

LITHUANIA'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY AGENDA

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Summary

Lithuania's accession to NATO and the EU opens up new possibilities for Lithuania together with other democratic nations to cope with challenges of globalisation and reinforce its security in the face of new risks and threats.

Membership of the EU and NATO has transformed Lithuania's engagement in regional and international affairs. Lithuania has joined these two organisations with a vision to become an active member capable of producing political

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La Revue internationale et stratégique, since its creation in 1991, is set out to take into account the great debates of the international scene. Through the confrontation of ideas and authors but also through the competition of distinguished specialists and decision-makers, it attempts to present a clear vision of the international system, which is more globalised and therefore more complex — that is a characteristic of the beginning of 21th century. Thanks to thematic folders, each trimester is punctuated with profound analysis of one of the subjects of great international discussion. This problematisation of a subject is completed by the sections allowing a reader to comprehend the current affairs in a detailed manner as well as to shed light on a region or a particular country.

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ideas and practical solutions to regional co-operation, promoting universal principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

Our aim is to expand the Baltic region's engagement with the neighbours in the North, the South and the East and to contribute actively to the development of new formats of regional co-operation. In this context, Lithuania's favourable geographical location and its experience of co-operation with neighbours is a great asset.

In his opening speech delivered at the summit of the Baltic Development Forum in Stockholm, President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso stated that the Baltic Sea region could be called 'a beacon of Europe'. Indeed, the Baltic Sea region is one of the fastest growing regions in the EU and has great possibilities to become a world leader in terms of economic growth, competitiveness, and innovation, as well as social welfare of its population.

Seeking to maintain regional dynamism, Lithuania is developing co-operation with Poland, trilateral co-operation with the Baltic States, consulting among the Nordic and Baltic EU members, taking part in the broader cooperation of the Nordic and Baltic States.

Still, the possibilities of the region are underused. Enlargement has drawn a new border on Lithuania's eastern frontiers. Our task is to make this border not only secure, but also less visible, more transparent, and by no means preventing political, economic and people-to-people contacts.

Eastern Europeans have every right to belong to the European family, once they adhere to common values and make practical steps to integrate with Europe.

We must also deliberate on the role of our "new neighbours" in reasserting Europe's global leadership, including such areas as foreign policy and energy safety. The Iranian nuclear case shows how important countries like Russia are in solving modern security problems.

Thus, promoting democracy to the East is a strategic priority. The success of integrating Russia, Ukraine, and the other emerging Eastern European democracies with a broader transatlantic community will secure energy supplies against political manipulations. It would also ensure broader support for European and transatlantic initiatives based on common values.

From a shorter perspective, there is an immediate interest to reinvigorate our indolent policies vis-à-vis the democratic situation in Belarus, as unpredictable

policies of the current Belarusian leadership may have abrupt strategic implications to European stability and cooperation.

In this context, transatlantic co-operation is crucial. Strong transatlantic partnership will also help to advance democratic values further to the Greater Middle East to address such security problems as nuclear safety, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and terrorism.

Future of Europe

Europe has changed dramatically over the last few years. It has enlarged to ten new countries in 2004. Bulgaria and Romania will join the EU once they conclude all preparations and necessary procedures. The EU has achieved more consolidation in foreign policy, particularly in the CFSP area. The foreseen expansion of the euro zone and the Schengen area to the new member states will only consolidate this important stage of EU integration.

With enlargement new relationships have emerged on the European continent. They enriched European political culture with new colours and fashions. Geographically, the EU already borders the countries which nearly a decade ago seemed so remote from Europe. The dynamism of change is indeed very striking.

Not surprisingly, enlargement has prompted discussions about the European future, which reflects today in numerous questions regarding *the finalité* of the EU.

The 'no' vote in France and the Netherlands on the Constitution for Europe has raised speculations in some European capitals that the EU needs a break to reflect the direction and the possible impact of ongoing changes.

In our view, the results of the French and the Dutch referenda should not prevent us from continuing European integration policy. The Constitution for Europe should further underpin the process of European integration. The adoption of a common political declaration could be a starting point for changing the context rather than the content of the constitutional debate.

Today the EU needs decisive leadership, strong institutions, and new initiatives. Our vision of Europe builds on four preconditions:

First, Europeans should be open to new solutions. Openness to the world and new ideas has always been the engine of European development. Therefore, national interests should add to rather than prevail over European needs and goals.

Second, solidarity and fairness have to remain at the core of the EU. A search for compromise and fair solutions for all EU members should guide the EU politicians in the future like they did in the past. The fact that the member states have reached a deal on the budget for 2007 - 2013 is a very important political signal showing that the EU is gradually recovering from stagnation and paralysis.

Third, we should feel responsibility to the people of our own countries, and to those of the neighbouring countries, which will be affected respectively. The vision of Europe that we are creating will equally affect all neighbours of the EU - Turkey, the Balkans and the South Caucasus, Ukraine and, of course, Russia.

Fourth, Europe should firmly stick to value-based policies and be ambitious in pursuing common goals. European foreign policy should build on the promotion of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

At the same time we need to understand the concerns and uncertainties of our citizens about the European future. The EU has to be comprehensible and acceptable to the EU's citizens. In this respect the Commission's decision to launch 'the plan D' for democracy, dialogue and debate in Europe was a step in the right direction. National governments should follow that path. Further debate needs a common agenda and an action plan.

Being understandable and acceptable also means being sensitive to different social, economic and fiscal models applied in the member states. These models reflect national peculiarities and stand up to fair competition at the European level. If closing the gap between the better-off and the worse-off member states of the EU is a real priority, the adoption of the Services Directive would be just the right thing to set in motion.

Paradoxically, sometimes we are more pessimistic about Europe's future than some of our neighbours are. For them, Europe is a source of hope and inspiration. Therefore, we should be rather careful when speaking about the so-called "borders" of Europe. We no longer live in the age where borders are drawn disregarding the interests of the nations living in that area. We believe that the people of Eastern Europe should themselves define how far and how wide Europe will be in the future by implementing far-reaching reforms and adopting their lives to European standards.

Transatlantic link

Only acting together can the EU and the US ensure viability of democratic values around the globe. At a global level, the EU and the US are major powers and as such have a global responsibility to act in a joint manner.

The successful democratisation of Central Europe and the Baltic States is a vivid example of the results the EU-US concerted action may produce. The joint efforts also bear fruit in the Balkans, which lay at the ruins of war nearly a decade ago. Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia-Herzegovina are now going through the process of association and stabilization with the EU. Meanwhile, the future status of Kosovo will be defined soon. Hopefully, the Balkan Gordian knot will be untied forever.

Collective EU-US action is also needed in solving such global issues as the Middle East peace process and the Iranian nuclear crisis.

The spread of accountable and representative governments, rule of law, and respect for human rights should be one of the most important strategic priorities in the EU-US strategic dialogue. The EU and the US can only succeed in advancing these fundamental values if they act together.

NATO is the most important asset in strengthening and developing the transatlantic link. To this end, NATO must strengthen its military capabilities by increasing rapid response standards of all NATO forces, also by developing specialisation and usability of these forces and pre-allocating sufficient funds for NATO-led operations.

On the other hand, the Alliance should not be reduced to a military toolbox. If the organisation is perceived this way, it might lose its political authority and prestige. Enhanced strategic political dialogue in NATO is crucial to understanding regional political developments that might affect NATO operations and security of its member states. Transformed NATO has to remain the prime venue for dialogue between Europeans and Americans on security and security related issues.

In implementing its global agenda, the EU is a natural partner for NATO. NATO and the EU must work together on the basis of burden sharing. The EU-NATO co-operation needs to develop further. However, duplication in terms of both capabilities and structures must be avoided.

Along military cooperation NATO and EU should seek new ways in increasing their civilian capabilities. In this respect it is worth exploring how existing contractual relationship between EU and NATO in military assets and capabilities could be used and extended into the area of civilian capabilities.

The geography of NATO's operations is the best illustration of NATO's ambitions to assume a global role. Lithuania is an active contributor to NATO's peace operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. Since early June 2005 a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) under Lithuanian command is operating in Ghor province of Afghanistan.

More close coordination of actions in areas where both organisations are present could harmonise EU-NATO dialogue. NATO-EU strategy for the Western Balkans could serve as an example. The testing ground for expanding such co-operation could become the EU and NATO operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

NATO enlargement is another tool of extending the area of security and stability to democratic European countries adhering to common values and making real progress in meeting NATO's standards. NATO should continue pursuing its "open door" policy. The recent round of NATO enlargement should not be the last.

We are certain that the countries which have signed the Adriatic Charter will join the Alliance as soon as they get ready for membership. Yet, the successful consolidation of such countries like Ukraine is also very important for transatlantic security. Ukraine is a country of geopolitical and geo-economic importance for Central Europe, the Black Sea Region and the South Caucasus. This factor should be taken into account as we start our discussions on the next round of NATO enlargement.

Neighbourhood Policy

Development of good neighbourly relations is one of the key goals of Lithuania's foreign policy. An experience gained during the period of independence has shown that good relations with neighbours can be an effective policy instrument in building the atmosphere of mutual trust and co-operation in the region.

Membership of NATO and the EU will allow Lithuania to develop good neighbourly relations first of all through active participation in the formation and implementation of the Union's neighbourhood policy.

Today, one of the biggest challenges for the EU is to stabilise its strategic neighbourhood. Europeans are still arguing over which neighbourhood is more important to them: North Africa, Middle East, the Balkans or the post-Soviet space. In our view, all are important for the long term strategic goals of the EU.

Even more controversial is the question of how stability in the neighbourhood could be achieved. For Lithuania, the answer is clear-cut: stabilisation without democratic reforms is just make-believe. We have walked this path ourselves. Therefore, it is important to keep the European perspective open to those countries, which seek to transform themselves and contribute to European development.

The EU countries have different perceptions and approaches on the EU Eastern Neighbourhood, particularly towards Russia. Geographical proximity makes relations with Russia more intense for some EU members than the others. The painful historical experience of some EU members is also a factor which must be taken into account.

It is obvious that Russia is a strategic energy partner of the EU. The EU is also Russia's biggest foreign trade partner. It can be expected that the economic boom in Russia will continue drawing European capital into Russia. However, whether growing dependency on energy supply from Russia in its current shape would benefit European security in the long run is still unclear.

Recent Ukrainian-Russian gas dispute affected the EU countries as well. The EU has learned that depending on one major energy supplier is rather dangerous. Therefore, the European Energy Security Strategy, as well as a common European energy policy, needs further elaboration. Lithuania welcomes Austria's determination to pay significant attention to this issue during its Presidency.

By creating a common energy policy, the EU would be able to take into account the interests of all EU countries. The projects like the North European Gas Pipe must be discussed in advance with all countries involved. We can only regret that such a discussion was absent this time, despite the vocal opposition of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

At a broader level, the EU needs to agree that such particular interests as trade and energy cannot undermine the EU's long-term objectives in its relations with Russia- namely, the consolidation of democratic values in this country. Lithuania has been and will remain one of the staunchest supporters of a democratic Russia consolidating and integrating with the European community.

In 2006 a series of elections will be held in Eastern Europe, including those in Ukraine and Belarus. Results of the March 26th parliamentary elections in Ukraine will show Europe how firm Ukraine's commitment to pursue EU-oriented policy is. We believe that a discussion under which circumstances the EU would provide Ukraine with a clearer perspective of membership is well matured.

Lithuania and Ukraine seek to further expand and strengthen their bilateral relations. In December 2005 the Foreign Ministers of Lithuania and Ukraine concluded a joint statement on regional co-operation and co-operation in the field of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. This document stipulates plans and actions aimed at promoting co-operation, sharing experience and facilitating gradual integration of Ukraine into the EU.

The EU also needs to pay more attention to the situation in Belarus. The evolving debate on creating a Union State between Russia and Belarus should be taken more seriously. We have to examine carefully what will happen if such a state becomes a reality.

Also, the outcome of the March 19th presidential elections in Belarus may lead to serious deliberations on the EU and the US policies toward Belarus. Lithuania considers that free and fair election is a first step to ensure democratic consolidation of this country. Therefore, the role of the OSCE observation missions will be crucial. In the long run, more flexible financial mechanisms will be necessary to reach out to the Belarusian society.

It is gratifying that Moldova and the South Caucasus attracts more and more attention of the EU. We believe that implementation of the EU Action Plans will help those countries to get closer to the EU.

At this moment, further implementation of political, economic and administrative reforms in Moldova is of utmost importance. Thus, international assistance to the process of reform implementation could be more substantial.

A complete withdrawal of the Russian troops from Moldova's territory as foreseen in international agreements is another issue, which needs quick solution. It is obvious that Russia will co-operate on the Transnistrian issue only in case it feels increased interest and participation of Western countries in the settlement process. The EU's Border Assistance Mission to Moldova and Ukraine, together with the expanded 5+2 negotiations format, will be instrumental in finding a viable and sustainable solution to the Transnistrian conflict.

Regarding the peacekeeping options, we need to find a multinational solution to the issue. The EU has to make clear that the ESDP instruments and post-settlement arrangements are available, including the possibility to deploy an EU mission to the conflict zone under the agreed mandate with the states concerned.

We welcome the progress achieved so far with regard to the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia, which gives us grounds to believe that it will be completed by 2008. Early fulfilment by Russia of all of its 1999 Istanbul commitments would highly contribute to the settlement of the long-lasting conflicts.

Lithuania together with Latvia and Estonia launched the initiative to use joint efforts of the Baltic States in assisting the South Caucasus nations in their transformation.

At a strategic level, we stress the importance of the South Caucasus region in the wider context of addressing global threats, of promoting stability and democracy in the Greater Middle East and Central Asia, and of securing safe energy transit from the Caspian oil and gas sources. The role of the EU Rule of Law Mission, which was launched in Georgia in summer 2004 under the Lithuanian initiative, serves as a successful example of the benefits that EU could provide for the region.

'Frozen' conflicts, or more precisely, 'the frozen resolution of the conflicts', which disrupts territorial integrity of the South Caucasus states, also requires the attention of the Euro-Atlantic community. The time is ripe to ask ourselves: do we believe that the existing negotiation formats and peacekeeping mechanisms on the territory of the former Soviet Union deliver the expected results or do we need new solutions, involving ESDP and NATO mechanisms?