

## THE LITHUANIAN–AMERICAN ASSOCIATION: WHY DO WE NEED THE U.S.?

Raimundas Lopata\*

Historically, the last six decades Lithuanians have been constantly complaining – now America shows no attention, now it shows too much attention and it disturbs Lithuania's relationship with Europe and Russia.

However, the principal characteristics of Lithuania-U.S. relations would be as follows. The United States of America was the determinant for the restoration of the State of Lithuania. The U.S. is still the main factor ensuring Lithuania's independent action. Such situation is determined by the following circumstances:

*Ideological.* The U.S. is constantly and consistently promoting and supporting the principle of democratic self-determination and its implementation. The impact of such position is proved by the fact that the U.S. did not recognise the illegal and non-democratic incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR in 1940 for five decades.

*Geopolitical.* The U.S. is the only state that objectively is able to offset the Russia's impact in the Eastern Baltic. The U.S. guarantees NATO and EU structures, which, in their turn, currently ensure Lithuania's military and economic security.

*Political.* a) The U.S. is interested in the existence of Lithuania (and other Baltic States) because with them the U.S. may affect the transatlantic relations, Russia and other aspects eventually; b) The U.S. has a big community of Lithuanians which during different elections become a valid political factor.

On the other hand, it is also clear that the U.S. interest in Lithuania is limited. The said historical discourse suggests that the U.S. recognised Lithuania's independence (in 1922) factually rather than continuously. The refusal to recognise the annexation of 1940 is also considered temporary. Economically, the U.S. capital does not have any significant economic interests. Socially-politically, visa waiver is still burdened by various clauses. Finally, geopolitically Lithuania is still outside the area of interest of the U.S. as the sea state. America is interested in the existence

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\* **Prof. Raimundas Lopata** is a Professor at the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University. Email: [raimundas.lopata@tspmi.vu.lt](mailto:raimundas.lopata@tspmi.vu.lt)

of not only Lithuania but also of other two Baltic States as a single regional factor. This tendency is proved by the U.S.-Baltic Charter, which was signed on 16 January 1998.

This Charter officially documented the strategic necessity of real and long-term America's participation in European matters and recognised the significance of the Baltic States in ensuring these so-called transatlantic relations. However, it should be noted that in addition to the multilateral consultation mechanism it provides for bilateral consultation mechanism as well: "The Partners will consult together, as well as with other countries, in the event that a Partner perceives that its territorial integrity, independence, or security is threatened or at risk". As a matter of fact, Lithuania tried to use this clause at the end of August 2008.

It is also important that the Charter covers not only security issues but also the promotion of socio-economic welfare. Unfortunately, Lithuania's efforts to follow this direction were not successful due to the lack of coordination and strategic political will in general. This fact allowed manipulation of anti-American feelings in the country, while the offset mechanism was not created.

As a result, on 8 October 2009 representatives of political, business and academic areas convened a Constitutive Assembly and established the Lithuanian-American Association. On 3 December 2009, the Association was registered in the Register of Legal Entities as a non-profit organisation, the aim of which is to strengthen bilateral relations with a help of economic, social-cultural, educational programmes and to become a place of political discussions of bilateral relations, international security and Atlantic *acqui*. The founders of the Lithuanian-American Association elected Raimundas Lopata, professor of the Institute of International Relations and Political Science of the Vilnius University, as the President of the Association. President Valdas Adamkus agreed to become the Chairman of the Council of Trustees.

On 1 March 2010, the founders of the Lithuanian-American Association and the Chairman of the Council of Trustees met the U.S. Ambassador to the Republic of Lithuania Anne Elizabeth Derse. The participants of the meeting agreed with the opinion that bilateral relations of the Republic of Lithuania and the U.S. had entered a new phase. As a result, the Lithuanian-American Association established at the social initiative and mobilising intellectual and financial resources can highly contribute to the development of bilateral relations in various areas.