

## **NEW VISION OF LITHUANIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

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Current Lithuanian foreign policy can be conditionally divided into three main directions: participation in so-called anti-terrorist coalition, NATO and the EU affairs, and support for the development of democracy to the East. In essence this type of policy is not new, but just since 2004 it has been purposefully pursued. However, after two years it is not clear whether foreign policy directions are justified, and whether Lithuanian foreign policy increases security of the state, its prestige and, finally, whether it serves national interests. Anyway, up to the year 2004 none of these questions have been addressed more seriously. Hence, there are reasons to consider what has changed in substance since 2004, what elements of a new policy are alarming, and which elements should be continued. Generally there is a need for such consideration in Lithuania.

Up to 2004 everything was comparatively simple because in principle foreign policy was oriented towards the integration into the EU and NATO. Strategically it was perceived as the integration into a single democratic world of the West, a common military, political, economic and cultural space. However, in terms of political practice it mostly meant orientation towards the United States, since in the past decade was realised that, first and foremost, membership in NATO depended on the US. That is why the membership in NATO was supposed to become a precondition for the EU membership.

Negative consequences of this political course in foreign policy have not been considered yet, since there were no serious reasons for doing that. For example, in 1999, after Lithuania declared its support for the military campaign against the Milosevic regime, tensions in relations with Russia grew up. However, that tension did not seem threatening as the Western world demonstrated unity during the campaign. A similar situation developed during

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the military campaign against the Afghan Talibs. Disagreements over the war against Hussein's regime between the US and Europe showed up due to the course chosen by the US Administration to base its actions not so much on functioning international structures but more on ad hoc alliances. However, even at that time the line of disagreement between the allies was very wiggly. It seemed to be a temporary disagreement, the one that had been quite frequent in the history of the Transatlantic community. Furthermore, Russia's position on the war in Iraq was more moderate than in the case of the war against Serbia. Finally, soon a solemn admission of the group of Central and Eastern European countries into NATO and the EU took place. That seemed optimistic.

However, with ongoing War in Iraq, and with famous strategy of President Bush in the Middle East becoming more complicated, the line dividing the European countries became more visible, and what is the most important, this line seemed to be more permanent than temporary. European countries split into the new and the old NATO and EU members. It even looked that the integration of the Eastern European countries into the Western structures was only imitation, a certain ritual or public relations campaign; however, the real policy had quite different tendencies.

The dividing line between the EU countries was less obvious when discussing Constitution for Europe, new budget, and especially an enlargement of the European Union, than the war on terrorism. That dividing line looked like the line isolating new EU member states. Lithuania was among those new member states. Nevertheless, it seems that the most substantial disagreements between Lithuania and other countries of the western European alliance occurred over so-called Eastern policy that was the policy towards Russia and its traditional sphere of influence. Because of that policy the symptoms of international isolation vis-à-vis Lithuania became clearly noticeable, among which the following facts of Lithuania's isolation deserve mentioning:

- Projected gas pipeline from Russia to Europe, bypassing the states on the western borders of Russia, including Lithuania;

- Circumstances surrounding negotiations on the Russian civil transit through Lithuania. It's worth reminding that Lithuania during the negotiations followed instructions of the EU Commission, but Russia through

direct contacts with the EU states managed to achieve that Commission's instructions were changed;

- The incident involving the crash of the Russian fighter aircraft, which was treated by Lithuanians as Russia's special provocation, and by Brussels as an accident;

- The recent negative decision of the EU concerning the introduction of the Euro in Lithuania and a vague prospect of integration into the Schengen zone;

- Finally, the episode in the United Nations where Lithuania, aspiring to become a member of the Human Rights Committee lost the election to... Azerbaijan.

However, Lithuania's image in Russia should take a special place among the most worrying symptoms. According to public opinion surveys, Lithuania was among the states, towards which Russians had the most hostile attitudes. Of course, there can be some reservations concerning the reliability of surveys. Furthermore, the recent information war between Lithuania and Russia on the commemoration of the victory against the Nazis organised by Moscow negatively influenced Russian public opinion. One can also appeal that suppressed Russian media deliberately portrays a negative image of Lithuania. Finally, one can appeal to imperial traditions of Russian thinking, and to treat that circumstance as objective regardless of how Lithuania behaves.

It goes without saying that all these circumstances influence the relationship. However, it seems that deliberate foreign policy of Lithuania substantially contributed to the formation of the negative image of Lithuania in Russia. In connection to this a threatening conclusion may be drawn: not only Lithuania's geopolitical location creates preconditions for becoming a target of eventual hostile Russian policy, but the policy that Lithuania deliberately pursues, makes Lithuania a target for Russia.

To my opinion there is no need to explain that this is highly dangerous policy. Perhaps some people will say that Lithuania can pursue such policy if it wants to remain independent and have an independent policy. However, even if such opinion has its motivation and argumentation, I think that consequences of such policy would be really upsetting.

I am going to list just a few, to my mind, important arguments, which raise doubts about the expediency and rationality of the current foreign policy.

The first argument relates to values. I incline to say that so-called active export of democracy to the East is practically not an export of democracy. Despite great efforts to influence political processes in Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia, the extent of democracy has hardly increased there. Theoretically it could not have been otherwise. The space we are talking about does not belong to the Western civilisation, and the development of liberal democratic values there is obviously problematic. Historical experience shows that the development of democracy has brighter prospects if it is carried out by adaptation and evolution rather than by a speeded-up introduction. However, historical experience has been ignored. As a consequence, everything that has been achieved is an escalation of tensions inside the societies in those countries, and an increase of Russia's hostility. Hence, the question is whether such a policy serves democracy in general and national interests of Lithuania specifically?

Second. An active campaign for NATO and the EU enlargement to the East can hardly strengthen NATO and the European Union. Speaking about NATO it is worth recalling history when the question whether NATO can expand to Central Europe and especially to the Baltic States was on the political agenda. There were concerns about problematic history of the candidates, about their geopolitical location. A list of requirements was given to the candidates to fulfil. It was required to maintain good neighbourly relations, to solve Holocaust related issues, to become providers of security not only consumers, etc. However, such requirements are not set for new candidates. Old EU member states are often accused of not understanding something or failing to fulfil certain obligations. Why the campaign of further NATO enlargement no longer relates to the need for stability and good neighbourhood, though the space into which a future enlargement should occur is historically and geopolitically even more complicated than the geographical space of previous NATO enlargement?

The enlargement of the European Union is, without doubt, the issue of large financial costs. Therefore it seems that it would at least be ethical if the EU members – donors – were the first to decide on the enlargement. However,

at the present time things are the other way round – Lithuania, which receives billions from the European Union gives the tone. So, what is being aimed to achieve by this behaviour? It is known that a large part of Russian politicians would not suffer too much if the European Union broke up. Without advertising it some conservative stratum of the US pursues similar aims. But how would the break-up of the European Union be beneficial to Lithuania?

Third. It is not a secret that the present US Administration stands behind the export of democracy to the East and enlargement of NATO and the European Union. This is the major and basic factor of the current foreign policy of Lithuania. It is understandable that the significance of such powerful factor with respect to such a small and weak country as Lithuania is not so easy to identify and assess.

Most probably there is no need to remind the role the US played in the reestablishment of the independence of Lithuania and other Baltic States. The role of the US was significant, if not decisive, in resolving the issue of integration of the Baltic States into NATO. However, it is worth noticing the fact that in those above-mentioned two cases the role of the US was significant not only because of a successful realisation of the objective sought, but also because in both cases interests of the US and Lithuania and other Baltic States coincided. Lithuania had no other choice at that time.

However, at the present time Lithuania is already a constituent part of democratic structures of the West. Hence, Lithuania's structural power and possibilities of sovereignty have greatly expanded. Thus, is the situation justifiable where a complete coincidence of interests with those of the US is further demonstrated without other alternatives on Lithuania's part?

However, the most important thing is whether those interests of Lithuania and the US really coincide. For example, with respect to Russia – is the sharpening of relations with Russia really beneficial to Lithuania? The answer to another question perhaps could make the answer to this question easier: is the US really strategically determined to make its position stricter with respect to Russia? The answer to the latter question could be as follows: a lot of theoretical and practical details show that it is not. Then why does Lithuania, speaking in a figurative meaning, try to be holier than the Pope himself?

Seeking to address another question – whether weakening of the EU that may eventually lead to its complete break-up, is really beneficial to Lithuania, it would be helpful to address a wider question – is the US really strategically interested in the break-up of the European Union. In the latter case too there is no more serious basis for a positive answer.

All that was said above leads me to the conclusion that the current foreign policy of Lithuania simply has no sufficient strategic substance. Therefore it is necessary to change Lithuania's foreign policy. Three basic principles could serve as the starting position for such change.

The first principle would require Lithuania starting to respect itself. Once there was well-known soviet diplomat Gromyko, who was called "Mister No" in the world. He answered to all initiatives coming from the West using the standard single word 'No'. As far as we can judge, the present day Lithuanian politicians and diplomats behave as "Mister Yes" in relations with the US. However, national interests of Lithuania and simple self-respect would require learning to say "Yes, but..."

The second principle calls for respecting Russia. At the present time in Lithuania—an ordinary citizen and a man from elite talk about Russia whatever comes to one's mind. One Lithuanian philosopher even called this situation as the greatest achievement of Lithuanian democracy. However, it seems inconceivable that by behaving like that the same mistake is constantly being repeated – the mistake that made the authors and distributors of Allah cartoons infamous.

And finally, the third principle would require starting to learn how to distinguish strategy and tactics.