

## LITHUANIAN-GERMAN POLITICAL RELATIONS

Prof.dr.hab. Kazimiera Prunskienė

The process of liberation from the Soviet regime and restoration of independence in Lithuania, as well as in the other two Baltic States, was commensurate with the unification of Germany. Both these processes facilitated and enabled each other. A common favourable political environment was created by M. Gorbachev's "perestroika". In Germany, the latter circumstance, i.e. the role of the "new thinking" and "perestroika" in M.Gorbachev's politics, is given a far more objective assessment than in Lithuania, where radical politicians and, especially, victims of the Soviet regime identify the author of the "perestroika" with the misery caused by that regime, and with the ideologists of the former Communist autocratic system.

### **First meeting with the Germany of the 90-ties.**

I would like to briefly return to my early acquaintance with the Germany of that time. This first acquaintance dates back to a time almost twenty years ago – my first research visit in 1982 in accordance with a cooperation agreement between Vilnius University and Frankfurt-am-Main J.W.Goethe University. This study visit lasted for about half a year and resulted in a widely spread network of scientific, political, professional (economy and business) and cultural ties with hundreds of partners and friends. In 2001, I was decorated with the highest award of the Federal Republic of Germany "Das Grösse Verdienstkreuz mit Stern" as acknowledgement of this long-standing cooperation. I am very proud of this award and hold it in a very high esteem.

20 years ago we were divided by a deep political, economic and social abyss. As a researcher in economics, working on my habilitated doctor thesis, I could not avoid noticing and analysing the fundamental reasons of this phenomenon as well as the system differences that determined the tremendous economic backwardness, low level of social welfare, and the restriction of individual possibilities in the Soviet Union of that time.

That acquaintance with Germany: (macroeconomic studies, discussions, interactions) played an essential role in my subsequent life, professional and political

activity. As an economist, I consider myself to be a disciple of Germany, and acknowledge the economic advantages of a socially oriented market.

During the first years of my acquaintance with Germany, I was more attracted by the Christian Democracy, which, by the way, recognises and promotes not only the principles of market economy, but likewise the social responsibility of the State. Such political affinity of mine was also influenced by the fact that the USSR authorities clearly preferred the Socialdemocratic government. In early 1983, when the SPD under H.Schmidt's leadership was ousted by H.Kohl's CDU coalition with CSU and FDP, I was just finishing my half-year study visit in Germany and welcomed the victory of the Christian Democrats.

The more engrossed I became in the politics and economy of Germany, the better I understood that there were no major differences between the policies pursued by the Socialdemocrats and the Christian Democrats, as over a long period of time, a consent had been reached between them over essential issues in foreign and domestic policy. I was also impressed by the fact that the ruling majority changes in the country were not accompanied by political or economic disturbances, and the SPD, which found itself in opposition, was neither humiliated nor persecuted. As we see 16 years later, the SPD, together with its coalition partners, has again regained the position of the ruling majority.

Between 1982 and 1983, the prospect of the Soviet Union collapse was not considered a real political issue. It was possible to be discussed only in confidential conversations. Nevertheless, the death of L.Breznev and the coming of J.Andropov, and the concurrent strengthening of the positions of M.Gorbachev, as one of the secretaries of the CPSU Central Committee, enabled to model such a possibility. In open conversations with my colleagues from Frankfurt-am-Main and Giessen universities, Ch.Winter, W.Meissner, K.Heller, R.Gulich, A.Hampel and others we did not shy away from such prognoses either. Together with prof. K.Heller (a historian-sovietologist) we worked out a "verdict" – collapse of the Soviet Union and liberation of the Baltic States at the point when the economy of the Soviet Union finally reached the deadlock, where it was heading at that time. It did not take more than 5 or 6 years for that prediction to come true. I take the courage to assert that I was the first economic scientist in Lithuania who,

as far back as in 1983, and especially from 1985 onwards, started to promote the ideas of economic reforms and economic (later also of political) independence from the USSR.

The national revival movement in the Baltic States, that gained momentum in 1998, their solidarity in demanding at first economic and later also political independence, were those fundamental factors that undermined and finally destroyed the USSR authoritarian mono-party political system together with the economic system based on “common for all people” property, centralised planning and distribution.

Already as far back as in 1988, in my reports read in J.Liebig Giessen University, in the Political Academy in Bonn and elsewhere, I used to hint about an evolving imminent opportunity both for the Baltic States to acquire freedom, and for the West and East Germanies to come to a determination. Some of the listeners would nod their agreement, others would sceptically remark, “Maybe, in some twenty years time...” In reality the events developed rather fast and favourably: in the period between 1989 and 1991, there happened both the unification of Germany and the restoration of independence in the Baltic States, as well as their subsequent international recognition. During that period, hundreds of times I stood before various audiences in Germany: in conferences, meetings, media programmes. I found that the attention we enlisted in Germany – from state officials to ordinary citizens – was not that of observation, but rather a demonstration of vital interest in our success. That was also a German interest – to win the future for a whole and united Germany, regional stability and the prerequisites for a peaceful Europe.

Countries of the West, including Germany, did not hurry to recognise our independence (in Lithuanian it was proclaimed on 11 March 1990). The underlying reason was to prevent destabilisation of M.Gorbachev’s position and avoid provoking conflicts (the reasonableness of such apprehensions was later confirmed by the developments in Chechnya and Yugoslavia). M.Gorbachev was regarded as a guarantor of a peaceful course of change, though, his “perestroika” could hardly have predicted either the liberation of the Baltic States or, unlikely, the unification of Germany. Nevertheless, we were heading exactly in that direction.

The West was urging us to start negotiations with Moscow, though on both sides there emerged enough hurdles for a real negotiation.

The defeat of the August 1991 coup in Moscow, organised by a reactionary communist faction, opened a favourable historical niche for the West to recognise our statehood. Germany was one of the first to do so. I have reasonable grounds to state that I also made a direct contribution in this development. In my lecture for diplomats, organised by Foreign Policy Society in the Bundestag Press Centre in Bonn on 21 August 1991, as well as during other meetings with politicians and mass media representatives, I repeatedly declared that it was time to decide. It became even more relevant at the moment of the “puchist” defeat. On 23 August, together with A.Urdze (informal representative of Latvia), we met with H.D.Genscher. That was a demanding conversation. I presented the arguments: M.Gorbachev was already weak, while B.Jelcin was still weak, thus it was the right time to acknowledge and rectify the historical injustice (I was referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact and the two ensuing occupations: Soviet and Nazist). H.D.Genscher made a telephone call and talked in our presence to the Danish Foreign Minister U.Jeleman-Jensen – one of the politicians who showed the most supportive attitude towards the Baltic States at that time.

In addition, together with A.Urdze and some other supportive Bundestag members, we exerted pressure upon the German Government at the level of Bundestag. We were preparing a draft statement of the Bundestag comprising provisions for the recognition and at the same time urging the Government to do so. We also included, inter alia, a clause that the German side would not express any claims in regard to Klaipėda Land. The draft was never adopted as the Government of Germany formally recognised the Lithuanian independence on 28 September 1991 and restored diplomatic relations. That date marks the start of a new epoch in the relationship between the two States.

### **Achievements in diplomatic relations and cooperation in the last decade**

During the decade of restored political, economic and cultural relationship, Germany has become one of the most important, and in a number of aspects – especially in the sphere of foreign trade, cultural ties and direct bilateral development support, including technological, research and academic, as well as humanitarian assistance – the first partner among the Western European countries. This was facilitated by the cultural

similarity between the two nations, deep roots of historic cooperation, as well as prevailing political and economic interests.

During the last decade, Lithuania and Germany have concluded 16 treaties and agreements aimed at providing legal regulation for the majority of the cooperation spheres. These treaties and agreements include:

- Agreement between the Republic of Lithuania and the Federal Republic of Germany for the promotion and reciprocal protection of investments;
- Agreement between the Republic of Lithuania and the Federal Republic of Germany for the avoidance of double taxation with respect to taxes on income and on capital;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on sea communication;
- Air transport agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on the abolition of visa requirements;
- Declaration on the basis of relations between the Republic of Lithuania and the Federal Republic of Germany;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on employing probationers to improve their skills and language knowledge (Agreement on probationers);
- Agreement between the Republic of Lithuania and the Federal Republic of Germany concerning mutual assistance in natural calamity and large accident cases;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on consultations and cooperation;
- Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany on financial cooperation (Project “DEG participation in capital and loan to the Lithuanian Development Bank”); and others.

Political cooperation, as well scientific, cultural or any other relationship is impossible without enthusiastic, knowledgeable and reliable people. From the very first

years of the Independence, stable and dynamic relations were formed with the Bundestag and the parliaments of the Lands that created a favourable political background for practical developments. On the German side, there greatly contributed the leaders of all its major political parties (the first of them was R.Sussmuth) and the chairmen of interparliamentary contact groups. It is impossible not to mention here prof. W.von Stetten, a steady supporter of Lithuania in the German Bundestag, who has remained in his post throughout the changing terms of office in the parliaments of both countries, and whose unequivocal regard for his political partners – Lithuanian Conservatives (the most active of them A.Račas) and Christian Democrats – has never prevented him from cooperating with partners from more leftist parties as well.

The complicated situation of Lithuanian, as a state under restoration, does not allow the parliaments of both sides to be confined exclusively within the area of legislation and parliamentary issues. The most active parliament members on both sides “employ” their partnership for the resolution of practical problems with the aim of enhancing business, scientific and cultural relations. Therefore, it is not surprising that during the visits of German businessmen to Lithuania, those parliamentarians (myself included) who have profound knowledge of this country and its economy, never consider our personal time wasted if it is spent on reports and consultations related with prospective projects and partnership. The same can be said in respect to visits of the representatives of mass media or non-governmental organisations, as well about private persons who come as tourists to get acquainted with this country.

Political cooperation with Germany is not limited only to interstate relations with the institutions of Federal authority. There is a well-developed relationship with the political authority of the German Lands, organisations of science, business and culture, various non-governmental organisations and foundations. By their mutual effort, the Lithuanian and German partners have implemented thousands of various programmes that enable entities of both countries to benefit from new experience and opportunities, which is particularly important for the Lithuanian side in its effort to cover the long distance towards the integration into the European Union.

Here are just some of the examples from my personal activities in the framework of partnership with the Lands of Germany.

Already in 1989, as a result of the visit in Hessen by a Lithuanian delegation, headed by myself, under the invitation and support of the government of that Land and non-governmental institutions, sustained and productive relations were established. Since that time, the Offebach Chamber of Industry and Commerce (IHK) has been supporting the Vilnius Chamber of Industry and Commerce, at the same time also coordinating the assistance of other German IHKs rendered to partners in Lithuania. During the first years of our independence, the administration of Hessen, with my participation as an intermediary, printed and donated to Lithuania textbooks of the German language for non-German schools; provided a considerable number of students with an opportunity to study at Hessen universities, including Manheim, Giessen. These programmes are also sponsored by individual persons. Lithuania is grateful for the basic financial support extended by the administration of the Land of Hessen to the only Lithuanian school in the Western Europe – the February 16<sup>th</sup> Gymnasium. Hessische Landezentrale fur politische Bildung, together with the Lithuanian Institute of Europe, where I am the Director, and other Lithuanian institutions have organised a great number of specialist exchange programmes, conferences, seminars, publication projects. Our first joint Lithuanian-Hessen Land Relationship Information Exchange, launched in March 1991 in Wiessbaden, was a start for major events of this kind that were subsequently continued in other Lands as well. In 1997, in cooperation with this Centre, and in response to the need produced by the statehood processes, we organised a conference on parliamentary democracy in the Lithuanian Seimas.

In the period between 1989 and 2001, with my furtherance alone, several hundreds of Lithuanian students and specialist studied, underwent training or advanced their knowledge in various courses and seminars. I would like to mention Eichstat University which since 1992 has made available, under my request, three places of continuous study for economists, that have already been used by several students; thanks to the businessman dr. F.Scheuerle grants at Manheim University, German diplomas were granted to various speciality students; Hanover, Giessen and other universities organised long-term study visits for highly qualified specialists, including professors. Since 1998, upon selection and recommendations of the Lithuanian Institute of Europe, several

Lithuanian students have studied economics and ecological science at Zittau University. All these opportunities will be available in future as well.

The cooperation between my German Alma Mater – Frankfurt/M J.W.Goethe University – and Vilnius University is of particularly developed and comprehensive character. I was destined to launch cooperation in the area of economic science as far back as in 1982.

In 1986 cooperation was started between the Lithuanian Institute of the Economy of Agriculture, where at that time I was Deputy Director for Science (now the Institute of Agrarian Economics) and Giessen J.Liebig University, known for its eminence in the sphere of agrarian science. Already in 1993, together with the famous professor of that University, K.E.Wudekin, we organised a scientific conference in Vilnius on the issues of agrarian reforms, the importance of which, listed in the recommendations, have not lost their significance in the present day Lithuania.

Hundreds of reports at international and national conferences or seminars, as well as my personal contributions in various political, business and academic events organised by Christian, women's or other non-governmental organisations (I still continue to receive a great number of such invitations) have, as a rule expanded into implementation of concrete programmes that bring one or another benefit to our country. Thus, the visit of Bavarian Landtag members to Lithuania in 1992 (under my initiative) and my subsequent weeklong political dialogue with Bavarian politicians, representatives of science, business and other fields in the first week of 1993, were followed by researchers' study visits (including in Würzburg), multiple, half a year long apprenticeship programmes for young agricultural specialists (I also included Rietavas Agricultural School into this programme) with Bavarian farmers; a diverse Bavarian Farmers Union's multiple assistance programme, now continued by my friend Ch.Götz, and many other programmes. A new impetus is being given to the cooperation with the Eastern Lands of Germany, including Thuringia.

An active participant in subregional cooperation is the city of Klaipėda and Klaipėda County. Strategically convenient situation and location of the Port of Klaipėda stipulate both the focus of attention by politicians and those working in the sphere of



transport infrastructure, as well as the participation of the County in the agreements and programmes of the European “Northern Dimension”.

Klaipėda County possesses a considerable German cultural heritage. The objects of this cultural heritage include authentic – in Lithuania referred to as “German” – architecture, memorable places related with famous classical writers, among them Thomas Mann house-museum in Nida, etc.

Klaipėda maintains partnership with Hanseatic city Lubeck. There operates the ferry line Klaipėda-Mukran. A group of experts from Bremen for several years consulted the development of Klaipėda city. With the support and participation of Germany, there are a number of cultural, research, academic and humanitarian projects being implemented in Klaipėda that substantially contribute to the development of this region.

It could be believed that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Germany will in the nearest future implement a suggestion, put forward in 1998, to open a German Consulate in Klaipėda. This requires the accumulation of mutual interests and practical prerequisites.

### **The importance and status of the German language**

In Soviet times, the German language was the second language of the three – English, German and French – most spread Western European languages. However, Lithuanian high school and university graduates, with the exception of those from specialized schools and programmes, could not boast good command of a third language (after the native Lithuanian and the compulsory Russian). There was no actual need for it anyway.

During the years of independence, the English language has become clearly prevalent among other foreign languages. This is a spillover process from the West into Lithuania and is conditioned by the expanding international ties. Nevertheless, the German language has not lost its importance: in 97 schools with enhanced German language teaching, there study about 10 000 students, some of them get the second level language certificate which provides them with the right, and creates the necessary prerequisites, to study in the higher schools of Germany. Conversely, the suggestions,

which are now being repeatedly mentioned, to provide the English language with the status of the first foreign language are fraught with danger that the positions of the German language in those schools where traditionally it was stronger might be eroded.

A number of arguments could be offered why it is not expedient to develop a monopolistic position for the English language, which might relatively impair learning of other European languages, including German. Germany is the most important economic partner of Lithuania in the Western Europe. Young people, who are studying to acquire a profession with the intention to maintain contacts (business, cultural, political) with partners in that country would, undoubtedly, get greater advantage and more real prospects for the development of reliable and meaningful partnership if they had a good knowledge of the German language.

A monolingual Europe, to my opinion, is not attractive from the cultural point of view. Profound mutual understanding between nations and the feeling of kinship, development of trust and lasting relationship is inseparable from the ability to communicate in the native language of one of them, and to understand and master not only business, but likewise cultural and traditional aspects of communication.

### **The role of Germany in the integration of Lithuania into the European Union**

German leaders, politicians, statesmen and representatives of the academic world have repeatedly emphasised the importance of Lithuanian integration, as well as that of other Baltic States, into the European Union, and reiterated their support for these processes. Lithuania with good reason considers Germany to be the “advocate” for its European integration as well as a supporter of progress. Today Lithuania has already covered halfway of the negotiations and is in reality prepared to become a member of the EU as from 2004. In this stage, apart from general aspects of political interrelation, there emerge a number of specific issues, which will, first of all, have to be decided with the approval of the present EU members.

One of the most important issues is free movement of people within the EU. The aspirant members, including Lithuania, are seeking to ensure an unrestricted movement of workers. The concern, expressed by Germany, as well as by other EU members, is

perfectly understood by Lithuanian politicians. Nevertheless, this issue is one of the areas, which determine the balance between the total of the rights to movement, including the movement of goods, investments and capital.

This sensitive problem ought to be decided by a process of bilateral consultations aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable agreement.

In 2001, the Lithuanian Seimas started discussing the amendments to Article 47 of the Constitution and the related legislation, which would enable foreign investors and other entities to satisfactorily resolve the issues related with the ownership of land in Lithuania. This aspect has repeatedly been criticised by foreign partners, in particular by those from Germany, where legally and traditionally it is an essential element of economic processes.

Rational coordination of bilateral interests and their incorporation into general process of reforms and documents of European integration is an essential prerequisite for a sustained progress both in individual countries and Europe as a whole.

Lithuania is counting on the support of Germany not only in the process of its preparation for the EU membership, but likewise in its accession to NATO. Some Lithuanian politicians, both in the former and the present governments, by attributing excessive importance to the role of the US in NATO enlargement, overlook, I am convinced, the full range of possibilities of discussion and cooperation in this area with other major NATO members on this side of the Atlantic. This is also reflected in the flawed current privatisation procedure of strategically important objects.

The EU enlargement is also naturally related with the shaping of Europe as a common security area. Therefore, the exclusive orientation primarily to the requirements related with NATO membership, with a simultaneous reducing of interest in the common European security system, fails, in my opinion, to fully conform to the focus and prospects of international processes.

There is no doubt that the cooperation of European countries in promoting security does not create an alternative to the enlargement of NATO. Nevertheless, European security institutions and politicians devote slightly more attention than NATO to conflict prevention and crisis management, as well as to the means of their prevention, that have become the issue of primary importance today. Within this context, there also

are the new prospects for the improvement and development of relations between the European countries and Russia, including the common interest to participate in the strengthening of European security.

One of the specific subjects in the political dialogue between Germany and Lithuania is the situation in Kaliningrad Oblast and its prospects. The changes in the attitude of the Russian President towards NATO enlargement, that occurred in the wake of the 11 September terrorist attacks, may significantly contribute to a greater openness in the relations of Kaliningrad with the countries of the Baltic region, as well as its participation in the European processes. Germany, as the most powerful state in the Baltic region, being interested in the stability and development of Europe, including that of Kaliningrad region, will, I believe, express its rational attitude in support of a flexible resolution of the problem related to the EU-Kaliningrad Oblast border, which will enable to avoid its increasing isolation and disproportionate development, as well as resultant undesirable political consequences and increasing tension. Lithuania is expanding its economic relations with Russia and its Kaliningrad Oblast. One of the new forms is the forum of the Parliamentary Group for the Relations with the Russian Federation at the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and the parliamentarians of the Duma of the Kaliningrad Oblast aimed at promoting dialogue and finding rational solutions. A similar form of dialogue is necessary in the relationship between all neighbours also with the participation of Germany and Poland. A dialogue is the best medium for building a reliable and stable relationship.

Translated by *Violeta Stankūnienė*