

Lithuania, Poland, Transatlantic Dimension

In the late eighties and the early nineties the world of Yalta, a hierarchic world of ideological battle ceased to exist. A new world order arose in which states' activities are subordinated not to interests of the block but to national interests. Security is no longer based on a fragile balance of fear and the risk of outbreak of a pan-European or global armed conflict has diminished. However, new threats have also appeared.

Those changes demanded that states redefine their place in the international system. The independent Republic of Lithuania and fully sovereign Republic of Poland, as democratic countries building a market economy, also had to find their ways to maximize their interests, first of all those related to security. After the disintegration of the Eastern Block, both countries found themselves in a security vacuum. Although the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe/Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe was valued as a “political guardian” of compliance with the CFE agreement¹ and of successive generations of CSBMs², it was soon to be found out that it would not be the main combined Euro-Atlantic institution to ensure the sense of security of survival, possession and unrestrained development. The concept of unilateral or multilateral guarantees was also rejected. Instead states began to see the opportunity for full protection of their interests in the membership in the organization that turned out to be victorious in the cold-war confrontation, and now, slowly but consistently, was adapting to new challenges – NATO. Pursuant to the decision taken during the NATO summit meeting held in Rome in November 1991, the North Atlantic Cooperation Council was established (NACC), a structure thanks to which the borders of the transatlantic security zone began to move eastward. Lithuania and Poland became members of NACC, participated in the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, in the reinforced PfP and in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. It is worth mentioning at this point that Lithuania was the second country to sign the framework program of PfP; Poland did the same a day later, on 2 February 1994, as the third country. However, the main objective of both states was NATO membership. Poland achieved the objective on 12 March 1999. The Republic of Lithuania is among the states that have been

¹ Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe signed in Paris on 19 November 1990, entered into force on 9 November 1992, <http://www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/cfe/cfetreat.htm>.

participating in the Membership Action Plan and have a chance of receiving an invitation to accession during the North Atlantic Council meeting, which is to be held in Prague next year at the level of presidents and prime ministers.

The ability to fulfill tasks arising from the collective security commitment and to undertake new NATO missions requires interoperability which, in turn, implies the need to adapt the infrastructure and purchase equipment. This demands substantial expenditures, but in the era of post-cold-war defense budget cuts and high unemployment, expenditures for modern armaments are not always regarded as a priority. It must be stressed that this is an all-European dilemma. Owing to the adoption of relevant legislation over the last few years, Poland and Lithuania seem to successfully overcome this difficulty and at the same time to maintain wide public support for NATO membership.

Both Lithuania and Poland attach great importance to their relations with the United States – the only world superpower of today – and also, owing to the contribution it makes, the leader of NATO. Unlike some European allies who – being anxious how the expansion of NATO could influence Russia – treated its enlargement with reserve, the American Administration energetically and effectively opted for admission of Central European states since mid-nineties. Also today, preparing NATO for the next stage of the enlargement, the United States cooperates with the countries aspiring to membership, the example of which may be the implementation of the provisions of the Charter of Partnership signed in January 1998 between the USA, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia³.

Intensive Cooperation with the United States does not mean, however, that Poland and Lithuania lack common interests with the European states. Both countries support the development of the European Security and Defense Identity (ESDI) – a path towards real transatlantic partnership. At the end of the last decade, the mainstream of the development of ESDI shifted from NATO and the Western European Union to the European Union, taking the form of the Common European Security and Defense Policy (CESDP). The United States looked at the decisions of the European Council in Cologne, Helsinki, Santa Maria da Feira and Nice with some anxiety. It was feared that the creation of European contingency forces, backed by strategic transport and the expansion of the satellite intelligence potential, would

² Confidence and Security Building Measures.

³ Charter of Partnership Among the United States of America and the Republic of Estonia, Republic of Latvia, and Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/nato/balty.html>.

absorb the resources of the European allies - EU members and that it could adversely influence their involvement in adapting NATO to the new circumstances. At the same time, the possibility of dissolution of the Western European Union and the taking over of most of its functions (except for collective defense) by the EU caused some anxiety among countries having the status of associate members in the WEU (like Poland) or associate partners (like Lithuania; Poland was an associate partner in the years 1994 – 1999). Facing the threat of finding themselves beyond the mainstream of ESDI development, those countries began to demand to be given an opportunity to participate in the development of the CESDP, even before their accession to the EU. It should be added that a great majority of those states were invited to accession negotiations with the EU either – like Poland – at the Luxembourg meeting of the European Council in December 1997 or – like Lithuania – two years later in Helsinki. Certain EU countries believed some candidate countries have too close ties with the United States and they feared the role those countries could play in future autonomous European structures of security. Hence, they looked at the Cooperation proposal with reserve, especially in the face of tensions created by the United States' plans to build its National Missile Defense system. In this context, the situation of the countries negotiating EU accession and at the same time aspiring to or already having obtained membership in NATO, is particularly sensitive. On the one hand, NATO with its integrated military structure and half a century of experience is the only institution in the Euro-Atlantic zone to offer hard guarantees of security, backed by the participation of today's only global superpower. Poland perceives NATO as the main forum for the realization of its national security strategy. Lithuania aspires to membership in NATO for similar reasons. That is why the weakening of NATO's position through animosities among its members on both sides of the Atlantic would be, from the point of view of both countries, particularly unfavorable, the more so that it could influence their aspirations to EU membership.

EU membership is a matter of great importance both for the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Poland, also for security reasons. One of the reasons, albeit not the most important one, is the development of the CESDP as mentioned above. While the EU could become one of the most important institutions organizing peace operations, it is a matter of the future and one that will require huge investment.

Equally important in terms of security seems to be the EU Cooperation in justice and home affairs. Owing to this kind of Cooperation it is possible to combat

organized crime, which appears to be the fastest-growing threat of the beginning of the 21st century. It is typically connected with drug dealing, money laundering, people trafficking (including immigrant smuggling), arms trafficking, and dealing in fissile materials. Especially those last two criminal practices have been developing on the border of the instability zone. Both Poland and Lithuania lie on the border of Central Europe and Eastern Europe, in the vicinity of that zone.

Yet this is not the main reason, either. The key problem is the threat of marginalization. In the days of globalization and information revolution, remaining outside the developed center of the system, which is continuously increasing its advantage, may only mean the widening of the civilization gap. For the states cleaning up the aftermath of over half a century's Soviet dominance, European integration is a chance to get out of the peripheries.

The accession to the EU also means an opportunity for a change in the relations with Russia. Neither the Republic of Lithuania nor the Republic of Poland has any disputable issues in their relations with the Russian Federation; those relations are governed by international law. The states cooperate with each other on the forum of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the institutions created for that purpose by NATO. It is not an easy neighborhood, however, partly for psychological reasons – smaller states usually watch with some anxiety their bigger neighbors where imperial sentiments are still alive. To this we could add historical burdens and the fact that neither Poland nor Lithuania are treated by Russia as partners. As members of integration group which, by developing the Common Foreign and Security Policy, displays growing ambitions to also become a significant political center, they will be able to co-create the EU policy towards the Russian Federation. It should be noted that they would also become co-creators of the mainstream of transatlantic relations within the framework of the EU – USA dialogue.

Analyzing the place of Lithuania and Poland in the transatlantic zone of security, one should not disregard the issue of their location in the Baltic Sea subregion. There are two issues connected with such location: the first one is that of common identity, perceiving the Baltic Sea as *Mare Nostrum* of a uniting Europe, but there is also a problem of threats which the states of the region must face. There are environmental threats, threats to public safety (drug addiction, spreading of infectious diseases) as well as problems connected with respecting the rights of ethnic minorities, problems related to the transformation of the political system

(including the implementation of principles of the rule of law), or with organized crime. The subregion is also an example of Cooperation between many states and institutions of the Euro-Atlantic zone. Apart from bilateral Cooperation, Lithuania, Poland and Russia cooperate here with Estonia, Iceland, Latvia, Norway and the EU countries within the framework of the Northern Dimension in the external and cross-border policies of the EU. Environmental protection, nuclear safety, fighting organized crime and Kaliningrad were recognized as priorities of the Northern Dimension initiative⁴. Its implementation is supported by institutions including the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Barents Euro-Arctic Council and the Arctic Council, and owing to the USA's observer status in the first two structures and its Cooperation and membership in the third, the venture assumes a transatlantic dimension. In the nineties, the United States showed an unprecedented interest in the presence on the Baltic, as testified by the Northern European Initiative started by the Clinton administration and the Charter of Partnership mentioned above.

In the nineties, because of the similarity of the places Poland and Lithuania occupied in the newly formed transatlantic zone, both countries developed similar interests in the sphere of security. Those interests are not identical, as the countries are not identical. Equal in the light of international law, equal in mutual partner relationships, but still different – in terms of the size of the territory, economic, demographic and military potential, and – in spite of over two hundred years of common statehood – in terms of historic experience. Nevertheless, both states seem to be aware of the fact that they have convergent interests and that with similar backgrounds they share the same goal, that is security. This awareness alone was enough to persuade Lithuania and Poland to declare strategic partnership. Will it be enough to fully overcome historic prejudice and fill the declaration with substance towards real partnership?

⁴ Presidency Conclusions: Santa Maria da Feira European Council 19 and 20 June 2000, <http://ue.eu.int/pesid/conclusions.htm>.