

International Conference “Europe Whole, Free and at Peace - 2040”

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On 15 September 2016, in the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania held an international conference “Europe Whole, Free and at Peace – 2040” to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the international recognition and UN membership of the reinstated Republic of Lithuania.

The sessions at the conference covered the most memorable events of the foreign policy of Lithuania, the current state of developments and challenges in Europe and scenarios for the changes in the global power balance in the future, adherence to the principles of the international law and nature of the newly emerging players. The conference brought together some 30 intellectuals, academics, politicians, analysts and diplomats from more than 10 countries.

The conference began with the welcome address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania, and Linas Linkevičius, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, and was followed by an address of Michael Moller, Director-General of United Nations Office at Geneva, and prof. Vytautas Landsbergis, Chairman of the Supreme Council of Lithuania (Reconstituent Seimas). The prominent speakers addressed the current state of Europe and the role of Lithuania in it. H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė and Linas Linkevičius underlined the importance of unity within Europe and Lithuania’s determination to take an active role in creating it. According to H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, ‘Lithuania believes in Europe and is well aware that it depends only on us to find a common language’.

Prof. Vytautas Landsbergis described the current state of Europe as ‘uncompleted’, compared it to ‘the blindness of kittens that are facing rats’ (referring to Europe’s relations with Russia) and suggested paying greater attention to the strengthening of unity and soft power capabilities of Europe. Michael Moller also pointed out that it would be a mistake to believe that Europe ‘can continue business as usual’. All of the prominent speakers during the opening of the conference stressed the importance of small countries creating more united Europe. According to Michael Moller, ‘We need more countries like yours [Lithuania] that are eager to go an extra mile for a better future.’

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Presidential discussion: region, Europe and beyond

The Presidential discussion of the conference brought together President Valdas Adamkus, President of the Republic of Lithuania (1998–2003, 2004–2009), and President Aleksander Kwasniewski, President of the Republic of Poland (1995–2005), and was moderated by Arnoldas Pranckevičius, adviser to the President of the European Parliament.

Their discussion was focussed on the past, present and future of Central and Eastern Europe. The Presidents were asked to address three main issues: the main domestic and foreign policy issues of Lithuania and Poland during the presidency of V. Adamkus and A. Kwasniewski, situation in Ukraine as well as the advices of the Presidents to the EU leaders.

A. Kwasniewski, when asked what he considered to be the biggest success and biggest regret during his presidency, pointed out the following achievements: strengthening of Polish democratic institutions and Constitution; membership of Poland in the European Union and North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO); independent Ukraine. He also highlighted that NATO's enlargement in 2004 should be considered as the real end of World War II and the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. At the same time, A. Kwasniewski regretted that Poland's efforts to support democracy in Ukraine provided only 50% of success because 'unfortunately, Ukrainians wasted those good efforts in time'.

Valdas Adamkus noted that during 25 years, Lithuania proved being the country which wants to live by the principles of freedom and may be an example to Ukraine because 'With the right goals and ideas you can win'. Amongst his biggest achievements, the President distinguished Lithuania's membership in NATO and the European Union, the initiative of Lithuania and Poland to challenge Russia in Ukraine and Georgia.

Referring to Europe's strategy to deal with Russia on the issue of Ukraine, the Presidents highlighted two problems. On the one hand, the position of the European Union was problematic because of its fragmentation. A. Kwasniewski pointed out that the European Union should focus on maintaining the unity that it had at the beginning of establishment, the clarity on the position towards Russia and creation of peaceful plan to solve Russia-Ukraine conflict. On the other hand, a lot depends on the events and processes in Ukraine. Some of the initiatives in Ukraine are too slow (the Parliament of Ukraine passes only 40% of bills proposed by the Government); the political elites in Ukraine do not demonstrate cooperative will.

A. Kwasniewski and Valdas Adamkus suggested that under the current challenges, the EU leaders should continue fighting for fundamental values that the European Union was based since its inception. Problems in the EU institutions are easy fixable. It is the fundamental values that the EU leaders should be focused on. Thus, the European Union should keep its identity and culture.

Session: Outlines of global governance and order

The session brought together H. Em. Cardinal Peter Turkson, President of the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace; Sir Malcolm Rifkind, Former Foreign Minister and Minister of Defence of the United Kingdom; Prof. Robert J. Shiller, economist, Nobel Laureate; Uffe Ellemann-Jensen, Former Foreign Minister of Denmark; Lilia Shevtsova, Associate Fellow, Russia and Eurasia Programme, Chatham House and Charles Davidson, Publisher and CEO 'The American Interest'. The session was moderated by Prof. Irena Vaišvilaitė, Ambassador of Lithuania to the Holy See and to the Maltese Order.

The panellists discussed the nature of newly emerging players, changes in the balance of global power, adherence to the principles of international law focusing on Russia and implications of Russia's actions to previously mentioned issues. H. Em. Cardinal Peter Turkson pointed out the global pattern of Europe ('Lithuania's home, Europe, is becoming global') and proposed to accept the globalised culture with brotherhood.

Prof. Robert J. Shiller addressed the issue of coping with the Russians in the globalised world. He noted that the Russians are not so different from other European nations and underlined the danger of the usage of historic narratives by politicians trying to create animosity towards Russians. According to the professor, however, there is a global spirit developing despite the efforts of certain people.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind focused on Russia as one of the key players in international relations and current security challenges. He pointed out that at the moment, the world is not facing a New Cold War because there is no threat of the usage of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Nevertheless, according to him, the actions of Russia in Crimea posed a threat to the rule of law. 'Rule by law' and 'Rule of law' are two different things; however, V. Putin has difficulties to understand that. Sir Malcolm Rifkind suggested that European countries should put more efforts to underline that 'Rule of law' is a universal value, not only the concept of the West.

Uffe Ellemann-Jensen highlighted the importance of the internal challenges to the European Union: 'We have to remember that our institutions might be threatened not only from outside, but from inside, too'. He noted that post-factual society is polluting the minds of people. The times, when mass media is following the tradition to present both sides in the discussion, are dangerous because it is more difficult to select what the truth is.

Lilia Shevtsova pointed out two challenges in current Europe. She suggested that on the one hand, it may seem that the example in liberal community (referring to the United States) is lost: 'Sometimes they look like Russia'. Simultaneously, Russia's 'weakness is becoming a strength'. Russia is not capable to respond to domestic challenges and wants the West to recognise Russia's rules of the game at international level. Therefore, actions of the Western countries trying to accommodate Russia and in such a way to prevent internal turmoil in Russia are a mistake.

Charles Davidson addressed the issue of kleptocracy. The greatest threat is from hostile autocracies and kleptocracy. In his opinion, kleptocracy is a civilisational threat. The capitalists who want to work with kleptocratic regimes should realise that it may destroy the liberal international order.

Session: Quo vadis, Europe?

What policy measures should the European Union take in order to respond to current challenges the best way possible? This question was addressed by the panellists Štefan Fule, Former European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy; Prof. Wolfgang von Stetten, Former member of Bundestag; Juri Luik, Former Foreign Minister and Minister of Defence of Estonia; Volodymyr Ohryzko, Former Foreign Minister of Ukraine; Tornike Gordadze, Former State Minister of Georgia on European and Euro-Atlantic Integration; Žaneta Ozolina, Professor at the University of Latvia. The session was moderated by Vivien Pertutsot, Head of Brussels Office, French Institute of International Relations.

Štefan Fule described the European Union as a work in progress. In speaker's opinion, the European Union itself needs the crisis management mechanism and has to answer the question who is in charge within the institution. Štefan Fule suggested giving greater responsibility and powers to the EU member states because they have the capabilities to tackle the crises. The speaker also pointed out that the problems in the European Union should be first addressed at local level (in the countries), only then in the European Union.

Prof. Wolfgang von Stetten and Volodymyr Ohryzko suggested that whilst tackling current challenges, the European Union should focus on economic issues and values. Juri Luik pointed out the necessity to decrease the EU bureaucracy by 10 percent and suggested to involve the best intellectuals of Europe in the improvement process of Europe.

Tornike Gordadze provided a list of ideas, how the European Union should proceed in the future. In speaker's opinion, the European Union should keep the enlargement ideas alive and to maintain the dialogue with Turkey and other Middle East countries at the same time. He pointed out that leadership in the EU is needed and suggested the Germans to engage more on hard power. He also highlighted the need of more coherence in the European Union, especially between different regions in Europe because, for instance, Southern European countries do not understand why the Baltic States are so hysterical about Russia. The main problem, in T. Gordadze's opinion, is current lack of ambition in Europe. Thus, the European Union should reimagine the ambition for European continent.

Žaneta Ozolina claimed that Europe needs a goal and leadership; feasible tasks needs to be achieved. The professor pointed out that Europe is living in pre-election and post-election cycles that are used as an excuse for lack of serious action.

Forum of Lithuanian Foreign Ministers. Lithuania in the international politics: 25 years of restored diplomatic relations

The Lithuanian Ministers of Foreign Affairs Linas Linkevičius, Algirdas Saudargas, Antanas Valionis, Petras Vaitiekūnas, Vygaudas Ušackas and Audronius Ažubalis recollected the most memorable events from their terms at office and discussed the future of the foreign policy of Lithuania. The forum was moderated by Rita Miliūtė, Host at Lithuanian National Radio and Television.

When asked about the most memorable events from his term at office, A. Saudargas highlighted the establishment of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania and continuity of its activities.

A. Valionis distinguished several events such as the declaration of Lithuania's independence, withdrawal of Soviet troops from Lithuania's territory and Lithuania's application for membership in NATO. In the context of current challenges in Europe, A. Valionis raised a number of questions for the discussion: does Europe have an interest that is worth to sacrifice for? Is Europe well aware of current global realities? In opinion of A. Valionis, the most important challenges that Europe has to deal with at the moment are BREXIT – a mistake made by UK politicians, refugees, developing nationalism in Europe, inability to reform the EU, lack of political will amongst the EU politicians when dealing with Russia.

P. Vaitiekūnas highlighted that Lithuania reflects problems of the European Union and stressed that amongst the most important challenges that Lithuania is facing is the Astravyets nuclear power plant in Belarus (Lithuania has to mobilise Europe to require Belarus for transparent construction of the project and assure highest international standards), Ukraine (Lithuania must help Ukraine and do not allow Russia to stand back without responsibility for all wrongdoings it has made in Ukraine), BREXIT (the main interest of Lithuania is to maintain as much Britain in the European Union as possible).

V. Ušackas suggested that Lithuania should put more efforts trying to convince the European Union that certain fundamental differences exist between the West and Russia. According to Vygaudas Ušackas, Lithuania's main interest is to have as much Lithuania in the European Union and NATO as possible and as much the European Union and NATO in Lithuania.

A. Ažubalis stressed that politicians should realise that talking about the necessity to reform the European Union does not mean being euro-skeptic. A. Ažubalis pointed out several tasks for Lithuania's foreign policy makers. In the European Union, political decisions should be made by national representatives, not by the EU bureaucrats. Lithuania has to define a clear foreign policy vision towards Poland and Nordic countries. Lithuania needs to have bigger team of diplomats in the Embassy of Lithuania in Washington DC.

L. Linkevičius underlined two challenges for Lithuania's foreign policy: BREXIT (that is a test for a greater good) and the EU values (are European countries ready to defend their values?). L. Linkevičius suggested that currently Lithuania has the following strategic priorities: economic diplomacy, value-based foreign policy, functional NATO and European Union and regional policy.