

FROM VILNIUS CONFERENCE '98

Lithuania Before an Open Door

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The time has come to speak frankly. Signals from Western capitals are already telling us that we should not expect good news concerning Lithuania's security when Poland and two other Central European states are accepted into the North Atlantic Alliance next year. "Nothing is expected to be said in relation to you." This is how they are obliging us to adapt to our potential political exclusion from a frozen Euro-Atlantic security area, as well as to the post-occupation zone of uncertainty and risk.

Events are likely to take this course, although we hope that this will not transpire in the end.

Silence concerning the Baltic states in April 1999, or a failure to mention any one of them among the most likely applicants for NATO membership, would amount to a negative sign implying acceptance of the implementation of the Russian expansionist idea regarding its zone of special interests. At the same time it implies the acknowledgment of the de facto right of the powerful to determine the future of the Baltic states in one way or another. This would also mean a riskier future for the West, which is already capitulating. Thus, we will oppose this exclusion not only for our own sake.

On the other hand, this zone of interest, deriving from nearly sixty-year-old concepts and events, is very familiar to us.

In 1999, we shall commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Stalin-Hitler conspiracy, which marked the start of World War II, which was initiated by Germany and the Soviet Union. To Lithuania this meant hundreds of thousands of lives taken away and annihilation of the economy, nature, spiritual life and humanity lasting half a century. To date, none of the countries in question, the perpetrators of these crimes, has even offered an apology.

We have already won a part of our freedom - but not the whole of it. We are still unable to exercise, and in reality lack recognition, of the freedom to choose our place in an international security structure, such as the Atlantic Alliance. This means that the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact, and the "zone" which it delimited, is still alive in the consciousness of politicians, even 60 years later. Our freedom is restricted by the will of Russia's political elite, which causes democratic European elites to step back.

At the beginning of 1999, we will be able to say that five years have passed since Lithuania submitted an official document requesting membership in the North Atlantic alliance. Have we received any reply yet? Most probably we have not. What can one say about an office which has failed to reply to an essential document for five years? It has failed to give an answer to a nation and state which contributed a great deal to bring about the collapse of the monster of red totalitarianism. As a result Russia had a chance to try out alternatives and thereby ease security concerns in democratic Europe. We are saying to the West: we have contributed to your security and you have been able to save billions, hundreds of billions; yet, when we ask for security for our small state, we find ourselves speaking to a brick wall.

After Poland's accession to NATO in April 1999, the area of peace and security should be further extended northward, and not eastward. If we are not provided any

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answer, no clearer sign of future membership, this in itself will serve as an answer pointing to the inability of the West to do what is justified and just, and avoid mistakes. Words about an open door were meaningful a few years ago. It is even uncomfortable to repeat them now, if they only convey vague phrases. However, who can say with any assurance that the politicians will not be repeating the same empty phrases in April of next year in Washington?

For example, words tell us that historically we have always been a real part of the family of Western civilization. However, when we knock on the door - "the open door!" - we are left outside in the yard. There you may be attacked and torn to pieces by a creature intent on fashioning for itself some gnawed-off satellite. Do the westerners know that Russia's laws in force today provide for special social guarantees for its officers in the event that they suffer injuries fighting in the Baltic countries? Please note that it is simply foreseen that some time in the future they will suffer injuries fighting on our land.

Has anybody noticed that a special military exercise was only recently held in the Pskov region? With the approval of the revised CFE treaty, the Russian army sallied forth towards the Estonian border. The exercise was code-named "Operation Comeback." The West permitted an increase in military forces stationed right in front of the Baltic states, and remains blind to everything. The Estonians are happily dreaming about the European Union, and the latter still does not know if it should invite Lithuania to open accession negotiations. Maybe it will wait a while, since a large exercise involving the firing of "strike missiles" was also recently held in the Kaliningrad region. One may ask, which neighbor is Kaliningrad preparing to strike? One may also wonder if the West will describe this Russian behavior in terms of "confidence building measures," though quite a number of such words have already been written and signed.

More questions of a similar nature arise. What would happen if a huge fire erupted in the East, just behind us? For anything can happen there, in fact, and it is not so difficult to imagine this. For instance, one such risk could be a hungry army, which is not under the control of any center. Shall we then see the West extending a helping hand, or will this hand be withdrawn for fear of getting it burnt?

When Stalin was demanding that the West not conclude a separate peace agreement with a nearly-defeated Germany, nobody reminded him that it was he who was the first to conclude similar "peace" agreements with allies - dictators aligned with Hitler. Nobody required a reasonable thing from Stalin; namely, that the Soviets should withdraw their armies from the occupied countries immediately after the war as a condition for being on the same side with the Western allies until the victory. Such demands were not raised. The Atlantic Charter went into the dustbin. Once again, we were the means of paying; such was the Yalta barter, which predetermined horrible misfortunes for nations, for which nobody assumes responsibility. No promises are being made to us in return to extend stronger security guarantees today. Moreover, the politicizing westerners sometimes tell us that the occupation we suffered is our drawback: we have already been sold, sacrificed and "Sovietized"; therefore, our restored existence is again creating problems and is annoying or irritating.

In particular, Russian politicians attached to yesterday's thinking are irritated by our wish to become secure; thus we hear advice from the West "do not irritate." The same advice was offered 60 years ago, when Lithuania was hit by consecutive ultimatums from three neighbors.

Lithuania, however, has no wish to once again find itself a commodity on a counter where the great traders bargain.

Anyway, if this should happen, we fail to understand why the West cannot be more straightforward with Russia. This unhappy and highly unbalanced country sometimes even experiences a shortage of borders; it has neither money, nor guarantees against the chaos, which is called “smuta” in Russian. Yet once again it receives donated funds to save itself and continue pressing its neighbors. Why is it impossible to say: “Here, you can have these billions again, but forget about your dominance in the Baltic states. They want to be with the West, and we will provide haven to them!”

Maybe this seems like the ransoming of hostages, yet it is better to ransom somebody, rather than give money out of fear and receive nothing.

The funniest thing is that in exchange for the money, the West receives orders from officials of its Russian partner: “We will not let the Baltics be accepted! Niet!” What could this mean? At best, states that are the most benevolent towards us translate it in a softer way: you see, Russia disagrees; thus, you are in for a long wait. This is how we come to experience the *de facto* recognized veto right of Russia. And when Western politicians claim that they do not recognize this right of Russia, these are only words, words, words. Another “confidence building measure,” which brings the West another humiliation.

The day is approaching when three Central European states will become NATO members. If on that day nothing is uttered about other states determined to seek membership, in particular about Poland’s neighbor and strategic partner, Lithuania, in other words, if empty phrases or a shameful silence follow the fanfare on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary of NATO, we will bear witness to a moral and political catastrophe of the West.

Although Lithuania poses no danger either in the East or in the West, the West nevertheless is capable of creating disasters for itself as has happened in the past. For instance, it has been approaching disaster by tucking money into the quagmire where the red-starred explosives are rusting away, and by not insisting on the removal of the detonators in order to accomplish true changes. Western money, given away without proper control, has probably done more harm, while the talk about reforms in Russia has made it possible to avoid implementing them. Today everybody is reaping the harvest of political illusions.

Aside from everything that is happening in our neighborhood, the international situation could be destabilized to an even greater extent. This is what would result from an unfortunate decision of the West to halt the steady process of extending peace guarantees, such as the enlargement of the North Atlantic Alliance. If, by halting this process, the Western politicians destabilize the currently positive development of NATO and thus awaken the Eastern imperial appetite for former colonies and dominions - who will be responsible? Names will be entered here. On the other hand, the names of the brave people who did not stop NATO enlargement will also be recorded for ever.

It is important to be reminded of the following again and again: if the West gives away a certain part of itself, a part which is less valued, for example, a country or countries on the Eastern coast of the Baltic Sea, after that something else will have to be surrendered, in terms of morale and geopolitics.

There was the Baltic Way in 1989, and there is the Atlantic way now – but is it for everyone or not? There is also the Munich way - not yet abolished, not yet closed - but still looming. And the direction of the latter is very well known.

The situation of Lithuania is special. In defending itself against the West in the Middle Ages, it naturally halted the “Drang nach Osten.” In later centuries up until the end of the 20th century, it halted Russia’s “Drang nach Westen” by defending itself against Eastern imperialism. This country can be further employed for this purpose. “You, our partner Lithuania, endure the security vacuum, endure it for a long time without actual support from us, and later we will see whether you should be offered the Atlantic, or Munich way.” This is the stand of the West, not yet put in words, but felt in the forecast of events in 1999. A vacuum, however, does not last forever. Usually it is filled with air or something else that works its way into the vacuum from the side where the pressure is greater.

Until now Lithuania has not received the most important elements of armament it needs. Nevertheless, Lithuania will not follow the Munich way, it is a part of the West and will not abandon this position, even if it has to express regrets about the doubts of the Western ally.

A short while ago, the Lithuanian press published the remarks of the former commander of the German Army, Bundeswehr General Major Dietrich Genschel, about our path to NATO. I would like to quote a couple of ideas from that article: “Russia’s opposition and Western concern [about that] ... poses a powerful obstacle for the continuation of the accession process;” “The Baltic states are placed in an adverse position as a result of large gaps in the guarantees of firm security. Accession to NATO is the only way to fill in this gap.”

These two points are separated by a vast field where one can notice both newly ploughed areas of secure life as well as trenches of the old insecure life. That is the field where political diplomatic work is carried out and the moral political fight is waged.