

THE NEXT STEPS IN U.S.-LITHUANIA RELATIONS

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Presidential elections in the United States in 2008 and Lithuania in 2009, along with the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in December 2009, marked major shifts in the political landscape on both sides of the Atlantic. Therefore, this is an opportune time to take stock of U.S.-Lithuanian relations and to take a look at their future direction.

The United States considers Lithuania to be one of its strongest friends and allies. The two countries have close, cooperative, productive, and mutually beneficial relations. There are well-founded reasons for this friendship, the most important of which is its roots in shared values, as well as in mutual respect and shared interests.

Both the United States and Lithuania were born in struggles against oppression, struggles fuelled by strong commitment to freedom, democratic principles and values, and human rights. Even in its darkest years of Soviet occupation, Lithuania has been able to count on the United States to defend and advance those values on its behalf. Seventy years ago this summer, on 23 July, 1940, then-Under Secretary of State Sumner Welles stated categorically that the United States rejected the forcible incorporation of Lithuania and the other Baltic States into the Soviet Union. The United States stood firmly by this policy of non-recognition and continued to support the Baltic countries' independence for the next half-century, until that independence was once again secure and the last occupying soldiers had departed.

The United States steadfastly opposed the oppression and repression of captive and satellite states by the USSR throughout the long years of the Cold War. That opposition was perhaps best epitomized by Ronald Reagan's demand to Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev in 1987 to "tear down this wall," but it was both those public proclamations and 50 years of tough diplomacy that helped create the conditions that allowed courageous Lithuanian patriots to be the first to reclaim their freedom from the Soviet Union, and to show others the way.

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Americans rejoiced when Lithuania regained its independence. The United States then strongly supported the efforts to secure this freedom for all future generations through accession to the EU and NATO, the bulwarks of European security, stability, and prosperity. Lithuania, this year, celebrates 20 years as a sovereign and independent nation once again, and for more than half a decade as an increasingly influential member of NATO and the EU. This is a great achievement, and as a partner in making it a reality, the United States can take pride in it along with Lithuania.

As much as some had hoped that the end of the Cold War would represent “the end of history” and introduce a new era of peace, the international environment today is once again complex and challenging. A new era of transnational, multi-polar threats has dawned, and the emergence of these new threats demands new approaches to ensure national, regional, and global security. On the economic front, we are just beginning to emerge from the worst economic crisis since the Great Depression of the 1930s, with a great deal of work still to do to promote and sustain recovery and make it real in people’s lives, both at home and globally. The hard work of securing freedom and democratic values throughout Europe is not yet complete. New vision and energy are required to sustain and expand the spectacular progress that Europe achieved in the post-war period. The EU itself is undergoing historic, transformative changes. The United States supports these changes, which it believes will make Europe an even stronger American partner, but they will require adaptability on both sides of the Atlantic.

In both Lithuania and the United States, new leaders are developing and implementing their policies to meet these new challenges. New generations of young people who do not have direct, personal experience of the Cold War are moving towards leadership positions in both countries. The goals that guided cooperation under the Baltic Charter after Lithuania regained independence – to support Lithuania and the other Baltic countries’ path to full Euro-Atlantic integration – have largely been achieved. Therefore, bilaterally, as well, relations have moved into an important new phase. Vice President Biden said in Bucharest last autumn that the question for the United States and its democratic partners in this region, such as Lithuania, is no longer what the United States can do for you, but what we can do together, as full partners ready to meet common challenges.

Therefore, how, in this new era, should these two countries further deepen and widen their cooperation? What new vision should guide them? I will focus on three key areas of the relationship: our security and political partnership;

strengthening ties, including commercial ties, between our people; and our joint commitment to promoting democracy and human rights at home and abroad.

The question of security is often the first to arise in discussions with Lithuanian colleagues about relations with the U.S, and it is a question with a simple and straightforward answer: as a NATO ally, the United States is unequivocally committed to Lithuania's defence. Lithuania and the United States have a superb security partnership, and the United States is committed to maintaining and strengthening that partnership. Secretary of State Hillary R. Clinton recently told the Atlantic Council: "I want to reaffirm as strongly as I can the United States' commitment to honour Article 5 of the NATO Treaty. No Ally – or adversary – should ever question our determination on this point. It is the bedrock of the alliance and an obligation that time will not erode."

The United States backs up those words not only with its strong national commitment to maintain defence forces second to none, but with a drive to strengthen NATO itself. President Obama set out U.S. policy in April 2009, when he said, "We must ensure that NATO is equipped and capable of facing down the threats and challenges of this new era." Secretary of Defence Robert Gates elaborated in Washington on 23 February 2010, calling for serious operational and institutional reform of NATO and significantly enhanced resources for NATO. Speaking at a NATO Strategic Concept Seminar, he said. "NATO is not now nor should it ever be a talk shop...it is a military alliance with real world obligations that have life-or-death consequences." Secretary Gates also said that NATO must have the means to back up its commitments, and that the new NATO Strategic Concept, which is to be completed this year, "must be clear that Article 5 means what it says: an attack on one is an attack on all." Then, he added: "The concept also must go further, to strengthen Article 5's credibility with a firm commitment to enhance deterrence through appropriate contingency planning, military exercises and force development."

It is in the context of this shared effort to enhance deterrence that the United States proposed a new phased and adaptive approach to missile defence last summer. Using proven technology and mobile platforms, this new approach will provide significant defensive capabilities against the current threat in a much shorter period of time, over a much broader geographic area, than the previous plan. It is a tangible U.S. contribution to NATO's mission of collective defence, and a concrete manifestation of American commitment to fulfil Article 5 obligations.

Lithuania also takes NATO's commitment to collective defence seriously, as it has demonstrated so clearly in Afghanistan. As a proportion of population and GDP,

Lithuania's contribution in Afghanistan is one of the most impressive in NATO. The United States is grateful to all Lithuanians for their country's significant contribution to restoring peace and securing freedom in Afghanistan. I was honoured to visit Afghanistan with a Lithuanian team shortly after taking up my duties in Vilnius, and to see for myself the contribution Lithuania is making. I was pleased to see that U.S. personnel, both military and civilian, were serving side by side with Lithuanian forces in the Ghor Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT). In addition, the partnership in Ghor Province is being strengthened. The United States has assigned a new agriculture expert to the PRT, and under the Partnership Program between the Pennsylvania National Guard and Lithuanian military, a joint U.S.-Lithuanian police training team is preparing to deploy to Ghor Province. As the situation in Afghanistan develops, the United States and Lithuania will look for even more ways to strengthen their cooperation to support common goals.

In a security issue that is closer to home for Lithuania, the United States also strongly supports the continuation of NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission for as long as necessary. That mission is another concrete manifestation of NATO's commitment to Lithuanian and Baltic security. In addition, it is also a concrete manifestation of American commitment – in late 2010, American fighter jets and personnel will take on the air policing mission for the third time.

The United States and Lithuania are strong security partners not just in NATO, but bilaterally as well. The two countries engage in a range of regional and bilateral training events and exercises, including four in 2010. The United States has provided Lithuania with more than \$75 million of equipment, training, and sales of advanced weapons systems, including Javelin antitank and Stinger anti-aircraft systems. U.S. naval vessels regularly enjoy port visits to Klaipeda. Four ships – the frigates USS Doyle and USS Hall, Maritime Prepositioning Ship USNS Bobo, and the 6th Fleet Flagship USS Mt. Whitney – made such visits in 2009, and the USS Vicksburg visited Klaipeda this May.

Active dialogue and regular contact between the American and Lithuanian military leadership are ongoing, with visits to Lithuania by the commanders of U.S. Army Europe and the Special Operations Command Europe, the Assistant Secretary of Defence for International Affairs and others just in the past year. The Lithuanian Defence Minister and Chief of Defence met their counterparts for comprehensive discussions in Washington in 2009 and 2010. I was with Minister Juknevičienė in Washington for her meeting with Secretary Gates, and I know the respect in which the Lithuanian military is held by the U.S. military.

All of these are tangible contributions that the United States is making, and will continue to make, to ensure Lithuania's security.

U.S. relations with other countries can also affect Lithuania's sense of security. Not surprisingly, Lithuanians are intensely interested in the Obama administration's approach to relations with Russia.

President Obama has underscored his commitment to engagement with Russia – not as an end in itself, but as a means to an end: to achieve concrete results in areas in which joint efforts will benefit the participating countries, and the world.

We are convinced that this engagement is yielding results. The New START Treaty signed on 8 April in Prague was a historic achievement, cementing the new atmosphere between the U.S. and Russia in which the two sides can cooperate in areas of mutual interest while also engaging in constructive and respectful dialog in areas where our interests diverge. We are cooperating to stabilize Afghanistan, confronting the Iranian threat, combating piracy in the Indian Ocean, promoting disarmament and strengthening nuclear security, and fighting trafficking in narcotics and persons. We have created a new Bilateral Presidential Commission, to further all these important global goals, and also to broaden bilateral ties in culture, science, and security. In addition, the United States is seeking to establish a NATO-Russia relationship that produces concrete results and draws NATO and Russia closer together, including on missile defence and arms control.

At the same time, Americans are realists. Given their different histories, experiences, and perspectives, the United States and Russia do not always have overlapping interests, and there will not always be agreement. The United States has real differences with Russia on important matters of principle. For example, the U.S. supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states and rejects the notion of spheres of influence. The U.S. will continue to press Russia to live up to its commitments on Georgia. Russia's new military doctrine states that NATO's enlargement and global actions constitute a military danger to Russia. On the contrary, the U.S. strongly believes that the enlargement of both the EU and NATO – extending peace, stability, and prosperity across the European continent – has increased security and prosperity for Russia as well. Moreover, all states have the right to determine their own future and decide which alliances to join, and NATO's door remains open to those who are willing and able to meet its conditions. The United States believes that the Treaty of Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) has been a cornerstone of conventional arms control, transparency, and confidence building, and believes it should remain so in the future.

The United States believes that Russia's proposals on European security contain constructive ideas, and is prepared to engage seriously with Russia on this important topic. However, the U.S. is prepared to do that in the fora that exist for that purpose: the OSCE and the NATO-Russia Council. New treaties are not needed. In addition, Russia must live up to the principles and values on human rights and individual liberties that it committed to uphold when it accepted the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

The United States is committed to engaging with Russia to promote global peace and stability. In areas of disagreement with Russia, however, the U.S. will also continue to constructively manage the differences while not conceding on its principles.

Russia is not the only external factor affecting the U.S.-Lithuanian relationship. Many people wonder whether Lithuania's growing stature as an active and influential member of the European Union is coming at a cost to the relationship with the United States. Not only is that not the case, but the opposite is true. Lithuania's membership in the EU enhances relations with the United States. The European Union is a key global partner for the U.S. We share history, common values, and the richest network of commercial ties and people-to-people connections of any two entities on earth, and the United States wants to strengthen those relations as much as possible. Working together, the U.S. and the EU have enormous power to act for good on a global scale. Lithuania's presence enriches the EU and makes it a better partner for America, and the U.S. engages more intensively now than ever with representatives of Lithuania – not only on matters of bilateral concern to Washington and Vilnius, but also on the full range of issues on the agenda between the U.S. and the EU in Brussels and Strasbourg.

This new level of engagement between the U.S. and Lithuania provides a host of new opportunities to bring Americans and Lithuanians together. It also presents new challenges in maintaining the historically strong links that the two countries have already established. How can those ties between Lithuanians and Americans be maintained and strengthened even further?

One giant step in that direction came when Lithuania joined the U.S. Visa Waiver Program in 2008, making travel easier for Lithuanians and promoting stronger connections between them and Americans. Moreover, the people of Lithuania have seized the opportunity. Travel to the U.S. for business and tourism has boomed, growing by 40% in 2009 alone. As economic recovery gains speed in both countries, the number of travellers will climb even higher.

The United States has also sought to build closer people-to-people ties with Lithuania through programs for studying in the U.S., university partnerships, and teacher exchanges, including the prestigious Fulbright Program. Twenty years after independence, these important programs deserve to be reviewed, revitalized, and expanded to bring them up to the level that the United States enjoys with other key EU partners. University partnerships can only be effective through committed efforts by citizens and faculty, but they pay invaluable dividends when successful, in increased exchanges, joint research, and long-term relationships. The United States is working and will continue to work to build these partnerships, as well as to build, together with interested Lithuanians, a strong network of alumni of U.S. exchange programs in Lithuania.

On exchanges, there is one area, in particular, where I want to focus my first efforts: student exchanges at the high school level. One of the best investments we can make in the long-term health of our bilateral relationship, and a proven way to build lasting cooperation between U.S. and Lithuanian schools, communities, and a generation of young people in both countries, is to increase the number of high school students studying in each other's country. Exchange experiences during the high school years have the highest positive, long-term impact in terms of promoting mutual understanding and common values. They change lives for participants in remarkable and fundamental ways. I am now exploring some promising avenues to increase high school student exchanges and am seeking assistance from American and Lithuanian partners who share my belief and are willing to support increased high school exchanges as an important investment in the future of our relationship.

In addition, as evidence grows that we are beginning to emerge from the global economic crisis, what about commercial ties? The U.S. and Lithuania are both working rather hard to recover. Both have recently launched important new programs to boost investment, exports, growth and jobs, and to reform and transform their economies in fundamental ways for the 21st century. These programs present significant new commercial opportunities.

As longstanding strategic partners, Lithuania and the United States will work together proactively to explore ways to increase trade and investment, binding their economies, and their people, more closely together. Working with my counterparts in Vilnius and Washington, we will identify promising new commercial prospects, bring them to the attention of our companies, and facilitate businesses and entrepreneurs' efforts to increase bilateral trade and investment. Prime Minister

Kubilius launched this process with his visits to the United States in February and again in May 2010. In between those two trips, U.S. Department of Commerce Deputy Assistant Secretary Juan Verde, responsible for U.S. commercial relations with Europe and Eurasia, visited Vilnius. Given the opportunities he observed, he offered support for the first-ever Commerce Department-certified trade mission to Lithuania. Planning is now underway.

The bilateral Science and Technology Agreement that was ratified by the Seimas in April provides another opportunity, and can be a new framework to strengthen research, education, and commercial cooperation to benefit both the United States and Lithuania.

Even more than shared commercial, educational, or other interests, however, what binds Lithuania and the United States together most strongly, now and for the future, are the shared values of democracy and human rights. The United States' strongest relationships are with those countries with which it shares not only interests, but values. Lithuania's love of liberty makes it the perfect example.

Everyone knows Winston Churchill's famous quote about democracy being the worst form of government – except for all the others. He was right; democracy is often a messy, slow, fractious, and difficult way to govern. However, because democracy reflects the people's will, is based on the rule of law rather than the whims of fallible human beings, and requires leaders to be accountable to the people, it is the best guarantor of individual freedom that exists.

Democracy is a demanding form of government for another reason, as well. Democratic values and respect for human rights are not naturally occurring phenomena. The work of sustaining them, even in mature democracies, is never done. To succeed, democracy requires strong, enlightened governmental and societal leaders, along with informed citizens, to engage every day in order to support and expand democratic values and human rights. Democratic values must regularly be taught at school and reinforced at home, and supported by a strong legal framework and strong democratic institutions. Democratic governments and societies must work actively to fulfil the promise of human rights, of equal rights, for everyone.

In the segregationist Alabama of 1965, 45 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., led thousands of people from Selma to Montgomery in a march in support of civil rights. Just a few months later, Congress passed and President Johnson signed the historic Voting Rights Act. Many Americans worked for many years to correct one of the darkest stains on America's democracy: the legacy of slavery and racism.

From the time that the nation was founded, many Americans committed to freedom, like Dr. King, worked to correct this wrong. Others stood against them. The American nation and American society were torn apart for many decades on this issue. The struggle was sometimes violent, and Americans died because of it, and not only during the Civil War. Through the steady work of ordinary citizens and the principled stands taken by leaders that they elected, in the end, America succeeded. On the night that he was elected in 2008 as the first African-American President of the United States, Barack Obama said, “If there is anyone who still doubts that America is a place where all things are possible, who still wonders if the dream of our founders is alive in our time, who still questions the power of our democracy, tonight is your answer ... that is the true genius of America ... America can change. Our union can be perfected.”

Americans are proud, as a nation, of this historic step. However, they are under no illusions that the work of perfecting American democracy is complete. They continue their efforts at home to make the promise of human rights, equal rights, for everyone real. In addition, the United States wants to work closely with democratic partners – like Lithuania – to expand the benefits of freedom abroad as well.

For example, in both foreign and domestic affairs, President Obama and Secretary Clinton have put women’s rights – the rights to education, health, equal employment and pay, and to lives free from fear, discrimination and violence, including domestic violence – high on their agenda. Empowering women and girls to develop and employ their potential is crucial for the future of both our countries. The countries that succeed best are those that make full use of the talents of all their citizens – women and girls as well as men and boys. I have had the honour of meeting with representatives of women’s organizations from throughout Lithuania who are carrying out crucial work in this regard, and I look forward to working with them even more in the future.

The United States was also honoured that Lithuania, as the current chair of the Community of Democracies, asked it to co-chair an important new working group on gender equality and women’s rights. The United States’ first Ambassador-at-Large for Global Women’s Issues Melanne Verveer visited Vilnius in April to help launch the working group and to meet with Lithuania’s many women leaders and activists for women’s rights. This partnership will also continue.

President Obama has also highlighted the importance of progress to fulfil the promise of universal human rights for America’s lesbian, gay, bisexual, and trans-

gender communities. In 2009, proclaiming June to be Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Pride Month in the United States, President Obama called on all Americans to “work together to promote equal rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity...and to turn back prejudice and discrimination, wherever it exists.”

President Obama took this step with the recognition that social, religious, and other issues related to sexual orientation and gender identity are sensitive issues in the United States, as they are in Lithuania. Reasonable people hold differing views. However, as modern democracies, we can all agree that every citizen has the right to choose his or her own path, and to live free from harassment, discrimination, and violence. Every citizen has the right to peacefully associate and assemble, and express his or her views, although others may not agree with them. For this reason, the United States applauded the decision by the Vilnius city government to permit the Baltic Pride Parade this year. That decision was a notable illustration of respect for tolerance, diversity, and human rights.

The United States and Lithuania are also partners in the fight against anti-Semitism and in efforts to address the legacy of the Holocaust. Through engagement in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research (ITF), and in the process launched by the 1997 London Conference on Nazi Gold, the U.S. and Lithuania are working to fulfil their commitments on restitution and compensation, as well as on research, education, and remembrance, to ensure that future generations understand the history of what occurred and the terrible consequences of intolerance and hate, and to guarantee such a tragedy never occurs again. We will intensify our joint efforts in this area; the ITF has awarded the U.S. Embassy in Lithuania a grant to create a teacher-training program on Holocaust education, and we will implement that program in partnership with the Ministry of Education, the International Commission for the Evaluation of the Crimes of the Nazi and Soviet Occupation Regimes in Lithuania, the Jewish Community of Lithuania, and the Vilna Gaon Jewish State Museum’s Tolerance Center, as well as with American and other international partners. The United States Special Envoy for Monitoring and Combating Anti-Semitism, Hannah Rosenthal, made a very successful visit to Lithuania in April, setting the stage for further cooperation on education and tolerance issues.

Finally, Lithuania is well recognized globally for the importance it gives to questions of fundamental human rights in its foreign policy. Lithuania has been steadfast in its support of those seeking freedom and democracy in the Eastern

neighbourhood, including in Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova, and Belarus. Lithuania is making a commendable effort to give new momentum to the Community of Democracies, including establishing a new Parliamentary Assembly for the organization. The United States will continue to support Lithuania's efforts, and looks forward to progress on human rights and democracy, including tolerance, at home and abroad, as Lithuania assumes important positions of international leadership in coming years – the Community of Democracies now, the OSCE in 2011, and the Presidency of the EU in 2013.

The United States and Lithuania have a valuable, and valued, relationship. The United States has ideas on how to make it even stronger in the future, and welcomes Lithuania's ideas as well. Our relationship is strong and growing, and we will take the next steps in U.S.-Lithuanian relations together, as partners.