

ARTICLES

From Solidarity to Partnership: Lithuanian-Polish Relations 1988-1998

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I. Introduction. The Context of Lithuanian and Polish Relations

The noted Lithuanian émigré historian, currently Lithuania's Ambassador to Israel, Romualdas Misiūnas declared "...Poland is Lithuania's closest neighbor psychologically."¹ Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus called Poland our "historically closest neighbor."² And indeed Lithuania is not tied with any other neighboring country as closely and with so many multifaceted relations as with Poland. Some people writing about the topic believe that one should not even call these relations as neighborly - they "resemble post-divorce bickering of wounded spouses."³ Up to now, for both Lithuanians and Poles an emotional evaluation of historical facts is the rule, the rewards for past victories and searches for culprits of failures are still being distributed.

The creation of a state system and the efforts to place this state in the region and in Europe shaped the relations between Lithuanians and Poles through the ages. All sorts of things, including conflicts and cordial cooperation, were met along this path. The young states of Lithuania and Poland encountered in both the East and West powerful and threatening forces which could be resisted only through joint efforts. In 1385 Lithuania and Poland in Krėva formed a personal union, which led to the introduction of Christianity into Lithuania in 1387. In 1410 the joint forces of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania defeated the Teutonic Knights at Grunwald – this triumph remains until today the symbol most uniting the two nations. In 1569 the Union of Lublin, uniting Lithuania and Poland into one state – Rzeczpospolita, was approved. During the Rzeczpospolita period the Polonization of Lithuania's nobility and higher culture which began with the coming of Christianity continued, resulting in the relegation of the Lithuanian language to the peasant class. In 1795 the weakened joint state of Lithuania and Poland disappeared from the map of Europe, divided up by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, but before the divisions it succeeded in leaving behind one of the most democratic constitutions of the period.

In the 19th century Lithuanians and Poles, fostering the ideas of national revival nurtured at the University of Vilnius during the period Adomas Mickevičius (Adam Mickiewicz) studied there, fought together in the uprisings of 1831 and 1863. Toward the end of the century the developing Lithuanian national consciousness (the formulators of this process were no longer the Polish speaking nobility, but Lithuanian intellectuals arising from the wealthy peasants of Western Lithuania) began to move away from Polish language and culture and toward a declaration for an independent statehood. For the greater share of Polish intellectuals, fostering the vision of restoring the Rzeczpospolita, these goals of the Lithuanians were not

¹Romuald J. Misiunas, "Lithuanian View of Poland and the Poles," *Talk Delivered at Polish Consulate-General* (New York, 25 May, 1994).

²Valdas Adamkus, "Litwa i Polska- przeszlosc i przyszlosc," (Lithuania and Poland – Past and Future) *Lithuania*, 1998, No. 3 (28), p. 13.

³Michael Szporer, "Politics of Intolerance in Europe's Center: Rhetoric of "Us" Against "Them" in Poland and Lithuania", *Presented at the 5th World Conference of Central and East European Studies*, Warsaw, August 6, 1995.

understandable and served only to break apart the unity. At the very same time, there was a search for ties, opportunities for cooperation, but unfortunately these efforts were not utilized - thwarted by both the games of the great neighbors and by the personal ambitions of the leaders from both nations. In 1918-1920 the Lithuanian nation had matured sufficiently to create an independent state, but in none of the various conceptions of reestablishing the Polish state - in the "confederation" of Josef Pilsudski (Lithuania reestablishes the historical borders of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and forms a union with Poland) or the "unitary state" of Roman Dmowski (the Lithuanian speaking districts form a separate territory within the borders of Poland) - was any place left for a Lithuanian national state.⁴ Lithuanian President Antanas Smetona after the beginning of World War II admitted that "the restoration of the Lithuanian state on narrow national foundations was a mistake."⁵ That was responsible for the conflicts between the two states (the "mutiny" of general Lucjan Żeligowski, the incorporation of the Vilnius region into the Polish state, the disputes in international tribunals) and the cessation of ties until March 1938. One could say that these ties were, in fact, restored only at the end of the eighties because neither in the period before World War II, nor during the war, nor even in the postwar period of the "family of socialist states" were there any conditions for a Lithuanian-Polish dialogue. The possibilities of closer ties between the two nations were shown when after the start of the war Lithuanians gave assistance to Polish officers by providing them with housing and helping them withdraw to the West. In the repatriations after the war the vast majority of Polish intellectuals withdrew from Lithuania to Poland - this fact had serious consequences in forming the national consciousness of the Poles in Lithuania and in shaping their social and cultural life.

Today, we have a time perspective that allows us to look also at the newest stage of relations between our countries. Looking at their development from a distance they appear in recent times to be balanced and consistent - in treaty after treaty the legal basis for cooperation was expanded, ties between the countries' leaders and institutions, free movement across the common border, and commercial exchanges were expanded. But to those better understanding the various shifts in Lithuanian-Polish relations, it is clear that this short road could not have been easy.

II. Poland's Role in Restoring Lithuania's Independence (1988-1991)

Contacts between Lithuania and Poland after the end of World War II and after the imposition of communist regimes in both countries were minimal: primarily consisting of visits of party delegations and pompous "cultural days." Seeking to limit the contacts of Lithuanian and Polish post-war resistance organizations, most but not all communications were steered through Moscow. However, exchanges of information could not be stopped completely: Polish television could be seen in the Western part of Lithuania, the Polish press and translations of books by Western authors - at the time for many this was the most important source of free information - were available in Lithuania. There were also exchanges of visits by scholars. The Polish internal and émigré press - the periodicals *Znak*, *Wież*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*

⁴*Akty i dokumenty dotyczące sprawy granic Polski na konferencji pokojowej w Paryżu* (Acts and Documents about the Polish Border at the Peace Conference in Paris), part 1, Paris, 1920, p. 131.

⁵ Raimundas Lopata, Kalba Lietuvos Respublikos Seimo iskilmingajame posėdyje, (Speech at a Formal Session of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania), *Seimo Kronika* (Chronicles of the Seimas), No. 5, February 23, 1998.

and especially the Paris based *Kultura* regularly published information about Lithuania, analyzed Lithuanian-Polish relations, and the possibilities of the two states drawing together. In 1981 in Krakow the periodical *Lithuania*, devoted to Lithuanian questions, began to be issued. But, nevertheless, all these things were known only in a narrow circle of intellectuals, “ideas about the necessity of drawing together the societies of both states smoldered only in the minds of the few opposition publicists.”⁶ (Bronislaw Geremek, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jerzy Giedroyc, Adam Michnik, Leon Brodowski, Marek Karp, and others later became the most active supporters of closer Lithuanian-Polish relations). The greater part of both nations continued living in the so-called “informational vacuum,” nurtured by Soviet cliches and unhappy recollections of the two countries relations in the inter-war period. This “vacuum” froze and allowed many old stereotypes, which had considerable influence on the relations between both nations and states after the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, to survive.

In the period of the dissolution of Communist systems and the crumbling apart of the USSR (1988 to first half of 1991), the positive aspects of Lithuanian-Polish relations were frequently stressed, the Polish people showed sympathy for and supported the efforts of Lithuania in freeing itself from the clutches of the Soviet empire. The formation of Sąjūdis was viewed in Poland as the birth of a movement similar to Solidarność: Solidarność leaders, including the current Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs Bronislaw Geremek, issued a letter, welcoming Sąjūdis and expressing the desire for cooperation. Sąjūdis leaders, in turn, sent a letter to Mazowiecki, congratulating him on gaining the post of prime minister and asking the Polish Government to support the right of the Lithuanian people to self-determination. Soon afterwards, the first contacts between society’s leaders and politicians were established, and the question of the possible restoration of relations between the two nations was raised. In October 1989 on the initiative of the All Poland Lithuanian Friends Club the first Lithuanian-Polish “round table” took place, in which representatives of Poland’s Sejm and Senate participated and one of the founders of Sąjūdis Česlovas Kudaba headed the social movements of Lithuania delegation. In December, a Lithuanian delegation, headed by Sąjūdis Chairman Vytautas Landsbergis met in Warsaw with the delegation of the Polish Parliament Citizens Club, headed by Geremek. In these meetings the Polish delegates supported the goals of Lithuanian independence and reaffirmed the inviolability of the Lithuanian-Polish borders.⁷

The declaration of March 11, 1991 on the restoration of Lithuania’s independence was welcomed enthusiastically in Poland, it was also supported by the Polish government and parliament (the first foreign visitor to address the Lithuanian Seimas was Polish Senator Tadeusz Kłopotowski). However, the formal establishment of interstate relations took place only a year and a half later. Lithuania’s gaining independence was part of the process of major changes in Europe: the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact organization and Comecom, the historical decisions accepting the unification of Germany and the confirmation of Poland’s western borders, negotiations were begun on the withdrawal of the Russian army from Poland.

⁶ Jacek Borkowicz, “Polska-Litwa: Ukryte bariery porozumienia”(Poland-Lithuania: Secret Barriers to Harmony), *Polska w Europie, Zeszyt dwunasty* (Poland in Europe, **(reikėtų duoti anglų vertimą)**) Warsaw, June-September 1993, p. 34.

⁷ *Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai 1917-1994, Dokumentu rinkinys*, (The Relations between Poland and Lithuania 1917-1944, A Collection of Documents), Vilnius, 1998, pp. 173-174.

Western states observed these processes carefully and avoided making any sudden moves that could speed up the deterioration of the USSR. All these factors also influenced the careful position of the Polish government in recognizing Lithuania's independence and in establishing the diplomatic relations which Lithuania actively sought. At the end of 1990 (after the signing of a border treaty with Germany and the declarations of independence by Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus), the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs created the so-called "two track" concept, which provided for maintaining parallel contacts with USSR leaders in Moscow and with the independence seeking USSR republics. There were people in both Lithuania and Poland who criticized this position and urged the immediate establishment of diplomatic relations with Lithuania. There were also other voices, seeking to link support for Lithuania with large obligations in regard to the rights of the Polish minority in Lithuania.

After the declaration of Lithuania's independence, the Polish government on March 13 adopted a statement which recognized the right of national self-determination and declared the desire to foster good neighborly relations with the Lithuanian nation. There was, however, no formal recognition of Lithuania in the statement. On March 28, Premier Mazowiecki declared his willingness to be an intermediary in the negotiations between Lithuania and the USSR. Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Algirdas Saudargas visited Warsaw on May 11, Prime Minister Kazimiera Prunskienė and Deputy Prime Minister Romualdas Ozolas – on June 21. In October the first border post between Lithuania and Poland began operations. Discussions were begun on the possibilities of exchanging consulates and information bureaus, and drafts of interstate documents were prepared. Poland along with the Scandinavian nations and Czechoslovakia supported the efforts of Lithuania and the other Baltic states to gain observer status in the Committee for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

Poland reacted passionately to the January 1991 events in Vilnius: the Sejm and government adopted statements which condemned the use of force against peaceful citizens and urged that the conflicts between Vilnius and Moscow be resolved in negotiations. The speech of Lithuanian Supreme Council deputy Ėslovas Okinėcas (Czeslaw Okinczyc) in the Polish Sejm which in a highly emotional manner described the situation in Lithuania and its desire for independence, received considerable attention among the people. Activities supporting Lithuania were organized in Poland, there were pickets at the foreign embassies in Warsaw and a campaign for gathering humanitarian aid. During the January events Foreign Minister Saudargas arrived in Poland with the authorization if necessary to form a Lithuanian government in exile - the Polish government supported this mission.

After the bloody events in Vilnius it was important for Lithuania to open an information bureau in Warsaw. This bureau, which began operations in February and was maintained by donations from the Polish people, distributed information about events in Lithuania, maintained contacts with Polish institutions, organized visits to Poland by Lithuanian representatives. In February 1991 discussions began on the draft of the declaration of Lithuanian-Polish Friendly Relations and Neighborly Cooperation.

These contacts formed the basis for future interstate cooperation, which after the recognition of Lithuania's independence on August 26, 1991 and the reestablishment of diplomatic relations on September 5 continued without

interruptions - the first round of negotiations on the declaration of Lithuanian-Polish Friendly Relations and Neighborly Cooperation started already on September 5-6.

In 1990-1993 the Lithuanian press discussed by which road the newly independent Lithuania would go to Europe. It was asserted that the best road was through Scandinavia (the idea of a "Common Northern House"). At the same time the Lithuanian Government understood the importance of relations with Poland: "Poland - is traditionally an important country for Lithuania. The closest road to Western Europe for Lithuania will continue to be through Poland, and therefore good relations are important..."⁸ These discussions ended later - it became clear that Lithuania in promoting its national interests has to utilize all foreign relations possibilities and work in all areas.

III. From the Establishment of Diplomatic Relations to the Treaty (1991-1994)

The interval between the restoration of diplomatic relations in September 1991 and the signing of the Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighborly Cooperation on April 26, 1994 was probably the most difficult period for Lithuanian-Polish relations (there were even assertions that relations in this period were "in some ways even worse than before the war"⁹ when the relations between the two states were darkened by territorial pretensions: Lithuania viewed the Vilnius area as occupied territory and the Lithuanian-Polish border as a demarcation line). The governments had to finish settling the "frozen" cases from the beginning of the century. First of all, to settle for all times the long lasting dispute over Vilnius and South-Eastern Lithuania, to end the "Lithuanian-Polish legal war" and to put down the foundations for cooperation between the two countries. The resolution of these questions was made more difficult by the complicated international situation at that time, the efforts to return Lithuania to the sphere of interest of its "great eastern neighbor." There was an effort to involve the Polish national minority, part of which for various reasons viewed the Lithuanian national awakening and the restoration of statehood with skepticism, (the two deputies of the Lithuanian Supreme Council who represented the Polish minority, abstained in the vote on the Declaration of Lithuanian Independence on March 11, 1990). The most important event inflaming bilateral relations was the dismissal in September 1991 of the local councils in the Vilnius and Ąalėininkai districts, which in 1989-1991 "supported the Moscow political line"¹⁰ seeking to block the goals of Lithuanian independence, and demanding autonomy for East Lithuania as well as the reunion with the USSR. The Polish government viewed this action as a restriction of the rights of the Polish national minority. The Lithuanian government, in turn, declared that the members of the dismissed councils were "not Poles, but Bolsheviks." It was stressed that the "autonomy supporters" consciously acted against the statehood and territorial integrity of Lithuania, and that the firmly rooted nomenclature-collective farm system of the Soviet period created very favorable conditions for such activities. Direct rule was introduced in the Vilnius and Ąalėininkai districts to help change this situation

⁸ "Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės užsienio politikos metmenys" (Outlines of the Foreign Policy of the Republic of Lithuania), October 5, 1990, In the Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania.

⁹ Borkowicz, *Polska*, p.36

¹⁰ Borkowicz, *Polska*, p. 38.

and to help place the foundations for administrative reforms and for privatization processes. The Polish government did not support the declarations of the “autonomy supporters” (in any case the declarations were not addressed to Warsaw, but to Moscow and Minsk). The main Polish demand was the organization as quickly as possible of elections of the Vilnius and Ąalėininkai district councils. After their holding in November 1992 bilateral relations became noticeably warmer. Other questions discussed at this time (plans to expand the boundaries of the city of Vilnius, the registration of the Polish University in Vilnius and the Armia Krajowa Club) did not create such confrontations. The Lithuanian government, in turn, often brought up during the negotiations the demands of the Lithuanians in Poland (Lithuanian textbooks for schools, the use of the native language in public affairs, broadcasts of radio and television programs in the Lithuanian language) stressing that the Lithuanians in Poland had far fewer rights to keep and promote their national singularity than the Poles in Lithuania.

An important caesura in this period of Lithuanian-Polish relations was the Declaration on Friendly Relations and Good Neighborly Cooperation, signed on January 13, 1992 by Foreign Ministers Algirdas Saudargas and Krzysztof Skubiszewski. The most general principles of relations between the two states - the nonuse of force, the inviolability of the border, protection of the rights of national minorities based on the requirements of international documents - were reaffirmed in the declaration. The signing of the declaration showed that the governments of both countries despite the considerable pressure from radical internal forces were able to maintain balance and to open the way to further common steps. In 1992 treaties on economic cooperation and the protection of investments were signed, the railroad crossing at ĄeĄtokai began operations. In November, a scientific conference devoted to Lithuanian-Polish relations was organized in Vilnius. This was the first public discussion after the reestablishment of diplomatic relations on questions sensitive to both nations.

The points of the declaration, which was a political document, had to be expanded in the Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighborly Cooperation, whose draft the Polish Foreign Ministry handed over in January 1993. From the reaction in both countries to the signing of the declaration (protest pickets and gathering of signatures in Vilnius, heated debates in the Polish Sejm), it was clear that the preparation of the treaty would not be easy.

Poland signed treaties for friendship and cooperation with her other neighbors who regained independence after the breaking apart of the USSR-Ukraine and Belarus - after relatively short negotiations (with Ukraine on May 18, 1992, with Belarus on June 23, 1993). In these negotiations there was no evaluation of past relations or debate about the protection of rights of national minorities. Discussions on these questions began only after the signing of the treaties (in May 1997 the presidents of Poland and Ukraine signed a “unity and reconciliation” declaration that evaluated their past relations).

The main demand from the Lithuanian side in the negotiations for the treaty was a condemnation of the 1920 aggression by Źeligowski and the annexation of the Vilnius region. The most important postulates of the Polish side, as in the negotiations on the declaration, were linked with the rights of national minorities. The Lithuanian negotiating team included representatives of the Foreign Ministry and Nationalities Department as well as historians. The first round of negotiations took place on July 19, 1993. The greater part of the treaty, relying on the usual points of such treaties:

the inviolability of the borders, the commitment to resolve all disagreements by negotiations, support for contacts between states and greater cooperation in various areas, etc. was quickly reconciled in negotiations. These points were later expanded in interdepartmental agreements.

More time was devoted to specific questions in Lithuanian-Polish relations: defining the rights of national minorities and the evaluation of events in the 1920s. The discussion of minority rights were based on international documents defining these rights, parts of which were at that time still being prepared. Thus a modern decision model for settling these questions was selected, in some cases even preceding the ongoing discussions in the Council of Europe and applying the “positive discrimination” principle to minorities. The resolution of these questions were often based on other international treaties, especially the historical Polish-German Treaty on Good Neighbors and Friendly Cooperation. Foreign Minister Geremek evaluated in a positive manner the definition of national minority rights in the document: “I believe that the Polish-Lithuanian treaty implements the standard of the rights of national minorities in the same way as they are defined in the main documents of the European Union. I consider that a major accomplishment.”¹¹ The responses by the representatives of the minorities were mixed, discussions on various questions on the protection of these rights continue to the present time, however, no longer in the context of political disagreements.

The question about the evaluation of the historical relations between Lithuania and Poland took the longest time to resolve. The Polish side refused to accept the Lithuanian proposed formulation in the Treaty text, arguing that statements of such a nature are not included in international treaties, and suggested that the issue could be covered in a separate declaration. This suggestion was subsequently not acted upon, and the Treaty’s preamble included assertions that stressed that both nations have the right to evaluate history in different ways, expressed regret for past conflicts, and recognized the integrity of the countries’ territories with the capitals in Vilnius and Warsaw. This was a compromise formulation whose aim was to end the discussions on the past relations of the two nations and to direct attention and energy toward the future.

The process of the two countries’ integration into Western structures shaped the atmosphere for and spurred on the Treaty negotiations. The establishment of normal relations with neighbors was one of the primary demands, which were required for our countries in this process. However, the essential factor, determining the change in the negotiations, was the conscious decision by both sides, based on the rational understanding of state interests and the well-learned lessons of history. As the Polish linguist Jan Karłowicz wrote more than a century ago about the possibilities of Lithuanian-Polish drawing together: “Only mutual understanding, two-sided concessions, on the path of friendship and unity can bring peace to two or more nations, which are destined to live together.”¹² A favorable atmosphere for the signing of the Treaty was created by the articles of historians and public figures, the statements about the necessity of Lithuanian-Polish drawing together by political

¹¹ “Spalio 31 d. prisakdinto Lenkijos užsienio reikalų ministro Bronislawo Geremeko pirmasis interviu- Lietuvos rytui” (The first interview to Lietuvos rytas by Polish Foreign Minister Bronislaw Geremek who was sworn in on October 31),” *Lietuvos rytas*, November 13, 1997.

¹² M. Jagiello, “Polsko-litewskie karczowanie uprzedzien” (The Destruction of Polish-Lithuanian Stereotypes), *Przegląd powszechny*, 1998, No. 6, p. 331.

figures and intellectuals - Jerzy Giedroyc, Czeslaw Milosz, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Adam Michnik, Jan Nowak-Jezioranski, Tomas Venclova.

The negotiations on the Treaty were widely discussed in the press of both countries with representatives of the parliaments and political parties participating actively. At that time the public attention and pressure made the negotiations work of the delegations much more difficult, but looking at it from the perspective of the present day one has to stress the importance of public discussion. It determined that the adopted decisions did not become only a "summit conspiracy." After the signing of the Treaty accusations of reciprocal wrongs and the settling of accounts withdrew from the center of the relations between the two states. "The Good Neighbor Treaty signed in April 1994 is proof of the breaking of prejudices and stereotypes in bilateral relations."¹³ It is worth noting that the Treaty was ratified by both parliaments on the same day - October 13, unanimously in the Polish parliament and by a large majority in Lithuania. This showed that good neighbor and friendly relations became the most important priority of the political forces in Lithuania and Poland.

The discussions on the Treaty did not halt the expansion of bilateral relations: in 1993-1994 treaties on legal assistance, visa free travel, avoidance of double taxation on income and capital, cooperation in the area of health protection, cultural exchanges, and cooperation in television and radio, an agreement on the opening of the border crossing post at Kalvarija-Dipliðkës were signed. There were also visits and cooperation at international forums. Poland supported Lithuania's efforts to get the Russian army withdrawn from Lithuania's territory. The expansion of military cooperation: on June 15, 1993 (a year before the signing of the Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighborly Cooperation) a treaty on cooperation in military affairs was signed, Poland's handing over to Lithuania its first shipment of military equipment in August had particular importance in strengthening open and mutual trust.

By signing the Treaty and successfully expanding cooperation, Lithuania and Poland refuted the "black scenarios" which some observers had foreseen in the development of relations. These, based on the models from the beginning of the century and on examples from other regions, predicted a strengthening of nationalism in Lithuania leading to ethnic conflicts and disagreements with Poland.¹⁴

IV. Expansion of Bilateral Relations in 1994-1996

The signing of the treaty was recognized in both countries as an event completing the important stage in forming bilateral relations, but another question arose at that time - what next? How to utilize in the societies of both countries the positive energy and favorable international opinion arising from the signing of the Treaty? How to use Lithuanian-Polish relations to reach the strategic foreign policy goal of both nations - EU and NATO membership? How to make sure that integration into Western structures would not choke bilateral relations? Evaluating the cooperation perspectives of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation after the signing of the Treaty it was predicted that "The Poles are so focused on NATO and the EU that

¹³ Robert Kupiecki, Krzysztof Szczepanik, *Polityka zagraniczna Polski 1918-1994* (Poland's Foreign Policy 1918-1944), Warsaw, 1995, p. 54.

¹⁴ Stephen R. Burant and Voytek Zubek, "Eastern Europe's Old Memories and New Realities: Resurrecting the Polish Lithuanian Union," *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 7, No. 2, spring 1993.

problems in the immediate neighborhood - including relations with Poland's eastern neighbors - have been relegated to the background."¹⁵

Declarations about reconciliation and the beginning of neighborly relations were not sufficient. It was necessary that the societies of both countries accept these ideas, that Lithuania and Poland become close partners in all fields of cooperation. Already in the year the Treaty was signed visits and meetings at various levels became more frequent: departments, districts exchanged delegations, the first closer contacts between the parliaments developed. A treaty on the reciprocal employment of citizens, cooperation protocols between the ministries of health and internal affairs, customs, prosecutors were signed.

The proposals for the signing of a Free Trade Treaty, the creation of joint peacekeeping battalion, and cooperation in the control of air space, made during the visit of President Algirdas Brazauskas to Poland on February 17-18, 1995, became an impulse for new cooperation. Lithuania expressed its desire to join the Central European Free Trade Organization (CEFTA). The Polish Sejm and Government supported these Lithuanian offers, although noting that their implementation could take some time. However, it turned out that the political goodwill of both countries could accomplish much. Soon afterwards the negotiations for the Free Trade Treaty were begun (the treaty was signed on June 6, 1996). Foreign Minister Povilas Gylys participated at the CEFTA summit meeting in Brno in the fall of 1996 during which Poland declared its support for Lithuania's joining CEFTA. In August the agreement on donations by the Polish military to the Lithuanian army and protocols for the training of officers at the Military Academies of both countries were signed. The creation of the joint battalion - LITPOLBAT - was begun.

The treaty on border cooperation, signed on September 15, 1995 during Premier Jyzef Oleksy's visit to Lithuania, opened a new area of activity. It created the possibilities for the realization of joint projects on the border infrastructure and direct cooperation between the border regions of both countries. During this period particular attention was devoted to the improvement of passage through the border crossing points, the expansion of the border infrastructure, cooperation between the border defense and customs services. The situation on the border improved significantly after the opening of the border crossing point at Kalvarija in September 1995 to all kinds of freight transport and the increasing of the permeability of the railroad crossing at Trakiškės-Dežtokai. The preconditions for further steps in this area, embodying the subsequently created vision of the Lithuanian-Polish border being a future European Union internal border, were created.

In 1995 regular meetings and consultations between the foreign ministries of both countries were begun on questions of regional cooperation and integration into Western structures, stressing that "Lithuania and Poland were talking, already sitting on the same side of the table." The outcome of these consultations was the ever-increasing attention given to questions concerning regional problems, integration into EU and NATO at the meetings of the countries' leaders. Political coordination on questions important to both countries, brought up by joint initiatives in the area of political dialogue with EU, was raised. "The grand opening of contacts with Poland

¹⁵ Stephen R. Burant, "Lithuania's Place in Poland's Foreign Policy," Prepared for delivery at the V World Congress for Central and East European Studies, Warsaw, August 6-11, 1995, p. 29

was begun, the previously so strongly felt lack of confidence and fear of Poland was forgotten.”¹⁶

The joint article of Lithuanian and Polish Foreign Ministers Povilas Gylys and Dariusz Rosati, published on September 5, 1996, the 5th anniversary of the restoration of diplomatic relations, and the declaration on September 19 signed by the Presidents noted that Lithuania and Poland would support each other in the process of integrating into NATO and hold consultations at all levels. The joint activities of the Lithuanian, Polish, and Ukrainian Presidents on the situation in Belarus in the fall of 1996 were viewed as an important and positively evaluated initiative.

In settling questions on the implementation of the Treaty, the greatest amount of attention had to be devoted to the problems of the rights of national minorities: “Great Vilnius” (the expansion of the boundaries of the city of Vilnius, which in the opinion of some of the leaders of the Polish minority threatened to change the national composition of the district by joining to the city some of the districts which had large Polish populations), the registration of a Polish university in Vilnius, teaching in the languages of national minorities, text books for Lithuanian schools in Poland, the representation of national minorities in the state administrative structures, the writing of last names in the native language, and other questions. These questions were discussed at meetings of the Treaty implementation inter-parliamentary control group, created by the parliaments of both countries. At these meetings the implementation of the points of the Treaty in both countries was evaluated in a positive manner. The relations between the two countries were improved by the registration of Polish War Veterans Club in February 1995 after which the question of the Armia Krajowa (a Polish military organization active during World War II in the pre-war territory of Poland which sought Poland’s freedom and the restoration of its pre-war borders) veterans was forgotten. Considerable attention was devoted to education questions: groups of children in kindergartens, classes with Polish as the language of instruction, the opening of Polish schools, the issuing of new textbooks, etc. The first Polonia Education Forum held in Poland in July 1995 recognized that the best organized Polish national minority education system in any foreign country was in Lithuania.

The visit of President Aleksander Kwaśniewski to Lithuania on March 5, 1996, during which the State Border Treaty and Joint Declaration on the Strengthening of Cooperation were signed, best exemplified mutual relations in this period. During the visit it was affirmed that the relations between Lithuania and Poland were the best ever in the history of the two countries, mutual cooperation was being developed in all areas, national minorities questions were no longer a barrier to Lithuanian-Polish relations. During the meeting of Presidents Brazauskas and Kwaśniewski on military ships in September 1996 it was declared that without a secure Poland there can not be a secure Lithuania, and without a secure Lithuania there cannot be a secure Poland. It was stressed that the Lithuania-Polish border can not become NATO’s eastern border.

The reconciliation of Lithuania and Poland was compared to similar processes taking place between Germany and France as well as Poland and Germany, and the relations of the two states were called a model of good neighborly relations. At the same time the two sides stressed that the expansion of Lithuanian-Polish relations was not an alternative to cooperation of the Baltic States, and that this cooperation was only an expansion in the direction of Central Europe.

¹⁶ Jan Widacki, “Stosunki polsko-litewskie” (Polish-Lithuanian Relations), *Kultura*, 1997, no. 11, p.66.

V. Strategic partnership and Institutional Cooperation (1997-1998)

A new stage of Lithuanian-Polish relations, called “strategic partnership” (this term was used for the first time by Foreign Minister Saudargas during his visit to Warsaw in January) began in 1997. During the meetings as well as in the documents of a political nature signed at the time it was declared that the strategic goals of Lithuania and Poland – membership in the EU and NATO - were the same and the two states would support each other in seeking these goals. Foreign Minister Geremek declared: “Lithuania can expect that when Poland becomes a member of NATO and the EU, she will become the motor pushing for Lithuania’s entry.”¹⁷ Polish leaders in meetings with partners in the West more than once stressed that Lithuania’s speedier inclusion in Western structures was a priority matter for Poland. The realization of the concept of strategic partnership was based on the vision of Lithuania and Poland drawing together as supported by Giedroyc (who was granted honorary Lithuanian citizenship in 1997) and his edited journal *Kultura*. Geremek emphasized: “I would like as long as I am working in the foreign relations ministry that the ideas, created by the Polish emigration, Jerzy Giedroyc and the journal *Kultura*, would remain alive and that the Polish Government would bring about their implementation.”¹⁸

The experiences of integrating into Western structures were shared during regularly held consultations between the foreign and defense ministries, and European integration institutes of the two countries. Practical cooperation was begun in the regional projects BALTNET, BALTSEA, and BALTRON. In September 1998 the first LITPOLBAT exercises, symbolically called the “Grunwald Wind” were held (The formation of LITPOLBAT has to be completed by February 1, 1999). Poland provides Lithuanian armed forces with significant technical and material support and there is an exchange of military school students.

Lithuania, on various occasions, has declared its support for the first round of NATO expansion, stressing that Poland’s membership in NATO also strengthens Lithuania’s security. The appeal by the USA Lithuanian Community on November 5, 1997 to the U.S. Senate, in which the Senate was urged to ratify as quickly as possible the protocol for the entry by Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic into NATO should be noted. Poland, in turn, has always supported the further expansion of NATO and the as swift as possible Lithuanian membership in NATO. As Polish Foreign Ministry representative Piotr Switalski said at the September 1998 conference held in Vilnius: “if some one attempts to close NATO’s doors, then Poland will be the first to stick its foot in the door”. The noted Polish émigré US representative Brzezinski stressed the necessity of maintaining “North-South” balance in the second round of NATO expansion, suggesting that Lithuania be included in this round.

Lithuania began the new stage of cooperation with Poland utilizing the positive experiences of cooperation and joint activities with Baltic and Nordic countries. Using this example joint Lithuanian-Polish institutions - Parliamentary Assembly, Government Cooperation Council and Presidential Consultative Committee - were created. This was an unprecedented step in Polish foreign policy. Lithuania, in turn, became the chain of cooperation linking Central Europe, Baltic, and Nordic countries. Without this tie it would be difficult to imagine the formation of a unified regional economic space, of strategic infrastructure projects (the VIA BALTICA highway and railroad, the Baltic Sea energy and gas ring). These projects are at the center of

¹⁷ *Lietuvos rytas*, November 13, 1997.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

attention of the Cooperation Council of the Lithuanian-Polish Governments, which at its first meeting in September 1997 foresaw concrete obligations for the next several years. In the program documents of the new Polish Government in 1997 Lithuanian-Polish relations are mentioned as being among Poland's most important priorities in the region. "We do not conceal that among the three Baltic countries Lithuania is the closest as a natural neighbor as well as a very important strategic partner" - Foreign Minister Geremek emphasized on the eve of his visit to Vilnius, which, by the way, was his first foreign visit.¹⁹ In the Lithuanian Government's foreign policy documents the importance of Poland is stressed in an analogous manner.

Poland is one of Lithuania's most important economic partners: Poland is in third place in the number joint ventures after Russia and Germany (until February 1998, 518 joint and 203 Polish capital enterprises were registered). In October 1997 the Polish bank Kredyt Bank, which was the first foreign bank in Lithuania, began operations in Vilnius. In 1997 Poland accounted for 4.4 percent of Lithuania's total foreign trade turnover and held 6th place (Lithuanian-Polish trade turnover reached 415.0 million USD, imports 325.1 million USD, exports - 89.9 million USD). As one can see from these figures, the most acute problem in Lithuanian-Polish economic relations is the vastly different rates of export and import growth - trade turnover between the states from 1995 grew (at a rate of 30-40 percent per year) with a significantly greater growth of imports from Poland to Lithuania.

The growth rate of Lithuanian exports was limited by unfavorable circumstances, which were created during the initial stage of liberalizing mutual trade. During the negotiations for the Free Trade Agreement the then in effect Lithuanian foreign trade system from which concessions were made, was significantly more liberal.²⁰ Evaluating the new circumstances and comprehending the importance of the Central European market, three Lithuanian firms (*Achema*, *Mapeikiø nafta* and *Alytaus tekstilė*), supported by the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, in the summer of 1998 opened a trade office in Warsaw. It is believed that during this year the adjustments to the Free Trade Agreement as well as the active work of the mentioned office will ease the entry of Lithuanian goods into the Polish market. This process should also encourage the activities of common firms, the organization of joint production and the implementation of joint investment projects. In the parliamentary assembly meeting which took place in Vilnius this year attention was paid to the problems of Lithuanian-Polish economic cooperation, a common economic cooperation commission was established in the Cooperation Council of the Governments.

The on-going processes of decentralizing government and administrative reform in Lithuania and Poland opened the possibilities of direct contacts between cities, districts, and local governments in both countries. By April 1998 thirty Lithuanian

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ About 70% of the trade goods positions according to the EU harmonized trade coding and description system are completely tariff tax free (for the remaining goods the size of the tax varies from 5 to 30%). The average tariff by weight of imports into Lithuania was about 1%, while in Poland it was correspondingly about 7%. Poland had foreseen placing import duties on more than 2,800 industrial goods from Lithuania, Lithuania - only on 700 goods. It is believed that the trade situation between the countries will improve; from July 1 of this year with the coming in force of an additional protocol to the existing Free Trade Agreement. Poland now allows into its markets without duty Lithuanian chemical and pharmaceutical products, fertilizers, woolen and cotton yarns, some cloths, furniture, wood and its products as well as some other goods. Tariff taxes on other goods, except for agricultural goods, will be gradually abolished until the year 2000. [Information given by the 1st Secretary in Lithuania's embassy in Poland Dalia. Kadišienė.]

cities and districts had already signed cooperation treaties with partners in Poland.²¹ On April 1, a partnership treaty was signed between the two capitals - Vilnius and Warsaw.

An impressive event, reminiscent in its scope of the Lithuanian-Polish Sejm meetings during the Rzeczpospolita period, was the Local Governments of Lithuania and Poland Forum (held in Poland on March 30 - April 3, 1998) in which representatives of 150 local governments and local government organizations participated. The Forum held the opening session in Warsaw, and subsequently its members spread out to almost all the districts of Poland, sharing experiences in reforms and establishing direct ties. It was decided that meetings of the Forum would be organized on a regular basis.

The negative image of the Lithuanian-Polish border, formed at the beginning of the 1990's with long lines, corruption, contraband on the border, is slowly disappearing. The common border looks increasingly less like a "dead front line" with contacts between the regions and their inhabitants opening the way to greater cooperation. Utilizing the forms of regional cooperation widespread in Western Europe after World War II as well as the successful experience of the Euroregion activities along Poland's western border, the following border crossing cooperation structures were created - the Euroregion "Nemunas" created in June 1997 joining the border regions of Lithuania, Poland, and Belarus, the February 1998 created Euroregion "Baltija," in which representatives from regions of Denmark, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Russia (Kaliningrad oblast), and Sweden participate. Border infrastructure projects will be carried out using funds provided by the Euroregion states as well as support from the EU and other funds.

Gradually, although now primarily due to the work of individual initiatives and sacrifices of enthusiasts of the region, cultural ties are being restored. The theater and music of Lithuania (this year the director from Lithuania Oskaras Koržunovas presented a performance at the STUDIO theater in Warsaw) is already well known in Poland, Polish films have enjoyed great success in Lithuania. In May 1998 Lithuania was the guest of honor at the traditional international book fair in Warsaw - this was the first cultural presentation of Lithuanian culture in Poland on such a scale. Unfortunately, there is still no Lithuanian cultural center in Warsaw although the commitment to create it was provided in a declaration signed in 1992, and later reaffirmed in the Treaty. An analogous Polish center has been successfully operating in Vilnius for several years.

In June 1997 a forum patronized by Milosz and Venclova, bringing together noted culture and science persons from both states who discussed the widest possible questions about the relations between the two states and nations was held in Vygriai. In September 1998 a second such forum was held in Druskininkai. At these meeting the idea of creating the Social Forum of Lithuania and Poland, whose formation the Parliamentary Assembly promised to support, was born.

The partnership of Lithuania and Poland gave an impulse to form new regional initiatives: the presidents of the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Poland met in Tallinn in 1997, the Lithuanian President participated in the meeting of the presidents from Central European states with the Pope in Gniezno, the Presidents of Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine met in Rzeszow in 1998, the Presidents of the Baltic States and Poland participated in the closing of the "Baltic Challenge" exercises in Klaipėda.

²¹ *Lenkijos ir Lietuvos miestų – partnerių bendradarbiavimas*, (The Cooperation of Polish and Lithuanian Cities – Partners) Poznan, 1998.

The experience of good neighborly relations was made general in the September 1997 international conference "Coexistence of Nations and Good Neighborly Relations: the Guarantee of Security and Stability in Europe" in Vilnius, attended by the presidents of eleven states in the region and the Russian premier. In September 1998 another conference, devoted to regional security questions was organized in Vilnius.

VI. The Horizons of the New Partnership

The forming of closer relations between Lithuania and Poland recent years was an objective process dependent on common geopolitical facts, common historical experience, and common interests. Looking at the relations between Lithuania and Poland in the context of the future unified Europe, their further expansion appears as a natural and unavoidable matter. Through this connection the Central European dimension, for several centuries an inseparable part of its history, is returned to Lithuania. Poland, in turn, obtains a dependable link with the Baltic and Nordic European regions.

Looking at the possibilities of future cooperation, one can distinguish these important directions:

- the expansion of relations at the public level, the intensification of cultural and informational exchanges, the inclusion of the national minorities in state and regional border cooperation;

- the further implementation of regional infrastructure projects (VIA BALTICA and the transportation corridor "Baltic-Black Sea" through Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine with possible extensions in both directions, and auxiliary routes, European gauge railroad from the border with Poland up to the eastern border of Lithuania, the Baltic energy ring;

- joint activities in the organizations and projects of the Baltic Sea region (Council of Baltic Sea States (CBSS), BALTSEA, BALTRON, BALTNET, the Euroregion "Baltija" etc.), cooperation in regional security initiatives;

- the expansion of regional partnership cooperation with Ukraine, Belarus, Russia's North West regions and the Kaliningrad district (the Euroregions "Nemunas" and "Baltija," the utilization of the opportunities of CBSS and the establishment of ties between this organization and the Black Sea Economic Council);

- greater cooperation and mutual support in the processes of integration into NATO and EU (Poland's forthcoming membership in NATO opens new opportunities in this area).

Today the relations between Lithuania and Poland are part of the dynamic processes of European integration. However, their expansion is certainly important not only because it helps our states to seek their strategic goals - membership in EU and NATO. Lithuanian-Polish relations have a spontaneous value and can essentially help improve the quality of the new cooperation in the region. The strengthening of the security of either Lithuania or Poland will not end with membership in NATO, and the creation of prosperity of the states and citizens - with integration into the EU. "...in the current situation the interests of the Polish state can not be limited only to its own security interests, based on integration with the West, but must be linked with the security interests of its most immediate neighbors."²² Lithuania and Poland should seek that their integration into Western structures would also benefit the interests of the other states in the region. Partnership, open regional ties, and free contacts

²² Kupiecki, p. 86.

between people must become the denominator of the whole “Center-Baltic Europe” region.²³ Lithuania and Poland will truly be secure only in a secure and successfully developing region and will be able to spread prosperity to its citizens. This assertion reflects the priorities and initiated projects of Lithuania, as the chairman this year of the Council of Baltic Sea States. The Baltic Sea, gradually becoming a “mare interna” (internal sea) of the European Union, must become open to regional cooperation and new initiatives. The support given by the border districts of Lithuania and Poland to the Kaliningrad district in the fall of this year became a successful test for regional cooperation.

There are no major problems visible today in Lithuanian-Polish relations. However, the process of the drawing together and better knowledge of each other promoted by political and intellectual persons has only been begun in the societies of the two countries, we still know very little about each other. For a substantial part of the Polish population Lithuania remains a “terra incognita” (unknown territory) - “a small, unimportant land inhabited by strange persons and nationalists” outside of Poland’s eastern borders.²⁴ (In 1992 a special issue of *Znak* was devoted to Lithuania with the appropriate heading of “Unknown Lithuania”). In the consciousness of these people, “old Lithuania” can in no way be replaced by the current independent Lithuania which will form new relations with Poland. In Poland there are still individuals who believe that there is and can not be any kind of national Lithuanian culture and it is being created only to “tease” the Poles. Lithuanians, in turn, suspect the Poles of appropriating the old legacy of Lithuanian culture, making Mickiewicz and Milocz more Polish. For many Lithuanians Poland is only a “transit” country in which one can stop for a little while on the way to Europe. This stereotype thinking already has almost no influence on the state relations between Lithuania and Poland, but it thwarts the drawing together of the two nations and the opening of the cultures to each other. In this area the local governments, social organizations, and culture and art people should take the initiative from the governments because “politicians can not regulate by decrees the cooperation between Lithuanian and Polish societies.”²⁵

It is clear that the new relations between Lithuania and Poland alter the point of view and ways to resolve national minority problems. Frankness and joint work can help avoid emotions and political speculations. Additional opportunities in this area are provided by the expanding rights of local governments in both states, the possibility of national minorities to participate independently in regional economic and cultural projects. “I would like very much that the national minorities in both states would be an element strengthening this cooperation, a kind of cooperation bridge,” Polish Foreign Minister Geremek stressed.

The relations of Lithuania and Poland today do not any longer attract the attention of the press as in 1990 and 1991. Discussions and passions on “historical reconciliation” was replaced by quiet everyday work, and the discussions about questions of the past moved from the newspapers to academic journals and scientific conferences. Lithuania and Poland have entered a new stage: the partnership of common goals becomes the partnership of common works.

²³ Vytautas Landsbergis, *Wspolnota interesow. Polska w Europie* (Community of Interests. Poland in Europe), Warsaw, May 1997, p. 68.

²⁴ Borkowitz, p. 38.

²⁵ “Przesłanie do Zgromadzenia Poselskiego Sejmów Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej i Republiki Litewskiej” (An Appeal to the Assembly of the Deputies of the Parliaments of the Republic of Poland and the Republic of Lithuania), *Lithuania*, 1998 3 (28), p. 67.

Translated by Saulius Girnius