

LITHUANIA AND NATO

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Geography is not destiny - a fact Lithuania has demonstrated time and again. Although they were separated from the West by an impenetrable "Iron Curtain", the Lithuanian people managed to retain their commitment to and belief in the common values of free nations. The sense of statehood cultivated since the early 13th century, and the memories of inter-war independence served as powerful reminders that the forceful incorporation into the Soviet Union was not history's final verdict on Lithuania's destiny.

Today, the conviction that Lithuania would eventually rejoin the community of like-minded nations has been borne out. Since independence, Lithuania, together with the two other Baltic nations, has become a success story. The Baltic area is representative of a new Europe, a Europe characterized by cooperation and integration, reviving old historic patterns of regional cooperation and trade, while simultaneously seeking integration into the wider European family.

Indeed, today Lithuania is a serious candidate for EU membership. It is also a long-standing cooperation Partner with NATO and an aspirant for NATO membership. Over the course of the 1990s NATO has become a key player in managing major transition processes which determine the future quality of European security: NATO today is playing an important role in the deepening and widening of a democratic and peaceful Europe, in engaging Russia, in re-balancing the transatlantic relationship, in facilitating pan-European military cooperation, and in crisis management. Because of this centrality, most European nations, including Lithuania, define their security policies in close cooperation with NATO.

Perhaps the overriding characteristics of NATO's approach to security post-Cold War is its strong preference for functional solutions over institutional ones. Although the issue of NATO-enlargement was bound to rise to prominence soon after the end of the Cold War, the Allies have been keen to avoid making enlargement into the "single issue" of post-Cold War European security. Indeed, to have made institutional membership the sole yardstick for NATO's value would have deflected from the key issue: how to re-organize European security after bipolarity.

This process of re-organization may take decades to complete. It can only be managed successfully if it takes the pluralist nature of Europe fully into account, including in its security arrangements. If one were to express this challenge in a bumper-sticker slogan, one might refer to "different needs and different speeds". For example, some states will join NATO first, and the EU later - Poland being a case in point here. Some states may join the EU first, and NATO later. Other states, like the neutral EU members Sweden and Finland, are satisfied with their existing relationship with NATO. And some states, such as Russia and Ukraine, require a special relationship with these institutions.

NATO has created a set of policies and mechanisms that take account of this pluralist environment. They allow for different forms of "association" with NATO, according to the aspirations and capabilities of nations, but also according to NATO's strategic interests. The fundamental elements are: cooperation, enlargement, and the NATO-Russia relationship.

Partnership and Cooperation

Cooperation throughout the Euro-Atlantic area is the first policy track. It is epitomized by the Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). In

involving nations from Europe, North America and Central Asia, PfP and EAPC represent a security framework that spans three continents. This framework caters to the different needs and aspirations of the wider Europe: First, it bridges different memberships. All OSCE nations can participate, no matter what institutional affiliations they may otherwise have. Second, it provides a venue for pan-European military cooperation in peace support operations, a value demonstrated on the ground in SFOR and KFOR. Third, its functional emphasis offers the post-neutrals a means of coming closer to Euro-Atlantic security structures, including defense planning, without forcing them into controversial domestic debates. And fourth, it offers the nations of Central Asia and the Caucasus a link to NATO. Lithuania was one of the first nations to join PfP in January 1994, and has been among the most active Partners ever since. Lithuania has taken great interest in all efforts aimed at enhancing the PfP process, and has developed an extensive and ambitious PfP program. Lithuania's participation in the Planning and Review Process (PARP) familiarizes the defense establishment with NATO's force planning procedures and will enhance interoperability between Lithuania and NATO.

Moreover, regional cooperation and activities "in the spirit of PfP" conducted with several Allied and Partner nations continue to contribute significantly to Lithuania's more focused participation in PfP. In cooperation with Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania offers BALTBAT and BALTRON for PfP exercises and operations. Lithuania and Poland have established a joint battalion (LITPOLBAT), based on existing units and funded by national resources. Lithuanian Armed Forces cooperate with almost 20 nations. Since 1994, over 600 Lithuanian military personnel have participated in UNPROFOR, IFOR, SFOR and KFOR operations in the Balkans. Lithuanian police officers serve in UNMIK.

If one looks at the evolution of our cooperative mechanisms over the years, including the establishment of a distinctive Partnership with Ukraine, the opportunities for Partners have constantly increased. In the early days of PfP, for example, NATO would essentially offer its Partners a menu of activities from which they could choose. Today, Partners appear much more self-confident and eager to shape the program together with Allies. In other words, Partners have understood that it is they who decide how far and how deep co-operation should go, and that, therefore, it is they who bear a certain responsibility for the future of these endeavors. That is why they have remained so interested -- and so active. It is this active participation that will allow Allies and Partners to explore the full potential of PfP and EAPC more fully: their role in supporting regional cooperation in South-Eastern Europe or the Caucasus, for example, their contribution to arms control, or in facilitating preventive military deployments in a crisis.

NATO Enlargement

NATO enlargement is another policy track. It rests on the logic that Europe's division can only be fully overcome once nations can determine their foreign and security policies by their own free choice. By keeping NATO's door open for possible future members, it thus provides a strong incentive for these aspirants to get their house in order. Fears that enlargement could turn out to be disruptive or divisive were put to rest by creating cooperative ties with all interested non-member states, and by offering Russia a privileged relationship. That way, the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland in March 1999 was managed successfully - setting the stage for a credible "open door" for possible future accessions.

At the 1999 Washington Summit, NATO Heads of State and Government decided to review the enlargement process at their next Summit meeting, which will be held no later than 2002.

In the meantime, the nine current aspirants need to focus on the Membership Action Plan (MAP), a program through which NATO seeks to help aspirant countries to better focus their preparations for possible future membership. MAP-related Partnership Goals and tailored PfP Individual Partnership Programmes have been agreed with the aspirants, to assist them in their efforts to meet the ambitious goals they have set themselves in the military field.

In helping to prepare countries for membership, the MAP draws heavily on PfP's established mechanisms. Many so-called Partnership Goals are MAP-related, which will reinforce and enhance preparations for possible NATO membership. Lithuania's priorities are being placed on interoperability, command and control, English language proficiency, CIS security, and air surveillance.

Lithuania was the first country to submit an annual national program on preparation for future membership, setting out the objectives and targets of this process of preparation. As the program is very ambitious, prioritization and allocation of sufficient resources will be essential.

The management of the enlargement process will continue to reflect the need for balance between the aspirants' ambitions, NATO's strategic interests, and the overall security situation in Europe. This implies the continuation of a gradual process - a process in which no European democratic country whose admission would fulfil the objectives of the Washington Treaty will be excluded from consideration. This logic applies regardless of a country's geographic location - because all states have the inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security.

NATO-Russia

NATO-Russia relations constitute the third policy track. Russia is the largest European security variable. If Russia remains on the path of reform towards democracy and market economy, and chooses to engage constructively with Europe, most problems of European security could be solved in a cooperative fashion. NATO thus has a vested interest in seeing Russia's transformation succeed. Even if the future of Russia lies within Russia herself, the Alliance can be more than an innocent bystander to Russian developments. It can engage Russia constructively. Above all, NATO can signal that it takes Russia seriously as a major security actor. The NATO-Russia Founding Act of May 1997 sent such a signal. The creation of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council reinforced it, setting an agenda that ranges from preventing proliferation to joint approaches to crisis management. Together, the Founding Act and the Permanent Joint Council signaled that NATO and Russia reject the notion of defining each other as permanent adversaries.

With the end of the freeze in relations brought about by the Kosovo crisis, the NATO-Russia relationship is developing well. What we need to aim at is a relationship that is resilient to occasional disagreement - a relationship where different views on one issue do not jeopardize our entire cooperation. Such a relationship is within reach. And even if consultations in the PJC will not always lead to common positions they serve to foster transparency and minimize misunderstandings.

A strong NATO-Russia relationship is of particular significance for the security of the Baltic states. But the need to engage Russia constructively is not confined to NATO. Indeed, Lithuania is particularly suited to foster better Russian understanding, as it borders the Russian oblast of Kaliningrad. Lithuania and Russia have worked together to resolve the issue of Russian military transport to Kaliningrad, and Lithuania has good economic incentives to expand trade and economic links with this region. Although the border treaty

with Russia still awaits ratification in the Russian Duma, the steady improvement of relations is an encouraging sign of Lithuania's ability to get on with its larger neighbor.

Conclusion

Given the unique complexities of the Baltic Sea region, and especially given the yet unfulfilled membership aspirations of the Baltic nations, the charge is sometimes made that the Baltic area suffers from the absence of a coherent policy by Western institutions. This, critics assert, would leave the job essentially to the Nordic nations, who have neither the resources nor the political will to carry the burden alone.

This is a false image, one that risks missing the forest for the trees. It ignores the fact that within this decade, most countries bordering the Baltic Sea will move closer to membership of the European Union - another clear step towards "Europeanizing" Baltic concerns and thus a step away from regionalisation. It also ignores the fact that the Baltic security situation is essentially benign - particularly when compared to ten years ago, when the Baltics and Kaliningrad were at the top of the scale of potential flashpoints. Finally, it also tends to ignore the fact that NATO is indeed there - and in more ways than one. NATO has developed cooperative patterns with all nations in the Baltic region, including Russia. And the Alliance has opened the door to possible future membership. Taken together, these initiatives offer the prospect of a further improvement of Lithuanian security, making the positive developments in the Baltic region truly irreversible. In short, geography is not destiny.