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# LITHUANIA AT THE UNITED NATIONS SECURITY COUNCIL: STRATEGY OR ACCIDENT?

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## *Abstract*

The aim of the article is to investigate more thoroughly in what ways Lithuania's becoming a member of the UN SC can be considered a tangible achievement. The main thesis is that UN SC membership itself has an important symbolic meaning and the successful bid for the UN SC seat is a demonstration of a consistent LFP strategy. However a notable lack of strategic ideas on how to capitalise on this success transforms the political achievement of a non-permanent UN SC seat into lofty declarations emphasizing mainly bureaucratic gains. First, the article analyses the theoretical significance of UN SC membership from the small state perspective. Second, it analyses Lithuania's bid to the UN SC by looking into the arguments to justify the decision and strategies used. Finally, in order to understand the vision of Lithuania's being in the SC, the article evaluates and puts into the theoretical context the first four months of its membership.

## **Introduction**

In October 2013 the United Nations General Assembly elected Lithuania to become one of the ten non-permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UN SC)<sup>1</sup>. Although in Lithuania itself this result received much less attention than the on-going Lithuanian presidency of the EU Council, it was nevertheless hailed as an "historic achievement"<sup>2</sup> of Lithuanian diplomacy. It was

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<sup>2</sup> „Istorinis pasiekimas: Lietuva išrinkta į Jungtinių Tautų Saugumo Tarybą“ [Historical Achievement: Lithuania is elected to the UN Security Council], Delfi.lt, 17 10 2013, <http://www.delfi.lt>

noticed that Lithuania was the first Baltic State to become a member of the UN SC<sup>3</sup>, that it served as a testimony of Lithuania's international prestige<sup>4</sup> and an opportunity to become a part of an important decision-making process<sup>5</sup>.

The symbolic value of a position at the UN SC notwithstanding, the actual impact of a position at the UN SC to a state's international standing, prestige, let alone more tangible gains in economic and political terms are far from obvious and have to be analysed more carefully. At the heart of the matter is the fact that the UN SC is a hierarchical institution. The permanent five members (P5) with their veto right have a clear institutional advantage over non-permanent members. The interests of the most powerful states in the world often fall at odds over matters of global peace and security. Hence the question is whether Lithuania, as a state with limited human, economic and military resources can participate in the "great power politics" of the UN SC and in what sense its newly acquired position can be considered as a successful, let alone, historic achievement.

The aim of this article is to investigate more thoroughly in what ways Lithuania's becoming the member of the UN SC can be considered a tangible achievement. The main thesis of the article is that UN SC membership itself has an important symbolic meaning while the successful bid for the UN SC seat is a demonstration of a consistent LFP strategy. However a notable lack of strategic ideas on how to capitalise on this success transforms the political achievement of the non-permanent UN SC seat into lofty declarations emphasizing mainly bureaucratic gains.

The argument of the article is developed in three steps. First, the article analyses the theoretical significance of UN SC membership from the small state perspective. Second, it analyses Lithuania's bid to the UN SC by looking into the arguments to justify the decision and strategies used. Finally, in order to understand the vision of Lithuania being in the SC, the article evaluates and puts into the theoretical context the first four months of its membership<sup>6</sup>.

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lt/news/daily/lithuania/istorinis-pasiekimas-lietuva-isrinkta-i-jungtiniu-tautu-saugumo-taryba.d?id=63066126, 10 11 2014.

<sup>3</sup> „Istorinė pergalė: Lietuva tapo JT Saugumo Tarybos nare“ [Historical victory: Lithuania became a member of the UN Security Council], *Lrytas.lt*, 17 10 2013, <http://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvos-diena/aktualijos/istorine-pergale-lietuva-tapo-jt-saugumo-tarybos-nare-atnaujinta.htm>, 10 11 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Press Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, „Lietuva išrinkta į Jungtinių Tautų Saugumo Tarybą“ [Lithuania is elected to the UN Security Council], 17 10 2014, [http://president.lt/lt/spaudos\\_centras\\_392/pranesimai\\_spaudai/lietuva\\_isrinkta\\_i\\_jungtiniu\\_tautu\\_saugumo\\_taryba.html](http://president.lt/lt/spaudos_centras_392/pranesimai_spaudai/lietuva_isrinkta_i_jungtiniu_tautu_saugumo_taryba.html), 04 05 2014.

<sup>6</sup> The data for the article was gathered through 5 interviews with current and former Lithuanian diplomats who were involved in Lithuania's bid for the UN SC.

## 1. Why bother? Small states at the UN SC

The proliferation of international organizations is the defining feature of a contemporary international system. Both from the perspective of international relations discipline<sup>7</sup> and political practice, state cooperation in multilateral forums facilitates collective action, enables the exchange of information and strengthens political and economic ties between nation-states, thus minimizing a threat of military confrontation<sup>8</sup>. To put it simply – international organizations increase the effectiveness of states' foreign policies and enhance the legitimacy of their actions in the international arena<sup>9</sup>.

The international relations theory also points out several points of contention that question either the capacity of international organizations to impact change in the international system, or their ability to facilitate anything else but the interests of their most powerful members. At the centre of this contention is the realist paradigm, which insists that despite claims of common interests and cooperation, the functioning of international organizations reflects the power differences between states. In other words, the interests of powerful states directly influence the actions of international institutions, which become less so platforms for multilateral cooperation than “clubs of the privileged”, where small states succumb to the rules of the more powerful ones<sup>10</sup>. From this perspective a discussion of international institutions as anything else but vehicles advancing the great states' interests is largely meaningless. Arguably, the dynamic of the “club of the privileged” is especially evident at the UN SC, which by its institutional structure alone clearly privileges the most powerful states (the P5) over others. UN SC actually more resembles a great power club rather than a typical international intergovernmental organization.

<sup>7</sup> For example, Keohane R., “Lilliputians' dilemmas”, *International Organization* 2 (23), 1969, p. 291–310.

<sup>8</sup> Keohane R., Martin L., “The promise of institutionalist theory”, *International Security* 1 (20), 1995, p. 42.

<sup>9</sup> See for example Snidal D., “Political economy and international institutions”, *International Review of Law and Economics* 1 (16), 1996, p. 121–137. Also Abbott K.W., Snidal D., “Why states act through formal international organizations”, *Journal of conflict resolution* 1 (42), 1998, p. 3–32.

<sup>10</sup> Keohane R., Nye J., “Introduction: Governance in the Globalizing World” in Donahue J. and Nye J., eds., *Governance in the Globalizing World*, Washington: Brookings Institutions Press, 2000, p. 17. Also Mearsheimer J., “The false promise of international institutions”, *International security* 3 (19), 1994-1995, p. 5–49.

The power differences between the states are emphasized by the mandate of the Council to maintain international peace and security and the exclusive right to authorize military action in the international arena<sup>11</sup>. Despite its mandate and power the Council is criticized for its inaction in the face of international crises. Geopolitical interests of the P5 often become more important than issues of global peace and security, leading the Council to an impasse<sup>12</sup>. On top of that, small states wishing to push any of the P5 members to action face the risk of upsetting their relations with the more powerful states<sup>13</sup>.

These facts lead to at least two questions: firstly, why do small states seek a place at the UN SC, and, secondly, how if at all can non-permanent small state members of the UN SC exert any tangible influence on the Council?

A liberal institutionalist approach to international organizations in general and to the UN SC in particular provides an answer to these questions. It notes that the very existence of international organizations means that states in general are interested in cooperation. In other words, the emergence of international organizations is a result of states' willingness to cooperate, even in the conditions of anarchy<sup>14</sup>. Hence disregard of the organization's rules limits a state's ability to effectively further its interests<sup>15</sup>. This works for the advantage of small states, as by limiting actions of the more powerful ones it creates additional room for its own manoeuvres. The UN SC is a good example: even though the power differences between its members are clearly pronounced, their cooperation is necessary, even if it is often limited to procedural questions. The right of every member of the Council to draw its attention to matters of global security prevents the P5 from taking over the Council's agenda and creates an important avenue for action for the small states even in this highly hierarchical institution<sup>16</sup>.

An even more important aspect here is that rules and procedures of international organizations not only facilitate their day-to-day functioning but also help to ensure their legitimacy and validate their role in the international arena.

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<sup>11</sup> See Chapter VII, article 42 - Charter of the United Nations, <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/>, 12 05 2014.

<sup>12</sup> For example, Glennon M, "Why the security council failed", *Foreign Affairs* 82, 2003, p. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Keating C., "The United Nations Security Council: Options for Small States", *Conference address*, Reykjavik, Iceland, 16 06 2008, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Keohane and Martin (note 8), p. 41.

<sup>15</sup> Abbott and Snidal (note 9), p. 16.

<sup>16</sup> Thorhallsson B., "Small States in the UN Security Council: Means of Influence?", *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* 2 (7), 2012, p. 141. Thorhallsson, referring to Hedley Bull, also notices that the procedures of international organizations are changing the bilateral and multilateral state relations. Thus these rule and compliance with them is as important as the substantive decisions.

International organizations, in other words, become more than just a sum of their members, but rather international actors in their own right<sup>17</sup>.

Besides simply facilitating multilateral action, international organizations perform symbolic and normative functions, which in turn give them power to act within the international system. By associating themselves with certain international institutions, states can tap into the source of their power<sup>18</sup>. Hurd notes, that while the UN Charter gives the UN SC broad powers, it does not provide the tools with which to enact them. Therefore, the power of the Council is contingent upon voluntary cooperation of states, which in turn is mobilized by the symbolic significance of the UN SC<sup>19</sup>. To put it differently, the UN SC is attributed with power over global matters of peace and security not because of formal provisions of the UN Charter, and not only because of involvement of the great states, but rather because the majority of members of the international community *see and acknowledge* the Council as a powerful institution. As a consequence states that compose the Council appropriate a part of its symbolic power<sup>20</sup>, which explains the attraction of a place at the UN SC especially for the small states.

Despite all of the constrains imposed by the power differences between the P5 and the rest, the UN SC still offers small states a say in global matters<sup>21</sup>, even if it does not necessarily get translated into action<sup>22</sup>. Nevertheless small states at the UN SC appear at the centre of global discussions, receive the possibility to voice their concerns and gain first-hand insight into matters of global politics<sup>23</sup>. Furthermore, the title of a non-permanent member of the UN SC affects a state's international standing, giving it additional tools to favourably shape its image both to its domestic public and abroad<sup>24</sup>, while the successful bid to the UN SC alone

<sup>17</sup> Barnett M., Finnemore M., "The politics, power, and pathologies of international organizations", *International organization*, 4 (53), 1999, p. 699–732.

<sup>18</sup> Hurd, I., „Legitimacy, Power, and the Symbolic Life of the UN Security Council“, *Global Governance* 1 (8), 2002, p. 44.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>21</sup> Colin Keating notes the role of New Zealand and its activism in matters related to Rwanda (note 13).

<sup>22</sup> Vanu Gapala Menon, the ambassador of Singapore notes that the small states are usually excluded from the “real” discussions at the UN SC that are dominated by the P5. In Gopala Menon V., Speech at the Academic Council of the United Nations system “Challenges facing small states at the UN”, *Informational Memorandum*, 79, 2009.

<sup>23</sup> Hurd, 42 (note 18).

<sup>24</sup> Australia is a case in point, which used its successful bid for a seat at the UN SC in 2013-2014 to strengthen its image of a middle power concerned about giving a voice to small and middle states in the world. Melissa C. Tyler, Eleanor Pahlow, “Australia on the UN Security Council 2013–14: A Voice for Small and Medium Countries?” *The Round Table* ahead-of-print (2014): p. 96, 102.

is taken as a sign of international recognition and trust in a state's political and diplomatic capacities<sup>25</sup>. UN SC membership can also bring tangible economic gains in the form of financial aid<sup>26</sup> and easier access to the funds of global financial institutions<sup>27</sup>.

Nevertheless it is worth noting that getting elected to the UN SC is only the beginning. Keeping in mind the constraints of power differences between the members, the ability of a small state to influence decisions made at the UN SC cannot be taken for granted. A small state that becomes a UN SC member has to be ready to deal with an intensive agenda, which firstly implies having competent and professional diplomatic staff, an effective administrative apparatus and the ability to set work priorities<sup>28</sup>. Secondly, a small state that knows how to use its coalition-building and leadership skills can strengthen its position at the UN SC and navigate between the interests of the great states easier<sup>29</sup>. Finally, a small state needs to be willing to assume an active role within the Council despite the risk of upsetting any of the more powerful states, if it wants to have any kind of influence on the UN SC<sup>30</sup>.

Thus to briefly summarize the reasons why small states would seek a place at the UN SC, it is worth noting the symbolic value of a seat at the Council, and quite possibly its symbolic power as well. UN SC membership also demonstrates a state's reputation in the international arena and provides first-hand insights into the global issues, processes and positions. Finally it endows small states with more legitimacy to talk and be heard. Even though some authors also stress financial gains, they seem to be only of secondary importance, not least because such gains cannot be guaranteed.

The theoretical literature provides a much murkier answer to the second question, namely the ways in which a small state can gain influence at the UN SC. Mainly it is the institutional framework of the UN SC that allows participating in the formation of a global peace and security agenda, and at least to some

<sup>25</sup> Malone D., "Eyes on the prize: the quest for non-permanent seats on the UN Security Council", *Global Governance*, 6, 2000, p. 6.

<sup>26</sup> The UN SC non-permanent seat brings up to 17 million USD in additional financial aid: US bilateral aid is 16 million, an additional 1 million is provided by the UN itself. See - Kuziemko I., Werker E., "How much is a seat on the Security Council worth? Foreign aid and bribery at the United Nations", *Journal of Political Economy*, 5 (114), 2006, p. 905-930.

<sup>27</sup> Dreher A., Sturm, J.-E., Vreeland J. R., "Global horse trading: IMF loans for votes in the United Nations Security Council", *European Economic Review*, 7 (53), 2009, p 742-757.

<sup>28</sup> Thorhallsson, "Small States in the UN Security Council", p. 152-154.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 157-158.

<sup>30</sup> Tyler, Pahlow, p. 99 (note 24).

extent enables quicker access to the most influential global powers. While a state's preparation to work at the UN SC in terms of diplomatic staff, clear priorities, and willingness to be active can have a positive effect, a small state's role at the UN SC is also likely to be shaped by unfolding global events and dynamics between the P5 themselves and other powerful states.

## **2. Lithuania's road to the Security Council**

By analysing the main reasoning behind Lithuania's UN SC bid, and the actions it took during the election campaign, this section demonstrates that the main goal of Lithuania was its symbolic recognition. Indeed, as Ian Hurd notes, the symbolic power of the UN SC fuels the desire to become a part of the Council, even if non-permanent members cannot expect to have real influence<sup>31</sup>.

The beginning of membership in the EU and NATO in 2004 was a landmark event for Lithuania. As the goals of accession largely defined its policies since regaining independence in 1990, Lithuania had to develop new ones that would lead its foreign policy onwards. These quickly became defined as greater presence and visibility both in the EU and NATO and international politics more generally, especially in the Eastern European region<sup>32</sup>. Initially the goal of greater international visibility was closely linked with the aim to establish Lithuania as a "regional centre", promoting democratic reforms in its Eastern neighbourhood<sup>33</sup>. Though the idea of a "regional centre" gradually lost traction, the goal of greater international visibility and hence, active participation in international organizations remained. Lithuania's efforts to become a non-permanent member of the UN SC have to be seen in this context.

Actually, neither strategic documents, nor the diplomats interviewed for this article have indicated any more concrete goals that Lithuania aimed to achieve in the UN SC. Rather, membership at the Council was seen as a goal in itself, enabling Lithuania to participate at the highest level of international politics – an achievement that in the future could possibly facilitate creation of economic and

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<sup>31</sup> Hurd, p. 41-42 (note 18).

<sup>32</sup> Paulauskas, A, „Naujoji Lietuvos užsienio politika“ [New Lithuanian Foreign Policy], Speech by Acting President Artūras Paulauskas at Vilnius University, 24 05 2004, <http://paulauskas.president.lt/one.phtml?id=4994>, 12 05 2014.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

cultural ties with the other UN member-states<sup>34</sup>. Nevertheless such a goal is still too vague to be considered strategic.

As indicated in the previous section, the seat at the UN SC is considered to showcase a state's international reputation. However an international reputation has to be at least partially built prior to actual membership in the Council. In other words, the country has to firstly become visible as a candidate, to be later visible as a member of the UN SC. Thus, it was understood that Lithuania had to increase its presence in UN structures and secure the support of the regional Eastern European electoral group in order to place a successful bid<sup>35</sup>.

Even though the UN Charter does not list any specific requirements for candidates to the Security Council, the general practice dictates that aspirants must have substantial experience in international leadership, be active in peacekeeping, peace-building and development efforts, and make timely contributions to the UN budget<sup>36</sup>. Meeting these requirements can be likened to acquiring “diplomatic capital”, and demands a long-term consistent effort.

Lithuania's most prominent involvements in the UN structures after 2004 were its chairmanship of the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) in 2007 and its bid for the UN GA presidency in 2012. Work at the forefront of the ECOSOC was an important exercise for Lithuania that strengthened its capacity to work with global development issues that do not receive much attention in Lithuania's foreign policy. According to the interviewed diplomats, this experience helped to create an image of an “honest broker” and develop consensus-building skills, which were important both for Lithuania's election campaign and work at the UN SC itself<sup>37</sup>. Nevertheless the value of ECOSOC chairmanship in terms of the UN SC bid is assigned retrospectively: it does not seem to have been a part of a consistent strategy to secure a non-permanent member's seat, but rather an outcome of the general LFP aim of “greater international visibility”<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>34</sup> Istorinis pasiekimas (note 2).

<sup>35</sup> Regional electoral groups ensure equitable geographical distribution on non-permanent UN SC members. Hence one seat is assigned for Eastern European countries that comprise the electoral group, which in turn selects a candidate for the UN SC to be approved by the General Assembly. See Chapter XV. Elections to Principal Organs in General Assembly of United Nations, *Rules of Procedure*, <http://www.un.org/en/ga/about/ropga/elect.shtml>, 10 10 2014.

<sup>36</sup> The UN Elections Campaign, *Security Council*, <http://www.unelections.org/?q=node/33>, 12 05 2014.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 26 03 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>38</sup> For example, a brief action report of MFA in 2007 notes that “successful chairmanship of the [ECOSOC] strengthens Lithuania's international authority”, however does not indicate any potential benefits to the UN SC bid. *2007 m. veiklos ataskaita (užsienio politika)* [Report of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2007], <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/2007m-veiklos-ataskaita>, 12 05 2014.



In that regard Lithuania's bid to preside over the 67th general debate of the General Assembly was probably a more significant factor establishing its status of a serious contender for a UN SC seat. Usually the president of the General Assembly is assigned on a rotational basis regarding the regional groups, – after they reach consensus regarding the candidate. In 2012, Russia, which belongs to the same regional group as Lithuania, unexpectedly threw its active support behind the Serbian candidate Vuk Jeremic, thus violating an implicit agreement<sup>39</sup> within the group to support the Lithuanian candidate Dalius Cekuolis.

Consequently the selection of the UN GA president that was meant to be a formality became a major challenge and competition for Lithuanian diplomacy. It was the first time in 20 years that the president of the Assembly was determined by a secret vote<sup>40</sup>. The Lithuanian candidate lost by a narrow margin (99 to 85)<sup>41</sup>, and the vote in Lithuania was labelled as “failure of Lithuanian diplomacy”<sup>42</sup>. However, this fight became instrumental in securing the seat at the UN SC. According to the Lithuanian diplomat, Russia's actions that breached informal arrangements within the regional group prevented it to dispute Lithuania's candidacy for the UN SC, as a representative of Eastern European countries<sup>43</sup>. Although the election dynamics vary across the regional groups, the most frequent determinant of UN SC elections is “turn-taking”<sup>44</sup>, arguably because in the conditions of high competition it helps to ensure equitable opportunities to bid for the UN SC to the majority of UN members. Hence the breach of “turn-taking” arrangements, although occurring<sup>45</sup>, is frowned upon, just as is the meddling of great-states in the electoral process<sup>46</sup>.

<sup>39</sup> As it was stated by Lithuanian diplomats participating in the process.

<sup>40</sup> United Nations, “General Assembly Elects Serbia's Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic President of Sixty-seventh Session; Also Names 20 Vice-Presidents”, New York: UN Department of Public Information, 2012, <http://www.un.org/press/en/2012/ga11253.doc.htm>, 12 05 2014.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> BNS, „Čekuolis pralaimėjo JT Generalinės Asamblėjos pirmininko rinkimus varžovui iš Serbijos“ [Čekuolis lost the elections of the UN General Assembly President to the Serbian opponent], *Alfa.lt*, 08 06 2012, [http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/14752698/Cekuolis.pralaimejo.JT.Generalines.Asamblejos.pirmininko.rinkimus.varzovui.is.Serbijos=2012-06-08\\_18-13/#.U3MTVMagwII](http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/14752698/Cekuolis.pralaimejo.JT.Generalines.Asamblejos.pirmininko.rinkimus.varzovui.is.Serbijos=2012-06-08_18-13/#.U3MTVMagwII), 13 05 2014.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with a former Lithuanian diplomat, 01 04 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>44</sup> Vreeland J. R., Dreher A., *The political Economy of the United Nations Security Council*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, p. 97.

<sup>45</sup> Malone (note 24), p 19.

<sup>46</sup> For example Australia saw its close relations with the US as a possibly damaging factor in its 2012 bid, as it was aware that other states could perceive that as protectionism. See International Peace Institute, Taking Stock, *Moving Forward. Report to the Foreign Ministry of Finland on the 2012*

Lithuania's attempts to secure the support of its regional group were further strengthened by the fact that its main competitor was Georgia. Although Georgia was especially active in promoting its candidacy<sup>47</sup>, its chances were limited because of its complicated geopolitical situation<sup>48</sup>. Thus, Georgia withdrew its bid for the UN SC seat four months prior to the vote in the General Assembly, leaving Lithuania the sole contender. It seems also that this decision was also influenced by good Lithuanian-Georgian relations and the latter's principle agreement to Lithuania being in the UN SC<sup>49</sup>.

It can also be contended that Lithuania's success was reinforced by its previous experience of chairing the OSCE and the Community of Democracies. Lithuanian diplomats believe that it shaped Lithuania's image as a competent international player and allowed to secure endorsements from other UN members in various bilateral and multilateral meetings<sup>50</sup>. This resulted in a successful albeit small budget<sup>51</sup> election campaign – Lithuania's candidacy for the UN SC received the support of 187 states.

Thus the quick analysis of the Lithuania's election process demonstrates that its strategy was to create a favourable international reputation and further increase international visibility. Besides meetings with diplomats in New York and other international forums, Lithuania did not seem to use many other election tactics (for example, actively promote a specific UN cause<sup>52</sup>). In that regard, Lithuania's election strategy could be likened to a process of acquiring diplomatic capital, which happens over time and requires using every opportunity for international engagements. However this also means that during the election process Lithuania's reasoning behind the UN SC bid was not explained beyond the goal of yet more international visibility.

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*Elections to the United Nations Security Council*, 2013, <http://formin.finland.fi/public/download.aspx?ID=112186&GUID=%7BD6FD5A08-5BD4-4F17-994E-F3262539F28F%7D>, 13 10 2014, p. 5.

<sup>47</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 26 03 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>48</sup> The UN elections Campaign (note 36).

<sup>49</sup> Interview with a former Lithuanian diplomat, 01 04 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 02 04 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>51</sup> Even though the exact sum is not disclosed, unofficial data suggests the campaign budget was 300 000 LTL, that were mainly used to pay for the trips of the diplomatic staff.

<sup>52</sup> As noted by the International Peace Institute Report, a clearly defined election theme or a priority area helps to demonstrate competence and leadership within the international community. It is used as election tactic and can be useful to the work in the Council itself. International Peace Institute (note 46), p. 5, also Thorhallsson (note 16), p. 147.

### **3. Lithuania at the UN SC: opportunities and visibility**

Small states that begin their term at the UN SC are simultaneously faced with an increased number of international issues on their agenda and the need to delicately navigate the interests and interactions of the permanent members of the Council. Even more important however is the internalisation of UN SC member status. As it was demonstrated in the first section of the article, there are few strategies and tools to influence the workings of the UN SC. The most tangible influence can be gained through agenda-setting, using the procedural rules of the Council.

As at the time of preparation of the article Lithuania has not even completed its first year at the UN SC, its performance and capacities to achieve its goals are assessed based on the first four months spent at the Council (including the presidency of the Council in February 2014) and through the perceptions of diplomats about the possibilities on what could and should be done. Therefore the main question of this section is not whether Lithuania is successful in influencing UN SC decisions, but whether it is prepared to do so.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania had institutionally prepared for membership quite effectively. As Lithuania's term in the UN SC was approaching, its diplomatic representation in New York received additional staff. The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also established a new Security Council Affairs Coordination division<sup>53</sup> that was set to coordinate the work at the UN SC. Clearly, institutional preparation was timely and calculated though the effectiveness and necessity of a new department has yet to be independently assessed.

During the first month alone, Lithuania had to engage in discussions regarding the situation in Mali, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Palestine, Sudan and South Sudan, the Ivory Coast and Burundi<sup>54</sup>. It also began its chairmanship of the Central African Republic Sanctions Committee, where it had to deal with questions of civilian protection, prevention of sexual violence and peace-building<sup>55</sup>. These are questions that usually fall out of the range of the competences of Lithuanian diplomacy and are very far from Lithuanian foreign policy interests, let alone

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<sup>53</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 03 04 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>54</sup> The UN SC Meetings Records, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/meetings/records/2014.shtml>, 12 05 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, „JT Saugumo Tarybos Sankcijų komitetas Centrinei Afrikos Respublikai“ [Security Council Committee concerning the Central African Republic], 17 02 2014, <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/jt-saugumo-tarybos-sankciju-komitetas-centrinei-afrikos-respublikai>, 16 05 2014.

priorities. Because of that Lithuanian diplomats cannot rely solely on their national bureaucracy (a situation further complicated by a small number of Lithuanian diplomatic representations outside of Europe), but have to find additional sources of information<sup>56</sup>. This situation increases the extent of the workload and responsibility and encourages personal rather than institutional diplomacy. On the other hand, a small bureaucratic apparatus leaves a lot of room for individual action and initiative for the diplomats in New York, which also allows them to react to situations quickly and speeds up the decision-making process.

The diplomats noted, that their work at the UN SC was facilitated by “team playing” with the UN Secretariat, especially with regards to the exchange of information<sup>57</sup>. Close cooperation with other EU countries was also important: several states which have an extensive network of diplomatic representations around the world were willing to share information and expertise regarding events that are outside the usual scope (and, hence, expertise) of Lithuanian interests<sup>58</sup>.

Nevertheless the Chairmanship of the EU Council in the second half of 2013 demonstrated that Lithuania lacks expertise in a variety of topics. The scope of demands for expertise is even more extensive at the UN SC. The events in Ukraine since the end of 2014 have forced Lithuanian diplomats to concentrate on an issue they are deeply competent and vocal about. But Lithuania’s capacity to express independent and concise positions on other matters seems to be limited so far. Furthermore, dependence on outside sources of expertise and information is an obstacle to form an independent position that fully reflects Lithuania’s national interests (assuming it has one regarding a particular issue) and policy.

The second challenge of being in the UN SC is working around a variety of cleavages that exist globally, especially between the countries of the “Global North” and the “Global South”. In this context Lithuanian diplomats most frequently tend to talk about Lithuania as an “honest broker”, the role which by itself can increase the country’s influence in the institution. However the implication behind the role of an “honest broker” has to be scrutinised more carefully.

Generally, the idea is that the majority of questions discussed at the UN SC are not of immediate significance to Lithuania, which facilitates the creation of an “honest broker” image. A limited geography of national interests also means that Lithuania does not bring its own “problems” to the UN SC and is unlikely to transfer its foreign policy questions to the Council’s agenda. In other words it is believed that Lithuania is generally considered as neutral regarding the questions

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<sup>56</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 26 03 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 26 03 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>58</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 03 04 2014, Vilnius.

that cause the biggest disagreements between the countries of the “Global South” and the “Global North”. Consequently, despite it belonging to the “club of the privileged”<sup>59</sup>, Lithuania is seen as a “reasonable country”, which opens up more space for it to act within the UN SC. But the question remains, what kind of actions is this kind of space being opened for?

Furthermore an even more acute question is whether membership in the so-called “privileged club” (i.e. the EU) provides at least part of the neutrality Lithuanian diplomats tend to depict. One case stands out as serious contradiction to the neutrality claims: namely the question of Palestine in the UN. In 2011 Lithuania voted against Palestinian membership in UNESCO<sup>60</sup>. Though this decision was much debated domestically<sup>61</sup>, in general this position essentially reflected the desire for official Lithuanian foreign policy to have strong and close relations with the US and its attempts to strengthen ties with Israel. However in the UN context this vote clearly put Lithuania in the group of states that support Israel in the Middle East conflict, which potentially also raises doubt regarding Lithuania’s ability to be a “honest broker” in matters of contentious global issues. Besides, the further question is whether a state can remain an “honest broker” when the actions of UN SC directly affect its national interests, as the crisis in Ukraine demonstrates. The vocal and unambiguous position of Lithuania regarding Russia’s role in the Ukrainian conflict<sup>62</sup> during the first several months in the UN SC clearly contradicts the initial ideas about Lithuania’s planned role in the institution.

<sup>59</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 26 03 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>60</sup> BNS, ELTA, „Palestina tapo UNESCO nare, Lietuva balsavo prieš“ [Palestine became UNESCO member, Lithuania voted against], Delfi.lt, 31 10 2011, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/world/palestina-tapo-unesco-nare-lietuva-balsavo-pries.d?id=51270287>, 17 05 2014.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Bogdanas, R., „Lietuva ir Palestina: greitai pamiršome, kaip mus palaikė“ [Lithuania and Palestine: we forgot very quickly how we had been supported], Delfi.lt, 02 12 2011, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/rbogdanas-lietuva-ir-palestina-greitai-pamirsome-kaip-mus-palaike.d?id=52440529>, 10 11 2014; Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, URM pareiškimas dėl Palestinos statuso UNESCO [MFA Statement regarding the status of Palestine in UNESCO], 02 11 2011, <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/urm-pareiskimas-del-palestinos-statuso-unesco>, 11 11 2014.

<sup>62</sup> See - Elta, „JT Saugumo Tarybos posėdyje - Lietuvos parama Ukrainai“ [UN SC – Support of Ukraine by Lithuania], Delfi.lt, 01 03 2014, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/jt-saugumo-tarybos-posedyje-lietuvos-parama-ukrainai.d?id=64163380>, 11 10 2014; BNS, „Lietuvos ambasadorė: Rusija JT naudoja propagandą, manipuliacijas ir spaudimą“ [Lithuanian ambassador: Russia uses propaganda, manipulation and pressure in the UN], Delfi.lt, 17 10 2014, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/lietuvos-ambasadore-rusija-jt-naudoja-propaganda-manipuliacijas-ir-spaudima.d?id=66139930>, 11 11 2014; BNS, „Lietuvos prašymu šaukiamas JT Saugumo Tarybos posėdis dėl Ukrainos“ [On request of Lithuania UN SC organizes the meeting on Ukraine], Delfi.lt, 28 08 2014, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/lietuvos-prasymu-saukiamas-jt-saugumo-tarybos-posedis-del-ukrainos.d?id=65684934>, 11 11 2014.

However such a role is consistent with Lithuania's resolve to be active at the UN SC, which in this case is not understood exclusively in a sense of frequent contributions to Council discussions (or other quantifiable criteria), but rather defines the general attitude to the work in the Council and willingness to take initiative. Lithuania's priorities for its work at the UN SC include strengthening the rule of law, prevention of armed conflict, civilian protection (in particular, of women and children), prevention of sexual violence, cyber and energy security<sup>63</sup>. These priorities should not be understood as stemming directly from Lithuanian national interests<sup>64</sup>, but rather approached as a set of broad questions that help it to get involved in the global agenda of the UN SC. But more importantly, their relatively high number reflects Lithuania's aim to be an active member of the Council, – a sentiment which was repeated by the interviewed diplomats<sup>65</sup>. Notably this is also consistent with a general goal of Lithuanian foreign policy – that of having an active role within international organizations, as noted above. But it also indicates ambiguity regarding the specific achievements that Lithuania expects of its term at the UN SC.

Nevertheless, Ukrainian events provided the impetus to have a more defined policy line in the UN SC, and to achieve some tangible results in its foreign policy. Even the general goal of “more visibility” here has a concrete expression. The UN SC pretty quickly started to pay attention to the Ukrainian crisis and Lithuanian efforts to include it in the agenda were visible and effective. Lithuania had to cooperate closely with UK, France and the US, as without their support it would have hardly been successful<sup>66</sup>. This revealed the Lithuanian capability<sup>66</sup> to use its resources (i.e. diplomacy and the image of an expert in Eastern European matters) and insert very specific questions into the Council's agenda, which are relevant for its national interests.

Even though it is very difficult to capture progress in the matters of global peace and security, the Lithuanian tendency to follow an ambitious agenda at international organizations complicates its abilities to achieve tangible progress in selected areas<sup>67</sup>. The effectiveness of its efforts would increase if it prioritized one of the areas relevant in the UN context. The benefits of such an approach are

<sup>63</sup> Permanent Mission of Lithuania to the United Nations in New York, *Lithuania Commenced its Term on the UN Security Council*, Vilnius, 02 01 2014, <http://mission-un-ny.mfa.lt/index.php?2151146331>, 16 05 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Except for energy and cyber security.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 26 03 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>66</sup> Interview with a Lithuanian diplomat, 02 04 2014, Vilnius.

<sup>67</sup> Thorhallsson (note 16), p. 146.

confirmed by the examples of the Nordic States, which have consistently worked with conflict prevention and peace-building issues and, arguably because of that created an image of effective and competent members of the international society<sup>68</sup>. However this kind of visibility is built not on the idea to be seen and heard as often as possible, but rather on taking up specific activities and having a consistent policy and position.

On one hand, Lithuania seems to be prepared to achieve some kind of influence at the UN: it made the necessary institutional arrangements and its diplomats have acquired experience of working at prominent multilateral institutions. However that does not guarantee an expert understanding of most of the issues discussed at the UN SC. Lithuania's position is further complicated by ambiguity of its "honest broker" image – it is not clear whether Lithuania is as successful in maintaining it as the interviewed diplomats suggest, especially with regards to events in Ukraine. On the other hand, Lithuania's vocal position on this matter is consistent with its national interests and its area of expertise. The question remains though, whether Lithuania will be able to capitalise on this issue in the absence of a more coherent strategy of membership in the UN SC.

## **Conclusions**

Lithuania's membership in the UN SC is clearly associated with a goal of increased international prominence and visibility. However the actual benefits of such a position to Lithuania's foreign policy remain unclear. Rather, with the UN SC membership Lithuania seems to be following the general tendency of its foreign policy to seek international visibility for its own sake. However with regards to the UN SC membership, such a position is not exclusive to Lithuania – as demonstrated in this article, it has a highly symbolic value that puts small states at the centre of global events and can even contribute to the increase of their symbolic power.

However, for that to happen a non-permanent member has to be able to capitalise on its membership at the UN SC, and Lithuania's position in that regard

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 147. On the other hand, as the interviewed diplomats note, the fact that Lithuania did not closely associate itself with one specific priority helped it to gather support in the election campaign. States that deviate from the best-practices in terms of rule of law or human rights did not have to be afraid of a Lithuanian "dictate", and thus supported its candidacy. This is also confirmed by the Finnish experience, whose failure to be elected to the Council in 2012 was partially caused by its insistence on good governance and human rights, that alienated a number of states. See International Peace Institute (note 46).

is ambiguous. On one hand, its election to the Council and previous experience at the helm of international forums (the OSCE, Community of Democracies and the EU Council) indicates that it can successfully raise its international profile and is capable of working at the top level of international politics, even if it lacks expertise on a number of questions discussed at the UN SC because of the limited priorities of its foreign policy. A notable exception in that regard is Lithuania's engagement with the question of Ukraine: the crisis that coincided with the beginning of Lithuania's term at the UN SC encourages Lithuania to assume an active role at the Council, as this is a question directly related to Lithuania's national interests.

On the other hand, the more important issue here is the absence of any coherent strategy of what Lithuania aims to achieve with its term at the UN SC. The priorities that it has set for itself are numerous, broad, and concern areas that are not within its expertise. Paradoxically this situation is somewhat mitigated by the coincidence of the Ukrainian crisis, however taking a broader look at the term in the UN SC it remains unclear how exactly, Lithuania intends to capitalise on its increased international visibility. Lithuania's membership in the UN SC thus more resembles a lucky accident that coincides with its insistence on "greater international visibility", rather than an outcome of the foreign policy strategy.

Of course, membership at the UN SC can indeed be considered an achievement in terms of opportunities for a small state's visibility and symbolic power. It is necessary to make sure though, that they both are not wasted.