



EMPIRES, THE WORLD ORDER AND SMALL STATES

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Introduction

“We must create a self-dependent empire and substantially expand our pivot. Former territories of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania constitute our natural borders and crossing them would present no challenge <...>. Europe and, I think, the United States too need our empire – both powers will soon realise it. After all, all their actions indicate they have already realised it, although not to the extent to which we are prepared to go. What good is having our own empire for us? We need it in case the U.S. and Russia collapse. Europe will then remain the power field and we must be one of those powers controlling Europe.” These are a few excerpts from Gintaras Beresnevičius’ book “Forging an Empire. Sketches of Lithuanian ideology”, which received somewhat ironic but generally positive appraisals a few years ago.¹ The critics were apparently captivated not so much by the idea of the Lithuanian empire as such but by the idea as an intellectual provocation. However, only the foreign policy makers succumbed to the provocation and began talking about

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¹ G. Beresnevičius, *Imperijos darymas. Lietuviškos ideologijos metmenys* (Vilnius, 2003), 18, 75. For reviews, see V. Girdzijauskas, “Kalėdinė Beresnevičiaus pasaka, arba lietuviškojo imperializmo metmenys”, *Literatūra ir menas* (May 3, 2003); K. Almenas, “Kaip darysime Imperiją?” *Atgimimas* 21 (May 30-June 5, 2003).

Lithuania's ambition to become the regional leader.² The pride taken in the recent publication of the Russian edition of Professor Edvardas Gudavičius' "History of Lithuania" reveals that the public opinion seems to be more enticed by the retrospective – supposedly, now the Russians will finally be able to read about the medieval empire of Lithuania in their own language.³ It's a pity though. The metaphor of empire is becoming entrenched in the expert debates regarding the condition of the international system as a serious methodological instrument both in the analyses of the international power distribution and for predicting further development of the international system.

This was recently spotlighted by Kęstutis Paulauskas in his review of *Colossus: the Price of America's Empire*, a study by British historian and political scientist Niall Ferguson, which came out after Beresnevičius' book. As Paulauskas notes, the author does not shun from value judgements, does not feign objectivism and openly pronounces for the empire by making a convincing argument that the anarchic society of sovereign states can no longer cope with contemporary challenges. Hence, Ferguson urges to acknowledge that which most prefer to gloss over: whether we like it or not, the world is living in the century of the American empire and the persistent attempts of the White House administration to deny the imperial nature of the United States only confirm that the problem exists.⁴

Doubtlessly, both the theoretical imperiological debates and the empirical studies of the particularities of the so-called American empire are encouraged by the domestic and foreign policy developments in the United States in the context of unipolarity. Naturally, historical parallels remain an important source of their popularity. After the U.S.-led coalition invaded Afghanistan and Iraq especially, it is often emphasised that American troops repeated Alexander the Great's march to Kabul and that American tanks that roared

² Speech of the Acting President of the Republic of Lithuania A. Paulauskas at Vilnius University, May 24, 2004. Available at <<http://paulauskas.president.lt/en/one.phtml?id=4995>>.

³ "Kultūra įveikia išankstinį priešišumą", Lietuvos Rytas No. 193 (August 22, 2005).

⁴ K. Paulauskas, "Apie laisvės imperiją, europietišką rojų ir naują pasaulio tvarką", Politologija 1, 37 (2005), 87.

over the Mesopotamia cannot but create associations with the empire-building projects – attempts to master the overseas colonies. However, it is not so significant in these cases that the new insights are often based on the images, notions or concepts that had already captured the minds and hearts of researchers at some point in the past. In these cases, the intellectual intrigue – the reasonableness of the reconstruction – plays the decisive role.

Admittedly, the current understanding of empire has been cleansed of the images of primitive, traditional imperialism that were woven by the Soviet and American ideologists during the Cold War when the main criterion of an empire was the fact of direct rule over colonies. The criteria for identifying empires are undergoing gradual refinement in the research (imperial ideology, power concentration, centre-periphery relations, and imperial dynamics) and are increasingly used in modelling the evolution of other international relations actors as well. The processes of empire creation identified in the European Union, Russia and China on the basis of the said criteria sometimes even nourish explanations that the world order is gradually evolving towards the imperial structure.

This article will discuss the peculiarities of the application of this instrument in the studies of the international system, as well as its explanatory strength in predicting the place and the functions of small states in the eventual imperial structure, which will be created if, to rephrase Beresnevičius, the imperial or empire-like entities do not collapse.

Imperiology

The notion of empire and its building strategies is not a new subject in the history and theory of international relations. However, the concept of empire that refers to the distribution of power in the international system has recently (beginning with the mid-nineties of the twentieth century) gained increasing popularity.

It may be noted that there is a pattern in the resurgence of discussions about empires and imperialism. There is a link between the genesis of debates and the development phases of the international system – debates surge with the weakening of the hegemonic power and the growing ambition of the candidates to replace it (in other words, during the interregnum).

Debates about empires at the end of the nineteenth century can be found in the academic literature at the start of the twentieth century. The “New imperialism” spans from 1871 to 1914 (from the Franco-Prussian War until the First World War). The Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), the Spanish-American, the South African, and the Russo-Japanese wars are said to mark the beginning of the new imperialism. It is associated with the spread of the industrial revolution, development of the capitalist system, and the ensuing expansionist policies and colonial acquisitions of the European powers, the U.S. and Japan, as well as their struggle for Africa.⁵ Proponents of the theory of economic imperialism supported such struggles. Charles A. Conant, who is regarded to be the author of the concept of economic imperialism, claimed in his essay “The Economic Basis of Imperialism” (1898) that imperialism was necessary to absorb surplus capital in the face of the shortage of profitable investment outlets. Meanwhile, critics of economic imperialism associated the concept of the empire with the negative aspects of capitalism: economic exploitation, inequalities of economic development, subservience to the interests of the ruling class, as well as racism.

British economist John Hobson was the leading critic. In his *Imperialism: A Study* (1902), he argued that every improvement of methods of production and the concentration of capital lead to imperialist expansionism. Imperialism was motivated by the need for new markets where goods could be sold and investments made and, in order to preserve new markets, it was necessary to establish protectorates or perform annexations. Hobson had an influence on Lenin, who explained the mutual competition between empires in an analogous book *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) that became the basis of Marxist studies of imperialism.

As a consequence of these normative discussions about empires among the Marxists and liberals at the start of the last century, the term “empire” later had negative associations in the U.S.: it was not considered academic and

⁵ J. B. Foster, “The Rediscovery of Imperialism”. *Monthly Review* (November 2002), available at <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/analysis/2002/02rediscovery.htm>>, last visited 05.01.2005.

⁶ J. A. Hobson, *Imperialism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948), available at <<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/1902hobson.html>>, last visited 17.06.2005.

was avoided. During the Vietnam War, which may be regarded as a new stage of the study of empires, the term came into usage but, again, mostly among the leftists. Harry Magdoff's book *The Age of Imperialism: The Economics of U.S. Foreign Policy* (1969) is considered to have initiated systematic analyses of imperialism anew. He regarded the Vietnam War not as choice of separate individuals in the U.S. government but as an outcome of long-term U.S. foreign policy tendencies closely related to capitalism. Magdoff argued that imperialism is directly beneficial to the capital at the imperial centre and the imperial struggle resulted from the unequal development of capitalism. Liberals criticised him, disagreeing that the control of resources was useful only to the U.S. corporations and the government that served their interests.

Contemporary academic debates about empires were stimulated by attempts to grasp and give a practical sense to the prospect of the potential uni-polar world order. The debates examined the global dominance of the U.S., their relative and structural power shifts, and the significance of domestic and foreign policy tendencies to the international system. Especially noteworthy is the change in the terminology – the concept of empire in the analysis of international politics gradually replaced by the concept of hegemony. This indicates the increasingly prevalent view that the U.S. is undergoing a fundamental transformation and it is no longer regarded only as a hegemon or a superpower.⁷

In other words, the discussion is whether the U.S. has already become or will soon become or will not become an empire at all. For example, some neoliberal and most neoconservative authors agree that the U.S. has already become an empire. However, the former criticise the U.S. empire and the latter support it. According to them, there has never before been an empire that would exert as much influence as the U.S., although it does not directly rule overseas territories and mostly exercises informal control. The imperial ambitions of the U.S. are also made more credible by the new strategic thinking after September 11 (the war against terrorism, the war in Iraq), which arising from a certain world outlook and a specific assessment of the U.S. power

⁷ R. Rilling, "American Empire' as Will and Idea. The New Major Strategy of the Bush Administration" (2003), available at <<http://www.rainer-rilling.de/texte/americanempireaswillandidea.pdf>>, last visited 03.11.2004.

which reflect the neo-imperial U.S. ideology. The third party of participants in the debates, the critics of the imperial approach question whether the U.S. could be viewed as an empire because such a view relies on the assertion that the international system is unipolar. However, this assessment of the structure of the international system raises some doubts since the U.S. power in non-military sectors is not entirely unquestionable. Thus, these authors believe that the U.S. may be viewed as superior to other states (especially in military terms) but not as a hyperpower. Finally, there is a rather original argument in the debates about empires that the age of the U.S. empire is ending, rather than beginning, because imperial domination is based on “hard” power, while the U.S., although dominant militarily, is gradually getting weaker in the economic sphere.⁸

Thus, discussions about the U.S. as an empire started from the emphasis on the role of its exceptional power in the creation of a unipolar world. The entrenchment of neoconservatives in the U.S. administration, the new strategic thinking of the administration and the emerging tendency in the U.S. foreign policy to replace influence by control in relations with other states provide basis to talk about the United States as an empire. On the other hand, it remains debatable whether the changes are significant enough to call the U.S. an imperial power. Therefore, it is worth reviewing the discussions about empires in general first. Who seeks to introduce the notion of the empire into the discourse of International Relations, and why? And, conversely, why is the notion of empire viewed negatively? Second, it is important to distinguish the attributes of the creation (and collapse) of empires, from their general characteristics, which would allow assessing the applicability of the concept of the empire in the analysis of contemporary international relations.

1. The notion of empire in International Relations

Debates about empires have a significant impact on the theoretical discussions of International Relations and serve as a challenge to the (neo)liberalist and globalist theories that have garnered a lot of supporters since the Cold

⁸ E. Todd, *After the Empire: The Breakdown of the American Order* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003).

War. Moreover, the participants in the debates about empires question the realist explanation of the international system, which was dominant for a long time.

Debates about the significance of empires introduce a new approach to International Relations. While the (neo)realists take the perspective of national (sovereign) states and the (neo)liberal institutionalists* as well as the globalists adopt the perspective of globalisation, students of empires argue that the past and future political, economic and socio-cultural processes in the international system are hierarchical in nature. In their view, relations between the subjects of the international system may be (and ought to be) studied through the prism of the relations of control and subordination.

The (neo)realists accept the classical notion of empires, according to which “empire” refers to one state’s direct or indirect political domination with regard to other states or (and) nations.⁹ The proponents of the (neo)realist theory rely on the Westphalian model of the international system: the contemporary international system was formed out of sovereign states precisely after the disintegration of the pre-modern empires and other political entities. According to them, the international system is anarchic (because there is no higher authority above the nation-state), although not chaotic, and therefore, the state is the most important and independent unit of analysis of international politics. Following this approach, decolonisation and the dismemberment of multiethnic socialist states, such as the USSR and Yugoslavia, may be viewed as the victory of nationalism and anti-imperialist ideologies over the imperialist ones.¹⁰ However, the (neo)realists do not take sufficient account of either the impact of globalisation or the hierarchical (subordinative) relations between states in the international system.

* The authors of this article do not make a strong distinction between realism and neorealism and between liberalism and neoliberal institutionalism because the axioms of the theories of these two paradigms with regard to the nature of international relations are identical and the explanatory differences are insubstantial for the examination of the subject of this article.

⁹ A.J. Motyl, “From Imperial Decay to Imperial Collapse”, in *Nationalism and Empire*, eds. D.F. Good and R.L. Rudolph (Minnesota: St. Martin Press, 1992), 17.

¹⁰ M. Mann, “The First Failed Empire of the 21st century”, *Renner Institut* 2 (2004), available at <<http://www.renner-institut.at/download/texte/mann.pdf>>, last visited 03.04.2005.

During the Cold War, the concept of the empire was usually used by leftist scholars (globalists) subscribing to Marxist views, who associated it with economic exploitation, racism, etc., thereby condemning the expansionist foreign policies of the U.S. and questioning its morality.¹¹ In the early eighties of the twentieth century, the paradigm of liberal institutionalism based on theories of mutual dependence and globalisation was gaining strength.

The latter approach emphasises peaceful relations between the largest states, which are conditioned by increased multilateral linkages, international regimes and international institutions. In the opinion of the (neo)liberals, globalisation forces even the U.S. to adjust to other international actors and processes. “The world is thus too complex and interdependent to be ruled from an imperial centre.”¹² According to the theorists of globalisation, the empire is a new form of global sovereignty, consisting of a series of national and supranational actors united under a single logic of rule.¹³ It is the whole system of moral and ethical norms and the law that regulates market and political relations between governments, organisations, individuals, companies and other actors.

The postmodern globalist notion of empire asserts a paradox that the empire is functioning not as some clearly defined subject of the international system but as a regime of governance without government. Governance is here understood in the Foucauldian sense – as the regulation of the behaviour of subjects. Such governance is a network of social relations, institutional powers and ethical principles that defines the norms of the actions or the behaviour of any particular subject. The postmodern notion of the empire deprecates the practice of the exploitation of peripheries by the classical imperialist “centre” and argues that, while the postmodern liberal empire does not eliminate the manifestations of subordination, it follows the logic of pacification and not exploitation. In other words, states under the liberal

¹¹ For more, see M. Cox, “Empire, imperialism and the Bush doctrine”, *Review of International Studies* 30, 3 (2004), 587-589.

¹² G.J. Ikenberry, “Illusions of Empire: Defining the New American Order”, *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2004), available at <<http://www.foreignaffairs.org/20040301fareviewessay83212a/g-john-ikenberry/illusions-of-empire-defining-the-new-american-order.html>>, last visited 03.11.2004.

¹³ M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (London, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), xi.

empire submit to the conditions of the governance regime because this ensures development and peaceful coexistence for them.¹⁴

Thus, the (neo)liberals and the globalists view various international agreements, the creation of multilateral institutions and the rule of international law positively because this strengthens the formation of the global security and governance system.¹⁵ Unilateral actions of the United States are deprecated because of the alleged failure of the U.S. to grasp the importance of mutual interdependence and the overestimation of its power and because such U.S. policies will ultimately lead to a blind alley as the logic of globalisation defies the imperial logic.¹⁶

According to neoliberals and globalists, international security is indivisible. Security is understood as a shared interest and value that the states can only achieve through co-operation and not by strengthening their national security individually.¹⁷ Neoliberals argue that ensuring national security by the (neo)realist means of increasing power is no longer adequate and cannot eliminate contemporary security threats because of their transnational nature.¹⁸ They do not believe that the U.S. or any other state could ensure its security by military force and emphasise the large financial costs and the

¹⁴ Ibid.; M. Coward, "The Imperial Character of the Contemporary World Order", forthcoming in *Theory and Event*, 8, 1 (2005), 12. Available at <<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/Users/mpc20/global/springsems/sem10/Coward,%20New%20Imperialism%20Review.pdf>>, last visited 30.03.2005.

¹⁵ Joseph Nye claims that the unilateral actions of the U.S. deplete its soft power. See J. Nye, *The Paradox of American Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). G.J. Ikenberry reprehends the unilateral actions of the U.S. and argues that it should act through alliances – see G.J. Ikenberry (note 23). G. Kupchan emphasises the importance of international institutions – see G. Kupchan, "The End of the American Era: U.S. Foreign Policy and the Geopolitics of the 21st Century". From an address to the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, February 27, 2003. Available at <<http://www.cceia.org>>, last visited 03.04.2005.

¹⁶ B. Barber, (note 26); see also M. Mann, *Incoherent Empire* (New York: Verso, 2003), quoted from G.J. Ikenberry (note 23).

¹⁷ R. Cohen and M. Mihalka, "Cooperative Security: New Horizons for International Order", *The Marshall Center Papers* No. 3 (2001); R. Cohen, "Spreading Cooperative Security: Creating a Euro-Atlantic Council?" *Connections* 1, 1 (2002), 13-21.

¹⁸ R. Cohen and M. Mihalka (note 29), 33

coercive nature of the emerging U.S. empire, as well as threats to institutions and alliances that have so far guaranteed the security of the United States and its allies.

Finally, the development of the international system may be viewed in the context of the hierarchical nature of relations among international subjects. Hence scholars who approve of the revival of the concept of the empire argue that “the fundamental categories of international relations were developed without sufficient regard to the nature and the character of those international relations that encompass the bigger part of the planet <...>, in particular, to the various types of imperial relations.”¹⁹ Currently, the concept of the empire is becoming more and more acceptable to the U.S. right wing – the so-called neoconservatives who claim that the choice of the imperial strategy is determined by the need to defend against threats to national security and to promote freedom and democracy²⁰ (although this is indistinguishable from striving to preserve and expand U.S. power). As the Hobbesian world order vision was confirmed by the events of September 11 and as the traditional assumptions about threats and deterrence strategies lost their meaning, the logic of neo-imperialism is becoming “too attractive to be refused.”²¹ The imperial approach envisions imperial rule as a certain response to the challenges of globalisation to the nation-state. In other words, it is sought to re-empower the state to control its fate in the age of globalisation. However, apart from “self-interested imperialism”, when the empire is justified by the desire to ensure the safety of the imperial centre, there is also “humanitarian imperialism”, when the empire is motivated by the benefits to the periphery (transposition of good government traditions, resolution of human rights issues).²²

Intellectual links between globalisation theories and the authors of the “imperial perspective” may be noted – as relations in the international arena are becoming more interconnected, there emerge premises for global politics

¹⁹ T. Barkawi and M. Laffey, “Retrieving the Imperial: Empire and International Relations”, *Millennium* 31, 1 (2002), 110.

²⁰ D. Cheney, D. Rumsfeld, P. Wolfowitz and others. See M. Mann, (supra note 14).

²¹ S. Mallaby, “The Reluctant Imperialist: Terrorism, Failed States, and the Case for American Empire”, *Foreign Affairs*, 81, 2 (March/April 2002), 6.

²² R. Rao, “The Empire Writes Back (to Michael Ignatieff)”, *Millennium* 33, 1 (Jan 2004), 146.

and the need for global governance which could be implemented by a global multilateral institution or a hyperstate (which in its political structure would essentially be comparable to a global empire). On the other hand, a certain ideational affinity between the theorists of imperialism and the hegemonic stability theory within the (neo)realist paradigm as well as the neoliberals may be discerned. The said theory states that international stability depends on the will and capacity of the hegemonic power to “create and maintain the world order.”²³ On the basis of this idea, the authors of the imperial perspective develop the ideas of the global liberal empire.²⁴ The hegemonic stability idea is associated with the doctrine of “liberal imperialism”, which emphasises the political inequality of states: some states cannot legitimately intervene into the domestic affairs of other states disregarding the principles of national sovereignty and self-determination.²⁵ As J. N. Pieterse notices, neoliberalism and the imperial perspective and the theorists and practitioners of neoliberal globalisation follow the same logic and lead to the same result – to the *global hierarchical integration*.²⁶

Therefore, it is understandable that, in order to protect the United States against threats and preserve domination, the U.S. neoconservatives promote the use of U.S. power in an insecure world – it is considered to be a liberal force that nurtures the spread of democracy and is capable of suppressing tyranny and terrorism.²⁷ Essentially, the authors of the imperial perspective who lament the undeserved abandonment of the concept of the empire may be called *globalisation imperialists (or liberal neo-imperialists)*.

²³ G. J. Ikenberry, “Rethinking the Origins of American Hegemony”, *Political Science Quarterly* 104, 3 (1989), 377, quoted from M. Cox (note 22), 587.

²⁴ N. Ferguson believes that the U.S. is a liberal empire and regrets that world may not get enough of her because the U.S. does not fully exploit its capabilities to make the world a safer place. See N. Ferguson, *Colossus: the Price of America's Empire* (Penguin Books, 2004), quoted from Mann (supra note 21).

²⁵ J. Purdy, “Liberal Empire: Assessing the Arguments”, *Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs* (Fall 2003), available at <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/analysis/2003/10liberalempire.htm>>, last visited 05.01.2005.

²⁶ J.N. Pieterse, *Globalization or Empire* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 39.

²⁷ R. Kagan, “Power and Weakness”, *Policy Review* 113 (June/July 2002), available at <<http://www.policyreview.org/JUN02/kagan.html>>, last visited 03.04.2005.

Thus, in analysing debates about empires, three conceptualisations of the empire may be distinguished: *classical*, *neo-classical* and *postmodern*. Differentiation between the “classical”, “neo-classical” and “postmodern” ideal types of empires is particularly important for the recognition of empires – the current imperial processes are different from past imperialism and the postmodern and neo-classical concepts of the empire permit discussion on new forms of empires.

The qualitative difference between the “classical” (past) and the “neo-classical” (present imperialism) versions can be apprehended by analysing the foundations of imperial power and the relations between the “imperial centre” and “peripheries”: the “hard” (military) power, which was dominant in the past and on the basis of which empires were forged, is replaced by the “soft” (economic, social and cultural), while the formal relations of subordination between the imperial centre and the periphery is replaced by more informal and indirect ones.

Theories of globalisation present a radically revisited postmodern conceptualisation of the empire. Basically, the empire is defined not by the clear relation between the centre and the periphery but by focusing on the governance regime. This conceptualisation of the empire does not have the “centre” as a political subject or, more precisely, the imperial centre is nothing more than a set of rules and norms constituting the governance regime and the network of institutions supervising these rules and norms. One of the more important features of such an empire that distinguishes it from the classical one is decentralisation. No single subject – either nation or state – is or can be the imperial centre or possess the power of the centre. Such imperial rule regime does not have limiting boundaries, it is characterised by universality and the sense of “the end of history.”

However, we would argue that, when even the proponents of the postmodern concept of the empire admit that imperial relations are hierarchical relations of control and subordination and that there are subjects of the international system who are overseeing the implementation of the “governance regime”, the motives for which the imperial international relations system is created cannot be an essential argument in validating the academic independence of the postmodern concept of the empire. In other words, it seems that it is merely a concealed version of the neo-classical concept of the empire.

Finally, it should be noted that as the imperial ambitions of such powers as the U.S., Russia, China or the EU are growing in the international arena, the study of empires is reasonably claiming to integrate the globalist, (neo)realist and (neo)liberalist theories in explaining the politics implemented by the subjects of the international arena and their mutual relations.

2. Attributes of empires

Participants in the debates about empires basically distinguish three essential criteria for the identification of empires:

- imperial ideology,
- concentration of power in the “imperial centre” (hierarchical structure of the “centre”),
- “imperial peripheries” – existence of client states (satellites) (specific configuration of the structure of relations between the “centre” and the “periphery”).

2.1. Imperial ideology

First, a state can become an empire only if it has an “imperial perspective”²⁸ (self-understanding as an empire) or, in other words, an imperial ideology. Empires are a type of ideocracies, projections of one or more ideas (value systems) in the geopolitical space, as well as structures for their spread and implementation. The origin of ancient empires is indistinguishable from theocracy based on transcendental absolute sacral truths that are not bound by either time or space. Empires are missionary by definition. Therefore, an empire essentially lacks boundaries – it is global and eternal because its ideational foundations are the absolute truths and values of belief. From this viewpoint, any imperial borders are temporary. Naturally, in reality geopolitical or ethno-cultural barriers stop the expansion of an empire and the

²⁸ E. Said, “Imperial Perspectives”, Al-Ahram (July 24-30, 2003), available at <<http://www.globalpolicy.org/empire/analysis/2003/0730perspectives.htm>>, last visited 05.01.2005.

assimilation of the “barbarians”. However, theocracy (ideocracy) inevitably presupposes the aspiration towards the global empire based on the spread of an absolute sacral truth.²⁹

All previous empires were characterised by self-portrayal as a superior civilisation or ethnic or ethnic (religious) community. The mission of all classical empires was to civilise (to proselytise) or at least contain the “barbarians”. Similarly, it may be observed that the Cold War “barbarians”, the Soviet Union and China, are being replaced by the “axis of evil” states, international terrorism and other “freedom enemies” in the contemporary rhetoric of the American globalisation imperialists. For the ideologists of the EU expansion, the “barbarians” are substituted by the “instability” at the EU borders.³⁰

2.2. Power concentration in the “imperial centre”

As already mentioned, although empires are potentially global by nature, the barriers of geopolitical and cultural reality draw the boundaries of empires by impeding their expansion and force them to create a network of satellite (client) states – the periphery of an empire.³¹ The authors of the imperial perspective emphasise that the key precondition for the formation of empires is a significant disproportion in power among the subjects of the international system. The imperial relationship of subjects indicates domination and control. The necessary condition for the emergence of this relationship is power, which may be defined as a causal link when the one who possesses power determines the behaviour of the subject of power. The hierarchical nature of relations in the international system that permits the formation of concentrated power pools (“imperial centres”) is considered to be the main precondition for the creation of empires.

²⁹ И. Яковенко, “От империи к национальному государству”, in *Этнос и Политика*, ed. А.А. Прусаускас (Москва: Издательство РОО, 1997), 107-109.

³⁰ М. Emerson, “The Wider Europe as the European Union’s Friendly Monroe Doctrine”, CEPS Policy Brief 27, Centre for European Policy Studies (October 2003), available at <<http://www.ceps.be>>.

³¹ М. Cox, (supra note 22), 600.

The emergence of a global empire requires a hierarchical world order, which exists if there is a dominant power in the international arena that establishes and enforces order. Discussions of the current state of the international system point out that the international arena is dominated by the U.S., which has a monopoly over the use of force, and that the domestic order of states at the national level is also influenced by the global influence of the United States.³² Therefore, the current structure of the international relations system is often called unipolar. Unipolarity impels creation of an empire but is not the only condition for the emergence of the global “imperial centre”.

Thus, apart from the imperial ideology, the second basic characteristic of an empire is large concentration of power in one “centre” (not necessarily a physically defined territory) and its capacity for controlling the periphery.

Imperial ideology and the concentration of power create the conditions for the recurrent, although not essential, feature of an empire – a specific relationship between the state and an individual and a hierarchical (autocratic) imperial rule model. An empire does not have citizens but only subjects. Empires nurture the “ruler-ruled” political culture and autocratic (monarchical, sultanic) political regimes. This is not surprising. The *raison d'être* of empires is the idea of which an empire is an earthly reflection. Therefore, an individual and the population of an empire are merely means for the implementation of the imperial idea. An empire is a perfect incarnation of the hierarchical principal – the supreme hierarch (it could also be a collective institution) is a mediator between the sacral transcendental truths and the inhabitants of the empire, qualitatively superior to all the other subjects of the empire.³³

2.3. “Imperial periphery”

Thus the phenomenon of empires is not possible without the “imperial centre”, and the latter – without the periphery controlled by such a centre. There is a dialectics of the imperial centre and periphery. Classical definitions of an empire indicate that the object of the relation between the centre and the periphery is state sovereignty or communal capacity for self-regulation. It is

³² Ibid.

³³ И. Яковенко, (supra note 41), 107-109.

emphasised that the peripheries may have their autonomous institutions and elites but without the possibility of independent government and decision-making. The level of subordination of the peripheries to the centre varies. On the basis of the historical analysis, some authors observe that ancient and medieval empires were characterised not by rigid hierarchy but by graduated political structures in which the influence of a hierarchically more organised centre was progressively lessening towards the deeper peripheries.³⁴ In comparison to past empires, contemporary proto-imperial subjects (e.g., the United States) are able to control the “periphery” much more effectively due to globalisation and the speed of communication. The periphery may thus be much larger and more readily accessible by means of the new forms of control. The latter are related to the second aspect – the increasing importance of soft power.³⁵ According to J. G. Ikenberry, in shaping the world order, power and liberalism provide a much more potent mixture than the usual use of crude material power. Therefore, it is maintained that the liberal empire is far more attractive and its control would not be resisted (furthermore, such control would be less noticeable as well).³⁶ The periphery of contemporary proto(neo)empires consists of a network of client states and other political subjects. The cost of administration of such a network is substantially lesser than the annexation of territories and a more favourable image of the “imperial” state can be created.³⁷

In discussing past colonial empires, the rule over territories is particularly important. Empires were created by annexing the territories of others and appointing viceregerents to positions of authority. There was a belief that “there has to be some sort of direct rule over the dominion for a power to

³⁴ O. Weaver, “Europe’s Three Empires: A Watsonian Interpretation of Post-Wall European Security”, in *International Society after the Cold War*, eds. R. Fawn and J. Larkins (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1996), 220-260.

³⁵ G. J. Ikenberry, “Liberalism and Empire: Logics or Order in the American Unipolar Age”, *Review of International Studies* 30, 3 (2004), 617.

³⁶ J. N. Pieterse, “Neoliberal Empire”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, 3 (2004), 119-140.

³⁷ D. Sylvan, S. Majeski, “An Agent-Based Model of the Acquisition of U.S. Client States”, Paper prepared for presentation at the 44th Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, 2003, available at <<http://hei.unige.ch/sections/sp/courses/0304/sylvan/docs/hostile/agentbasedmodel.pdf>>, last visited 25.02.2005.

be classified as an empire.”³⁸ On the other hand, control was not necessarily implemented directly: for example, “the British imperialism pursued formal annexation and informal domination, direct political government and indirect economic control.”³⁹

The neo-classical concept of the empire emphasises new forms of the manifestation of imperial influence:

- the expansion of military bases – it is based on the expansion and control of military bases, rather than the occupation of territories. It is suggested that the U.S. is consolidating its Cold War military power and re-arranging its bases according to the new global imperial rule system⁴⁰;
- temporary territorial imperialism – intervention to a foreign state, regime change and withdrawal after the establishment of a friendlier regime;⁴¹
- the current debates about empires emphasise greater disposition towards the rule of territories through informal control and not through annexation (i.e. the formal rule of territories is replaced by control through economic dependency, etc.).

3. Imperial dynamics

When the international system is viewed as hierarchic by nature, the history of international relations appears as cycles of the formation and collapse of empires, and the strategy of building an empire is considered by the new imperialists to be the strategy of national and international security. “While the Westphalian state system always made a claim to permanency, empires were always limited in time, emerging and disintegrating.”⁴² According to A. J. Motyl, “degeneration is typical to the very system of imperial government”

³⁸ D. Lieven, “The Concept of Empire”, available at <<http://www.fathom.com/feature/122086>>, last visited 03.04.2005.

³⁹ J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade”, *Economic History Review* 6, 1 (1953), 1-25, quoted in Cox (supra note 22), 599.

⁴⁰ Ch. Johnson, *The Sorrows of Empire: Militarism, Secrecy, and the End of the Republic* (Metropolitan Books, 2004), quoted in Ikenberry (note 47), 610.

⁴¹ D. Frum and R. Perle, *An End to Evil: How To Win the War on Terror* (New York: Random House, 2003).

⁴² M. Coward, (supra note 25).

and, therefore, they can be considered to be self-destructive systems.⁴³ The preconditions for the collapse of an empire are:

- Disintegration from within. The constant friction between the centre and the periphery gradually leads to an inevitable conflict and the joining of the forces of peripheries against the centre may result in the disintegration of an empire.
- Imperial overstretch. It is conditioned by, firstly, the hypercentralisation of an empire, which means a less effective accumulation of information and use of resources that encourages the socio-political fragmentation of the empire. Secondly, the excessive economic cost of the maintenance of an imperial regime increases the appeal of nationalism to regional elites and hampers the capacity of the empire to compete on the international arena with the less fragmented states.⁴⁴
- Growing power of hostile forces. Empire building always prompts formation of counter-alliances. The emergence of blocs of adversarial states either stops the expansion of an empire and increases the cost of its preservation (which eventually leads to its disintegration – (see the second precondition) or destroys its power altogether.

Thus the hierarchical international system, the concentration of power at the “centre” through the subordination of the “periphery”, and the imperial ideology creates conditions for the emergence of an imperial state. Imperial rule manifests itself in the control of other units of the international system. The conditions of the collapse of an empire are inbuilt in the imperial rule itself and the capacity of the units of the international system to form balance against an imperial power. Therefore, the dawn of the new age of empires is inseparable from the new age of anti-imperial revolts.

⁴³ A. J. Motyl, “From Imperial Decay to imperial Collapse: The Fall of the Soviet Empire in Comparative Perspective”, in *Nationalism and Empire: The Habsburg Empire and The Soviet Union*, eds. R. L. Rudolph and D. F. Good (St. Martin’s Press, 1992), 40.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

Imperiography (identification of empires)

As already mentioned in examining the theoretical debates regarding the formation of empires, they are essentially incited by the ongoing changes in the domestic and foreign policies of the U.S. under the conditions of increasing unipolarity. Therefore, the natural course to begin the identification of empires would be to examine the existence of the main attribute of empires – the imperial ideology in the U.S. (without disregard to the other two attributes as well). Analyses of this and the other attributes of empires in the cases of the EU, Russia and China indicate the empire building processes in these countries as well.

1. The United States of America

At the moment, the United States may not yet be called a full-fledged empire. However, among all the contemporary great powers, the U.S. has the greatest potential to become a global empire. The U.S. has a messianic imperial vision and sufficient power to implement it, which after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, is upheld by an influential political force – the neoconservatives. The neoconservatives essentially understand the U.S. global rule as the “Empire of Freedom”, which primarily aims to build peace in the world through the spread of freedom and democracy based on the U.S. military superiority.

Scholars analysing events in the international arena agree in principle that the U.S. is the only global hegemon after the end of the Cold War. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is no state that could match the U.S. in its power. Naturally, a state or an alliance capable of challenging the U.S. may emerge in the medium term, i.e. in the next 10-15 years. Nevertheless, the United States substantially surpasses all its closest competitors claiming the status of a global hegemon both in terms of its military capacity and in terms of economic potency, as well as the level of technological development and the global reach of its culture.

As mentioned, a certain vision is required for building an empire. It seems that the U.S. has such a vision. It is a messianic universalist world vision, in which the American nation (as a civic nation) performs the divine mission related to the spread of “freedom” and “democracy” in the world.

The universalisation of democratic liberal values creates the conditions for the qualitative transformation of the global hegemony of the U.S.

Apart from the unprecedented dominance of the U.S. power in various areas, some episodes of concentration of power in the “centre” can already be observed. After September 11, activists of the administration of President G. W. Bush initiated the establishment of several new intelligence, security and strategic planning institutions that are accountable only to the president or his close subordinates: a new special service – the Homeland Security Department; a new analysis and planning unit – the Office of Special Plans under the Ministry of Defence⁴⁵; the Office of the Coordinator for Reconstruction and Stabilization under the State Department, which is responsible for co-ordination of the activities of the Pentagon, the State Department, the CIA and other U.S. institutions in stabilising Iraq and other collapsed states and conflict regions. Moreover, a draft bill has already been registered at the Senate regarding the establishment of the Office for International Reconstruction and Stabilisation, which would be responsible for full-scale international implementation of the functions of the said co-ordinator for reconstruction and stabilisation.⁴⁶

The main characteristic of an empire is political domination. Political domination means that “the periphery does what the centre commands it.”⁴⁷ All the empires that have existed so far (e.g., Roman, Chinese, British empires) had a clear hierarchy of authority. While the current political domination of the U.S., which manifests as political influence, in some states (e.g., Iraq) may remind of the political control of peripheral zones by past empires, this obviously does not yet give a reason to talk about a full-fledged global American empire. Nevertheless, the problems encountered by the U.S. in the implementation of foreign policies remind of those that were troubling past empires.⁴⁸ As America ensures control over a certain number of states and

⁴⁵ J. N. Pieterse, “Neoliberal Empire”, *Theory, Culture & Society* 21, 3 (2004), 119-140.

⁴⁶ D. Ignatius, “A Quiet Transformation”, *Washington Post* (May 18, 2005), available at <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/17/AR2005051701327.html>>, last visited 18.05.2005.

⁴⁷ J. Schell, “America’s Vulnerable Imperialism”, *YaleGlobal Online* (2003), available at <<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=2873>>, last visited 19.03.2005.

⁴⁸ E. A. Cohen, “History and Hyperpower”, *Foreign Affairs* 83, 4 (2004), 49-63.

societies and with the corresponding changes in its domestic political-administrative structure, the implacable logic of the resolution of these problems may force the United States into becoming a full-fledged global empire.

The U.S. currently has the largest network of client (satellite) states in the world. According to S. Majeski and D. Sylvan, at least sixty states in the world are currently dependent on the U.S., i.e. their patron state.⁴⁹ Many of the geostrategically most important states are clients of the U.S.; the indirect control of these states allows talking about the potential creation of a global system of governance based on American values. A significant increase in the control exerted from Washington over the domestic and foreign policies of client states and the growth of the number of new satellite states could be considered to be a clear-cut criterion of the formation of the U.S. empire.

2. The European Union

The current European Union has features of both the neo-classical and the postmodern empire. First, the EU functions as a governance regime characterised by a unified set of rules. Second, a power relation exists, in which the peripheries accept and conform to the decisions of the “centre”. Third, the enlargement of the EU conditions the absence of clear boundaries and the internal mobility of the governance regime, as well as a weak hierarchical structure. However, the problems of the “centre” of the EU empire result in the uniqueness of the European Union as an emerging empire.

The idea of *Europeanisation* is the European Union’s analogue to the U.S. ideology of “liberal globalisation”. In our opinion, Europeanisation can most usefully be defined as the deepening of the European integration and the impact of this process on the states outside the EU, as well as the adjustment of these states to the EU. Europeanisation is essentially the process of synchronisation and harmonisation of the domestic and foreign policies of the member states, the candidate state and the neighbouring states. Europeanisation takes place through the adaptation of the business conditions to the norms

⁴⁹ S. Majeski and D. Sylvan, “An Agent-Based Model of the Acquisition of U.S. Client States” (Geneva: Graduate Institute of International Studies, 2003), available at <<http://hei.unige.ch/sections/sp/courses/0304/sylvan/docs/hostile/agentbasedmodel.pdf>>, last visited on 21.06.2005.

functioning in the EU, the democratisation of domestic political systems, the implementation of obligations in the area of human rights and freedoms, and the introduction of European values, beliefs and identity. Therefore, in our opinion, Europeanisation is a complex historical phenomenon that characterises the potential imperialism of Europe, the spread of cultural values, norms, traditions, as well as political and economic practices⁵⁰, while promotion and propagation of Europeanisation serves as the Pan-European ideology.⁵¹

The governance system of the EU and its comparisons to the nation-state system has been one of the main puzzles of leading EU scholars for quite some time now. The mainstream approaches conceptualise the EU as a multi-level governance system.⁵² The more critical ones see the EU as network governance, while others specialise in more narrow analyses of decision-making processes. However, all these approaches share the view that the EU has already become a governance system in which the competencies of the main decision-making actors – the national governments and the supranational EU institutions – are intertwined. The EU has already become a governance system in which the centre – the supranational institutions of the EU – create rules that are mandatory for the peripheries – the member states.⁵³ The position of peripheries in relation to the centre, largely determined by the close integration and “voluntarism”, is being replaced by dependency. Some states

⁵⁰ N. Diamandouros, *Cultural dualism and political change in postauthoritarian Greece* (Madrid: Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales, 1994), quoted from K. Featherstone, “Introduction: In the Name of ‘Europe’”, in *The Politics of Europeanization*, eds. K. Featherstone and C. Radaelli (Oxford University Press, 2003), 3-27.

⁵¹ Motieka E., Statkus N., Jonas Daniliauskas, “Globali geopolitinė raida ir Lietuvos užsienio politikos galimybės”, *Lietuvos metinė strateginė apžvalga 2004*. Vilnius: Lietuvos karo akademija, 2005, 1, p. 39-80.

⁵² G.M. Marks, F.W. Scharpf, P.C. Schmitter, W. Streeck, *Governance in the European Union* (London: Sage Publications, 1996); T. Christiansen, “Reconstructing European Space: From Territorial Politics to Multilevel Governance”, in *Reflective Approaches to European Governance*, ed. K. E. Jørgensen (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997).

⁵³ On the regulatory state in the functional sense, see G. Majone, *Regulating Europe* (London: Routledge, 1996); J.A. Carporaso, “The European Union and Forms of State: Westphalian, Regulatory or Post-Modern?”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 34, 1 (1996), 29-52.

agree to implement voluntary “imperisation” in the areas of “high politics” as well (the “last sanctuary of states”); however, other states have different visions of the EU. The discrepancies between the visions, variations in the integration to the EU structures, and the different coalitions of the member states determine the European Union’s movement towards a postmodern empire.

The imperial power relation of the EU is also manifest in the enlargement policy. As old member states attract third parties like a gravitation centre, the EU policies towards these states turn into the domination of the centre and the control of the peripheries. By setting the conditions of membership, the centre sets and controls the reforms and adjustment in the peripheries. The result is that “external” peripheries become “internal” ones. The membership negotiations of Central and Eastern Europe illustrate this process.

Various geopolitical factors and the European Union’s reputation as a guarantee of democracy, prosperity and welfare in third countries turned the EU club into a centre of gravitation. Through its enlargement policies, the EU functions as an integral imperial centre that directly and indirectly influences the peripheries – the states seeking to join the EU. The membership conditions that must be met by the candidates in order to achieve full membership in the EU function as a mechanism of domination and control.⁵⁴

The new European Neighbourhood Policy has already become a compromise that reconciles the deceleration of enlargement with the further projection of the EU power to third countries without giving a clear promise of membership. Action plans devised for each particular state participating in the Neighbourhood Policy are used by the EU to exert indirect influence – they determine the progress, assess the state and the technical analysis of relations with the EU, and encourage reforms financially. Thereby the EU creates buffer zones of stability in the East, the Caucasus and the Mediterranean Sea region. This new European Neighbourhood project contributes to the EU’s evolution towards the imperial model by softening the boundaries between the inside

⁵⁴ J. Böröcz, “Empire and Coloniality in the ‘Eastern Enlargement’ of the European Union”, in *Empire’s New Clothes: Unveiling EU Enlargement*, eds. J. Böröcz and M. Kovacs, (Central Europe Review, 2001), available at <<http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~eu/Empire.pdf>>.

and the outside of the EU. Agreements at various levels between the EU and the “neighbourhood” countries that are likely in the future will form additional overlapping structures. The Barcelona Process for the Mediterranean Sea region and the Stability Pact supporting the Balkan countries perform essentially the same function as the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Thus the EU enlargement process obscures the boundaries between the inside and the outside that are characteristic to the classical state. Shifting borders is a typical feature of medieval empires. The enlargement of the European Union is becoming a form of colonialism, whereby the “Other” is incorporated into the population of the empire but does not fully become part of the “Self”. The complex structure of the EU is characterised not by hierarchy but rather by overlapping, graduated structures. The Euro-zone and the Schengen area provide the best example of the formation of overlapping circles-coalitions, which create the “inside-outside” effect – the core states inside and the peripheries outside.

The postmodern EU empire as a geopolitical entity does not have a future in the Westphalian international system. Further enlargement and the lack of unity will paralyse the EU as a unitary agent in foreign policy. In the event of the Post-Westphalian international system (the “new middle ages”), the development model of the EU empire would become the model. Institutionalised interdependency, an integrated system of multiple policies and unified rules, obscure boundaries between the inside and the outside, and the voluntary movement towards the dissolution of state sovereignty are the defining features of the Post-Westphalian international system. In an ideal case, the evolution of the Post-Westphalian system would culminate in a global “voluntary” empire without the sovereign subject at the centre.

3. Russia

Russia is not merely a state or a distinct society – it is an individual and unique civilisation. The defining characteristic of the Russian civilisation is the constant fear for its survival. This fear finds its expression in messianism and the “missionary” imperialist state created and constantly recreated by it. Over the centuries, only the names of “missions” and the ideological grounding changed.

The duchy of Moscow *liberated* itself as well as other Russian duchies from the Mongol Tartars. Later, Muscovy *liberated* the Orthodox lands of Kiev Russia captured by Catholics and Muslims. Then the Russian empire *liberated* “brother Slavs” and other nations from the yoke of the Ottoman Empire and the Germans. Finally, the Soviet Union *liberated* “the proletariat of the entire world.” In actual terms, *liberation* usually meant incorporation in Russia and the imposition of the Russian civilisation, which was supposed to result in increasing the security of both the incorporated ones and Russia. This mission of *liberation* indicated the indeterminacy of Russian identification. On the other hand, the mission of *liberation* concealed the intertwined aspirations of security and imperialism, the Machiavellian realism and the Campanilian idealism.⁵⁵

At present, Russia no longer has any particular mission of liberation but the general disposition of the *disseminator of the good* still remains. This disposition is noticeable in the daily ideological propaganda in Russia in relation to, for example, the countries that once belonged to Moscow’s sphere of influence and, especially, that were part of the USSR. The propaganda reveals a tendency to emphasise that the population (“the people”) of one or another state favour Russia and express desire to integrate with it and that, seemingly, only the ruling elites of these countries divert them from Russia. This is a typical symptom of latent imperialism.⁵⁶ Currently, the ruling elite of the Russian Federation propagate an idiosyncratic set of symbols and values composed of individual components of Soviet ideology, the ideas of Zapadniks (Westernisers), and elements of the Eurasian perspective. True, it must be noted that the ideological schizophrenia is characteristic to Russia’s transitions from one political and social order to another.

During the presidency of V. Putin, a closer political and economic integration of the former republics of the USSR with Russia as well as the centralisation of the administration of the Russian Federation itself has become a priority for the president’s administration.⁵⁷ In this way, Putin seems to have returned the state to the traditional domestic and foreign policy course of Russia.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 313-314.

⁵⁶ J. Bugajski, *Cold Peace. Russia’s New Imperialism* (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 29.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 32-49.

In order to achieve control over the post-Soviet space (including the Baltic States), Russia uses the instruments of diplomatic pressure, economic and energy dependence, and information conditioning. Moreover, Russian foreign policy-makers take advantage of ethnic tensions and conflicts in the former republics of the USSR, as well as connections with criminal organisations and special services of the USSR.⁵⁸

In domestic politics, Putin strengthened and expanded the powers and the apparatus of the president's administration, thereby creating the so-called "vertical of authority". The president's administration duplicates the work of the government and other state institutions. The administration and presidential representatives in federal districts essentially perform the functions of the apparatus of the former Communist Party.

Putin's administration supplements the power monopoly of the central authorities with economic state monopolies. Current plans are to form a multiprofile mega-concern of raw materials on the foundation of *Gazprom*. The logic of central state control would inevitably spread to other strategically important areas of the economy as well. In other words, the oligarchic monopolies of the times of B. Yeltsin are gradually being replaced by the monopolies of state "apparatchiks" (a large number of whom consists of former and present members of special services).⁵⁹

Russia still has imperial ambitions and its relations with the "near abroad" possess the character of the relations between the imperial "centre" and the peripheries. However, these ties are weakening and the ambitions are not supported by effectively co-ordinated actions of the governmental and non-governmental structures in mobilising the required resources. Russia's attempts to control the states of Central and Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia were not successful. Thus the project of the restoration of the "new USSR" may at best be implemented within the bounds of the territories of Russia, Belarus, Eastern Ukraine and Northern Kazakhstan.⁶⁰ Essentially, this corresponds to the boundaries of the geostrategic continental zone – *the heartland*. This re-imperisation of Russia would be based on ethnic

⁵⁸ Ibid., 32-49.

⁵⁹ L. Shevtsova, "Russia in 2005: The Logic of Backsliding", *New Europe Review* 2, 3 (2005), available at <<http://www.neweuropereview.com/English/Shevtsova.cfm>>.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

and cultural commonalities, the existing integration of economies and the energy dependence on Russia. Russia's influence in other post-Soviet states is waning and there are no convincing indications that Russia could restore control over these states in the medium term.

Russia is currently undergoing a crisis of realisation of its imperial potential. The Russian Federation faces a set of external and internal problems that are ruining the remains of the former empire. *Internally*, Russia faces the social and economic backwardness of regions and the growing extremism of the Muslim subjects of the Federation. The case of Chechnya shows that Russia encounters difficulties in controlling the situation inside the state and the Chechen tendencies threaten to engulf neighbouring Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, as well as Tatarstan and Bashkortostan that are experiencing crises of regional government and growth of the Islamic factor. *Externally*, the Russian Federation encounters the problem of making a geopolitical choice between the Eurocontinentalist and the Eurasian perspectives. In the event of a choice, Russia will be treated as a "junior" partner that has energy resources and a well-developed military industrial base as its main advantage.

4. China

The imperial traditions of China go back to two thousand years before Christ. The strategic and political culture of China is essentially imperial. They affect every aspect of life in China.⁶¹

The traditional Chinese strategic and political culture has profound influence on the modern Chinese state and geopolitical identity, as well as its foreign policies, and encourages Sino-centrism and Chinese imperialism in East Asia. The modern imperialist ideology of China focuses on the concept of the "peaceful ascension" in international politics. The so-called fourth generation of China's leaders (Hu Jintao, Wen Jiabao) replaced China's strategic foreign policy goal of creating a multipolar world with the aim of "peaceful ascension". "Peaceful ascension" is primarily based in the supposedly mutually beneficial co-operation in economic, social and military areas with

⁶¹ Jiyi Tao, "Chinese Tradition on Foreign Policy", Chinese American forum 19, 4 (2004).

neighbouring countries. The provision of good neighbourhood policies is meant to resolve disputes with the neighbouring countries and strengthen economic ties with other East Asian states, as well as provide for the peaceful expansion of China's influence in the region and help China integrate into the global economy.⁶²

However, Chinese strategists discuss the necessity for China to create a "survival space" around it (i.e. essentially turning the neighbouring states into buffers and controlling the South and East Chinese seas). Thus, the concept of "peaceful ascension" is basically supposed to help China create in the medium term a regional system and economic co-operation in East and Southeast Asia under the leadership of China, which would exclude the U.S.⁶³ China's aspiration to become the leader of East and Southeast Asia is based on a long historical tradition of Sino-centrism.⁶⁴ Moreover, the global and regional position of China determines that continental China understands itself not as the only legitimate Chinese state (in the dispute between China and Taiwan) but as the defender and promoter of the entire Chinese civilisation – as the state of all the Chinese of the world.

The growth of Chinese power is a long-term historical process. In the course of the last two thousand years, China has more than once reached the status of a regional power*. The idea of the revival of China's influence was used in the rhetoric of both Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, as well as Jiang Zemin. The concept of the "recovery of power" involves a psycho-

⁶² E.S. Medeiros and M.T. Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy", *Foreign Affairs*, 82, 6 (2003), 22-35.

⁶³ N. Statkus, E. Motieka, J. Daniliauskas, "Globali geopolitinė raida ir Lietuvos užsienio politikos galimybės", *Lietuvos metinė strateginė apžvalga 2004* (Vilnius: Lietuvos karo akademija, 2005), p. 39-80.

⁶⁴ Peter Van Ness, "China's Response to the Bush Doctrine", *World Policy Journal* 21, 4 (2005), 38-47.

* During the rule of the Chan (206 BC-220 AD), Tang (618-907) and early Ming (1368-1643) dynasties. According to the calculations of historical political economy, China's GDP in 1820 (29 years before the Opium Wars) constituted approximately a third of world GDP. The defeat in the Opium Wars substantially weakened the Chinese Empire ruled by the Qing dynasty and paved the way for its collapse in 1911.

logical understanding of power, which is manifested in China's aspirations to reclaim the former global status of the country and the concept of "peaceful rise". In 1978, the Communist leadership of the country made decision to implement four radical modernisations of the country's industry, agriculture, science and technology, as well as its military force. The Programme of Four Modernisations aims of integrating China into the global economy, creating a viable modern socially-oriented market economy and a defence system corresponding to the status of a superpower.⁶⁵

The surprising continuity of China's domestic and foreign policies was ensured by the stability of the Chinese Communist Party's rule. The party basically performs the role of a traditional monarchical dynasty. The structure of the party is characterised by strict hierarchies, distribution of functions and centralisation of authority. The functions performed by the chairman of the party may be seen as analogous to the traditional functions of the Chinese emperor. Although lately China has been placing more emphasis on its economic growth as the foundation of overall national power, China seeks to strengthen its military power and its strategic position as well. The programme for the modernisation of the national military forces of contemporary China states the aim of the Chinese political and military leadership to strengthen its influence on the sea, as well as its view of the east and the south as the main source of threats to China. Regaining influence over the neighbouring states is an important indicator of China's rebirth as an empire. China's relations with Mongolia and Myanmar (Burma) are particularly important in this regard. The rapid economic growth of China, the programmes for the modernisation of the armed forces, and its increasing political and economic influence over the countries of the ASEAN worries the foreign policy elites of the U.S.⁶⁶ Therefore, the U.S. is creating a system of preventive alliances against China in East Asia.⁶⁷ The U.S. is strengthening military co-operation

⁶⁵ A. D. Barnett, "Political Overview", in *Reform and Development in Deng's China*, ed. Shao-chuan Leng (Virginia: University Press of America, 1994), 1.

⁶⁶ R. Sutter, "Why Does China Matter?" *The Washington Quarterly* 27, 1 (2003), 75-89.

⁶⁷ "How ASEAN can hold its own against China", *The Straits Times*, available at <<http://straitstimes.asia1.com.sg/home/0,1869,,00.html>>.

with India and has reinforced its strategic ties with Japan, Australia⁶⁸, and Singapore⁶⁹.

Thus, as in the case of the imperial ambitions of the EU and Russia, the future of China's empire in the long term depends on its ability to resolve its domestic problems and create (as well as preserve) a bloc of satellite (peripheral) states (a certain buffer zone of its own). The creation of such a bloc would be favourable to the implementation of China's concept of "peaceful rise". In building a bloc of exclusive influence, China would reduce the strategic superiority of other powers, primarily the U.S. and Russia.

Opportunities for small states in the imperial structure

The imperiographical analysis presented above reveals that the great states of the world – the U.S., Russia and China – are evolving towards the formation of neo-classical imperial structures. The formation process of the EU as a postmodern empire is taking place in Europe. Naturally, questions arise regarding the impact of these processes on the foreign policies of small states (including Lithuania) and the eventual opportunities for their international action.

The definition of small states is not universally accepted in the academic literature and depends on the criteria selected by each scholar. There are two approaches in describing small states and, correspondingly, two groups of definitions: those based on quantitative parameters and those based on relational characteristics.

Quantitative definitions list the measurable characteristics of states, such as territory, population and GDP, and assign various values to these criteria, according to which a state may be described as a small state. Relational definitions are based on the results of mutual relations between states, as well as ideational factors (identity, etc.). According to these definitions, small states are those which do not have independent policies and are under the influence (tutelage) of larger states. It is clear that both groups of

⁶⁸ S. Blank, <<http://www.carlisle.army.mil/ssi/about/2004/feb/feboped.pdf>>.

⁶⁹ "The U.S. and Singapore establish new strategic defense and security ties", Radio Singapore International (October 22, 2003).

definitions use state power as an essential criterion in distinguishing states as small and large, only definitions of the first group value the relative power of states and definitions of the second – the structural power.⁷⁰ In our opinion, both types of power are important in describing the status of states in the international system. It is important both how a state assesses itself and how it is assessed by other subjects of the system, as well as the material parameters of power.

However, it must be stated for the purposes of this article that the existence of small states, however defined, depends on and acquires meaning only in the context of the interests of large states.⁷¹ Small states in multipolar or bipolar international relations systems may perform a number of useful functions: they may serve as buffer states, barriers, outposts, geopolitical gateways, resource-rich peripheries, diplomatic mediators, etc.⁷² In the context of the problems examined in this article, it is important to examine and historically compare the roles of small states in hierarchical (imperial) structures of the international relations system.

The results of comparative historical studies of the role of small states in imperial international relations structures show that:

- First, small states in strictly hierarchical (imperial) international relations structure survive if they are sufficiently far from imperial centres and have geostrategic importance;
- Second, small states in international systems dominated by land empires more often perform three main roles – buffers, barriers, and outposts;
- Third, small states in international systems dominated by sea empires are more often performing the role of outposts and geopolitical nodes (protection of communication nodes).

⁷⁰ N. Statkus, E. Motieka, Č. Laurinavičius, *Geopolitiniai kodai* (Vilnius: Vilnius Universiteto leidykla, 2003), 84-87.

⁷¹ See “Background notes on the notion of weak state as employed in International Relations Studies”, Central European University: Notes made in preparation of the Florence Blue Bird Overcoming State Weakness: An Agenda for State Reform in Eastern Europe Conference, available at <<http://www.ceu.hu/cps/bluebird/pap/aligica3.pdf>>, last visited 15.01.2005.

⁷² Č. Laurinavičius, E. Motieka, N. Statkus (note 73), 15-16.

1. Opportunities for Lithuania

According to the mentioned scenarios of the imperial world order, Lithuania's opportunities will be determined by two circumstances.

First, the decision of the large states regarding the eventual functions of Lithuania as the state at the junction of geostrategic zones. Geostrategically, Lithuania and other Baltic States are located at the fringe of the discontinental geostrategic zone. This essentially delineates the range of particular functions: a barrier of maritime states or an outpost against the continental states; a barrier of heartland states or an outpost against maritime states.

Second, the resolution of Lithuania itself regarding the functions provided for it by the geopolitical codes of the large states. At the moment, as a result of its political initiative and civilisation belonging, Lithuania orients itself towards sea states.⁷³ The orientation is based on the historical experience and the belief grounded in the realist paradigm that Russia's political and military power in the region can only be counterbalanced by the U.S. This creates tension with both Russia and the core states of the European Union that attempt to use Russia in acquiring strategic independence from the U.S.

If the key global power centres are evolving towards empires, Lithuania will soon doubtlessly face the necessity to reconsider the consequences of its choice. Essentially, the number of choices is limited: continuing orientation towards the U.S., aligning with the continental core of the EU, or benefiting from the growth of Russia's influence. Each of these choices entails different correlations of threats and opportunities in the short and in the long term.*

Orientation towards the U.S. With regard to short-term threats, the cost required by the U.S. imperial project of global democratisation should first be mentioned: financial and human resources for the peacekeeping, peace enforcement and democracy promotion operations initiated by the Americans. This could decrease Lithuania's possibilities of ensuring smooth socio-economic development and create tensions in domestic politics. The situation

⁷³ Č. Laurinavičius, E. Motieka, N. Statkus (note 67), p. 80.

* Threats and opportunities are assessed from the viewpoint of the general national interests: political autonomy, territorial integrity, and material welfare of citizens.

would be aggravated by Russia's attempts to take advantage of the domestic problems of the country, as well as the diplomatic pressure of the EU core states with regard to joining the Eurozone, delays in European projects, reduction of support from structural funds, etc. In the long term, the client status of Lithuania, as well as other states continuing similar orientation, would strengthen. Eventually, multilateral institutions under the exclusive control of the U.S. would not fulfil their purpose as they would not ensure the political autonomy and, even more, if there were exchanges of the spheres of interests between great states.

On the other hand, Lithuania's opportunities resulting from orientation towards the U.S. are already apparent. Tensions with Russia and the core states of the EU have been overcome, albeit with some difficulty. Lithuania receives support in positioning NATO and the EU towards the East (Kaliningrad Oblast of the Russian Federation, Belarus, Moldova, and South Caucasus). In other words, Lithuania is regarded as an effective implementer of democratisation projects that reasonably aspires to distinctiveness in the region. In the long-term perspective, the acquired experience and the accumulated human potential would allow Lithuania to achieve the role of an expert on Eastern Europe and Northern Russia and diplomatic mediator (an outpost of the spread of U.S. influence), transformable into the role of the barrier against Russia's imperial reintegration. Implementation of the U.S. plans aiming at strengthening transatlantic co-operation (e.g., the creation of a transatlantic free trade zone, the transatlantic summit council, etc.) would allow expecting both economic benefits and political dividends for Lithuania.

To conclude, it may be argued that the long-term benefits of this choice would outweigh the threats and their costs.

Alignment with the continental states of Europe. The short-term threats of this strategy are lesser but the long-term benefits are dubious. Full integration of Lithuania into the functioning EU mechanisms, the introduction of euro, and so forth, should result in social stabilisation and economic development, although at the likely price of reduced political autonomy. If Lithuania manages to integrate with the economic nucleus of the EU and perform economic or political functions that are useful for the large EU states, Lithuania would become a safe, "golden" province of the EU. On the other hand, alignment with the core of the EU would be one of the factors

strengthening the federalisation of the European Union, i.e. its becoming a full-fledged geopolitical subject, which would melt the autonomy of states. In regaining its strategic independence, the EU may be forced to enter into exchanges of the spheres of influence with Russia. This would be particularly felt at the eastern borders of the EU, “liberated” from the imperial influence of the U.S., where Russia would gain dominance.

Elements of these event scenarios may be observed in the current situation as well. The core states of the EU are sometimes rather indulgent towards Russia’s efforts to increase Lithuania’s dependence (e.g., energy dependence) and to ostentatiously point to its continuing presence within Russia’s sphere of influence. Russia motivates its actions by both short-term (social stabilisation, development of communications transport and energy, as well as agricultural sectors) and long-term benefits, cultural affinities and the important geopolitical function of Lithuania in bringing Russia closer to Europe. Such motivation has the following implications – turning Lithuania into an “agent of influence” in the Western transatlantic and European institutions and strengthening shared cultural (linguistic) basis. Doubtlessly, the implementation of this projection would eventually turn Lithuania into an outpost of the renovated Russian empire in Europe.

Concluding remarks

Obviously, the projection of Lithuania’s capabilities is based on a pragmatic cost-benefit analysis. It illuminates the range of available options. However, this analysis alone may not serve as the basis for making decisions. Primarily, because the so-called imperial tendencies discerned in the international system lack any definitiveness. Apparently, only the third – the Russian option – does not raise questions. Yet, even in this case, the pragmatic allurements of stability could be stronger than the other two options that presuppose more freedom but greater risks as well. In other words, further political analysis of these issues is futile because the choice will be finally determined by the values dominating in the Lithuanian political community.

Naturally, Lithuania’s resolution regarding one or another foreign policy strategy will not have a decisive influence on its international position. The context of global geopolitical processes is particularly important in this regard.

The growing imperial tendencies in international relations should neither be perceived as only threatening nor ignored. The tendencies of imperialisation indicate efforts to minimise the possibility of global turmoil by increasing control over global processes. If this process accelerates, the basis for the survival of small states will be their ability to find specialised niches in the imperialist international environment (e.g., administration of the territories of “failed” states, development of market economy mechanisms and democratic institutions, etc.). In the particular case of Lithuania, global management needs must be identified and corresponding capabilities must be created for the fulfilment of these needs. A pragmatic cost-benefit analysis seems to indicate that, in the long term, the global (imperial) governance project nurtured by the U.S. is superior and more advantageous for Lithuania. Among other things, this would mean a serious revision of G. Beresnevičius’ idea – we have already been invited to “forge” an empire.