

LITHUANIAN-POLISH RELATIONS AFTER 2004: GOOD OLD COOPERATION IN REGRETFULLY BAD NEW WRAPPING

Galina Vaščenkaitė*

Abstract

This article aims to analyse the change of Lithuanian-Polish relations after accession of both countries to the EU and NATO and to evaluate the influence of the main identified problems of bilateral relations upon the effectiveness of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation. The priority areas of bilateral cooperation (i.e., military and economic cooperation as well as cooperation in the energy field) and the main catalysts of tensions in Lithuanian-Polish relations (namely, unresolved issues of the Polish national minority in Lithuania and the influence of both countries political leaders' personal characteristics upon changes in political rhetoric) are examined. The analysis results in concluding that although the issues of national minorities and harsh political rhetoric worsen the general emotional setting of bilateral relations, they do not create obstacles for the effective and substantial cooperation between Lithuania and Poland.

Introduction

Not only during the centuries, but also over the last 25 years Lithuania and Poland keep changing their “political feelings” towards each other radically from time to time. Very warm relations between Lithuania and Poland during the *Solidarność* and *Sąjūdis* era started to deteriorate gradually by the end of 1991, soon after both countries escaped the “Iron Curtain”. It took just a fraction of time to worsen bilateral relations to the point that they were described by some experts as almost openly confrontational in 1992–1993¹. However, it did not take long

* **Galina Vaščenkaitė** holds an MA in International Relations and Diplomacy from the Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University. E-mail: galina.vascenkaite@gmail.com

This article was written as a part of the research project “Lithuanian Foreign Policy since 2004: Between Stability and Change” conducted by Vilnius University. The research was funded by a grant (No. MIP–012/2013) from the Research Council of Lithuania.

¹ Laurinavičius Č., Motieka E., Statkus N., *Baltijos valstybių geopolitikos bruožai. XX amžius* [‘Features

to witness a new “thaw”. It started in 1994 and reached its peak in 1997, when Lithuanian-Polish strategic partnership was officially declared and successfully developed until both countries became members of the EU and NATO as well as several years after.

It is hard to tell unequivocally which event(s) triggered the new fracture in Lithuanian-Polish relations. However, since 2010–2011 experts again unanimously agree that relations between the two countries are very bad, even conflicting, full of constant strains², or that at least “their deterioration [...] is beyond doubt”³. Exceptionally unfriendly political rhetoric, resurfaced disagreements on national minorities’ issues and exceptionally negative reflections in the media on these issues in both countries are usually referred to as main indicators of the worsening of Lithuanian-Polish relations⁴.

of the Baltic States’ Geopolitics. 20th Century’], Vilnius: Lietuvos istorijos instituto leidykla, 2005, p. 306

- ² Dambrauskaitė Ž., et al., “Lithuanian-Polish Relations Reconsidered: A Constrained Bilateral Agenda or an Empty Strategic Partnership”, *EESC analytical review* No. 3, 2011, p. 3-4, 14; Ivanauskas V., “Netapti Smolensko tragedijos įkaitais: Lietuvos ir Lenkijos gerų santykių dinamikos veiksniai” [‘Avoiding Becoming Hostages of Smolensk Tragedy: Factors of Good Lithuanian - Polish Relations’], *The Eastern Pulse*, No. 1(40), 2012, p. 1; Kasčiūnas L., Keršanskas V., Kojala L., “Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai: recepto paieškos” [‘Lithuanian-Polish Relations: The Search of Recipe’], *The Eastern Pulse*, No. 2(47), 2013, p. 1; Bujnicki T., “Some Comments on Polish-Lithuanian Tensions”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 26, 2011, p. 149; Dudzińska K., „Polityka wobec Litwy – pat czy szansa na przełom:?” [‘Policy towards Lithuania – The Stalemate or the Turning-Point?’], *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2011*, Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2011, p. 136; Fuksiewicz A., Kucharczyk J., Łada A., *Šalia. Lenkai ir lietuviai vieni kitų akimis*: Tyrimo ataskaita [‘Alongside. Poles and Lithuanians through the Eyes of Each Other: Research Report’], Varšuva: Viešųjų reikalų institutas, 2013, p. 111; BNS, „Politologas: Lietuvos ir Lenkijos nesutarimai gali atsiliepti viso Baltijos regiono energetikos saugumui“ [‘Political Scientist: Lithuanian-Polish Disagreements Can Affect the Energy Security of the Whole Region’], *Delfi.lt*, 2010 10 26, <<http://www.delfi.lt/verslas/energetika/politologas-lietuvos-ir-lenkijos-nesutarimai-gali-atsiliepti-viso-baltijos-regiono-energetikos-saugumui.d?id=37895687#ixzz2IIqu4HKz>>; PAP, „Relacje Polski z Litwą najgorsze w UE“ [‘Polish Relations with Lithuania Are the Worst within the EU’], *Wirtualna Polska (Wp.pl)*, 14 01 2011, <<http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,1023303,title,Relacje-Polski-z-Litwa-najgorsze-w-UE,wid,13035175,wiadomosc.html?tcid=113528>>.
- ³ Bumblauskas A., “Lietuvos etninės įtampos kaip didžiųjų istorijos naratyvų priešpriešų išdava” [‘Ethnic Tensions in Lithuania as a Result of Face-Off of the Great Historic Narratives’], an article written as a part of research project “The Tradition, Image and Modern Identities of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania”, Vilnius: 2011, <<http://www.mdl.projektas.vu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/2011-lietuvos-etnines-itampos-kaip-didziuju-istorijos-naratyvu-priespriesu-isdava.pdf>>, accessed 04 04 2014.
- ⁴ Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 1; Borodzicz-Smolinski W., Jurkonis V., “Lithuania and Poland: Lost in Translation”, *The Eastern Pulse* 2(41), 2012.

Leaving prejudices on the quality of relations behind, this article aims at analysing the change of Lithuanian-Polish relations after accession of both countries to the EU and NATO and evaluating the influence of the main identified problems (i.e., disagreements on the situation of the Polish minority in Lithuania and harsh political rhetoric) upon the effectiveness of Lithuanian-Polish bilateral cooperation. The hypothesis is raised that although the issues of national minorities and harsh political rhetoric worsen the general emotional background of relations, they do not create obstacles for effective and substantial cooperation between Lithuania and Poland.

The hypothesis is confirmed in two stages. Firstly, the priority areas of bilateral cooperation – military and economic cooperation as well as cooperation in the energy field – are examined. These areas reflect the real potential of strategic partnership and the possibilities to mobilise this potential for the implementation of common goals. Political relations between Lithuania and Poland are not analysed separately, assuming that due to their horizontal nature, they penetrate all areas of bilateral cooperation. Secondly, the main catalysts of tensions in Lithuanian-Polish relations are examined, namely – the unresolved issues of the Polish national minority in Lithuania and the influence of both countries' political leaders' personal characteristics upon changes in political rhetoric. The analysis reveals that during certain periods, these factors influence the creation of a negative context of bilateral relations; however, they do not prevent constructive bilateral cooperation in other areas.

1. Explanations for the deterioration of Lithuanian-Polish relations and their limitations

While searching for the reasons of the new “Ice Age“ of Lithuanian-Polish relations, several factors are usually named. Popular discourse is dominated by the explanation that the deterioration of bilateral relations is stipulated by the long-standing and unresolved issues of the Polish national minority in Lithuania (this factor also considered as the most important by some Polish experts⁵) and the harsh rhetoric of Lithuanian and Polish political leaders alike. In both cases, reasons

⁵ Dudzińska, (note 2) p. 136; Expert interviews (I) and (III) with researchers at Polish foreign policy think-tanks, Vilnius, 20 01 2014 and 10 04 2014; Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk, Łada (note 2) p. 16, 118-119.

are confused with (eventual) symptoms. The issue of the Polish national minority in Lithuania is without doubt the biggest problem in bilateral Lithuanian-Polish relations. However, this issue was always on the Lithuanian-Polish relations agenda⁶, nevertheless it has not impeded with intense cooperation during the period of exceptional closeness, i.e., 1994–2004. Thus, while active escalation of national minority issues clouds the atmosphere of Lithuanian-Polish relations, the problems of national minorities “do not reflect the real reasons behind the worsening of relations”⁷. These problems are rather the result or reflection of tensions than the reason themselves. Similarly, political rhetoric may deepen or inflame tensions in bilateral relations. Yet political rhetoric by itself is hardly the reason behind changes in relations but rather the reflection of such changes. The poignancy of Lithuanian and Polish political leaders’ rhetoric, which raises a huge resonance in the respective countries’ societies, especially during electoral campaigns, is caused more by the personal qualities of the leaders, the models of political behaviour they adopt and partly – by their ideological beliefs⁸ and approach to history⁹ rather than the changing content of bilateral relations.

Scholars, analysing the changes in Lithuanian-Polish relation more deeply, usually outline four geopolitical factors. First, the increase of Poland’s political

⁶ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 23; Sirutavičius V., “Lithuanian-Polish Strategic Partnership: Genesis and Prospects”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 7, 2001, p. 21; Miniotaitė G., Jakniūnaitė D., “Lietuvos saugumo politika ir identitetas šiuolaikinių saugumo studijų požiūriu” [‘Lithuanian Security Policy and Identity from the Viewpoint of Contemporary Security Studies’], *Politologija*, No. 1(23), 2001, p. 18;

⁷ Samoškaitė E., „V.Adamkus: toks jausmas, kad Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai sugriuvo per naktį“ [‘V. Adamkus: Feels Like Lithuanian-Polish Relations Collapsed Overnight’], *Delfi.lt*, 19 02 2011, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vadamkus-toks-jausmas-kad-lietuvos-ir-lenkijos-santykiai-sugriuvo-per-nakti.d?id=42165857#ixzz3B41AVQEq>>; Expert interview (I) with the researcher at Polish foreign policy think-tank, Vilnius, 20 01 2014.

⁸ Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 4.

⁹ For more information on projections of historic memory in contemporary Lithuanian-Polish relations, see Bumblauskas, (note 3); Sirutavičius V., Lopata R., „*Lenkiškasis istorijos veiksnys Lietuvos politikoje*, [‘The “Polish” History Factor in Lithuanian Politics’], Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2011; Łaszkievicz H., „Pamięć i zapomnienie. Węzły pamięci w stosunkach polsko-litewskich” [‘Memory and Oblivion. The Memory Knots in Polish-Lithuanian Relations’], article written as a part of research project “History and the Present. The Heritage of Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Current Polish-Lithuanian Relations”, Lublin, Instytut Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej, 2012, <<http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/projekty/pliki/IESW-121-02-09.pdf>>, accessed 22 08 2014; Kazlauskaitė R., “Common Past, Divided Memories: The “Question of Vilnius” in the Collective Memory of the Polish Minority Members in Lithuania”, in Dębicki M., Makaro J., eds., *Sąsiedztwa III RP – Lenkija, Litwa, Polska, Lietuva. Zagadnienia społeczne*, Wrocław: GAJT Wydawnictwo, 2012, p. 223–236; etc.

“weight” within the EU and corresponding changes in Polish geopolitical orientation. It is argued that full-fledged EU membership raised Poland’s awareness of its potential (stemming from its size and economy) of becoming one of the most influential nations in the EU. Poland started to exploit this potential after the proponent of pragmatic policy Donald Tusk came into power as the Polish Prime Minister and even more so when Bronislaw Komorowski took up the President’s office after his predecessor Lech Kaczyński died in the Smolensk catastrophe in 2010. While searching for political allies Poland started to gradually turn away from smaller partners in Eastern Europe towards the “core” EU countries (first and foremost – Germany and France) and align its foreign policy with the *modus operandi* of the latter¹⁰. Meanwhile, analysts claim, Lithuania did not succeed in finding enough common denominators with the changing interests of Poland. Most importantly, Lithuania failed to react adequately upon the fact that as Poland becomes more powerful, Lithuanian-Polish relations become even more asymmetrical than they were before. Thus, Lithuania should now be more interested in investing in a close relationship with Poland than Poland is in trying to find a common ground with Lithuania¹¹. The effect of the change in Polish geopolitical orientation upon relations with Lithuania is beyond doubt. Therefore, this argument is compelling. However, its explanatory power is limited. It could only explain the diminished intensity of Lithuanian-Polish relations, but not the reasons behind their rising hostility (in case this rise actually takes place).

Second, according to experts, the estrangement of Lithuanian-Polish relations was also stimulated by the “reset” of Polish-Russian relations¹². Former Polish Foreign Minister Radoslaw Sikorski was indeed one of the most enthusiastic supporters of the US-Russia “reset”¹³ and thus steered Polish foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Russia in a similar direction¹⁴. In fact, for some time, especially in the aftermath

¹⁰ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 10, 11-14; Hyndle J., Kutysz M., “Stosunki Polski z Litwą w latach 2004–2006” [‘Polish Relations with Lithuania in 2004–2006’], *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2007*, Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2007, p. 148; Sirutavičius (note 6) p. 18; Dudzińska, (note 2), p. 137; Bukowiecka H., „Polityka Polski wobec Litwy” [‘Polish Policy towards Lithuania’], *Rocznik Polskiej Polityki Zagranicznej 2008*, Warszawa: Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2008, p. 214; Samoškaitė, (note 7).

¹¹ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 10, 13; Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 5.

¹² Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 10, 15–16.

¹³ Krickus D., “Barack Obama and the Security in the Eastern Baltic Sea Region”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2010-2011*, Vilnius: Military Academy of Lithuania, 2011, p. 18.

¹⁴ Miniotaitė G., “Europeanisation Tendencies of the Foreign and Security Policy of the Baltic States”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2010-2011*, Vilnius: Military Academy of Lithuania, 2011, p. 116. For more information, see Bieleń S., „The Possibility of Reconciliation in Polish - Russian Relations”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 27, 2012, p. 11–34.

of the Smolensk tragedy in 2010, it seemed that Polish-Russian relations improved significantly¹⁵. However, even if Russia's factor might have influenced Lithuanian-Polish relations negatively since 2009, delusion in the "reset" towards Russia has begun to vanish during recent years, and totally collapsed since the outbreak of the crisis in Ukraine in 2013. Thus for some time already, the Russian factor serves not as a hindrance, but as a catalyst of Lithuanian-Polish relations.

Third, the increased attention of Lithuanian foreign policy towards cooperation with the Nordic countries¹⁶ is sometimes considered as an additional factor worsening Lithuanian relations with Poland. The emersion of the Nordic dimension in Lithuanian foreign policy was partly stimulated by the reaction towards changing Poland's foreign policy vectors and also by the success story of Estonia. However, bilateral cooperation with individual EU Member States or close partners of the EU is not a zero-sum game. Thus, the emphasis on the trade-off between cooperation with Poland and with the Nordic countries appears artificial. The argument that "strengthening ties with the Nordic Countries does not contradict but, instead, complements cooperation with Poland"¹⁷ is more convincing.

Fourth, the worsening of Lithuanian-Polish relations is mostly beneficial to the external actor – Russia. It is interested in preventing the development of a Polish-Lithuanian alliance capable (especially, if supported by the USA) of consolidating other actors of similar foreign and security strategies and thereby (potentially) counterbalancing Russia's influence in Central and Eastern Europe and the EU Eastern neighbourhood¹⁸. Russia's interests are without doubt one of the major factors influencing both the domestic and foreign policies of Central and Eastern European countries. However, while the Russian factor may indicate one of the most important sources of Lithuanian-Polish rift incitements, it is not sufficient

¹⁵ Krickus, (note 13) p. 18.

¹⁶ Dudzińska, (note 2) p. 137; Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 10.

¹⁷ Bajarūnas E., "Cooperation of Nordic-Baltic Countries on Security and Defence", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2012-2013*, No. 11, 2013, p. 118.

¹⁸ Borodzicz-Smolinski, Jurkonis, (note 4) p. 2–3; Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 5; Šapokas E., LRT televizijos naujienų tarnyba, "A. Michnikas: kam naudingas Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykių griovimas" ['A. Michnik: Who Is to Profit from the Demolition of Lithuanian-Polish Relations?'], *Delfi.lt*, 21 08 2014, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/a-michnikas-kam-naudingas-lietuvos-ir-lenkijos-santykiu-griovimas.d?id=65622006>>; Expert interview (II) with high-ranking Lithuanian diplomat, Vilnius, 20 03 2014; the same idea expressed during the discussion „Lithuanian Foreign Policy: *quo vadis?*“ organized by the Eastern Europe Studies Centre, Vilnius, 07 03 2014.

to explain why Lithuania and Poland surrender to the “divide and rule” policy of Russia, which is harmful to both of them.

To sum up, none of the above-mentioned arguments provides either undeniable evidence or sufficient explanation of the worsening of Lithuanian-Polish relations in recent years.

2. Priority areas of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation

2.1. Lithuanian-Polish military cooperation as the most consistent expression of the countries’ strategic partnership

Military cooperation between Lithuania and Poland started in 1994 by signing the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Defence Cooperation. The countries cooperated in training of professional soldiers, consulted on the development of air defence systems and exchanged classified military information. Bilateral military cooperation reached a qualitatively new stage in 1999 when Poland became a member of NATO. Polish assistance was key for transformation of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and Lithuanian engagement into international peacekeeping operations¹⁹. Poland’s support for Lithuanian Euro-Atlantic integration stemmed not only from friendliness towards a smaller neighbour, but also from a very rational consciousness that without a secure Lithuania there cannot be a secure Poland; likewise without a secure Poland there cannot be a secure Lithuania²⁰.

Seeking to enhance security in the region and, most importantly, to help the Lithuanian Armed Forces adjust to NATO military standards, the Lithuanian-Polish peacekeeping battalion LITPOLBAT with its headquarters in Poland²¹ was established in 1999²² making Lithuania the only NATO candidate country

¹⁹ Žigaras F., *Baltijos šalys: saugumas ir gynyba 1990-2002*, [“The Baltic States: Security and Defence 1990–2002”], Vilnius: Leidybos centras prie KAM, 2002, p. 191–192.

²⁰ Sirutavičius, (note 6) p. 16.

²¹ Krivas A., “Lithuanian-Polish military cooperation”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 1(7), 2001, p. 35; “Polish-Lithuanian Cooperation”, at the website of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Vilnius, <http://www.wilno.msz.gov.pl/en/bilateral_cooperation/polish_lithuanian_co_operation/>, accessed 19 01 2014.

²² Lithuanian-Polish agreement on creation of a joint peacekeeping battalion signed two years before, in the summer of 1997.

at that time to have a joint military unit with a NATO member state²³. Poland's membership in NATO created the opportunity for LITPOLBAT soldiers to participate in international military exercises (e.g., "Amber Hope 2001") and training as well as NATO, UN and OSCE missions, namely in Kosovo, Syria, Lebanon and Iraq²⁴. Furthermore, Poland supported the Lithuanian Armed Forces by donating used and new military equipment and training Lithuanian soldiers in Polish military training institutions²⁵. Both countries also cooperated on civil protection.

Lithuanian-Polish military cooperation was not limited to bilateral projects but also actively developed in regional formats. Poland participated in joint defence projects of the three Baltic States. Due to technical and geographical reasons, some of those projects could not have even been implemented without Poland's involvement²⁶. Poland also acted as a "bridge" for Lithuanian military cooperation with other NATO members. E.g. Lithuania, together with Latvia and Estonia, was invited to participate in trilateral meetings of the Defence Ministers of Denmark, Poland, and Germany²⁷.

Before and several years after accession to NATO, the Lithuanian military mainly participated in international peacekeeping missions (e.g., in Kosovo, Afghanistan, Iraq) with Polish compounds²⁸. Although during the first years of

²³ Lithuanian Ministry of Economy, "Lithuania. Country Profile: April 2001", Vilnius: Lithuanian Ministry of Economy, 2001, p. 11.

²⁴ „Zamknięto LITPOLBAT“ [‘LITPOLBAT Closed’], *Tygodnik Wileńszczyzny*, No. 356, 5-11 07 2007, <<http://www.tygodnik.lt/200727/aktualia.html>>.

²⁵ Krivas, (note 23) p. 36; Valionis A., Ignatavičius E., Bričkovskienė I., "From Solidarity to Partnership: Lithuanian-Polish Relations 1988–1998", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 2, 1998, p. 17; Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 163.

²⁶ BALTBAT (Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion, established in 1994; dissolved after fulfilment of its functions in the autumn of 2003); BALTNET (Baltic Air Surveillance Network integrated into NATO Air Surveillance and Control System in 2004. Technically and geographically, BALTNET could only operate through Poland and therefore its involvement was a prerequisite); BALTRON (The Baltic Naval Squadron, established in August 1998 as a constant readiness unit of the Baltic States' military ships, still operative); BALTDEFCOL (The Baltic Defence College is an international military education institution for operational and strategic-level military and civilian leaders of the Baltic states and allied countries, established in February 1999 in Tartu, Estonia) – Krivas, (note 23) p. 36; Žigaras, (note 20) p. 191; „Baltijos šalių bendradarbiavimas“ [‘Cooperation among the Baltic States’], on the website of the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania (Lithuanian version), <http://www.kam.lt/lt/tarptautinis_bendradarbiavimas/baltijos_saliu_bendradarbiavimas.html>, accessed 01 04 2014.

²⁷ Žigaras, (note 20) p. 200.

²⁸ In 1999, Special Operations Element of Lithuanian Armed Forces participated in the NATO

Lithuania's membership in NATO Poland continued to support the transformation of Lithuanian Armed Forces, the demand for this support decreased as Lithuania itself became adapted within the Alliance. Being a member of the EU and NATO, Lithuania developed into a self-sustaining contributor to international missions. Today both countries participate in NATO, EU, and UN peacekeeping missions and operations on an equal basis, though, naturally, with different capabilities. Thus, Lithuania is no longer dependent on Polish integration and networking assistance as it was before the accession to NATO.

Nevertheless, due to geographical proximity and common security threats, Lithuania and Poland continue to play an exclusive role in each other's security architecture. Within NATO, Lithuania and Poland, as neighbouring nations, inevitably cooperate with each other much closer than with other, especially more distant, member states. Regional exercises are continued under the NATO "umbrella" with the participation of the Polish, Lithuanian, and frequently – the military forces of the other Baltic States (e.g., "Steadfast Jazz" in November 2013). Poland leads the Baltic Air Policing Mission, established in 2004 in Zokniai, Lithuania, more frequently than any other NATO member state. Already the fifth rotation of Polish pilots and fighters was deployed in Zokniai in the summer of 2014²⁹ and the sixth rotation is scheduled for January 2015³⁰.

Moreover, Lithuania and Poland transfer their experience of bilateral military cooperation into new projects aimed at responding to security challenges in their immediate neighbourhood. For example, after LITPOLBAT accomplished its

operation in Kosovo (KFOR) as a part of the Polish military battalion. After accession to NATO, Lithuania actively continued participation in KFOR until 2009, not only as a part of the Polish battalion, but later also as a part of Danish, Czech and Slovak battalions. In terms of the Lithuanian contingent deployed, KFOR (1999–2009) was the second largest international operation for the Lithuanian military surpassed only by NATO-led operations in Afghanistan. During operations in Iraq (2003–2011), the most numerous Lithuanian military forces were deployed as part of Polish and UK units (during 2003–2008). During 2003–2006, five LITDET (Lithuanian Detachment) rotations were deployed in the areas of Polish responsibility (as a part of the Polish Division in the cities of Al Hillah and Al Kut). LITDET were withdrawn from Iraq after Poland decided to reduce its contingent in the mission – Žigaras, (note 20) p. 197; Krivas, (note 23) p. 35; "Multinational operations", on the website of Lithuanian Armed Forces (Lithuanian version), <http://kariuomene.kam.lt/lt/tarptautines_operacijos_786.html>, accessed 01 04 2014.

²⁹ German pilots and fighters also completed five rotations, but the sixth one has not yet been announced.

³⁰ „Baltijos šalių dangų saugantys lenkai: „Rusai kasmet aktyvesni“ [Poles Guarding the Baltic Sky: "Russians Are Getting More Active Each Year"] (BNS and lrytas.lt inf.), *lrytas.lt*, 27 07 2014, <<http://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvos-diena/aktualijos/baltijos-saliu-dangu-saugantys-lenkai-rusai-kasmet-aktyvesni.htm>>.

mission and *de facto* ceased to exist in 2007³¹, it was used as a model for creating the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade (LITPOLUKRBRIG). A Memorandum of Understanding on creation of LITPOLUKRBRIG signed back in 2009. However, the project was delayed mostly due to the alternating position of the Ukrainian government. The foreseen start of the project was postponed several times and the draft Agreement on establishing LITPOLUKRBRIG remained unsigned³². As Lithuanian-Polish relations appeared to grow colder, it seemed that the idea of creating the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade would never materialize. However, in light of the political crisis in Ukraine and Russia's increased aggression, the Polish Ministry of Defence announced the renewal of LITPOLUKRBRIG after consultations with NATO Headquarters in March 2014³³. The idea of creating the Joint Brigade as soon as possible was supported by the Lithuanian and Ukrainian Defence Ministers. Thus, the evident and rapid growth of security threat boosted the signature of the Agreement on establishing the joint Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade, which finally took place in September 2014³⁴.

³¹ Lithuanian-Polish Treaty on LITPOLBAT officially denounced in May 2008. – LR įstatymas Nr. X-1547 dėl Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybės ir Lenkijos Respublikos Vyriausybės sutarties dėl bendro karinio dalinio sudarymo tarptautiniam saugumui ir taikai palaikyti bei atkurti denonsavimo [Act of the Republic of Lithuania No X-1547 on the Denunciation of the Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Lithuania and the Government of the Republic of Poland on the Establishment of Joint Military Peacekeeping Unit], (20 05 2008), Vilnius: Valstybės žinios, No. 63, 03 06 2008; „LITPOLBAT savo vaidmenį atliko“ [‘LITPOLBAT Accomplished its Role’], *Delfi*, 07 11 2007, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/litpolbat-savo-vaidmeni-atliko.d?id=14915545>>.

³² Marcin Wojciechowski, „Wspólna brygada Polski, Litwy i Ukrainy“ [‘Joint Polish, Lithuanian and Ukrainian Brigade’], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 11 2009, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,7257108,Wspolna_brygada_Polski_Litwy_i_Ukrainy.html>; Interfax-Ukraine, „Combined Ukrainian-Polish-Lithuanian brigade could appear in autumn“, *KyivPost*, 13 05 2011, <<http://www.kyivpost.com/content/ukraine/combined-ukrainian-polish-lithuanian-brigade-could-104303.html>>; „Угода про створення ЛІТПолУкрбріг може бути підписана в червні – Міноборони Польщі“ [‘Agreement on the Establishment of LITPOLUKRBRIG Can Be Signed in June’], *Укрінформ*, 17 04 2013, <http://www.ukrinform.ua/ukr/news/ugoda_pro_stvorennja_litpolukrbrig_moge_buti_pidpisana_v_chervni_minoboroni_polshchi_1818939>.

³³ Matthew Day, “Poland Plans to Reform Military Brigade with Ukraine and Lithuania”, *The Telegraph*, 17 03 2014, <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10703016/Poland-plans-to-reform-military-brigade-with-Ukraine-and-Lithuania.html>>.

³⁴ “Agreement on the Establishment of trilateral Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade was endorsed”, Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, 20 09 2014, <http://www.kam.lt/en/news_1098/current_issues/agreement_on_the_establishment_of_trilateral_lithuanian-polish-ukrainian_brigade_will_be_endorsed.html?pbck=10>.

The wish to help its “little brothers” in the Baltics may not be the main reason behind Poland’s increased concern about regional security. It may be grounded by very pragmatic considerations. First, eventual Russian aggression next to Polish borders would take a heavy toll on Poland itself. Second, Poland, as the largest and economically strongest country on the Eastern frontier of NATO, would have to deploy the largest military contingent to protect the Baltic States in case of Russia’s aggression³⁵. Notwithstanding this pragmatic rationale, however, one could hardly reckon on the mobilisation and consolidation of Polish and Lithuanian defence capabilities of such a velocity and scale in case the relations between the two countries were indeed antagonistic. Thus, the effective military cooperation between Lithuania and Poland casts serious doubts on the claims that the relations between the countries are hostile. On the contrary, the intensification of bilateral defence cooperation in light of a genuine security threat demonstrates the capability of Lithuania and Poland to mobilise the potential of their strategic partnership and cooperate constructively as such need arises.

2.2. Lithuanian-Polish economic relations: invisible hand of the market with a glimpse of political interests

Well-developed economic relations are often presented by experts either as proof of the constructiveness of Lithuanian-Polish bilateral cooperation or at least as a clear contrast to the harsh political rhetoric and problems of national minorities³⁶.

During the last decade, Lithuanian-Polish economic cooperation intensified significantly. From 2004 to 2013³⁷ Lithuanian exports to Poland increased more than fivefold and Polish exports to Lithuania more than tripled (see Figure 1). Poland is one of the most important trade partners of Lithuania. In 2013, Lithuanian exports to Poland totalled 6.26 bn LTL (7.4% of overall exports). Lithuania exported more only to Russia (16.8 bn LTL), Latvia (8.5 bn LTL), and Estonia (6.4 bn LTL). Lithuanian imports from Poland amounting to 8.6 bn LTL (9% of all imports) were only surpassed by Lithuanian imports from Russia

³⁵ Krickus, (note 13) p. 21.

³⁶ Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk, Łada, (note 2) p. 113.

³⁷ Statistics Lithuania and Central Bank of Lithuania have yet only published the data for the IQ of 2014, thus data for 2013 is used as the most up to date in this article.

(26.8 bn LTL) and Germany (9.5 bn LTL)³⁸. The bilateral trade balance however remains negative for Lithuania for the last decade. Lithuania imports more from Poland than it exports to Poland (see Figure 1).

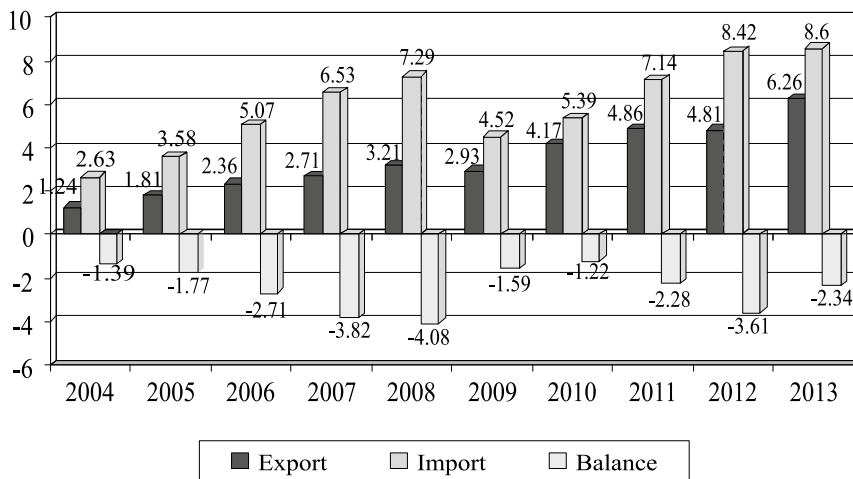


Figure 1. Lithuania's exports to Poland, and imports from Poland, trade balance, 2004–2013 (end of year, bn LTL)

Source: Statistics Lithuania

Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) flows between the two countries increased even more significantly during the last decade. Annual net cumulated FDI from Poland increased 16 times (from 0.29 bn LTL in 2004 to 4.73 bn LTL in 2013) (see Figure 2). In 2013, in terms of cumulated FDI, Poland was the second largest investor in Lithuania (after Sweden, the cumulated FDI of which totalled 10.3 bn LTL by the end of 2013)³⁹.

³⁸ Statistics Lithuania, <http://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/606987/Imp_exp_2013_01_12.pdf/1b4a5ba6-0c55-460c-9cf0-a1c895665f63>, accessed 28 03 2014.

³⁹ Central Bank of Lithuania, <http://www.lb.lt/stat_pub/statbrowser.aspx?group=8006&lang=lt>, accessed 28 03 2014.

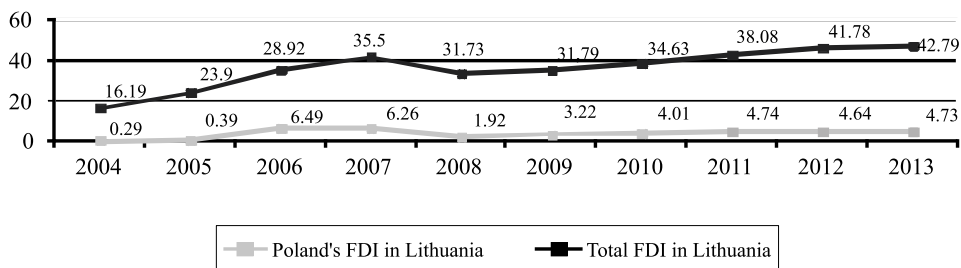


Figure 2. Aggregated FDI in Lithuania and Poland's aggregated FDI in Lithuania, 2004–2013 (end of year, bn LTL).

Source: Central Bank of Lithuania

Taking into account the size of the economies, Poland is a significantly more important investor for Lithuania than Lithuania is for Poland. This tendency is not likely to change in the future. FDI flows from Lithuania to Poland are comparatively very low (amounting to millions rather than billions LTL) and have almost no effect on the Polish economy. Still, Lithuanian FDI in Poland has grown since 2006⁴⁰ (from 0.35 bn LTL in 2006 to 0.49 bn LTL in 2012), and almost doubled during 2013 (from 0.49 bn LTL in 2012 to 0.8 bn LTL in 2013) (see Figure 3). In 2013, in terms of Lithuanian FDI, Poland stood at fifth place. Lithuania invested more in the Netherlands (1.74 bn LTL), Estonia (1.04 bn LTL), Latvia (1 bn LTL), and Cyprus (0.9 bn LTL)⁴¹.

⁴⁰ If we compare the amounts of Lithuanian net cumulative FDI at the end of the year in Poland from 2004 to 2013, the increase by 100 times of this indicator might appear misleading. This is the case because Lithuanian FDI were insignificant before just several years after its accession to the EU. To illustrate this trend, Figure 2 shows Lithuanian FDI starting from 1997, not 2004. The graph demonstrates that to reflect not the overall changes of the flows of Lithuanian FDI, but rather the trends of Lithuanian investments to Poland, it makes more sense to analyse the period of 2006–2013 not 2004–2013.

⁴¹ Central Bank of Lithuania, <http://www.lb.lt/stat_pub/statbrowser.aspx?group=8006&lang=lt>, accessed 28 03 2014.

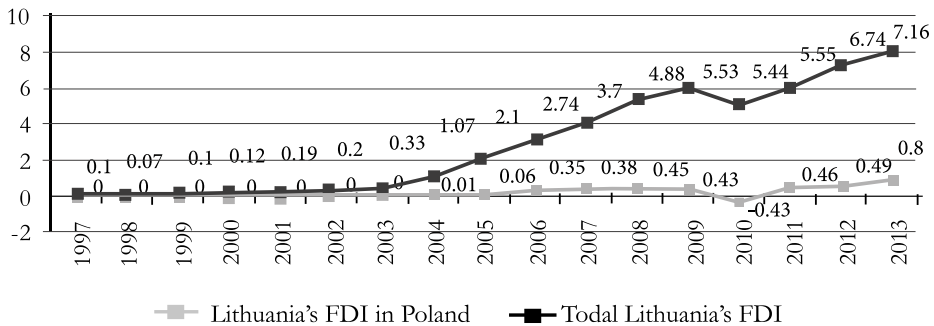


Figure 3. Aggregated Lithuania's FDI and aggregated Lithuania's FDI in Poland, 2004–2013 (end of year, bn LTL)

Source: Central Bank of Lithuania

Strengthening bilateral economic cooperation should not necessarily be considered a consequence of political partnership. Market economy determines that business interests, legal regulation of the Internal Market, economic development of the countries, the structure of national economies, business culture, and other aspects, not necessarily directly related to “high” politics, shape economic relations between two EU Member States more than politics does. At the same time, however, the possibilities of politicising economies should not be underestimated. Political interests can influence economic cooperation just as business interests influence politics, both by encouraging and by hampering it.

The most vivid example of politicising of economic relations between Lithuania and Poland was the sale of the oil refinery *Mažeikių nafta* to the Polish *PKN Orlen* in 2006⁴². This deal was based primarily on energy security concerns rather than on economic calculations. The probability was high that after bankruptcy of the Russian *Yukos* owning a 53.7% share of *Mažeikių nafta*, the controlling block would go for a mere trifle to the Kremlin-controlled *Gazprom*⁴³. Thus, it was of vital importance for Lithuania that the company of its strategic partner Poland would hinder such a scenario. Officially, Warsaw also supported Lithuania's aim to prevent this energy security threat and emphasized the political side of the deal. More importantly,

⁴² Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 30.

⁴³ Staselis R., „Kommersant“: „Jukos“ akcininkams iš Rusijos priteista 50 mlrd. USD“ [“Kommersant”: 500 Billion USD Adjudged to Yukos Shareholders], *Vz.lt*, 28 07 2014, <<http://vz.lt/article/2014/7/28/kommersant-jukos-akcininkams-is-rusijos-priteista-50-mlrd-usd>>.

Poland considered it a possibility to enhance not only Lithuanian, but also Polish and regional energy security. Therefore, both countries regarded the acquisition of *Mažeikių nafta* by *PKN Orlen* as clear proof of a Lithuanian-Polish strategic partnership⁴⁴.

Thus, energy security interests and the strategic partnership between Lithuania and Poland stimulated the largest-ever Polish investment in Lithuania. It is worth mentioning that the Lithuanian government continues to closely cooperate with the Polish government and *PKN Orlen* at both a national and EU level seeking to improve business conditions for *PKN Orlen*⁴⁵ and helping obtain maximum dividends from this political investment both for *PKN Orlen* (in economic terms) and for Lithuania (primarily in terms of energy security).

The example of the acquisition of *Mažeikių nafta* by *PKN Orlen* demonstrates that when the need arises, economic cooperation can serve as a means of the realization of strategic interests of Lithuania and Poland. At the same time, when there is no strategic demand to interfere into economic relations determined by the free market and fuelled by business interests, macroeconomic data (exports and FDI flows) illustrates that political relations between Lithuania and Poland at least do not hinder the development of economic cooperation.

2.3. Implementation of strategic energy projects: the paradoxes of the most asymmetrical area of cooperation

The notion that cooperation with Poland is necessary in order to ensure and strengthen energy security of Lithuania, primarily by reducing dependence on energy supplies from Russia, has been present in Lithuanian strategic documents since 1994⁴⁶. Talks on certain projects began even earlier. At the time being, there are two major Lithuanian energy infrastructure projects, the implementation of which requires cooperation with Poland – the Lithuanian-Polish electricity link *LitPol Link* and Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL).

⁴⁴ Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 156, 159.

⁴⁵ „Strateginiai projektai naftos sektoriuje“ [‘Strategic Projects in the Oil Sector’], on the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (Lithuanian version), <<http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/uzsienio-politika/uzsienio-politikos-prioritetai/energetinis-saugumas/strateginiai-projektai-naftos-sektoriuje>>, accessed 23 08 2014.

⁴⁶ Budrys K., “The Impact of Cooperation with Poland on Lithuania’s Energy Security”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2007*, Vilnius: Military academy of Lithuania, 2008, p. 224.

The Lithuania-Poland electricity link, *LitPol Link*, is one of the means of integrating Lithuania into a common EU electricity system, thus eliminating existing energy isolation and diversifying Lithuanian electricity import and export markets. This aim encompasses two parallel processes: 1) connection of the Baltic States' electricity market with the market of continental Europe by connecting Lithuania's and Poland's electricity systems (building *LitPol Link*), and 2) synchronisation with the European Continental Network (ECN), that would enable disconnection from the CIS countries' energy system. To synchronise the Lithuanian power system with ECN, *LitPol Link* is not enough. Two more interconnections are needed – another one with Poland (*LitPol Link 2*) and the link with Sweden (*NordBalt*). Although the talks on the Lithuanian-Polish power link began in 1992, the real work started only in 2008, after signing the Lithuanian-Polish agreement on building the electricity link and establishing the joint venture *LitPol Link*, owned in equal shares by the electricity supply system operators of Lithuania (*Litgrid*) and Poland (*PSE*). *LitPol Link* officially began being built on 5 May 2014. The start of operation of the 500 MW Lithuanian-Polish power link is scheduled at the end of 2015. After completion of the second phase in 2020, its operational power should double⁴⁷.

Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL) is aimed at integrating isolated gas markets of the Baltic countries through Poland into a single European gas market and herewith diversifying gas supply sources and routes. This would reduce Lithuanian dependence of gas import from Russia creating possibilities for an alternative gas supply. Under preliminary calculations, the estimated length of GIPL is to be 562 km, most of it in Polish territory. Accordingly, the major share of the estimated cost (471 mill EUR in total) will be invested in Poland. In 2013, the GIPL feasibility study was completed and in 2014 the project developers Polish GAZ-SYSTEM S.A. and Lithuanian AB Amber Grid submitted requests

⁴⁷ Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 2.; Janeliūnas T., Tumkevič A., “Securitization of the Energy Sectors in Estonia, Lithuania, Poland and Ukraine: Motives and Extraordinary Measures”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 30, 2013, p. 78; BNS, “Pradedamas dar vienos Lietuvos energetinės vilties tiesimas” [“The Laying of Yet Another Lithuanian Energy Hope Begins”], *Delfi.lt*, 05 05 2014, <<http://www.delfi.lt/verslas/energetika/pradedamas-dar-vienos-lietuvos-energetines-vilties-tiesimas.d?id=64698841>>; “Synchronous operation Connection”, on the website of the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.enmin.lt/en/activity/veiklos_kryptys/strateginiai_projektai/Synchronous%20operation.php?clear_cache=Y>, accessed 14 09 2014; “LitPol Link (Lithuania-Poland electricity link)”, on the website of the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.enmin.lt/en/activity/veiklos_kryptys/strateginiai_projektai/litpolink_project.php?clear_cache=Y>, accessed 10 10 2014.

for EU co-financing under the Connecting Europe Facility. GIPL is expected to be completed by 2019⁴⁸.

The third one – the Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant (VAE) project is currently “frozen” in Lithuania, and it is unclear whether it will be renewed or not. The plans of building Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant (VAE) have been in development since 2006. The main rationale behind this project is the compensation of the impact of the shutdown of Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant on the Lithuanian energy system. The VAE project was planned as a joint project of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. At the beginning, Polish participation was not foreseen. However, later in 2006, Poland declared its intentions to join the VAE project. The project was planned to be completed by 2020. The new VAE would have supplied electricity to the Baltic States and Poland and energy surplus could have been exported to the East, West, and North alike. In 2011, the Japanese company *Hitachi GE Nuclear Energy* was selected as the strategic investor of the project. However, already by the end of 2011, the differences of project partners’ interests became evident. Poland left the project because it was not satisfied with the allocated future production quotas and considered building new NPPs on its own territory. In addition, the Fukushima NPP catastrophe raised fears regarding nuclear safety. The project was finally wrecked in 2012 by the negative turnouts of the consultative referendum on the development of nuclear energy in Lithuania (organised together with the parliamentary elections) and by the lack of political will of the newly elected left-wing Government to continue the development of the VAE project. Finally, this resulted in withdrawal of the strategic investor *Hitachi* from the project making further prospects of the project vague⁴⁹.

However, VAE deserves attention as a symptomatic example of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation in the field of energy.

Infrastructure development, especially in the area of energy, is a time-consuming process. Nevertheless, the fact that after more than two decades of

⁴⁸ “Gas interconnection Poland-Lithuania”, on the website of the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.enmin.lt/en/activity/veiklos_kryptys/strateginiai_projektai/pipeline_Lt_PL.php?clear_cache=Y>, accessed 14 09 2014; “The Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania (GIPL)”, on the website of “Amber Grid”, <<http://www.ambergrid.lt/en/transmission-system/development-of-the-transmission-system/the-gas-interconnection-Poland-Lithuania>>, accessed 14 09 2014.

⁴⁹ Budrys, (note 49) p. 255-256; Molis A., Gliubutė J., “Prospects for the Development of Nuclear Energy in the Baltic Region”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2011-2012*, Vilnius: Military Academy of Lithuania, 2012, p. 130-131, 136-137, 140-142, 149-151; “About the Project”, on the website of Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant project, <<http://www.vae.lt/en/pages/about-the-project>>, accessed 14 09 2014.

considerations and planning, none of the Lithuanian-Polish energy projects are completed⁵⁰ forces us to admit that the bilateral cooperation in this area is not effective enough, and that the reasons behind this should be looked at.

The simplest argument to name is poor political relations between Lithuania and Poland. Such an explanation might seem rational, since energy infrastructure projects are usually based not only on economic benefit, but also (and even more so) on political will and strategic interests. The economic benefit of such projects manifests itself only in the long-term and is usually hard to forecast due to the evolving geo-economic and political situation. Therefore, the possibility to find an agreement on such politically motivated projects is low (or non-existent at all) in case the relations between the partners are poor. However, despite its explanatory power, this argument proves to be inapplicable to the analysis of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation in the field of energy, because the periods of effectiveness and stagnation of this cooperation do not coincide with the periods of “freezing” and “warming” political relations. From 1994 to 2006, despite warm political relations, Lithuania could hardly convince Poland to become involved in joint energy projects⁵¹. The acquisition of *Mažeikių nafta* by *PKN Orlen* and the declared Polish interest to join the VAE project in 2006 raised hopes that cooperation in the energy field could become more substantial. These expectations were further reinforced as the Lithuanian-Polish power interconnection feasibility study was completed in 2007⁵² and the agreement on establishing the joint company *LitPol Link* was signed in 2008. Political will to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the energy field was fuelled by the direct effect of the Russian gas cuts policy and repetitive “breakdowns” of the “Druzhba” pipeline on both countries’ energy security⁵³. Yet despite the fact that this period of seemingly intensified Lithuanian-Polish energy cooperation coincided with the time of a favourable political climate, it did not materialize into tangible results (the only exception being the *Mažeikių nafta* acquisition)⁵⁴. Paradoxically, the GIPL feasibility study was completed in 2013,

⁵⁰ *LitPol Link* started to be built only in 2014; the developers of GIPL are still waiting for the final decision concerning their request for EU co-financing submitted at the end of October, 2013; and the prospects of the VAE remain vague.

⁵¹ Budrys, (note 49) p. 224; Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 157.

⁵² Budrys, (note 49) p. 223–224.

⁵³ Budrys, (note 49) p. 260–262; Adamkus V., *Paskutinė kadencija. Prezidento dienoraščiai*. [‘Last Term. The President’s Diaries’], Vilnius: Tyto Alba, 2011, p. 336–337, 429.

⁵⁴ Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 2.; Bukowiecka, (note 10) p. 215; Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 25; Česnakas G., “Energy Security in the Baltic-Black Sea Region: Energy Insecurity Sources and their Impact upon Strategies”, *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review 2011-2012*, Vilnius: Lietuvos karo akademija, 2012, p. 168, 196.

and the construction of *LitPol Link* started in spring 2014, at the time when Polish-Lithuanian political relations were considered as deteriorating for quite some time. Thus, there is no direct causality between the political climate in Lithuanian-Polish relations and (in)effectiveness of cooperation in the field of energy⁵⁵.

Searching for more plausible arguments, attention needs to be paid to the different scale of demand of Lithuania and Poland on bilateral cooperation in the energy field. Due to different geo-strategic positions, Poland is a more important energy transit country in the region than is Lithuania. Also, Poland has more alternatives for energy supplies and thus, is less vulnerable to energy security threats than Lithuania. Geographically, Poland is a necessary link for Lithuania to connect with Eastern, Central and Southern Europe⁵⁶. Whereas for Poland Lithuania can only serve as a link with other Baltic States and, partly, the Nordic countries. Due to the different geo-strategic functions of Lithuania and Poland, the biggest sceptics even held that Lithuanian-Polish cooperation on energy security is altogether impossible, and thus Lithuania should implement its energy projects independently or search for other partners⁵⁷. Such assessments proved wrong as the implementation of *LitPol Link* started and the GIPL project moved forward. The asymmetry of the necessity of bilateral energy relations is partly neutralised by the fact that Poland considers strengthening its own and whole regions' (including Lithuania's) energy independence an instrument of reducing Russian influence in Central and Eastern Europe. Thus, Poland is also interested in cooperation with Lithuania on energy security⁵⁸. Nevertheless, Poland's interest is only derivative, whereas Lithuania's interest – direct and vital. Therefore, bilateral energy projects being of strategic importance for Lithuania do not top Polish energy policy agenda.

Considering the asymmetry in demand of cooperation in the energy field, three factors, which influence the effectiveness of implementation of joint Lithuanian-Polish energy projects more than a bilateral political climate does, can be suggested. First, since joint energy projects with Lithuania are not among Poland's priority strategic projects, Polish involvement is strongly determined by economic calculations. If the project is not economically viable (or its viability unclear), political will is hardly enough for its development. For example, one of the main holdbacks of *LitPol Link* in 2007 was the inconsistency of the project

⁵⁵ Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 2.

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 1–2.

⁵⁷ Budrys, (note 49) p. 223, 269–272.

⁵⁸ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 16.

with the interests of major Polish financial and energy companies⁵⁹. In the case of the VAE, despite numerous feasibility studies and evaluations, the real costs of the project and the prospective cost price of electricity produced by the VAE remained unclear⁶⁰. This was the main reason of Polish withdrawal from the project.

The second factor influencing risk and cost evaluation as well as effective implementation of strategic energy projects is political stability and broad political consensus on these projects in the countries involved. Poland and Lithuania (at least until 2008) definitely lacked political consistency in the energy field. There was and still is a broad political consensus in both countries regarding energy independence as their strategic objective. However, major political parties in both Poland and Lithuania take different stances regarding which particular projects are their priorities. From 1990 to 2008, 15 governments changed in Lithuania making the lack of political continuity one of the major problems undermining the successful implementation of not only energy projects but also many other political initiatives. In Poland governments were more stable, but as joint energy projects with Lithuania were not the top priorities, governments' position regarding them was also easy to change. The development of the VAE is the most vivid example of the aftermaths of such political inconsistency. After 2008, however, there is more political stability in Lithuania. The fact that the 15th right-wing government endured the entire term and the present left-wing government, which won elections in 2012, has every chance to repeat this precedent, raises expectations that the Lithuanian government's position regarding priority energy projects will become more consistent or at least that it will not change more often than every four years. The increase of political consistency in Lithuania can partly explain the recent rise of efficiency of energy cooperation with Poland and suggests that we could expect a continuity of implementation of these (or any new) projects, at least from the Lithuanian side, in the future.

The third factor, affecting the economic efficiency of the project, is the institutional capacity of participating states to create favourable conditions for project implementation and to ensure external financing of the project. Due to the above-mentioned asymmetry of Polish and Lithuanian demand in cooperation in the energy field, this factor mainly applies to Lithuania as the initiator of joint energy projects. Before its EU accession and during the first years of membership, the institutional capacities of Lithuania were rather poor or at least not sufficiently mobilised for implementation of strategic projects. One of the illustrative examples

⁵⁹ Adamkus, (note 57) p. 379–380.

⁶⁰ Molis, Gliebutė, (note 53) p. 144–146.

– the Ministry of Economy lingered for two years and finally, after repeated public tender procedures, busted the agreement between the Lithuanian *AB Lietuvos energija* and the Polish *Power Grid Company* on the building of the Lithuanian-Polish Power Bridge back in 1999⁶¹. After its EU accession, Lithuania's institutional and support-mobilising capacities gradually improved. EU membership increased Lithuania's reliability in the eyes of potential investors. More importantly, Lithuania developed capacities to transfer its national interests onto the EU agenda and thereby to mobilise the advantages of EU membership for their realisation. Lithuania, together with Poland and some other Member States sharing similar interests, managed to lift energy security issues on the priority agenda of the EU. This allowed Lithuanian-Polish electricity and gas interconnections to obtain the status of EU common interest projects aimed at completing the European single energy market, and apply for EU co-financing under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF). The eligibility for EU co-financing served as the major impetus for implementation of *LitPol Link* and GIPL⁶².

To sum up, only the last years witnessed a transition from words to deeds in implementing the most important Lithuanian energy projects with Poland – the power interconnection *LitPol Link* and the gas interconnection GIPL. Before, despite the good political climate, Lithuanian-Polish energy cooperation was ineffective. The economic efficiency of energy projects was vague, and Lithuania as their initiator lacked the institutional capacities and political consistency vital for their implementation. The major stimulus for implementation of joint energy projects was their listing among priority EU infrastructure projects, which also enabled EU co-financing. Similarly as in the case of military cooperation, be the bilateral relations poor, neither an external threat (energy dependence on Russia) nor a possibility (EU co-financing) would be enough to start joint projects, especially in a field as politicised as energy. The last 20 years' experience of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation in the energy field demonstrates that even though political will alone is not enough and external stimuli are needed, the political

⁶¹ In the end of 1997, the Ministry of Economy denied the permission to *AB Lietuvos energija* to sign the agreement, despite the fact that negotiations were successfully completed and the draft agreement prepared. Later, the public procurement procedure was dragged on for more than a year. Due to too short deadlines for applications the procedure was repeated twice; when no single company was able to comply with all the procurement requirements, direct negotiations started with *Power Grid Company*. However, the negotiations failed in 1999, and the agreement was not signed – Kazlauskas J., “About the Lithuanian-Polish Power Bridge”, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, No. 7, 2001, p. 55–59.

⁶² Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 2.

will to cooperate remains, and it had started to materialise, despite the widespread belief that political relations are bad. Thus, again, similarly to the cases of bilateral military and economic relations, the analysis of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation in the energy field does not provide any evidence that a worsened political climate in Lithuanian-Polish relations could have had a negative impact on the implementation of joint energy projects. On the contrary, it rather challenges the prevailing opinion that Lithuanian-Polish relations are at a deadlock and that the Lithuanian-Polish strategic partnership has ceased to exist.

3. The main problems in Lithuanian-Polish relations

3.1. Problems of the Polish national minority in Lithuania: some things never change

The most obvious problem in Lithuanian-Polish relations is the still disputed situation of the Polish national minority in Lithuania. Some of the issues (e.g., the recognition of education certificates obtained abroad) were resolved as both countries harmonised their laws with the EU's *acquis communautaire*⁶³. Other issues remain unresolved, most important among them being the spelling of personal names in their original form (using Polish diacritical marks) in a person's identity documents (IDs) issued by the Republic of Lithuania; the display of bilingual Lithuanian-Polish place (mainly, street) names plates in the areas densely populated by Poles (mainly in the Vilnius region – Šalčininkai, Trakai, Švenčionys and Vilnius district⁶⁴ municipalities); and the issues of education of the Polish minority in Lithuania.

Disagreements regarding the situation of national minorities are on the agenda of Lithuanian-Polish relations since the reestablishment of independence. Different periods were marked with different levels of escalation of these disagreements. From the end of 1991 until the beginning of 1994, the situation of national minorities (alongside different interpretations of history) was the major source of disagreements between Lithuania and Poland. In 1994–2004, during the period of

⁶³ Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 146, 151; Jakimowicz R., „Polityczne aspekty stosunków polsko-litewskich w latach 1991-2003“, [‘Political Aspects of Polish-Lithuanian relations from 1991 to 2003’] *Zeszyty naukowe Akademii Ekonomicznej w Krakowie*, No. 706, 2006, p. 58.

⁶⁴ Not to be confused with the Vilnius City municipality.

tangible improvement of bilateral relations, the disputes on the issues of national minorities remained unresolved, but re-emerged only episodically. Both countries were rather focused on strategic partnership and the achievement of common goals than inclined to look for threats in each other's domestic policies. Also, Lithuania kept demonstrating the political will to solve the problems raised by the Polish national minority as soon as possible⁶⁵. In the decade after both countries' accession to the EU, Poland has raised the issues of the Polish minority in Lithuania at almost every bilateral meeting with Lithuanian officials arguing that it is wearied of waiting while Lithuania fulfils the promises it has made⁶⁶. Meanwhile, Lithuanian politicians keep making promises to improve the situation but do not deliver, constantly lacking either political will and flexibility, or political consensus, or, sometimes, all of the above.

The accusations against the Lithuanian government regarding the unresolved issues of the Polish national minority in Lithuania are usually based on three main arguments. First, the reference is made that Lithuania is not fulfilling its obligations (namely, postulated in the Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighbourly Cooperation of the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Poland, signed in 1994) to improve the situation of the Polish national minority. The Polish side usually refers to Article 14 of the Treaty, which envisages that Lithuanian citizens of Polish descent and Polish citizens of Lithuanian descent have the right "to use their names and surnames according to the sound of the national minority language"⁶⁷. However, this wording does not imply that the names and surnames of Lithuanian Poles in their IDs must be written using Polish diacritical marks, but not transcribed into Lithuanian following their pronunciation, as is the case currently. Thus, the argument about non-adherence to the bilateral agreements partly depends on their interpretation.

The second argument states that the Polish minority in Lithuania should be granted the same rights as the Lithuanian minority enjoys in Poland. This argument is solid, but applicable only concerning the issue of the spelling of personal names in the ID's and, to some extent, concerning the use of bilingual street name plates. In Lithuania, neither of the two rights are granted by law. In Poland, The Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages provides the right to spell

⁶⁵ Miniotaitė, Jakniūnaitė, (note 6) p. 18; Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 23; Sirutavičius, (note 6), p. 21; Bukowiecka, (note 10) p. 215; Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 164.

⁶⁶ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 4; Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 164.

⁶⁷ Treaty on Friendly Relations and Good Neighbourly Cooperation of the Republic of Lithuania and Republic of Poland, Vilnius, 26 04 1994. (Translation into English – <<http://www.lfpr.lt/uploads/File/1998-2/Treaty%20on%20Friendly%20Relations.pdf>>, accessed 10 10 2014.)

personal names in IDs in their original form if the citizen of non-Polish descent requires so and if the original alphabet is based on the Latin script (otherwise, the name is transcribed)⁶⁸. The same Law allows use of bilingual place names plates in the counties that are on the list of Polish counties inhabited by national or ethnic minorities, or if a certain national minority constitutes at least 20 percent of a county's population and its request for use of bilateral plates is granted by the municipality⁶⁹. Thus in practice, the Lithuanian minority in Pusk County (which is on the above-mentioned list) could enjoy this right, but chooses not to, due to practical reasons – they all understand Polish and the place names in the county are of no historical or cultural significance to Lithuanians. Meanwhile, for example, Lithuanians constituting around 90 percent of the inhabitants of Burbiškės village in Sejny County are not granted the right to use bilingual place name plates by the municipality, as in the whole Sejny county Lithuanians do not make up the required 20 percent of inhabitants. On the other hand, the argument of unequal rights of Lithuanian and Polish national minorities in Poland and Lithuania respectively, is absolutely inapplicable, or rather, can be used by the Lithuanian side to accuse Poland, if the possibilities for national minorities to gain an education in their mother tongue are considered. Since 1990, the number of Polish schools in Lithuania increased by 50% (from the total of circa 170 Polish schools abroad, 81 are in Lithuania alone). Lithuania is the only country in the world where citizens of Polish descent can obtain an education in Polish from kindergarten to their university degree. Moreover, they can learn and study from Polish textbooks. Meanwhile, in Poland, the number of Lithuanian schools has been in constant decline. From 1999 to 2013, 8 Lithuanian schools closed in Poland and only 4 remain open (in Sejny, Pusk and Widugiery). Lithuanian schools in Poland are closed not only because of the shrinking number of pupils, but also due to insufficient allocations from Poland's budget. Children attending Lithuanian schools in Poland can learn from Lithuanian textbooks only until the fourth grade. From the fifth grade up, no textbooks are translated into Lithuanian.

The third argument is that the Polish minority feels discriminated in Lithuania. This argument is quite ambiguous though. According to social research conducted in 2012 by the Polish Institute of Public Affairs under the request of the Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Vilnius, 44 percent of surveyed Lithuanian Poles

⁶⁸ Ustawa z dnia 6 stycznia 2005 r. o mniejszościach narodowych i etnicznych oraz o języku regionalnym [The Law on National and Ethnic Minorities and Regional Languages of 6 January, 2005], Art. 7, p. 3, <<http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/DetailsServlet?id=WDU20050170141>>, accessed 02 10 2014.

⁶⁹ Ibid., Art. 12, p. 5–6.

claimed that their rights are respected in Lithuania. Somewhat fewer (40 percent) disagreed with this statement. As many as 73 percent of surveyed Lithuanian Poles stated that they personally have never experienced any sort of discrimination based on nationality⁷⁰. When asked to identify the problems in Lithuanian-Polish relations, only 7 percent of respondents named the lack (or closure) of Polish schools in Lithuania, 22 percent pointed at disagreements on bilingual place name plates or the original spelling of personal names in the IDs issued by the Republic of Lithuania. Only 3 percent of surveyed Lithuanian Poles named the lack of tolerance⁷¹.

Definitely, the controversy around all three above-mentioned arguments does not imply that the problems are non-existent or that they should not be addressed and resolved. However, there is also enough room for (at least partly artificial) securitisation of these problems. Thus, the questions arise, who and why benefits from the securitisation of Polish minority problems, and how it affects the content of Lithuanian-Polish bilateral cooperation.

First, the problems raised by the Polish minority in Lithuania are widely escalated by the media in both countries⁷², mainly to raise the readability of articles with resonant headlines. It should be noted that the problems of the Polish minority in Lithuania are exaggerated more in Lithuanian nationalist tabloids (such as *Respublika*, *Lietuvos Aidas*, *Voruta*, and some others), rather than in respectable Lithuanian- or Polish-language media. The afore-mentioned nationalistic media outlets are oriented towards readers with marginal viewpoints and do not affect the public opinion to the extent that could have an influence upon either policy-makers or the content of Lithuanian-Polish relations.

Second, the escalation and securitisation of Polish minority problems in Lithuania are fuelled by the activities and statements of The Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (EAPL) and its leader Valdemar Tomaševski. After its creation in 1994 as a party focused only on the situation of the Polish minority in Lithuania, the EAPL seems to be keen on maintaining the status of a “single-issue” party. Although EAPL representatives make up a majority in Vilnius region municipalities, they focus on the issues of the spelling of personal names in IDs, the display of bilingual Lithuanian-Polish place names plates and the issues of education of the Polish minority in Lithuania ignoring other acute problems, such as high unemployment, poor infrastructure development, low flows of foreign

⁷⁰ Fuksiewicz, Kucharczyk, Łada, (note 2) p. 15.

⁷¹ Ibid., p. 75.

⁷² Borodzicz-Smolinski, Jurkonis, (note 4), p. 2.

investments and other issues relevant to the Šalčininkai, Trakai, Švenčionys and Vilnius district municipalities⁷³.

The assumption that the EAPL is outgrowing its current “single-issue“ and “one-leader“ status was fuelled by EAPL’s success in the Lithuanian Parliamentary elections in 2012 and the following entry of EAPL into a governing coalition. The EAPL took part in these elections in coalition with the Russian Alliance, and for the first time gained Parliamentary seats not only in several single-member constituencies, but also nation-wide, overstepping the 7 percent electoral quota due for coalitions. The activities of the EAPL in the governing coalition, formed in 2012, seemed to be constructive until the spring-summer of 2014. EAPL-nominated Minister of Energy Jaroslav Neverovič was one of few ministers of the 16th Government, commended by the President⁷⁴, the partners within the ruling coalition, policy experts⁷⁵, media, and even the opposition alike. The EAPL did not attempt to raise the issues of the Polish minority in Lithuania above the efficient work of the whole Government. However, the scandalous resignation of the EAPL from the governing coalition in the summer of 2014, interpreted as a part of EAPL’s electoral campaign for upcoming municipal elections, raised doubts on EAPL’s intentions of evolving to adopt a full platform. While being part of the governmental coalition, the EAPL possessed tangible political assets for solving national minority issues. However the EAPL chose not to fully exploit them but on the contrary, to resign from the coalition, thus confirming experts’ estimations that the main objective and *raison d’être* of the EAPL is the escalation – not the resolution of Polish minority problems in Lithuania⁷⁶. In case these problems were solved, the EAPL would lose its main means of electorate mobilisation. Thus, the EAPL neither tries to solve Polish minority issues on the level of Lithuanian national

⁷³ Ibid., p. 4-6; Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 31–32.

⁷⁴ „D. Grybauskaitė įvertino J. Neverovičią“ [‘D.Grybauskaitė Commended J. Neverovič’], *Delfi.lt*, 21 05 2014, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/d-grybauskaite-ivertino-j-neverovicu.d?id=64840875>>.

⁷⁵ „Kas laukia ministrų po Prezidento rinkimų?“ [‘What Awaits Ministers after the Presidential Elections?’], *Delfi.lt*, 04 05 2014, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/kas-laukia-ministru-po-prezidento-rinkimu.d?id=64697767>>.

⁷⁶ Jackevičius M., „T. Janeliūnas: LLRA naudinga įtampa tarp Lietuvos ir Lenkijos“ [‘T. Janeliūnas: EAPL Gains from Growing Tension between Lithuania and Poland’], *Delfi.lt*, 11 02 2013, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/tjaneliunas-llra-naudinga-itampa-tarp-lietuvos-ir-lenkijos.d?id=60640099>>; Andrulevičiūtė V., „R. Lopata: lietuvių ir lenkų santykiai – Lietuvos politikų impotencijos išraiška“ [‘R.Lopata: Lithuanian-Polish Relations – the expression of impotence of Lithuanian politicians’], *Delfi.lt*, 06 02 2014, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/r-lopata-lietuvu-ir-lenku-santykiai-lietuvos-politiku-impotencijos-israiska.d?id=63947100>.

politics nor is it interested in making Polish-Lithuanian bilateral cooperation a “hostage” of these problems.

The escalation of Polish minority issues in Lithuania is to some extent stipulated by Poland’s politicians, especially during electoral campaigns. *Polonia*⁷⁷ issues serve as a popular electoral “card up the sleeve” of Polish politicians and parties, left-wing and right-wing alike, helping them gain popularity, especially among the elderly conservative electorate⁷⁸. However, during the periods between the campaigns, the escalation of *Polonia* issues decreases and the situation returns back to the usual *status quo* of a “frozen problem”. Thus, when estimating the real impact of Polish minority issues in Lithuania on Lithuanian-Polish bilateral relations, one needs to distinguish the electoral rhetoric, both in Lithuania and in Poland, from the real scope of the problem as it is perceived in both countries. Furthermore, Polish anxiety about *Polonia* and the securitisation of its situation is applicable not only to Lithuania. The rhetoric of the Polish political elite on Polish diaspora issues is equally strong regarding other countries, not Lithuania alone. For example, in May 2011, Poland cancelled negotiations with the German delegation and refused to sign a bilateral declaration on the implementation of the intergovernmental Polish-German agreement, arguing that the Polish minority is being discriminated in Germany⁷⁹. Thus, the escalation of Polish minority issues should not be interpreted as unique and employed only towards Lithuania. The same problem is present in Polish bilateral relations with many other countries – including Germany, the Czech Republic, Belarus, Ukraine, and others⁸⁰. Although, this does not mean that Poland’s bilateral relations with the above-mentioned countries, especially Germany or the Czech Republic, qualify as bad.

To conclude, there are no substantial arguments to claim that any significant political player in Lithuania or Poland has an interest to go further than just escalating the problems of the Polish minority in Lithuania and to make the other areas of cooperation into hostages of minority problems. There was no proof of such behaviour while previously analysing Lithuanian-Polish relations in military and economic cooperation and joint projects in the energy field. Thus, while the

⁷⁷ A term used for Polish diaspora.

⁷⁸ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 25-26; Borodzicz-Smolinski, Jurkonis, (note 4) p. 3–4.

⁷⁹ „Varšuva atšaukė derybas su Vokietijos atstovais dėl politikos lenkų mažumos atžvilgiu“ [‘Warsaw Cancelled the Negotiations with German Delegation because of their Policy towards Polish Minority’] (BNS and lrytas.lt inf.), *lrytas.lt*, 06 05 2011, <<http://www.lrytas.lt/-13046754891303960520-var%C5%A1uva-at%C5%A1auk%C4%97-derybas-su-vokietijos-atstovais-d%C4%97l-politikos-lenk%C5%B3-ma%C5%BEumos-at%C5%BEvilgiu.htm>>.

⁸⁰ Bujnicki, (note 2) p. 151.

problems of the Polish minority in Lithuania have remained on the bilateral agenda already for two decades, they are becoming more of an undesirable but usual *modus vivendi* in bilateral relations rather than leverage or an “instrument of blackmail” in solving other issues of cooperation.

3.2. The impact of political leaders’ personalities on Lithuanian-Polish political rhetoric

Considering the assessments of Lithuanian and Polish politicians and experts, as well as the provided analysis of bilateral cooperation, the assertion can be put forward that the harsh rhetoric of Lithuanian and Polish high-level politicians does not influence, at least substantially, practical bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, such rhetoric creates an unfavourable background of bilateral relations and fosters escalation of the conflict, be it real or artificial. The argument of emotional weariness regarding old and unresolved national minorities problems is hardly enough to explain why the rhetoric of both Vilnius’ and Warsaw’s politicians turned exceptionally negative over the last few years. More convincing answers can be found in a detailed analysis of the personal characteristics and ideological beliefs of Lithuanian and Polish top foreign policy makers.

1995–2008 can be considered as the period of the warmest Lithuanian and Polish political rhetoric towards each other. It was caused primarily by the close personal ties of the then Lithuanian and Polish Presidents and their similar views towards Poland’s and Lithuania’s role in the region and in Europe. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the Polish President during 1995–2005, enjoyed a personal friendship with Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus. Kwaśniewski also had personal sentiments towards Lithuania as his mother and grandmother were born in Vilnius. He tried to avoid or at least immediately neutralise any disagreements with Lithuania. Even if the issues of national minorities or other potentially high-tension questions were unavoidable during bilateral meetings, Kwaśniewski raised them very delicately, almost apologising that they had to be discussed at all⁸¹. Both Kwaśniewski and Adamkus were adherents of diplomatic and compromise-oriented rather than confrontational rhetoric.

The period of Rolandas Paksas’ Presidency from 2003 to 2004 was too short to make an impact on Lithuanian-Polish bilateral relations at the highest political level. His impeachment destabilised the political situation in Lithuania for a

⁸¹ Adamkus, (note 57) p. 219.

while though. To demonstrate neutrality regarding domestic political processes in Lithuania, Polish high-ranked officials cancelled their planned visits to Lithuania during the impeachment process. However the return of Adamkus to presidency quickly restored the tradition of warm informal relations between the Heads of both states⁸².

Lech Kaczyński, who replaced Aleksander Kwaśniewski as the Polish President in 2005, unlike his predecessor, had no personal relation with Lithuania. However, his views on the common history of Lithuania and Poland stipulated Kaczyński's positive approach towards the neighbouring country. He was inclined to believe that the cultural and political achievements of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth were more important than interwar bilateral conflicts. Accordingly, in contemporary bilateral relations he paid much more attention to long-term strategic interests rather than short-term problems⁸³. The potential for Lithuanian-Polish disagreements on the highest political level was also diminished by the fact that both Kwaśniewski and Kaczyński shared the so-called "Jagiellonian" and Jerzy Władysław Giedroyc's visions of contemporary Poland. The first conceiving Polish leadership in Central and Eastern Europe and "containment" of Russian impetus of the country's foreign policy, the second emphasizing the importance of good cohabitation with neighbouring countries, and both being favourable towards Lithuania⁸⁴. To a lesser extent, but also important was the fact that Adamkus had spent the period of major disagreements between Lithuania and Poland (1991–1994) in the USA. Thus, he was not associated with any of the conflicting interpretations of Lithuanian-Polish interwar conflicts neither in Lithuania nor in Poland. Some experts argue that good personal relations between Adamkus and Kaczyński had a major impact on the favourable development of Lithuanian-Polish relations at the time⁸⁵.

The tradition of warm personal relations and atmosphere of friendliness at the highest political level, developed by Adamkus, Kwaśniewski and Kaczyński, started to deteriorate in 2009–2010. First, having gained experience as Polish Foreign Minister, Sikorski, characterised by harsh and sometimes openly arrogant rhetoric⁸⁶, started to play a more pronounced and distinct role in Polish foreign policy. Sikorski publicly emphasised the broad and unquestioned political consensus

⁸² Hyndle, Kutysz, (note 10) p. 147–149.

⁸³ Adamkus, (note 57) p. 517.

⁸⁴ Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 3.

⁸⁵ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2, version in Lithuanian) p. 24.

⁸⁶ Expert interviews (I) and (III) with researchers at Polish foreign policy think-tanks, Vilnius, 20 01 2014 and 10 04 2014; Expert interview (IV) with high-ranking Lithuanian diplomat, Vilnius, 16 04 2014.

in Poland on the domination of Giedroyc's vision in its foreign policy. However, according to some experts, Sikorski himself (at least partly) sympathised with the political vision of the Piast dynasty (advocating Poland's participation in the "Concert" of the great European powers), which was unfavourable for Lithuania⁸⁷. In July 2009, President Adamkus was succeeded by President Grybauskaitė, whose strict and non-concessional rhetoric as well as an inclination to separate working relations from close personal ties contrasted with her predecessor's Adamkus' posture. Officially, Grybauskaitė has never revealed her political attitudes and has not aligned herself with any political party. However, the influence of conservative thought upon her views generated an inevitable conflict with the projections of the Piast dynasty ideas in Sikorski's foreign policy visions. Later, in 2012, Sikorski's advocated "reset" of relations with Russia provoked Grybauskaitė to "declare" a "pause" in Lithuanian-Polish relations⁸⁸. The situation further worsened as the relatively liberal and autonomous Foreign Minister Vygaudas Ušackas was replaced with the conservative Audronius Ažubalis. The conservative line (at least partly balanced by Ušackas before) prevailed in Lithuanian foreign policy. And the power centre of Lithuanian foreign policy-making was transferred from the MFA to the President's Office, as it was aspired. President Kaczyński balanced the harsh rhetoric of Sikorski, at least to some extent. However, as Kaczyński perished in the Smolensk catastrophe in April 2010, and his successor Bronisław Komorowski distanced himself from foreign affairs, Sikorski emerged as the main player in Polish foreign policy⁸⁹. The emotional background of Lithuanian-Polish relations at the highest political level was left to be shaped by Sikorski in Poland and Grybauskaitė in Lithuania – both strict and straightforward public speakers not avoiding to officially raise bilateral issues on which they disagreed. Thus, it is not surprising that their plainspoken messages got the attention of media in both countries and were further exaggerated for the sake of sound-bite headlines.

In 2013, there was an attempt to turn a new page in Lithuanian-Polish political leaders' rhetoric. The appointed Lithuanian Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius during his visit to Warsaw presented a public apology to the Polish nation for the regrettable fact that on the eve of the Smolensk tragedy, during the last visit

⁸⁷ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 22–23; Kasčiūnas, Keršanskas, Kojala, (note 2) p. 2–3.

⁸⁸ BNS, "D.Grybauskaitė apie Lietuvą ir Lenkiją: kai kuriuose santykiuose geriau daryti pauzę nei bandyti taisyti, kas nepataisoma" ['D. Grybauskaitė on Lithuania and Poland: In some Relations it Is Better to Make a Pause Rather than Try to Repair what Is Irreparable'], *Delfi.lt*, 04 06 2012, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/dgrybauskaite-apie-lietuva-ir-lenkija-kai-kuriuose-santykiuose-geriau-daryti-pauze-nei-bandyti-taisyti-kas-nepataisoma.d?id=58849941#ixzz3B3ezrxaF>>.

⁸⁹ Dambrauskaitė, et al., (note 2) p. 21.

of Polish President Kaczyński to Vilnius, Lithuanian politicians lacked the will to adopt the law, granting the right to spell non-Lithuanian personal names in the IDs in their original form using non-Lithuanian diacritical marks. After the meeting with Polish Foreign Minister Sikorski, Linkevičius stated that his apology was an effort to put Lithuanian-Polish dialogue “back on the normal track”. “The time of miscommunication, and frankly, non-communication of Lithuania and Poland has taken too long”, Linkevičius said⁹⁰. However, this step by the Lithuanian Foreign Minister towards rhetorical reconciliation with Poland was not supported in Lithuania, rather, on the contrary, it was publicly criticised by President Dalia Grybauskaitė and the Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius⁹¹. Polish-Lithuanian public “miscommunication” and “non-communication” at the highest political level continued.

From July to December 2013, Lithuanian and Polish political rhetoric normalised, since Warsaw kept its promise not to escalate the issues of national minorities during the Lithuanian EU Presidency. Harsh mutual rhetoric almost renewed after the end of the Lithuanian EU Presidency, but a deepening crisis in Ukraine and an increased Russian threat to regional and European security “silenced” rhetorical disputes between Lithuanian and Polish politicians, demonstrating their absurdity⁹² and incompatibility with the real content and quality of bilateral cooperation. Lithuanian-Polish cooperation strengthened in the light of the Russia’s threat revealing and mobilising the real potential of strategic partnership. In her State of the Nation Address delivered in March 2014, Grybauskaitė emphasised that “The direct threat to regional security [...] highlighted the importance of neighbourhood cooperation. Fully aware that the strength of the region is built on unity, together we – Lithuanians, Poles, Latvians, and Estonians – assessed the threats and joined our efforts to ensure security”⁹³.

The “warming” of Lithuanian and Polish political leaders’ rhetoric, inspired by Russian expansionism, might be further impelled by changes in Polish leadership after Tusk leaves Polish internal policy to be appointed the President of the European Council. Sikorski’s rise to the post of Speaker of the Parliament

⁹⁰ BNS, „L. Linkevičius atsiprašė lenkų“ [‘L. Linkevičius Apologized to the Poles’], *Delfi.lt*, 07 02 2013, <<http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/linkevicius-atsiprase-lenku.d?id=60617107#ixzz3BM3ilgpi>>.

⁹¹ BNS and lrytas.lt, „Prezidentė kritikuoja L. Linkevičiaus atsiprašymą Lenkijoje“ [‘President Criticises Linkevičius’ Apology in Poland’], *lrytas.lt*, 13 02 2013, <<http://www.lrytas.lt/lietuvos-diena/aktualijos/prezidente-kritikuoja-l-linkeviciaus-atsiprasyma-lenkijoje.htm>>.

⁹² Šapokas (note 18).

⁹³ State of the Nation Address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius, 27 03 2014, <http://president.lt/en/activities/state_of_the_nation_address/2014.html>.

demonstrates his choice to re-orientate himself from foreign towards domestic policy and focus on leadership within Civic Platform, which lost its charismatic Tusk. The appointment of the new Polish Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz and her choice of Grzegorz Schetyna as the new Foreign Minister, both relative novices to foreign relations (despite that since November 2011, Schetyna was Chairman of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Commission, experts claim that he played no significant role in Polish foreign policy)⁹⁴, marks a new stage in Polish foreign policy and, respectively, creates the preconditions for change in political rhetoric.

To conclude, the harsh rhetoric of Lithuanian and Polish political leaders is a temporary problem in bilateral relations, which so far has not created fundamental obstacles for bilateral cooperation, and can increase, decrease, or totally disappear either due to external factors (mainly, the Russian threat) or as a consequence of changes within the political elite's configurations in both countries.

Conclusions

The analysis of Lithuanian-Polish military and economic relations as well as cooperation in the field of energy provides no compelling evidence for the prevailing public (and often – expert) opinion that over the last few years Lithuanian-Polish relations are hostile and constantly worsening. To the contrary, in the area of defence, although NATO membership widened the circle of partners, Lithuania and Poland often enjoy more solid cooperation with each other than with geographically more distant member states. Defence capabilities and the potential of Lithuanian-Polish strategic partnership are effectively mobilised to respond to external threats, primarily, the growing aggression of Russia challenging regional and European security. Bilateral economic cooperation has been intensifying constantly during the last decade, and can be, when needed, employed to achieve other common goals like enhancing energy security or counterbalancing Russia. In recent years tangible results have been achieved in implementing joint Lithuanian and Polish projects of energy infrastructure development.

The major problems in Lithuanian-Polish relations – disagreement regarding the conditions of the Polish minority in Lithuania and the “harsh” rhetoric of

⁹⁴ New Eastern Europe, “Meet Poland’s New Minister of Foreign Affairs”, *Neweasterneurope.eu*, 19 09 2014, <<http://www.neweasterneurope.eu/articles-and-commentary/1331-meet-poland-s-new-minister-of-foreign-affairs>>; Magierowski M., “Schetyna as foreign minister: a disaster in the making”, *Dorzeczy.pl.*, 19 09 2014, <<http://dorzeczy.pl/id,4270/Schetyna-as-foreign-minister-a-disaster-in-the-making.html>>.

political leaders – although worsening the climate of bilateral relations, nevertheless, do not create obstacles for constructive cooperation in the above-mentioned areas. The disagreements on Polish minority issues in Lithuania have not disappeared from the bilateral agenda for more than two decades, and thus gained the status of a “frozen problem”. The intensification of escalation of this problem is usually related to the electoral cycles in both countries. However it creates more of an undesirable but habitual *modus vivendi* of Lithuanian-Polish relations rather than leverage or an “instrument of blackmail” in proceeding with other issues of cooperation. The “harsh” rhetoric of Lithuanian and Polish political leaders is influenced more by their personal characteristics and ideological beliefs rather than by changes in the content or perspectives of Lithuanian-Polish bilateral relations. The problem of hostile relations is a temporary one and can increase, decrease, or totally disappear subject to changes of the political elite’s configurations in both countries.

To sum up, the negative popular and expert evaluations of recent Lithuanian-Polish relations are hardly based on facts and tend to be superficial and misleading. The narrative of bad Lithuanian-Polish relations can be a result of focusing on dramatic changes of political rhetoric rather than on the unbiased analysis of practical bilateral cooperation. To some extent also, the narrative of spoiled Lithuanian-Polish relations might have been fuelled by unjustified expectations that the extraordinarily intense bilateral cooperation during 1994–2004 would further intensify and bring even more rapid and visible results. Meanwhile, after 2004, some of the bilateral cooperation issues were naturally relocated into multilateral, mainly EU and NATO, formats. At the same time, the bilateral agenda lost a segment of mutual support for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, which carried a strong emotional charge. The results of Lithuanian-Polish cooperation after 2004 though still tangible and important, are not nearly as striking and overwhelming as the achievement of a joint strategic objective, integration into the EU and NATO, was. Nevertheless, despite the unsatisfied expectations of further revolutionary achievements, Lithuanian-Polish day-to-day cooperation can be regarded as a tangible strategic partnership and productive neighbourly relations with, like in relations between all and especially neighbourly countries, some problems to be addressed.