

# Lithuanian foreign policy vis-à-vis Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostrovets

Justinas Juozaitis\*

## *Abstract*

The development of nuclear power in Belarus is an important issue addressed by Lithuanian foreign policy due to a mixture of geographic, political and nuclear safety concerns. Despite the pronounced relevance, the topic has received very limited academic attention. The paper attempts to fill this gap by identifying key objectives of Lithuanian foreign policy towards Ostrovets NPP and strategy for attaining them. The research is based on the analysis of high-level meetings and statements of six Lithuanian decision makers and a wide range of official documents. The paper argues that despite the apparent focus on nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP, Lithuanian foreign policy aims to prevent its construction or at least to prolong the process. In order to do this, Lithuanian pressures Belarus via European Union and other international organizations and platforms by highlighting the nuclear safety issues of the plant, Belarusian non-compliance with Espoo and Aarhus conventions and presenting it as matter of international concern.

## *Keywords*

Lithuanian foreign policy, Belarus, nuclear energy, Ostrovets nuclear power plant

## **Introduction**

The year of 2016 marks the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear disaster and the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the nuclear tragedy in Fukushima. Not only did these events impose massive environmental, social and economic burden on the states affected by the disasters, they have also increased the importance of nuclear energy in international politics by facilitating discussions on common approach to nuclear

\* **Justinas Juozaitis** is a PhD candidate in political science at Vytautas Magnus University. He is a junior researcher at Energy Security Research Centre and a member of Future Energy Leaders network “FEL-100” at World Energy Council. The author is grateful to the reviewers for their valuable comments that helped to improve the article. The views expressed in this paper are the author’s own and do not represent the views of institutions that he is affiliated with. E-mail: justinas.juozaitis@vdu.lt

safety. One can assume that these debates are mostly relevant to 33 countries, in which 442 nuclear reactors are in operation and 66 nuclear units are under construction<sup>1</sup>, but this assumption does not apply to Lithuania. Despite the closure of Ignalina Nuclear Power plant in 2009 and inability to further develop (or cancel) a substitute project – Visaginas NPP, nuclear safety is one of the most important topical issues addressed by Lithuanian foreign policy.

Firm establishment of nuclear safety in Lithuanian foreign policy agenda is associated with the 20<sup>th</sup> December 2008 proposal by the Belarusian State Commission to construct a nuclear power plant near the town of Ostrovets.<sup>2</sup> Such proposal, approved by Lukashenka's Presidential Decree three years later, provoked a sensitive reaction in Vilnius. The development of nuclear energy in Belarus is listed as the second most important external danger, risk and threat in the current National Security Strategy,<sup>3</sup> it is denounced as a political project in the resolution adopted by the Lithuanian Parliament in 2016<sup>4</sup> and it is often mentioned in important speeches by high-ranking decision makers, such as the state of the nation address by the Lithuanian President.<sup>5</sup>

Lithuanian attention to Ostrovets NPP is motivated by three types of concerns. First, Lithuania is troubled with the geographical proximity of the project as the location of Belarusian NPP is approximately 20 km away from Lithuanian border and 50 km away from its capital city Vilnius. Second, Vilnius has legitimate doubts about nuclear safety of the plant. Not only did Belarus fail to comply with important international treaties, namely Espoo and Aarhus conventions, at least three incidents were reported from the construction site in 2016. Finally, Vilnius is concerned about hidden Russian political agenda behind this project. Lithuania, together with Latvia and Estonia, aims to synchronize its electricity system with

<sup>1</sup> “Nuclear Power Plants World-Wide,” European Nuclear Society, <https://www.euronuclear.org/info/encyclopedia/n/nuclear-power-plant-world-wide.htm>

<sup>2</sup> “General Information about the Construction of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant,” Ministry of the Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus, <http://www.gosatombnador.gov.by/index.php/en/safety-of-belarus-npp/general-information-about-construction-of-belarus-npp>

<sup>3</sup> National Security Strategy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Rezoliucija dėl Černobylio atominės elektrinės avarijos 30-ųjų metinių bei Baltarusijos Astravo rajone statomos atominės elektrinės keliamo pavojaus Lietuvai ir siūlymo Vyriausybei imtis visų reikiamų veikslių grėsmei sumažinti, 2016 (Resolution concerning the 30th anniversary of nuclear disaster in Chernobyl and the danger of Ostrovets nuclear power to Lithuania and proposal to the Government to take action to mitigate the threat).

<sup>5</sup> „State of the Nation Address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė,” President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://www.lrp.lt/en/press-centre/press-releases/state-of-the-nation-address-by-h.e.-dalia-grybauskaite-president-of-the-republic-of-lithuania/25365>

Continental European Networks,<sup>6</sup> while Russia openly opposes these plans and supports the construction of Ostrovets' NPP politically and financially, provides it with technology and expertise.

Despite the clarity of Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP, identification of key Lithuanian foreign policy objectives and strategy towards it is a more complex task due to different and sometimes conflicting approaches expressed by Lithuanian decision makers and institutions. During the last seven years Lithuania has sent diverse messages to Minsk. Some acknowledged the right of Belarus to determine its own energy mix, while at the same time emphasizing the need to implement strict nuclear safety standards, to abide international law and to conduct the project in a cautious and transparent way.<sup>7</sup> Others proposed relocating the construction site of Ostrovets' NPP further away from Lithuanian border,<sup>8</sup> limiting the imports of electricity produced in the NPP at the EU level<sup>9</sup> or even preventing it from being constructed.<sup>10</sup> Hence, one can distinguish two most important research questions: what does Lithuanian foreign policy aim to achieve regarding Ostrovets' nuclear power plant and how?

The paper aims to answer these broad research questions, i.e. to identify key Lithuanian foreign policy objectives *vis-à-vis* Ostrovets' NPP<sup>11</sup> and strategy for attaining them. In order to do that, it analyses high-level meetings<sup>12</sup> of important Lithuanian decision makers, such as the President, Prime ministers, speakers of the Parliament and ministers of Foreign Affairs, Energy and Environment, and statements they make after them. Furthermore, the paper consults a wide range of official documents exposing Lithuania's approach towards Ostrovets NPP and

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<sup>6</sup> "Declaration on Energy Security of Supply of the Baltic States," <https://www.em.gov.lv/files/ministrija/15012015.docx>

<sup>7</sup> "A. Ažubalis to Belarusians: Experiment in the Wasteland, not near our Border," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/aazubalis-baltarusiams-eksperimentuokite-dykvietėje-o-ne-salia-musu-delfilt-2011-m-balandzio-28-d>

<sup>8</sup> "The U.S. is Lithuania's Partner in Energy Independence," President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/jav-lietuvos-partnere-siekiant-energetines-nepriklausomybes/pranesimai-spaudai/11500>

<sup>9</sup> "Safety of Ostrovets is a Concern for all the European Union Countries," President of the Republic of Lithuania, <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/astravo-ae-saugumas-visos-es-rupestis/pranesimai-spaudai/24709>

<sup>10</sup> "U.S. Administration Closely follows the Nuclear Safety of Nuclear Projects in the Baltic Region," Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://enmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/jav-administracija-atidziai-stebi-atominiu-projektu-sauga-baltijos-regione>

<sup>11</sup> The paper does not analyse Lithuanian foreign policy towards the construction of Baltic NPP in Kaliningrad due to the fact that its construction is stopped since 2013. Furthermore, Russia is not a signatory of Espoo and Aarhus conventions making it harder for Lithuania to voice its concerns.

<sup>12</sup> The research is positioned within the chronological boundaries of 2009 – 2016.

concerns regarding it. The application of such methodology allows analysing Lithuanian foreign policy in a systematic way. Not only does it help to define formally expressed concerns and objectives, but also it allows to determine how frequently Lithuanian decision makers voice them during the meetings with their peers, to distinguish how frequently they meet and discuss Ostrovets NPP with high-ranking officials of particular countries and multilateral arenas and to determine which arguments vis-à-vis Belarusian nuclear project they use the most. Finally, the application of this methodology allows comparing the nature of Lithuanian objectives and arguments voiced to Belarusian representatives and to officials from other countries and organizations.

The need for such paper stems from the lack of academic attention given to Lithuanian foreign policy towards Belarusian nuclear power plant. There are many studies and reports that touched upon or were exclusively focused on the development of nuclear power in Belarus, namely the ones by Agnia Grigas,<sup>13</sup> Antony Froggatt and Mycle Schneider,<sup>14</sup> Aliaksandr Novikau,<sup>15</sup> Arūnas Molis<sup>16</sup> and Justina Gliebutė,<sup>17</sup> David Marples,<sup>18</sup> Margarita Balmaceda,<sup>19</sup> Martin Jirušek and Tomáš Vlček *et. al.*,<sup>20</sup> Stasys Backaitis,<sup>21</sup> Mikhail Khurs,<sup>22</sup> Vyachaslau Paznyak.<sup>23</sup>

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- <sup>13</sup> Agnia Grigas, „Energy Policy: The Achilles Heel of Baltic States“, in *The Baltic States in the EU: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, eds. Grigas et. Al. (Paris: Notre Europe – Jacques Delors Institute, 2011), 65-86.
- <sup>14</sup> Antony Froggatt and Mycle Schneider, *The World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2015* (London and Paris: A Mycle Schneider Consulting Project), 2015, 45-46.
- <sup>15</sup> Aliaksandr Novikau, „Nuclear Power Debate and Public Opinion in Belarus: From Chernobyl to Ostrovets“, *Public Understanding of Science* 14 no. 1 (2016): 1-13.
- <sup>16</sup> Arūnas Molis, „Constructions of the Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant: Whom to Trust and What to Expect?“, *Energy Security Highlights* (2011): 74-76.
- <sup>17</sup> Arūnas Molis and Justina Gliebutė, „Prospects for the Development of Nuclear Energy in the Baltic Region“, *Annual Strategic Review* 10 (2012): 121-151.
- <sup>18</sup> David Marples, „The Energy Dilemma of Belarus: The Nuclear Power Option“, *Eurasian Geography and Economics* 49 no. 2 (2008): 215-227.
- <sup>19</sup> Margarita Balmaceda, *Politics of Energy Dependency: Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania between Domestic Oligarchs and Russian Pressure* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).
- <sup>20</sup> Martin Jirušek and Tomáš Vlček *et. al.*, *Energy Security in Central and Eastern Europe and the Operations of Russian State-Owned Energy Enterprises* (Brno: Masaryk University, 2015).
- <sup>21</sup> Stasys Backaitis, „Dangers from Proposed Belarus and Russian Nuclear Power Plants to Lithuania“, *Lithuanian American Council* (2009): 1-15.
- <sup>22</sup> Mikhail Khurs, „The Energy Security of Belarus as the Basic Condition of the Implementation of the Goals of its Socio-Economic Development“, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* 22 (2009): 130-142.
- <sup>23</sup> Vyachaslau Paznyak, „Control of Belarusian Denuclearization Policy and the Nuclear Weapons“, in *The Nuclear Challenge in Russia and the States of Eurasia*, ed. George Quester (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1995), 153-180.

However, explicit studies on Lithuanian foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Ostrovets nuclear power plant, such as a brief paper by Mažvydas Jastramskis,<sup>24</sup> are lacking and the paper intends to fill this gap.

The text is structured into three parts. It begins with a brief overview of nuclear power development in Belarus and its rationale, continues by presenting key Lithuanian concerns regarding Ostrovets NPP and concludes with the analysis of Lithuanian foreign policy that focus on the high-level visits and statements of key Lithuanian decision makers.

## **The development of nuclear power in Belarus: chronology and rationale**

In order to understand Lithuanian foreign policy regarding Ostrovets NPP, one must first study the development of nuclear power in Belarus and the rationale behind it. Beginning from the former, it should be noted that the initial stage of nuclear power development was marked by the unfortunate turn of events. In 1980s, Soviet Union planned to build two nuclear power plants in Belarusian territory with a projected generation capacity of up to 8 GW. Despite the initial progress, these plans were scrapped after the Chernobyl disaster in 1986.<sup>25</sup> Unfavourable wind direction and rainfall dispersed the majority (70 %) of the total radioactive fallout from the Chernobyl on Belarus and it covered a quarter of its territory. Radioactive fallout have affected more than 2 million Belarusians, it contaminated 20 % of agricultural lands and 22 % of forests.<sup>26</sup> Not only did the disaster prevented Soviet Union from building nuclear power plants in Belarus, but it also forced Minsk to allocate approximately 20 % of its government spending for the mitigation of consequences from the Chernobyl disaster after Belarus regained its independence in the early 1990s.<sup>27</sup>

Despite the magnitude of these figures, independent Belarusian authorities revitalized plans to develop nuclear power shortly after the collapse of Soviet

<sup>24</sup> Mažvydas Jastramskis, „Nuclear Ambitions of the Neighbours and a Possible Response from Lithuania“, *Energy Security Highlights* (2011): 17-19.

<sup>25</sup> Grusha, Mikhalevich and Tushin, *Public Acceptance of Prospects of Nuclear Power Development in Belarus* (Minsk: International Sakharov Institute of Radioecology and National Academy of Sciences of Belarus, 2014), 168.

<sup>26</sup> “The United Nations and Chernobyl: Republic of Belarus,” United Nations, <http://www.un.org/ha/chernobyl/belarus.html>

<sup>27</sup> Aliaksandr Novikau, *Ibid.*, p. 2, 6.

Union.<sup>28</sup> In 1993, Belarusian Council of Ministers decided to create a new programme for the development of nuclear energy, but it was postponed in 1998 due to the lack of financial resources. Plans to build nuclear power plant returned to political agenda in 2006, when Belarusian Government considered introducing nuclear power into National Energy Development Plan.<sup>29</sup> In 2007, nuclear power was incorporated into Energy Security Concept<sup>30</sup> and few months later Lukashenka distributed initial responsibilities among Belarusian authorities to do preparatory works and proposed three possible construction sites. One of them was Ostrovets in the Grodno region, while the other two – Krasnopolyansk and Kukshinovsk – were located in the Mogilev region.<sup>31</sup> At the end of 2008, Belarusian State Commission on the selection of the location for the Belarusian nuclear power plant defined the site near Ostrovets as a preferential one and it was officially confirmed by the Presidential decree No. 418 in September 2011.<sup>32</sup>

Key contracts and intergovernmental agreements followed shortly. Atomstroyexport, Areva, China Guangdong Nuclear Power Corporation and Westinghouse-Toshiba were the companies that have expressed interests to participate in the construction of Belarusian nuclear power plant. However, for varying reasons the proposals of the latter three were rejected.<sup>33</sup> Belarus state-owned Nuclear Power Plant Construction Directorate signed a preliminary contract for the construction of two 1200 MW AES-2006 nuclear reactors with a Russian state-owned Atomstroyexport in October 2011.<sup>34</sup> The deal was expanded in November 2011, when Belarusian and Russian governments agreed that Russia would lend up to \$10 billion to finance 90 % of the aforementioned contract. In July 2012, the general contract for the construction of two nuclear reactors for an estimate of \$10 billion dollars and additional \$3 for construction of new infrastructure was signed by Russian and Belarusian counterparts.<sup>35</sup>

In November 2013, the concrete was poured for the foundation of the first reactor signalling the beginning of actual construction process. The first reactor

<sup>28</sup> Vyachaslau Paznyak, *Ibid.*, p. 174.

<sup>29</sup> Sergey Tretiakovich and Philipp Speransky, „Safety Review of the Belarusian NPP Design“, (presentation at IAEA Technical Meeting TM-46995, November 3-5, 2014, Istanbul), [https://www.iaea.org/NuclearPower/Downloadable/Meetings/2014/2014-11-3-11-5-TMNPE/12\\_Tretiakovich\\_Speransky\\_BLR.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/NuclearPower/Downloadable/Meetings/2014/2014-11-3-11-5-TMNPE/12_Tretiakovich_Speransky_BLR.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 433, 2007.

<sup>31</sup> World Nuclear Association, *Ibid.*

<sup>32</sup> “Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No. 418, 2011”

<sup>33</sup> Martin Jirušek and Tomáš Vlček *et. al.*, *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>34</sup> World Nuclear Association, *Ibid.*

<sup>35</sup> Antony Froggatt and Mycle Schneider, *Ibid.*, p. 45,46.

is expected to be operational in 2018, while the second is planned to be finished in 2020. Two more nuclear reactors are proposed for 2025 if conditions prove to be favourable.<sup>36</sup> So far, the construction proceeds according to schedule. It was not delayed even by a significant increase in its costs (by 71 % from \$13 billion to \$22.9 billion) due to the fluctuations of the Russian Rouble.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, it might be delayed to some extent because of the fall of the reactor vessel, which Minsk decided to replace.<sup>38</sup>

The rationale behind the development of Ostrovets NPP is a puzzling one. Even though consequences of Chernobyl disaster, conflicting public opinion<sup>39</sup> and an ambiguous provision in Belarusian constitution that aims making the country a nuclear-free zone<sup>40</sup> forms a strong opposition against the project, Belarusian strategic documents indicate that security of energy supply is a strong driving force for the development of nuclear energy. Current Energy Security Concept aims to increase the coverage of national energy demand by domestic production, to diversify energy sources and suppliers and most importantly – to decrease the share of dominant supplier (Russia) in total energy import structure.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Belarusian studies show that not only will Ostrovets NPP help to achieve these aims, but they also present concrete numbers. Belarusian research claims that Ostrovets NPP will help to reduce the domestic natural gas consumption by a quarter thus reducing natural gas imports from Russia by the respective amount.<sup>42</sup>

In theory, such rationale is sound. The starting point of security of energy supply lies in diversification of energy sources, suppliers and routes. Lithuanian energy

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<sup>36</sup> „Safety of Nuclear Installations in Belarus,“ European Parliament Research Service, <http://www.eptthinktank.eu/2016/06/03/safety-of-nuclear-installations-in-belarus-plenary-podcast/>

<sup>37</sup> Antony Froggatt and Mycle Schneider, *Ibid.*, p. 45-46.

<sup>38</sup> “Russia’s Rosatom Agreed to Replace Reactor Vessel at Belarus NPP,” Eurobelarus, <http://en.eurobelarus.info/news/economy/2016/08/12/russia-s-rosatom-agreed-to-replace-reactor-vessel-at-belarus-npp.html>

<sup>39</sup> Opinion of Belarusian citizens on nuclear energy is divided. Latest opinion polls show that the majority of Belarusians do support nuclear power development, but they do not support Russia’s involvement in the construction of Ostrovets NPP. On the contrary, the majority of the population (47 %) believed that Belarus should not develop nuclear power as opposed to 25 % that were in favor of the development in 2005. Please see: Aliaksandr Novikau, *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>40</sup> The document does not explicitly define the applicability of this provision and leaves room for interpretation: does it only apply to nuclear weapons, nuclear energy or both? Constitution of the Republic of Belarus, art 18.

<sup>41</sup> Concept of Energy Security of the Republic of Belarus, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Olga Meerovskaya et. al., *Belarus Energy Sector: the Potential for Renewable Energy Sources and Energy Efficiency* (Minsk: Belarusian Institute of System Analysis and Information Support of Scientific and Technical Sphere and Belarusian Innovation Fund, 2014), 13.

strategies declare this principle; one can find it in NATO's summit declarations and various EU's documents. In practise, however, such Belarusian approach is fundamentally flawed. As it was discussed above, Ostrovets nuclear power plant is being built by Russian companies, funded by Russian money and will operate on Russian technology. The biggest problem is the choice of technology as there are no alternative producers of fuel assemblies for the selected Russian nuclear units. Therefore, the facts point out that Ostrovets NPP will have a contrary effect – it will fail to reduce Belarusian reliance on Russia in the energy sector and it will increase its economic and political dependence on its Eastern neighbour.<sup>43</sup>

In brief, Belarusian rationale behind Ostrovets NPP remains unclear due to the flaws in official argumentation. Nevertheless, the construction itself is a temporary input into Belarusian economy that has contracted by an estimated 3,6 % in 2015,<sup>44</sup> given that no other strategic objectives are pursued. So far, Minsk has managed to proceed with the project according to the schedule and the progress was not staled by the increase of an original estimate.

## **Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP**

Lithuanian concerns can be divided into three groups. First, there are geographical concerns that deal with the location and proximity of the plant. Second, there are concerns over the capability of Belarusian authorities to ensure the nuclear safety of the project, i.e. to achieve proper operating conditions, prevent accidents, mitigate the consequences of the accidents and protect the public and the environment from the radiation hazards.<sup>45</sup> Finally, there are political concerns that perceive Ostrovets NPP as a Russian political project that directly opposes the objectives of National Energy Independence Strategy, such as construction of Visaginas NPP and synchronization of the electricity system with Continental European Networks.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>43</sup> „Safety of nuclear installations in Belarus,“ European Parliament Research Service, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/583789/EPRS\\_ATA\(2016\)583789\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/583789/EPRS_ATA(2016)583789_EN.pdf)

<sup>44</sup> „Belarus: a repressed economy,“ European Parliament Research Service, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/579068/EPRS\\_ATA\(2016\)579068\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/579068/EPRS_ATA(2016)579068_EN.pdf)

<sup>45</sup> „IAEA Safety Glossary. Terminology Used in Nuclear Safety and Radiation Protection,“ International Atomic Energy Agency [http://www-pub.iaea.org/mtcd/publications/pdf/pub1290\\_web.pdf](http://www-pub.iaea.org/mtcd/publications/pdf/pub1290_web.pdf)

<sup>46</sup> National Energy Independence Strategy, 2012.



## Geographical concerns

The starting point of all Lithuanian concerns regarding Ostrovets NPP is its geographical proximity. Belarusian authorities claim that in the event of a major incident in the plant, three exclusion zones might be set up. The first one covers 5 km radius and prohibits people from entering, the second one might cover the area between 5 and 25 km and shall enforce high readiness, while the third one might cover up to 250 km radius, in which usage of local agricultural products should be limited.<sup>47</sup> Current Lithuanian Plan for the Protection of Lithuanian Citizens in the Event of Nuclear Disaster distinguishes similar zones and distances.<sup>48</sup>

Exclusion zones, however, serve more as general guidelines for the population and authorities, because distance cannot guarantee the protection from radioactive hazards.<sup>49</sup> In practise, the spread of radioactive contamination is hard to predict, because it is influenced by weather conditions, such as winds and rainfalls, geographical particularities, like water basins and dominating currents within them, etc. For example, some towns, such as Poliske, were abandoned despite being 60 km away from Chernobyl, while some evacuated villages in Belarus were 80 km away.<sup>50</sup> Radioactive contamination has even reached Sweden despite it being approximately 800 kilometres away from Chernobyl.<sup>51</sup> As it was mentioned before, the construction site of Ostrovets is about 20 km away from Lithuanian border and 50 km away from Lithuanian capital city Vilnius. Hence, there is a possibility that Vilnius' inhabitants, including key decision makers, parliamentarians, ministers, judges, prosecutors, heads of Lithuanian military, police and border guard service, etc. might have to abandon the city temporarily or permanently. Even if no harm is done to Lithuanian people and leadership, the evacuation itself might make the country ungovernable.

<sup>47</sup> Ministry of the Environment, „Viešo visuomenės supažindinimo su planuojamos atominės elektrinės Baltarusijoje poveikio aplinkai ataskaita protokolas“ (Presentation of Environmental Impact Assessment report of the planed nuclear power plant in Belarus).

<sup>48</sup> Valstybinis gyventojų apsaugos planas branduolinės avarijos atveju, 2012. (Plan for the Protection of Lithuanian Citizens in the Event of Nuclear Disaster).

<sup>49</sup> Countries might have different distances for exclusion zones. United States has two zones: the first one is up to 17 km from the area of nuclear incident, while the other one is up to 80 km. United States used this standard recommending its citizens to avoid 80 km radius near Fukushima disaster. Please see: “Nuclear Power Plants,” Department of Homeland Security, <https://www.ready.gov/nuclear-power-plants>

<sup>50</sup> “Chernobyl: Five Years of a Disaster,” World information service on energy, <https://www.wiseinternational.org/nuclear-monitor/349-350/chernobyl-five-years-disaster>

<sup>51</sup> Stasys Backaitis, „Dangers from Proposed Belarus and Russian Nuclear Power Plants to Lithuania“, *Lithuanian American Council* (2009): 2.

Another area of Lithuanian concern is the cooling system of Ostrovets NPP. The problem here is that it will use the water from the river Neris, which belongs to the Nemunas water basin – the main source of Lithuanian drinking water. Lithuanian Association of Water Suppliers emphasizes that any kind of radioactive pollution would reach the first watering facility of Vilnius in 10 – 12 hours, it would reach the others after 5 – 6 more hours and would continue to spread downstream towards Kaunas, Kaliningrad and the Curonian Lagoon.<sup>52</sup>

In brief, these arguments might be criticised for being too hypothetical and speculative. However, the point of this chapter was not to determine the likelihood of the accident in Ostrovets NPP, nor was it an attempt to estimate the magnitude of the radioactive contamination that it might cause. The intention here is to point out that any kind of damage caused by accidents or improper exploitation of the plant will most likely impact both Lithuania (including its capital city) and Belarus and that is major source of Lithuanian concern over the location of the Ostrovets NPP.<sup>53</sup>

## Nuclear safety concerns

Vilnius is critical towards Belarusian capability to prevent accidents in the nuclear power plant and to protect Lithuanian people and the environment from the radiation hazards.<sup>54</sup> On one hand, Lithuanian concerns are objective and justified. Belarus is in non-compliance with important international treaties, such as Espoo<sup>55</sup> and Aarhus<sup>56</sup> conventions. Furthermore, the region has experienced earthquakes in

<sup>52</sup> “Potential Threat to Vilnius’ Watering Stations,” Lithuanian Association of Water Suppliers, [http://www.lvta.lt/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/LVTA\\_37\\_3.pdf](http://www.lvta.lt/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/LVTA_37_3.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> “A. Ažubalis to Belarusians: Experiment in the Wasteland, not near our Border,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/azubalis-baltarusiams-eksperimentuokite-dykvieteje-o-ne-salia-musu-delfilt-2011-m-balandzio-28-d>

<sup>54</sup> The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Rezoliucija dėl Černobylio atominės elektrinės avarijos 30-ųjų metų bei Baltarusijos Astravo rajone statomos atominės elektrinės keliamo pavojaus Lietuvai ir siūlymo Vyriausybei imtis visų reikiamų veikslių grėsmei sumažinti, 2016 (Resolution concerning the 30th anniversary of nuclear disaster in Chernobyl and the danger of Ostrovets nuclear power to Lithuania and proposal to the Government to take action to mitigate the threat).

<sup>55</sup> “Meeting of the Parties to the Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Trans-boundary Context” Espoo Implementation Committee, <http://www.unece.org/fileadmin/DAM/env/documents/2013/eia/ic/ece.mp.eia.ic.2013.2e.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> “A Summary Report of Aarhus Convention MOP 5, PRTR Protocol MOPP 2, and their Joint High-Level Segment,” <http://www.iisd.ca/download/pdf/sd/crsvol190num2e.pdf>

the past<sup>57</sup> and three incidents have been reported from the construction site this year. On April 8, load bearing constructions have collapsed,<sup>58</sup> Lithuanian State Security Department have reported another incident in June<sup>59</sup> and approximately 300 t weighing reactor vessel was dropped from a height of 2 – 4 meters.<sup>60</sup> However, incidents in Ostrovets construction site are not the only reasons for scepticism in Vilnius. It also stems from other flaws in construction of nuclear power plants that are managed by Russian companies, such as the one in Leningrad-2 NPP, in which reactors' outer protection shield collapsed in July 2011.<sup>61</sup>

On the other hand, concerns over nuclear safety of Belarusian NPP are fuelled by uncertainty regarding the project. Amnesty International reports that Minsk does not shy away from arresting and prosecuting environmental activists, local residents and politically engaged citizens opposing the construction of the plant. Furthermore, it illuminates the attempts by Belarusian security services and the police to prevent the citizens from participation in public hearings and access to information on environmental matters.<sup>62</sup> Hence, such Belarusian behaviour makes it hard for Lithuanian authorities to distinguish between general repressive behaviour of autocratic countries towards its citizens and coordinated attempts to hide flaws of the nuclear project.

Another problem stems from the delays in reporting the accidents from the construction site. The collapse of load bearing constructions on 8 April were publicly announced by Lithuanian media on 4 May, while Belarusian authorities have acknowledged that incident really took place on 10 May.<sup>63</sup> The reactor vessel made for Ostrovets NPP fell on 10 July, while Belarusian Energy Ministry has partly acknowledged the incident sixteen days later by confirming that there was

<sup>57</sup> "Earthquake zone on EU border to host Belarus nuclear plant," Euobserver, <https://euobserver.com/belarus/115329>

<sup>58</sup> „Safety of nuclear installations in Belarus," European Parliament Research Service, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/583789/EPRS\\_ATA\(2016\)583789\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/583789/EPRS_ATA(2016)583789_EN.pdf)

<sup>59</sup> "Lithuania's Foreign Ministry summons Belarusian chargé d'affaires over alleged incident at Astravets nuclear power plant," <http://www.urm.lt/default/en/news/lithuanias-foreign-ministry-summons-belarusian-charge-daffaires-over-alleged-incident-at-astravets-nuclear-power-plant>

<sup>60</sup> "Belarus plant work suspended after installation mishap," World Nuclear News, <http://www.world-nuclear-news.org/NN-Belarus-plant-suspended-after-installation-mishap-02081601.html>

<sup>61</sup> "Russian Audit Chamber cites ballooning budgets in domestic nuke projects," Bellona <http://bellona.org/news/nuclear-issues/nuclear-russia/2015-01-russian-audit-chamber-cites-ballooning-budgets-domestic-nuke-projects>

<sup>62</sup> Amnesty International, „What is not Permitted is Prohibited: Silencing Civil Society in Belarus“, 2013, 38-41.

<sup>63</sup> „Safety of nuclear installations in Belarus," European Parliament Research Service, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/583789/EPRS\\_ATA\(2016\)583789\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/ATAG/2016/583789/EPRS_ATA(2016)583789_EN.pdf)

an emergency situation in the construction site.<sup>64</sup> Hence, the delays in reporting stimulate the assumptions that not all accidents are known. Finally, there are other factors, such as the resonance of Fukushima nuclear disaster in 2011, negative experience of seven thousand Lithuanian liquidators of Chernobyl nuclear disaster and poor translation<sup>65</sup> of Environmental Impact Assessment report into Lithuanian language, increasing the uncertainty regarding nuclear safety and forms a negative sentiment against Ostrovets NPP.

In summary, Lithuania's scepticism towards nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP can be explained by both objective and subjective factors. The former ones explicitly deal with facts: the shortcomings of the project, such as non-compliance with Espoo and Aarhus conventions or accidents in the construction site, the reliability of the contractor and the choice for construction site. The latter ones expose tendencies and events that lead Lithuanian authorities and society to assume that Belarus is not capable to ensure the nuclear safety of the project.

### **Political concerns**

Political concerns are mostly related to the perception that the rationale behind Ostrovets NPP is not an economic, but a political one. Second Investigation Department argues that Russia perceives energy independence<sup>66</sup> of CEE countries as a violation of its economic and political interests in the region. Russian response to perceived violation usually involves implementation of energy infrastructure projects that might have no economic rationale, but have the potential to strengthen Russia's influence in the energy sectors of CEE countries. The department argues that Ostrovets NPP falls within this tendency due to its hidden purpose to prevent Baltic States from completing Visaginas NPP and synchronizing their electricity

<sup>64</sup> „Russian nuclear officials attempt to bury construction mishap at Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant,“ Bellona <http://bellona.org/news/nuclear-issues/nuclear-issues-in-ex-soviet-republics/2016-08-russian-nuclear-officials-attempt-to-bury-construction-mishap-at-belarusian-nuclear-power-plant>

<sup>65</sup> Lithuanian diplomats openly claim that this document have been: „Google translated into Lithuanian-like language.“ Please see: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, „Lithuania“ (Presentation delivered at IAEA's technical meeting of the country nuclear profiles, 2016) [https://www.iaea.org/NuclearPower/Downloadable/Meetings/2016/2016-05-10-05-13-NPES/Country\\_pres/Lithuania\\_2016\\_05\\_11\\_LTU\\_PPT\\_\(IAEA\\_CNPP\)\\_final.pdf](https://www.iaea.org/NuclearPower/Downloadable/Meetings/2016/2016-05-10-05-13-NPES/Country_pres/Lithuania_2016_05_11_LTU_PPT_(IAEA_CNPP)_final.pdf)

<sup>66</sup> Judging from the context, the institution associates energy independence with an ability of countries to freely choose between several energy suppliers, routes and energy sources. On the contrary, Russia seek to limit this ability by having a dominant position in the energy supply chains of CEE countries.

systems with Continental European Networks.<sup>67</sup> At first, Lithuanian State Security Department neither agreed nor disagreed with the such statements by arguing that: “Lithuanian energy security may be affected by the nuclear power plant (NPP) projects in the Kaliningrad Region and Belarus.”<sup>68</sup> However, it changed its position in 2016 and directly supported the view of Second Investigation Department.<sup>69</sup> The political aspect presented by Lithuanian intelligence and counterintelligence institutions was further supported by the resolution of Lithuanian Parliament in 2016 that acknowledge the political aspect of the plant.<sup>70</sup>

Judging by the data from public sources, these arguments do reflect the essence of particular tendencies and events. First, it relates with Minsk’s ambiguous justification of Ostrovets NPP. As it was mentioned before, Belarusian authorities claim that the project will reduce its reliance on Russian energy supply, but it can only give a contrary effect due to the involvement of Russian companies, funding and technology. Second, brief history of independent Lithuania was marked with disruptions in Russian energy supply that lead to numerous price fluctuations and energy shortage. These disruptions and Russia’s political motives behind them are well documented in the scientific literature.<sup>71</sup> Hence, Ostrovets NPP can be associated with a broader Russian strategy to use energy as tool of political pressure against Lithuania and other CEE countries.

Third, the construction of Ostrovets NPP fits the official Russian position regarding the synchronization of Baltic State’s electricity systems. Putin personally spoke out against Baltic States’ plans to change the synchronous zone by appealing to the European Union officials. He argued that implementation of such project requires numerous investments and creates no added value.<sup>72</sup> Furthermore, lower ranking Russian officials stated that Baltic States will have to cover the costs of

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<sup>67</sup> Second Investigation Department Under the Ministry of National Defence, „Assessment of Threats to National Security 2013,“ 5-6.

<sup>68</sup> State Security Department, „Annual Threat Assessment 2014,“ 15.

<sup>69</sup> State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania and Second investigation department under the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania, “Assessment of Threats to National Security 2015,“ 34, 35.

<sup>70</sup> The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Resolution concerning the 30th anniversary of nuclear disaster in Chernobyl and the danger of Ostrovets nuclear power to Lithuanian and proposal to the Government to take action to mitigate the threat, 2016.

<sup>71</sup> For an extensive review please consult: Giedrius Česnakas. Energy Security in the Baltic-Black Sea Region: Energy Insecurity Sources and their Impact upon States. *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 2012. P. 155–197.

<sup>72</sup> „Interview to American TV channel CBS and PBS,“ President of Russia, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50380>

synchronization, because their planned withdrawal from the IPS/UPS system will force Russia to make additional investments in energy infrastructure.<sup>73</sup> Completion of Ostrovets NPP will strengthen the interconnectivity of Baltic States with the aforementioned system and thus it could be used as an argument against the synchronization. Moreover, the prices of the electricity produced in Ostrovets NPP might be dumped in order to exploit the upgraded Lithuanian infrastructure, namely “LitPol link” and “NordBalt” electricity interconnections, for exporting cheap electricity further into the European Union.<sup>74</sup>

Finally, the comparison of the development of Ostrovets NPP and Visaginas NPP shows that the progress of the former was mimicking the momentum of the latter. In July 2006, three months after energy companies of the Baltic States have signed a *communiqué* that included provisions to conduct a feasibility study on the potential of the new regional NPP, Belarusian Government renewed discussions on nuclear power (they were on hold as of 1998). Minsk included provisions on nuclear energy in its Energy Security Concept in 2007 – six months after Lithuanian Parliament adopted National Energy Strategy with the respective provisions. In 2011, Belarus was quick to react to Hitachi’s selection as a general contractor for Visaginas NPP. It took only two months for Minsk to approve Ostrovets as an official construction site for its new NPP, three months to sign an initial agreement with Rosatom’s subsidiary Atomstroyexport and four months to obtain Russian funding. Lithuanian Government approved the project of concession agreement with Hitachi on May 2012, while Minsk signed a general contract for the construction of Ostrovets two months later. In October 2012, Lithuania held an advisory referendum on the construction of Visaginas NPP and the majority of Lithuanian citizens voted against. After it became evident that Lithuania fails to make gains with Visaginas NPP, the construction of the Baltic NPP in Kaliningrad was stopped, while the construction of Ostrovets NPP began in 2013.

In brief, geographical, nuclear safety and political concerns should form a basis for a proactive Lithuanian foreign policy towards Ostrovets NPP, but do these concerns permeate the agenda of key Lithuanian decision makers? Do they raise them during high-level meetings with their foreign peers? How often do they raise them? Do they engage Belarus directly in bilateral meetings or indirectly by

<sup>73</sup> “Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia does not have to compensate Russia for withdrawal from Brel,” BNS, <http://www.bns.lt/topic/1911/news/48422735/print/true/>

<sup>74</sup> „Ostrovets NPP is a Geopolitical Project Aimed at Creating Difficulties for the Baltic Region“ (Astravo AE — geopolitinis projektas, kuriuo norima apsunkinti gyvenimą Baltijos regionui.) Delfi <http://www.delfi.lt/verslas/energetika/r-svedas-astravo-ae-geopolitinis-projektas-kuriuo-norima-apsunkinti-gyvenima-baltijos-regionui.d?id=71101196>

voicing their concerns to other countries and multilateral arenas? What objectives do they often declare in their statements? What arguments do they use to justify these objectives? In order to define essential objectives of Lithuanian foreign policy towards Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostrovets and to identify the strategy for achieving them, these questions must be answered first.

**Table 1:** Chronology of the development of Visaginas and Ostrovets NPPs.

Visaginas NPP		Ostrovets NPP	
Date	Development	Date	Development
March 2006	Baltic States' energy companies <sup>75</sup> signs a communiqué, mentions feasibility study of new NPP in Baltic States	July 2006	The Government considers introducing nuclear power into National energy development plan
January 2007	Seimas approves National Energy Strategy, the document urges to reintroduce nuclear energy after the shutdown of Ignalina NPP	September 2007	The President signs Energy Security Concept containing provisions to build new NPP
July 2007	Nuclear Power Law is adopted	July 2008	The Law On the Use of Nuclear Energy is adopted
August 2008	Environmental impact assessment report is prepared	December 2008	Ostrovets construction site is defined as preferential by the State Commission
July 2011	Hitachi is selected as the strategic investor	September 2011	The President announces Ostrovets as an official construction site
December 2011	Lithuania and Hitachi signs a preliminary agreement	October-November 2011	Atomstroyexport and Directorate for Nuclear Power Construction signs and initial contract, Belarus secures Russian funding
May 2012	Lithuanian Government approves the project of Visaginas Nuclear Power Plant Concession Agreement	July 2012	Atomenergoprojekt and Directorate for Nuclear Power Plant Construction signs a general contract
October 2012	Advisory Referendum on the construction of new nuclear power plant takes place, the majority vote against the construction	November 2013	The first concrete is poured

**Source.** Ministry of Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus<sup>75</sup> and VAE SPB<sup>76</sup>

<sup>75</sup> „General Information about the Construction of the Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant,“ Ministry of Emergency of the Republic of Belarus, <http://www.gosatomnadzor.gov.by/index.php/en/safety-of-belarus-npp/general-information-about-construction-of-belarus-npp>

<sup>76</sup> „Development of the Project,“ UAB VAE SPB, <http://www.vae.lt/lt/projektas/projekto-eiga>

## **Analysis of Lithuanian foreign policy towards Ostrovets NPP**

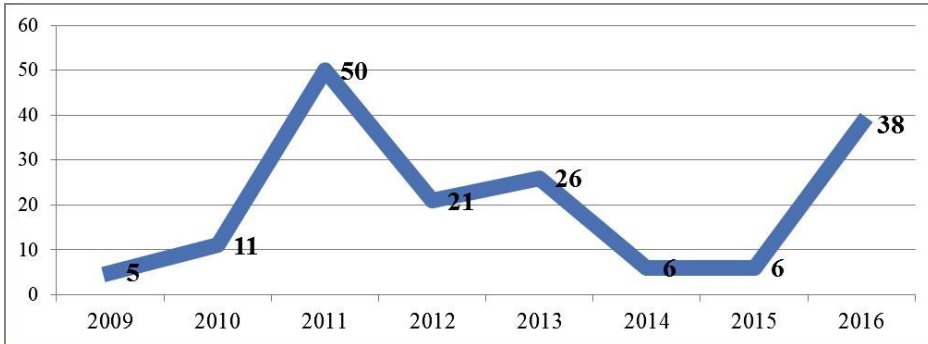
In order to answer the questions above, the paper studies high-level meetings and statements of Lithuanian President, Prime ministers, speakers of the Parliament and ministers of Foreign Affairs, Energy and Environment that explicitly or implicitly address Ostrovets NPP. The analysis is carried out in three major steps. First, the paper documents all the bilateral and multilateral meetings of the aforementioned Lithuanian officials with respective foreign representatives. Second, it notes the aims and arguments expressed in press releases following high-level meetings. Third, it analysis the data by measuring the intensity of the high-level meetings by country, international organization or multilateral platform, classifying Lithuanian aims and arguments and distinguishing most constantly repeated ones. Fourth, the data is juxtaposed with Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP, key Lithuanian official documents and contemporary research on Belarus-Lithuanian relations.

Such analysis helps to illuminate Lithuania's foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Ostrovets nuclear power plant in a number of ways. First, it shows how deep do Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP permeate the political agenda of key Lithuanian decision makers, e.g. to measure how frequent they discuss on the subject-matter with their high-ranking peers. Second, it helps to objectively identify the focus points of Lithuanian foreign policy on particular countries and multilateral platforms, on specific officially declared aims regarding Ostrovets NPP and arguments justifying them. Finally, the comparison of the above with Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP, key official documents and particularities of Belarus-Lithuanian relations ensures deeper analysis and thorough interpretation of the data.

### **Intensity of high-level meetings, main multilateral formats and bilateral partners**

The analysis shows that the aforementioned Lithuanian officials have participated in 163 high-level meetings implicitly or explicitly addressing Ostrovets NPP in a period of 2009 and mid-2016. The highest intensity was recorded in 2011 (50 meetings) and 2016 (until July – 38 meetings), while the lowest – in 2014 and 2015 (six meetings each year). Such fluctuations in the intensity suggest that the agenda of high-ranking Lithuanian officials was impacted by particular events and crises. The spike of the intensity in 2011 can be associated with the Fukushima disaster, collapse of the outer shield in Leningrad-2 NPP and Lukashenka's





**Figure 1:** Number of high-level meetings addressing the issue of Ostrovets NPP per year.  
**Source.** Own calculations based on the data provided by press services of the analysed officials.

decree confirming Ostrovets construction site. High-intensity in 2016 can be motivated by the timely constructions progress, incidents in the construction site and by the upcoming Lithuanian Parliamentary elections. In 2014 and 2015, Lithuanian decision makers were forced to react to other important international developments, such as Russia's military interventions in Ukraine and Syria, refugee crisis and negotiations on Iran's nuclear program, that diverted their attention from Ostrovets NPP. Despite the observed fluctuations, it is safe to say that Ostrovets NPP did permeate their agenda (please see the Figure below).<sup>77</sup>

The distribution of the recorded meetings among countries and multilateral formats is a diverse one. Lithuanian officials have discussed their concerns over Ostrovets NPP with high-ranking representatives from 25 different countries and presented them in 15 international organizations and multilateral platforms. Some of them are frequently addressed by Lithuanian foreign policy, such as European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations, the U.S., Germany, Baltic States, Poland, etc. However, few meetings on the subject-matter were somewhat unorthodox, for example, the meetings with high-ranking officials of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Cyprus, etc.

Despite the wide coverage of countries and multilateral platforms, main focus points of key Lithuanian decision makers are clearly identifiable. First, they mostly addressed the issues regarding Ostrovets NPP on the level of European Union. Lithuanian high-ranking officials have raised the issue during multilateral sessions (25 times) and met with various European Commissioners and the leadership

<sup>77</sup> On average, one high-level meeting that involved discussions on Ostrovets NPP took place each week in 2011.

on individual basis. For example, Lithuanian representatives have met with the President, High-Representative, Vice-President for Energy Union, Commissioner for Climate Action and Energy and the one for the Environment, Maritime Affairs and Fisheries (18 meetings took place in total). Second, Lithuania is active on both multilateral and bilateral levels. The majority of multilateral meetings took place in the sessions of International Atomic Energy Agency (6 sessions, 4 meetings with high-ranking representatives), United Nations (4 sessions), Asia-Europe Meeting (4 sessions) and Nuclear Security Summit (3 sessions). Most meetings on the bilateral level took place with high-ranking representatives of the United States (14), Estonia (9), Germany (8) and Latvia (8). Third, Lithuanian officials have actively engaged Belarus as well (10 meetings took place, please see Table 2).

**Table 2:** The quantity of high-level meetings addressing the issue of Ostrovets NPP by country or multilateral platform.

No.	Country or Multilateral Platform	Quantity of meetings
1	European Union	25
2	European Commissioners	18
3	U.S.	14
4	Belarus	10
5	Estonia	9
6	Germany	8
7	Latvia	8
8	IAEA	6
9	UN	4
10	Asia – Europe Meeting	4
11	IAEA High-Ranking Officials	4
12	France	4
13	Finland	3
14	Nuclear Security Summit	3
15	Other bilateral and multilateral meetings	43

**Source.** Own calculations based on the data provided by press services of the analysed officials.

In brief, the numbers discussed in this chapter indicate the following points. Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP do permeate into the political agenda of key decision makers. Even though the coverage of various countries and multilateral platforms is a wide one, the focus on particular international organizations and countries is clearly observable.

## Statements, objectives and arguments

The second part of Lithuanian foreign policy analysis towards Ostrovets NPP presents the study on statements that high-ranking Lithuanian officials make after the meetings discussed above. To begin with, it should be noted that the objectives declared by high-ranking Lithuanian officials can be broken down into two categories – general ones and specific ones. The former represents a broad direction of Lithuania's intentions towards Ostrovets NPP, while the latter – specific set of instruments and tools for attaining it. The most important research finding here is that key decision makers do not declare the intention to prevent the construction of Ostrovets NPP. On the contrary, they argue that Lithuania is interested in the nuclear safety of the project. Objective to make Ostrovets NPP safer is repeated 93 times, while there are only two statements that could be interpreted as ambitions of Lithuanian officials to stop the construction of Ostrovets NPP.<sup>78</sup> Other general objectives are even broader – Lithuania was either trying to internationalize the problematic aspects of Ostrovets NPP (62 repetitions) or to acquire political support from countries and international organizations (mostly European Union) in dealing with them (86 repetitions).

The repetitions of specific objectives are consistent with Lithuania's general objective to increase nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP, because they deal with nuclear safety issues. The decision makers were mostly arguing for an increased involvement of international organizations with some kind of mandate in nuclear safety, such as European Union and International Atomic Energy Agency, in the development of the Ostrovets nuclear project. They also emphasized the need for Belarus to comply with Espoo and Aarhus conventions, to conduct stress tests under EU's methodology (63 repetitions). Moreover, decision makers gave some attention towards the external dimension of EU's Common Energy Policy by arguing for same safety and environmental standards for energy produced in the

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<sup>78</sup> Both of these statements were delivered by former Energy Minister Arvydas Sekmokas shortly after the nuclear accident in Fukushima took place. After the Council of the European Union he argued that: „European Union must show solidarity and take immediate action regarding these countries [e.g. Russia and Belarus] by demanding them to ensure international nuclear safety obligations and to stop the implementation of these nuclear power plants [e.g. Ostrovets and Baltic NPPs] until nuclear safety is assured“ (Please see: <http://enmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/es-sieks-kad-kaimynysteje-statomose-ar-planuojamose-statyti-atominese-jegainese-butu-laikomasi-auksiausiu-saugumo-standartu>). Moreover, in a meeting with a former U.S. Deputy Secretary of Energy Sekmokas stated: „<...> we must ensure that potentially unsafe nuclear power plants in the region would not even start to be constructed“ (Please see: <http://enmin.lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/jav-administracija-atidziai-stebi-atominiu-projektu-sauga-baltijos-regione>)

third countries as in the EU (10 repetitions). There were few proposals to create a commission or a dispute settlement body that would involve international experts, Lithuanian and Belarusian representatives and to give it some authority in the construction process (3 times). Finally, the most aggressive Lithuanian proposal was to limit the electricity imports from Ostrovets at the European Union level if nuclear safety standards are not upheld (3 times, please see Table 3).

**Table 3:** Lithuanian foreign policy objectives regarding Ostrovets NPP and their repetitions.

Number	Objectives Regarding Ostrovets NPP	Repetitions <sup>2</sup>
<i>General objectives</i>		
1	Making Ostrovets NPP safer	93
2	Political support in dealing with issues related to Ostrovets NPP	86
3	Internationalization of Ostrovets NPP as issue	62
4	Stop the construction	2
<i>Specific objectives</i>		
1	More involvement of international organizations and mechanisms (European Union, IAEA, Espoo, Aarhus, stress tests, etc.)	63
2	Same safety and environmental standards for energy produced in the countries outside of the EU (external dimension)	10
3	Limitation of electricity imports from Ostrovets at the EU level	3
4	Creation of bilateral / international commission or dispute settlement body	3

**Source.** Own calculations based on the data provided by press services of the analysed officials.

As it can be observed from the data above, high-ranking Lithuanian officials declare that their main objective is nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP and they aim to achieve it by trying to increase the involvement of international organizations in the project and to persuade Belarus to comply with international conventions, but how do they justify it?

The analysis of arguments of key Lithuanian decision makers show a very clear tendency to voice concerns over nuclear safety and geographical proximity, but to keep the political concerns for themselves. Lithuania's main justification for intervening in the development of nuclear energy in Belarus is its non-compliance with ESPOO and Aarhus conventions (the argument is repeated 32 times). Moreover, they do not simply argue that Ostrovets NPP threatens Lithuanian people and environment. Instead, they are trying to connect these country-specific concerns with a broader geographical and topical context. For example, they are

suggesting that unsafe nuclear power plant is being built at the EU's external border (25 repetitions), as opposed to Lithuania's border. Alternatively, they argue that the aforementioned NPP is a threat to the Baltic Sea region and CEE countries (13 times) as well as the threat to drinking water supply (2 times). Finally, they emphasize that nuclear accidents have no borders (6 times) as previous incidents in Fukushima and Chernobyl show (14 times). Such formulations mean that Lithuania attempts to present Ostrovets not as a national problem, but as a concern for the international community with a strong emphasis on the international organizations and instruments having a mandate in nuclear safety, U.S. and the countries belonging to CEE and the Baltic Sea regions (please see Table 4).

**Table 4:** Arguments against Ostrovets NPP and their repetitions.

Number	Arguments	Repetitions
1	Non-compliance with ESPOO or / and Aarhus conventions	32
2	Unsafe nuclear power plant at EU's border	25
3	Disasters in Fukushima, Chernobyl or other NPPs	14
4	Lack of transparency	13
5	Threat to Baltic Sea region or/and CEE	13
6	Nuclear accidents have no borders	6
7	Water security	2
8	Rushing and underfunding	2

**Source.** Own calculations based on the data provided by press services of the analysed officials.

Last but not least, the research highlights the particularities of Lithuania's approach towards Belarus. Lithuanian decision makers assume softer position during the meetings with Belarusian officials than the one expressed in multilateral platforms and during meetings with the representatives from other countries. They encourage Belarus to be cautious about nuclear safety and argue that involvement of international organizations and compliance with international treaties will help Minsk to guarantee it. Furthermore, they remind Belarusian representatives about the problems of transparency regarding the construction process of the plant and common experience of the Chernobyl disaster. On these grounds Lithuanian officials ask for more involvement in the construction process of Ostrovets NPP via

some kind of commission or a dispute settlement body. Finally, Lithuanian decision makers do not tell their Belarusian counterparts that Ostrovets NPP is a nuclear threat to the region and do not threaten them to limit the imports of electricity produced in Ostrovets as they do in the meetings with other high-ranking officials and in the sessions of various multilateral platforms<sup>79</sup>.

To conclude, the analysis leads to the following observations. First, the number of meetings implicitly or explicitly addressing Ostrovets NPP exposes the great importance given to the plant by Lithuanian foreign policy as issues of minor concern do not permeate into the agenda of key decision makers. Second, Lithuanian foreign policy is characterized by a wide coverage of countries and multilateral platforms, but has concrete points of emphasis. Analysed decision makers were mostly focused on the U.S., Germany, Baltic States and Belarus itself. They have actively raised Lithuanian concerns over Ostrovets NPP during the sessions of European Union and International Atomic Energy Agency; expressed their concerns in meetings with high-ranking officials of the aforementioned organizations. Third, the data suggest that fundamental objective of Lithuanian foreign policy is to ensure the nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP by increasing the involvement of international organizations, such as the EU and IAEA, and pressuring Belarus to comply with Espoo and Aarhus conventions. The validity of such statement is strengthened by the fact that main Lithuanian arguments justifying such aim are centred on nuclear safety and geographical concerns that position the nuclear power plant as a problem of international community. Finally, the data shows that the key strategic feature of Lithuanian foreign policy is its indirectness towards Belarus. Lithuanian decision makers attempt to operate through international organizations and platforms, to internationalize the problematic aspects of Ostrovets NPP and to obtain political support from the U.S., Germany and neighbouring countries as opposed to direct and aggressive bilateral engagement with Belarus.

## **Contextualization of research findings**

The analysis of high-level meetings and following statements of key Lithuanian decision makers was concluded with two major observations. First, Lithuanian decision makers were exclusively focused on nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP by arguing for an increased involvement of relevant international organizations and pressuring Belarus to comply with international law. Therefore, the data suggests

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<sup>79</sup> The argument is grounded on the data provided in official press releases by the analyzed Lithuanian officials.

that the essential goal of Lithuanian foreign policy is to ensure the nuclear safety of the project, not to prevent its construction or relocate the construction site. Second, Lithuanian decision makers were most active in the European Union, an organization that is capable of imposing sanctions against Belarus. Furthermore, their rhetoric during EU's sessions and meetings with other countries, such as U.S., Germany and the Baltic States were far more aggressive than the one during the meetings with Belarusian official representatives. Hence, it suggests that Lithuania is focusing on indirect approach by mounting pressure on Belarus to ensure nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP and to comply with Espoo and Aarhus conventions via international organizations and other countries as opposed to pressuring it directly.

The latter research finding can be considered as a valid one because it corresponds to the important strategic feature of Lithuanian foreign policy, i.e. to approach national security issues via international organizations and platforms. As it was mentioned in the introductory chapter, current Lithuanian National Security Strategy lists Ostrovets NPP as the second external threat, risk or danger.<sup>80</sup> Other important official documents, such as the agreements of Lithuanian political parties regarding Lithuanian foreign policy and national security for the years of 2004-2008<sup>81</sup>, 2008-2012<sup>82</sup> and 2014-2020,<sup>83</sup> associate Lithuania's national security and foreign policy with its membership and active participation in international organizations, namely in NATO and the European Union.

On the contrary, the former finding can be questioned in a number of ways. First, attempts to ensure the nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP fail to address the full spectrum of Lithuania's concerns regarding it. Even if the plant will correspond to the highest nuclear safety standards, it will fail to diminish Lithuania's political concerns. Since they are mostly related with Russian foreign policy, one can assume that these concerns are taken seriously. Second, such aim does not correspond to a resolution adopted by the Lithuanian Parliament in 2016 that encourages the Government to take all the necessary: "diplomatic, legal, and technical action in order to stop the construction of unsafe nuclear power plant in Belarus."<sup>84</sup>

<sup>80</sup> National Security Strategy 2012.

<sup>81</sup> The Agreement of Political Parties Regarding Main Foreign Policy Aims and Objectives of the State during 2004-2008

<sup>82</sup> Agreement of Political Parties Regarding the Principles, Strategic Guidelines and Aims of Lithuanian Foreign Policy during 2008-2012

<sup>83</sup> Agreement of the Lithuanian Political Parties that Represent Lithuanian Parliament Regarding Strategic Guidelines of Foreign, Security and Defence Policies of the Republic of Lithuania.

<sup>84</sup> The Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania, Rezoliucija dėl Černobylio atominės elektrinės avarijos 30-ųjų metinių bei Baltarusijos Astravo rajone statomos atominės elektrinės keliamo pavojaus Lietuvai

Furthermore, such approach does not relate to a petition signed by approximately 65 thousand Lithuanian citizens that tasks Lithuanian Parliament to consider the adoption of the Law on the Protection of Electricity System and Market. In case the this law is adopted, not only it will forbid to sell Belarusian electricity in Lithuania, it will also task Lithuanian authorities with preparing technical conditions in order to prevent the electricity produced in Ostrovets NPP from entering Lithuanian electricity system.<sup>85</sup> Finally, such observation conflicts with the five year old findings of Mažvydas Jastramskis, who argued that Lithuania: “is taking responsive measures aimed at <...> adjusting or stopping the plans for the construction of new power plants [the ones in Kaliningrad and Ostrovets].”<sup>86</sup>

Given the arguments presented above, it is very unlikely that Lithuanian foreign policy is only concerned with the nuclear safety of the Belarusian project, even if the analysis of press releases indicates it. It is far more likely that hidden intention behind nuclear safety is attempts to stop or at least to prolong the construction of Ostrovets NPP due to two groups of arguments supporting such approach. First, extensive focus on nuclear safety *per-se* is not only an attempt to make the object safer, but as a by-product, it is also an attempt to slow its progress and to increase its estimate due to the fact that nuclear safety is both costly and time-consuming objective.<sup>87</sup> Furthermore, such Lithuanian foreign policy approach forces Belarus to choose between two negatives. If Minsk does not comply with Espoo and Aarhus conventions, approach them formally or simply fails to persuade others that nuclear safety is taken seriously, it loses its credibility as a responsible member of international community that can back-fire in a number of hardly foreseeable ways. On the contrary, if Minsk decides to comply with the conventions, allows for the EU’s representatives to conduct stress tests, invites more IAEA missions, or takes national measures regarding nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP, like the one to replace the fallen reactor vessel, it can lead to an increased financial expenditure

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ir siūlymo Vyriausybei imtis visų reikiamų veiksmų grėsmei sumažinti, 2016 (Resolution concerning the 30th anniversary of nuclear disaster in Chernobyl and the danger of Ostrovets nuclear power to Lithuanian and proposal to the Government to take action to mitigate the threat).

<sup>85</sup> “Petition against Ostrovets NPP,” <https://www.lietuva2.lt/pasiulymas/sustabdykime-nesaugiastravo-atomine-elektrine/57318f470a1d0d0e5c0128cb>

<sup>86</sup> Mažvydas Jastramskis, „Nuclear Ambitions from the Neighbors and a Possible Response from Lithuania“, *Energy Security Highlights* (2011): 17.

<sup>87</sup> For example, one study found that: „in nine of the 13 countries with the largest nuclear fleets, costs to comply with post-Fukushima requirements will total more than \$40 billion, mostly before 2020. Those countries accounted for 289, or two-thirds, of the power reactors in operation worldwide.“ (Please see: „Nuclear safety upgrades post-Fukushima cost \$47 billion,“ <http://blogs.platts.com/2016/03/29/nuclear-safety-upgrades-post-fukushima/>)



and prolonged construction time. If the construction process will be prolonged long enough, it presents Lithuania with a window of opportunity to synchronize its electricity system before NPP in Ostrovets is operational.

Second argument deals with Lithuanian capabilities and likely Belarusian retaliation. By voicing concerns over nuclear safety Lithuania is appealing to problems that particular international organizations and instruments, such as European Union, International Atomic Energy Agency, Espoo and Aarhus conventions, have a rather limited, but nevertheless a mandate to tackle. On the contrary, Lithuania does not have sufficient capabilities to stop or to prolong the construction by national means alone. Limiting the entrance of Belarusian electricity and forbidding its trade requires investments and agreements amongst all Baltic States.<sup>88</sup> Furthermore, cautious and indirect approach towards Ostrovets NPP reduces the likelihood of retaliation from Belarus. Since Belarus is an important Lithuania's partner in the transport sector and it is a common destination of the investments by the Lithuanian businessmen<sup>89</sup>, it is important not to over provoke it by aggressive rhetoric and direct actions.

That said, the paper argues that the essential aim of Lithuanian foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Ostrovets NPP is to stop or to at least prolong its construction process. Even though the analysis of meetings and statements of high-level Lithuanian decision makers show that they aim to ensure the nuclear safety of the Belarusian nuclear project, contextualization of such finding illustrate that nuclear safety is more of an instrument used for halting the construction of Ostrovets NPP, not an objective itself. Finally, both the empirical analysis and the contextualization show that Lithuanian foreign policy attempts to achieve this aim by tackling the issue of Ostrovets NPP indirect via international organizations, instruments and other countries.

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<sup>88</sup> "Energy Commission of the Lithuanian Parliament Discussed the Possibilities to Limit the Access of Electricity Produced in Ostrovets into Lithuania," Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania: [http:// www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p\\_r=119&p\\_k=1&p\\_t=163802](http://www.lrs.lt/sip/portal.show?p_r=119&p_k=1&p_t=163802)

<sup>89</sup> Lithuanian Statistics Department reports that in 2014 70 % of total goods transported by rail reach Lithuania from Belarus, 76 % of total passengers departed to Belarus by rail transport and 77 % of them arrived from Belarus by rail transport. Furthermore, Belarus comprises 30 % of transit load of Klaipėda port. Finally, Belarus ranks in 7th place considering Lithuanian foreign direct investments and Lithuanian business has a strong foothold in Belarus.

## Conclusions

In the end, the paper points out that many important Lithuanian documents, such as National Security Strategy, National Energy Independence Strategy, particular resolutions of the Parliament and agreements of political parties, form a basis for a proactive foreign policy towards Ostrovets NPP. However, it is the number of high-level meetings implicitly or explicitly discussing Ostrovets NPP that expose the true extent of the activity of Lithuanian foreign policy. Since 163 high-level meetings took place during the analysed period, Lithuanian foreign policy *vis-à-vis* Ostrovets NPP can be considered as an active one.

The analysis shows that three types of concerns that deal with geographical proximity, nuclear safety and political issues regarding Ostrovets NPP are influencing Lithuanian foreign policy. Despite the pronounced group of concerns, key Lithuanian decision makers choose not to voice political ones. Instead they focus on geographical proximity and nuclear safety by framing Ostrovets NPP as a matter of international nuclear safety problem that borders European Union, Baltic Sea Region and Central Eastern Europe as opposed to Lithuania. By doing that Lithuania aims to involve relevant international organizations, such as the EU, IAEA, into the project and to pressure Belarus to comply with Espoo and Aarhus conventions.

The study lists Lithuanian attempts to ensure nuclear safety of Ostrovets NPP as an essential foreign policy objective. Even though this particular objective was most frequently repeated by Lithuanian decision makers, it fails to address the full extent of Lithuanian concerns, namely it ignores the political ones. Contextualization of the objective leads to an argument that nuclear safety is more of a tool for prolonging or stopping the construction of Ostrovets NPP by increasing its estimate and construction time, than an objective *per-se*. The appeal to international safety standards helps Lithuania to engage Belarus indirectly, i.e. via international organizations and instruments. Such strategy stems from both limited Lithuanian capability to influence the outcome of nuclear power development in Belarus and attempts not to provoke Minsk's responsive measures in the transport sector or against Lithuanian businessman.

Hence, the paper argues that Lithuanian foreign policy aims to stop or to prolong the construction of Ostrovets NPP. It aims to do so by highlighting nuclear safety issues of the plant, Belarusian non-compliance with Espoo and Aarhus conventions and presenting it as matter of international concern that international organizations, such as the EU and IAEA, must deal with.