1992

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It is important and interesting to look at the restoration of the diplomatic service and foreign policy development trend in 1990–1992. It is useful to compare the international milieu and domestic circumstances of statehood restoration with the situation in 1918–1920.

The Government Programme of the Republic of Lithuania, drawn up on 5 October 1990, set out overall foreign policy guidelines. The top priority task raised was the reinforcement of Lithuania's independence and its return to the world community of independent nations. It was understood, even back then, that there was only one road ahead, i.e. integration into Western Europe.

Three strategic tasks of foreign policy were also defined then. The first task was about the bilateral interstate agreement with the USSR, reinforcing unconditional political independence of Lithuania. The second task was to become a full-fledged player of the European political integration in the context of the Council of Europe. The last objective was to become part of the European economic space formation.

In less than a year, i.e. in the autumn of 1991 the strategic goal of foreign policy – Lithuania's international recognition – seemed to have been achieved. Moreover, Lithuania became a full-fledged member of the OSCE (formerly CSCE); it restored its diplomatic ties with the majority of states, and joined the UN. However, further tasks of integration in the global community in the area of policy, economy and culture, were still to be accomplished.

It was the time when country foreign policy makers seeing the two union possibilities – one in the East, the other in the West – made a logical conclusion that the only logical direction for Lithuania to take was the European Community. It was then assumed that regional integration was to be considered only as a means to achieve a general move towards the EC. The forecast, as we can witness now, has proved right.

A year later, more clarity was made with regard to security issues. In the autumn of 1992 an agreement was finally reached regarding the withdrawal schedule of Russian troops. The implementation could have been prevented only by major shocks in Russia. Fortunately, no such shocks happened and the troops were successfully withdrawn. At the same time, NATO membership came gradually to be perceived as the only security guarantee, under the conditions of the polarisation between the East and the West. The polarisation still exists and there are few reasons to believe it will soon disappear.

To have a clearer insight into the background of foreign policy formation, it would be helpful to compare the situation in 1990 and 1918. Statehood restoration always involves the issue of territory and government. In the Declaration of Lithuanian Independence, signed on 16 February 1918, the Lithuanian Council declared itself as the sole representative of the Lithuanian nation. It proclaimed the restitution of the independent State of Lithuania, with Vilnius as its capital and cautiously declared that "a Constituent Assembly elected democratically by way of universal suffrage and convened at the earliest possible time shall determine the final form of the Lithuanian State and shall fix its foreign relations".

We know well how difficult it was for the Lithuanian Council to pursue recognition of the state. Notable is the fact that it had not been denied the right of national representation and until the very convention of the Constituent Assembly remained, as maintained, the only representative of the Lithuanian nation aspiring only to make the Lithuanian state independent. All the above demonstrates the importance of initiative, as sooner or later the representation right would have been usurped by the front men of other states.

Elected in 1990, the Supreme Council, which declared the restoration of statehood on 11 March, was from the very beginning mandated to express national will. This right was also recognised by foreign states. It was not denied by the Soviet Union either. In fact, Gorbachov did not deny the right for the Supreme Council to take March 11 decisions, but only announced them to be in contradiction with the Constitution of the Soviet Union, and demanded repeal. The representatives of the Lithuanian nation, paradoxical as it might seem, took power peacefully, making use of the elections declared by the Soviet Union.

Opposite to 1918, all the government institutions were taken over in corpore, except the army, KGB and other KGB-subordinate establishments. It again confirms the importance of initiative. Had the March 11 Declaration not been adopted from the very beginning, it would have been difficult to prove that the newly elected Council was unrelated to the occupational powers. This is confirmed by the subsequent conduct of Moscow. Having lost the initiative, the Soviet authorities embarked on alternative devices. On one hand, they inspirited the so called "autonomists" in the eastern part of Lithuania, seeking to create a territorial problem. On the other hand, they also tried taking power directly, which required force and the set up of a puppet "salvation committee" (events of January 1991).

The Soviets did not dare overthrow the government in Lithuania, as that would have required physical destruction or isolation. Besides, it would have entailed civilian losses. Therefore, the Soviets had to resort to delayed dual power strategy, which shortly proved pointless. Everything came to be resolved by the outcome of the August coup.

The context of the circumstances is well illustrated by the situation in the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry. Opposite to other ministries, it was to be created from scratch. Actually, some of the functions were to be maintained. For instance, the former Soviet foreign passports were still to be used. The matter was handled by the Consular Department by keeping contacts, at a practical level, with the SU Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which behaved as if nothing had happened and continued to treat the Lithuanian consular institution as a Soviet establishment until the end of the August coup. In the meantime the Lithuanian Ministry recruited the needed personnel and when the avalanche of high-ranking visits after the restoration of diplomatic relationship started in the autumn of 1991, the Ministry staff was ready to handle it.

The second issue important to the state was regarding territory. 1918 was a really difficult year. The border with Latvia was the only one established. In the west, there were problems with Klaipėda. In the east, the demarcation line, defined in the Peace Treaty of Brest Litovsk, could have been considered. The southern border was not clear at all. Therefore, we should not be too surprised that the major states, used to the Balkan wars, recognised the border between Lithuania and Poland established on the battlefield. Where the recovery of

Klaipėda was a successful, though temporary, solution, Vilnius remained a
major interwar problem of the Republic of Lithuania. In fact, even though the
Government of Lithuania succeeded in consolidating its aspiration of having Lithuania
within its ethnographic borders and Vilnius as its capital in the Treaty of 1920 with Soviet
Russia, this Treaty, along with the recovery of Klaipėda, paved the road to the borders that
are currently in place.

Even though the Declaration of March 11, 1990 did not contain any specific border
information, it recognised border inviolability. As a result, Lithuania, without declaring
it, recognised the border lines which were actually in place during Soviet times. Lithuania
was satisfied with this. Specific border lines were confirmed by bilateral agreements
without any major problems. Again, it may look paradoxical, as Lithuania, having
recognised the borders of the former Soviet republic, assumed a strong legal and political
position. As a matter of fact, the fight of pre-war Lithuania for Vilnius and Klaipėda, lost
as it was, with the onslaught of occupations, left hold ups
in legal documents and political events for the Government of the restored
Republic of Lithuania to make use of.