

## LITHUANIA AS A NATO PARTNER

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### INTRODUCTION

On September 8, 1999 Lithuania became the first North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) candidate country to submit its national NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). By outlining achievements and stressing objectives, this document is another milestone in Lithuania's integration into NATO. Since January 1994, when Lithuania formally requested membership in the Atlantic Alliance, and June 1994, when Lithuania (second only to Romania) joined the NATO Partnership for Peace (PFP) program, close cooperation with NATO has been an integral part of Vilnius's foreign and security policy. Lithuania's participation in PFP is not limited to strictly formal adaptation procedures, but also includes extensive internal reforms and active regional and bilateral cooperation efforts.

The April 1999 NATO Washington Summit, which approved an updated NATO's Strategic Concept, reaffirmed the Alliance's commitment to enlargement, and approved a Membership Action Plan for countries wishing to join, was met in Lithuania with enthusiasm and optimism. By naming Lithuania (along with eight other countries) as potential candidates for the next round of enlargement, the Washington Summit contributed greatly to Lithuania's resolve to become a member.

The purpose of this article is to review Lithuania's activities while being a NATO partner. Lithuanian perspectives regarding NATO enlargement issues will also be discussed.

### PFP AND NATO ADAPTATION PROCESSES

The end of the Cold War led to NATO adaptation processes that in turn influenced the international order in Europe and beyond. NATO's Strategic Concept, adopted by the Heads of State and Government of the Alliance in Rome on November 7-8, 1991, "recognized the profound political changes" that had taken place in Central Europe leading to the "radically improved security environment" in which:

The USSR's former satellites have fully recovered their sovereignty. The Soviet Union and its Republics are undergoing radical change. The three Baltic Republics have regained their independence. Soviet forces have left Hungary and Czechoslovakia and are due to complete their withdrawal from Poland and Germany by 1994. All countries that were former adversaries of NATO have dismantled the Warsaw Pact and rejected ideological hostility to the West. They have, in varying degrees, embraced and begun to implement policies aimed at achieving pluralistic democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights, and a market economy. The political division of Europe that was the source of the military confrontation during the Cold War period has thus been overcome.<sup>1</sup>

As a symbol of this new international situation, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC), inaugurated on December 20, 1991, included all the members of NATO, former Warsaw Pact states, former neutrals, the Baltic states, and the CIS countries.

Moreover, on January 1994, the NATO Summit in Brussels also decided to welcome NATO enlargement to the East. Eventually, this opened the way for three

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\* This article is written based on research paper compiled for the Atlantic Council of the United States. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Atlantic Council or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>1</sup> "The Alliance's Strategic Concept," *NATO Handbook* (Brussels: NATO office of information and Press, October 1995), Appendix IX, p. 235

former Warsaw Pact members, the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland, to join on the eve of NATO Summit in Washington in April 1999.

As a part of opening up the enlargement process NATO leaders started the Partnership for Peace (PFP) initiative, whose aim was to organize the enlargement process. Although sometimes sarcastically called a “policy for postponement,” the PFP provides the countries of post-Cold War Europe with a unique security cooperation framework. The cooperation tools established within the PFP are oriented toward improving the capability and readiness of the Partners to participate in NATO led missions and, eventually, to integrate into the Alliance. The Partnership Work Program (PWP) serves as a “menu” from which Partner countries can choose their cooperation options. Their choices are cemented within the Individual Partnership Program (IPP), developed jointly by the Partner country and NATO. Another tool, the Planning and Review Process (PARP), introduced in January 1995, should enhance Allied - Partner interoperability and transparency.

After the establishment of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) at the last meeting of the NACC on May 30, 1997 and the decision on PFP enhancement a new quality in NATO - Partner cooperation was established. The main goal of the enhanced PFP is to increase the participation of the partner states in the PFP decision making-process.<sup>2</sup> The enhancement also foresees a role for the Partners in PWP development in 1998-2000, greater participation of the Partners in the work of NATO Senior Committees, international posts for Partners at the Partnership Coordination Cell (PCC), and the expansion of PARP.<sup>3</sup> The enhanced PFP also uses NATO assets in providing security investments, supporting regional cooperation and consulting on terrorism and sabotage. It also foresees the possibility of establishing NATO/PFP offices in the Partner countries.<sup>4</sup>

For Lithuania, the end of the Cold War has opened the way to rejoin the international community after 50 years of Soviet domination. Europe changed in many ways over the fifty years, and “coming back to Europe” became the main objective for every Lithuanian cabinet. Applying for membership in NATO and taking part in PFP has become one of the ways that Lithuania decided to take in order to be able to “fit into” Eastern Europe. The first post-Cold War NATO enlargement, although somewhat obscured by the crisis in Kosovo, also brought the Atlantic Alliance right up to the Lithuanian borders, making the membership objective far more real.

## LITHUANIA IN PFP

Within the PFP framework, Lithuanian - NATO cooperation efforts include the Lithuanian-NATO Individual Partnership program initiative in 1994, Lithuania's accession to PARP in 1995 as well as Lithuania's newly formed armed forces' units participating in a number of PFP military exercises. To demonstrate this in greater detail a short review of Lithuanian security and defense policy is needed.

Upon restoring its independence from the USSR in 1990, Lithuania also embarked on the difficult task of forming its own military. On November 19, 1992 Lithuania's parliament adopted the “Armed Forces of the Republic of Lithuania Restoration Declaration” re-establishing Lithuania's armed forces.<sup>5</sup> The Constitution of Lithuania foresaw strict civilian control over the defense establishment. According to

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<sup>2</sup> Javier Solana, *Comprehensive Progress Report on PFP Enhancement and Implementation of the EAPC Basic Document*, Document EAPC(C)D(97)6, December 1, 1997.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *Valstybės žinios*, 34-1030 (1992).

the Constitution, the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces is the President of the Republic. Defense issues are coordinated by the State Defense Council, consisting of the President, the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Seimas, the Minister of Defense, and the Commander of the Armed Forces. "The Government, the Minister of Defense, and the Commander of the Armed Forces shall be responsible to the Seimas for the provision and command of the State's armed forces. The Minister of Defense may not be a serviceman who has not yet retired from active service."<sup>6</sup> The laws and regulations also provided for civilian deputy ministers of defense as well as civilian staff of the Defense Ministry (KAM).

Since, Lithuania's defense structures grew out of volunteer formations and were aimed at a very limited range of activities (mostly providing security for government institutions, strategic objects, and border posts), their goals and purposes were not clearly defined. The landmark legislation in this area was the Law on the Basics of National Security. Adopted by the Seimas (parliament) on December 19, 1996, the Law on Basics of National Security<sup>7</sup> provided the legal framework for establishing the National defense system based on both citizens and government initiatives directed at enhancing Lithuania's security and stability. According to this document, the risks and threats to Lithuania's security are seen in "the specific geopolitical environment, hardly predictable due to existing militarized territories and states of unstable democracy."<sup>8</sup> The main national security enhancing measures include "participation in international security consolidating organizations, membership in NATO, the EU, and WEU, strategic planning of national security and preparation and implementation of long range State security strengthening programs, [...] and legislation regulating the system of ensuring security and defense."<sup>9</sup>

Subsequently Lithuania also adopted the Laws on National Defense Service, Military Conscription, Mobilization and Mobilization Reserve Training, and National Defense Organization and Service. These laws outline the responsibilities and status of the defense establishment and personnel.

The development of the armed forces, initiated in 1996, aims at reforming the chain of command, size, and structure of the forces. Directed and overseen by the Seimas (mostly its Committee for National Security), the Government (through the KAM), and the President, the reforms are oriented towards fulfilling NATO standards so as to enable Lithuanian forces to act together with the Allied military. Under this new structure Lithuania's Armed Forces will be better situated and better prepared both for territorial defense and international operations. The Rapid Reaction Force is being developed with the specific mission to respond quickly both to national defense and international contingencies.

Today, there are approximately 11,000 men and women serving and working in the Lithuanian National defense system. The National Defense Volunteer Force (SKAT) or home guard of 12,000 comprises a strategic reserve. Providing appropriate funding for the armed forces is one of Lithuania's budgetary priorities. According to the Law on Funding Strategy of the National Defense Establishment, Lithuania's defense expenditures should be 1.7 - 1.75 percent of the country's GDP in 2000 increasing to 1.95 - 2 percent of GDP in 2001.

Upon joining the PFP, the paramount political objective of Lithuania in PFP was to pave the way to becoming a full member of the Atlantic Alliance. Lithuanian

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<sup>6</sup> *The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania* [Parliamentary record], Chapter 13, Article 140, 11, 1992.

<sup>7</sup> "The Law on Basics of National Security," *Valstybės žinios*, 2-16 (1997).

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

officials have frequently said that they see PFP strictly as a means of joining the Alliance. Lithuania welcomed the NATO Enlargement Study presented to Vilnius on October 16, 1995 by NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs Ambassador Gerhart von Moltke. Being both an EU associated country and a candidate, Lithuania welcomed the Alliance's intent to give particular consideration to countries with a perspective of EU membership in order to determine whether to invite them to join NATO.

Although in PFP political and military integration and cooperation have certain distinct features (i.e. making political decisions on participation in certain programs, considering budget appropriations, on the one hand, and, operational planning and actual participation in Partnership events, on the other), usually they are closely intertwined. When, in 1994 Lithuania started its Individual Partnership Program (IPP), this was seen as having more of a political meaning - demonstrating the depth of the country's interest in cooperation. Since 1995 the implementation of the IPP could already be evaluated in military terms. For example, in 1995 the Lithuanian IPP contained 91 PFP activities and 35 activities "within the spirit of PFP." These included both military exercises and various courses, workshops, and seminars on everything from English language training to mine clearance during peacekeeping operations, logistics and command, control, and communications (C3).

The military task, which could be identified as Lithuania's prime objective in PFP, is to achieve greater interoperability of the Lithuanian military with the Allied militaries. Already in 1996 in the Lithuanian IPP, PFP was an important factor, regarded as the most important tool for improving the interoperability of the Lithuanian armed forces with the Alliance. Initially, however, concerning this main military objective, Lithuania found itself at the crossroads. Not having large armed forces, it could have attempted to make all its troops interoperable with NATO as soon as possible. However, simultaneously with participation in the Partnership program, Lithuania had to continue to build up its military capabilities, which put an additional burden on conversion to NATO standards. Other obstacles were scarce resources and the poor knowledge of English language among Lithuania's military. Taking these factors into account, as well as seeking to speed up the conversion process, Lithuania decided to adopt the "cornerstone unit" approach. According to it, certain armed forces units were identified as the first ones to become interoperable with NATO. Later, the "interoperable" units will be used as examples in forming and training other units, thus achieving a positive spillover effect for the whole armed forces.

The assets Lithuania identified and made available for operations, training, and exercises within the PFP include ground and maritime units as well as training and base facilities. The ground units include the three motorized infantry battalions and an infantry company (LITCOY) of BALTBAT. The maritime units are two light frigates.

Since joining the PFP, Lithuanian Armed Forces units took part in many NATO-led exercises abroad and in Lithuania. These included "Baltic Challenge '98" (Lithuania), "Best Effort '97" (Latvia), "Amber Hope '99, '98, '97, '96" (Lithuania), "Winter Forest '96," which were highly visible and received positive public recognition. Participation in these exercises allowed Lithuanians to come into contact with the armed forces of other countries (particularly the US, Nordic, and Polish), to gain international cooperation experience, and to share it with others.

The peacekeeping and "peace support" operations in Croatia and Bosnia in which Lithuanian forces have participated are also important. In 1994-1995 three Lithuanian platoons LITPLA 1-3 served within a Danish peacekeeping battalion in the UNPROFOR mission in Croatia. Later in February 1996, Lithuania participated in the IFOR mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina by sending a platoon (34 soldiers) to the Danish

battalion within the NORDPOL brigade. The platoon was later replaced by a company (145 personnel). In 1997 LITPLA-5 and LITPLA-6, containing 40 and 41 persons, participated in the SFOR mission. In 1998 participation in SFOR was continued by LITPLA-7.

In addition to early entry in the Partnership for Peace program, Lithuania also responded actively to other NATO incentives. The Lithuanian Discussion Paper on NATO Enlargement was presented to NATO Secretary General Javier Solana during his visit to Vilnius in 1996. It outlined Lithuania's readiness to undertake the reforms necessary for NATO membership.

In the intensive talks within a "16+1" formula Lithuania presented to the Alliance its views concerning the NATO enlargement process, discussed the degree of tactical preparedness of the Lithuanian armed forces, its further development, and set the agenda for future deliberations.

In 1999, responding to NATO's MAP initiative, Lithuania formed a Coordination Commission on integration into NATO, which in September presented to NATO its national MAP. The Commission's duty is to inform the Government about Lithuania's implementation of the preparation plans for NATO membership and to suggest ways to implement the MAP.

## LITHUANIA'S OTHER STRATEGIC RELATIONSHIPS

Participation in PFP and other common interests have led Lithuania to engage in strategic relationships with several NATO and Partner countries. The most outstanding examples are the US - Baltic Charter, 'strategic partnership' with Poland, cooperation efforts among the Baltic States, Baltic-Nordic cooperation, and the "Friends of the Balts" initiative.

The presidents of Lithuania, the USA, Estonia, and Latvia signed the Charter on January 16, 1998 in Washington. This document initiated more intense US - Baltic economic cooperation and created consultative mechanisms in policy and defense. During the Charter signing ceremony in Washington, Lithuanian President Algirdas Brazauskas said that he saw the Charter as proof that Lithuania was regarded as a serious candidate for NATO membership. Echoing this statement, US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot on July 16, 1999 after the meeting of the US - Baltic Charter Partnership Commission, declared that no potential NATO candidate would be excluded from membership for reasons of "geography or history."

In spite of quite strong disagreements during the period between the world wars and considerable distrust in the early nineties, Lithuanian - Polish relations are now the "best in history." The turning point came after intensive bilateral efforts produced the Lithuanian - Polish Declaration and the Lithuanian - Polish Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighborly Cooperation, signed in Warsaw in 1992 and in Vilnius in 1994, respectively, by Presidents Algirdas Brazauskas and Lech Walesa. These documents, to a large degree inspired by the NATO expected enlargement, consolidated such principles as the recognition of present borders and their inviolability, territorial integrity, and the rights of national minorities in both countries. Lithuania and Poland have altogether signed over 60 treaties and agreements, 20 of them at the state and governmental level. In view of traditionally close ties and similar positions of both countries on European and trans-Atlantic cooperation, Lithuania and Poland have forged a strategic partnership. This partnership is aimed at strengthening bilateral economic relations and providing mutual political support regarding the countries'

integration in the EU, as well as achieving greater security through membership in NATO.

Lithuanian-Polish cooperation is not the only example of ties among the partners or partners-allies in the Baltic-Nordic area. There also are the Baltic cooperation arrangements that include only Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia (Baltic Assembly, Baltic Council of Ministers, joint peacekeeping battalion, joint naval squadron, joint defense college, common air space control project) as well as wider regional cooperation frameworks including Nordic countries (formula "5+3") and some European Allies ("Friends of the Balts" initiative).

The purpose of the 'Friends of the Balts' initiative is to increase the effectiveness of defense related assistance which Lithuania and the other two Baltic countries receive and to involve all the countries concerned in dialogue and cooperation in the field of security and stability. The initiative was launched in Oslo on April 10, 1997 during the first Baltic Security Assistance Group (BALTSEA) meeting. It was agreed that further BALTSEA meetings would be held three times a year.

## NATO ENLARGEMENT AND LITHUANIA

Partnership for Peace was the crucial instrument for bringing about the first NATO enlargement after the Cold War. Tested in PFP, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary were able to demonstrate sufficient political will to be accepted within the Alliance. And while the first round of NATO enlargement was built on Alliance - Partners solidarity, the perseverance of the Partners in meeting Alliance identified objectives and geopolitical logic, the second round will also take into account the incredible progress that some partner countries have made in developing up from ground zero. Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, and Slovenia have made huge strides towards entering NATO in this regard. Recent developments in Slovakia also call for a review of its standing vis-a-vis NATO. Romania, Bulgaria, Albania, and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia have also expressed their desires to join NATO. The question today is not if, but when and which of these countries ought to be invited to join the Alliance.

Understandably the enlargement is not the only issue being considered by the Alliance today. The issues of trans-Atlantic cooperation, burdensharing, the nature and ways of combating new threats, as well as the development of a new yet effective NATO posture, are sometimes seen as more important than enlargement.<sup>10</sup> Yet the issue of enlargement will persist, at times even interfering with and magnifying the 'larger issues', if only demonstrating that the Alliance's ability to solve complex ones is compromised if it is unable to solve 'simple' problems. This also applies to the sometimes proposed cancellation or suspension of further enlargement. Such decisions would not only compromise the Alliance in the eyes of its Partners, but also challenge NATO's capability to respond positively to the needs of the new Europe.

The formula for the second round of the enlargement foreseen for the year 2002 could probably include up to three countries selected from among the eight candidates. While the first post Cold-War enlargement round included three middle-tier countries of Central Europe, the logical area for the second round would be both north and south

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<sup>10</sup> Lynn Davis (Rand Corporation; Undersecretary, Arms Control and International Security Affairs, 1993-1997), "An American View," Presentation at NATO symposium Atlantic Partnership: *NATO's Focus for the New Millennium* October 30-31, 1998.

of the first three. If Slovenia is the most likely candidate in the south, Lithuania is the obvious candidate in the north.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, some apprehension is felt when considering NATO membership for the Baltic States, including Lithuania. There are few if any concerns about the Baltic States' democratic development or economic liberalization and growth. If one disregards the indefensibility argument (many European Allied countries could have been considered indefensible during the Cold War), the main obstacle to Baltic accession is the possible negative Russian reaction.

True, the NATO - Russia relationship is an uneasy one. Some Russians still think "the West, the former Warsaw Pact countries and the Soviet republics owe Russia [...] for the spectacular retreat, within two years, from Magdeburg to Smolensk."<sup>12</sup> This notion wrongly assumes the continuity of the Soviet Union in Russia and of NATO-USSR relations in contemporary NATO-Russian relations. It ignores the fact that the West appreciated Russia's greater engagement today in European and global cooperation.<sup>13</sup> It has to be realized that the ideological confrontation between democracy and communism that characterized the political landscape of Cold War Europe in the second half of the 20th century, is over. NATO no longer sees Russia as the main Western security threat. The new international situation, although full of dangers and uncertainties, has had a positive impact on developing Western - Russian relations'.

Yet the Russians themselves have to decide if they want to seize this historic opportunity to build an essentially new Western - Russian relationship. The main ingredients of such a relationship include both an understanding of Russia's specific internal situation concerning its political, social, and economic transition; and, on the part of Russia, upholding its international obligations in the areas of disarmament, non-proliferation, trade, and relations with its immediate neighbors.

By allowing Russia to draw a "red line" NATO would face both a credibility problem and growing Russian assertiveness in this area. In fact, having Lithuania as the first Baltic state would help NATO solve its Russian dilemma.

First, Lithuania, just as Poland, does not have a border with 'mainland' Russia - only with the Kaliningrad enclave. Thus, Lithuania's accession will not bring 'the Alliance up to Russia's borders' any closer than Poland's accession did, which is a major Russian concern. Even Kaliningrad's 'encircling' by the Alliance (another Russian concern) is not likely to be any different than the 'encircling' by the ally Poland and Partner Lithuania. Lithuania and Russia already have a mutual understanding on civil and military transport to the enclave and this is unlikely to change if Lithuania joins NATO.

Second, the Lithuanian - Russian Treaty of 1991 has an explicit reference to the countries' right "to independently realize their sovereignty in the area of defense and security [...] as well as through the systems of collective security."<sup>14</sup> Within the framework of the 1991 Treaty Lithuania and Russia have also fully settled the issues of ethnic Russians and borders (delimitation agreements signed in 1997).

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<sup>11</sup> Zibigne Brzezinski, "NATO: The Dilemmas of Expansion," *The National Interest* (Fall 1998).

<sup>12</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "The Process of NATO Enlargement and the Baltic States," Talking Points at the Vilnius Conference, September 1-4, 1998.

<sup>13</sup> Strobe Talbott, Address at a conference on "Russia at the End of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century," Stanford University, November 6, 1998.

<sup>14</sup> "Treaty between the Republic of Lithuania and the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic on the Basis of Relations Between States," *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, 1, (1998), 119-127.

Third, Lithuania's constitutional provision banning peacetime foreign military stationing on Lithuanian soil could serve as a reassurance to Moscow of not 'spreading NATO's military infrastructure' which is also a major Russian concern.

Finally, Lithuania's membership in NATO would serve as a material gesture to reassure Latvia and Estonia on the Alliance's continued engagement in the area.

In terms of the membership criteria Lithuania fulfills all the requirements outlined in the North Atlantic Treaty. Lithuania today is a stable and predictable democratic country with a growing economy and thriving private sector. Its experience in Partnership for Peace has familiarized young Lithuanian military with the NATO defense concept and techniques. Lithuania, which less than eight years ago did not have a single soldier, has managed to build up credible armed forces capable of participating in NATO-led operations and exercises. By becoming a member of the Atlantic Alliance, Lithuania would bring not only substantial cooperation experience, good neighborly relations, and democratic stability, but also its willingness and capabilities to contribute to future NATO endeavors.

## CONCLUSION

While actively pursuing full membership in NATO, Lithuania also regards its current ties with the Alliance and the other Partners as highly beneficial in terms of security and stability. In this sense, the reassurances that NATO provided to its partners in the Balkans during the Kosovo crisis, supporting their national security, are good news for Lithuania. Such reassurances reinforce the clause of the PFP Framework Document that "NATO will consult with any active participant in the Partnership if that Partner perceives a direct threat to its territorial integrity, political independence, or security."<sup>15</sup>

"Growth in security" coupled with the NATO's pledge to keep Alliance's door open provides Lithuania with a strong incentive to work industriously towards the preparedness objectives identified in the Lithuanian NATO Membership Action Plan. In particular, the Lithuanian MAP addresses Political and Economic, Military and Defense, Resource, Security and Legal issues of Lithuania's integration into the Alliance and defines areas of consultation with NATO.

Through the ever strengthened partnership with NATO Lithuania is becoming closely associated with European processes not only by being a European state, but also by taking part in the above mentioned cooperation mechanisms. Yet the ultimate objective, membership in the Alliance, remains the high priority on Lithuanian political agenda. The April 1999 NATO Washington Summit not only mentioned Lithuania as a potential future member, but also named 2002 as the year when further enlargement will be considered. As the year 2002 approaches Lithuania expects that it will be prepared and the Alliance ready to deal positively with further enlargement issues, especially in extending membership invitations to Lithuania and the other Baltic states. (This article was written based on research compiled for the Atlantic Council of the United States. The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the Atlantic Council or the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

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<sup>15</sup> *NATO Partnership for Peace brochure* (Brussels, 10th January 1994).