

**MODERN LITHUANIAN
FOREIGN POLICY:
THE ADJUSTMENT
OF TRADITIONAL POLICY**

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The authors consider the core areas of Lithuanian foreign policy. Special attention is paid to the adjustment of the major foreign policy vector, which concentrated earlier on the cooperation with the United States of America and strategic partnership with the Republic of Poland. The article analyses the attempts of Lithuanian president Dalia Grybauskaitė to formulate the so-called «new foreign policy» based on the multivector approach to the intergovernmental cooperation.

This research is timely because of an increasing influence of small states on foreign policy decision-making within the European Union. It emphasizes the need to analyse foreign policy priorities of the Baltic States and Central and Eastern European countries and to identify the dominant trends in the international policy in the region in order to forecast further development at European and global levels. This objective is achieved with the help of an integrated approach with elements of interdisciplinary research. Special attention is paid to the comparative-historical approach, which facilitates the analysis of the relations between the Republic of Lithuania and the neighbouring states and its principal partners. Alongside traditional methods of historical research, this work employs such methods as participant observation, content and event analysis, and simultaneous and comparative analysis.

The research and practical significance of this work is explained by its emphasis on the need to apply an additional theoretical framework to studies into the foreign policy initiatives of the Republic of Lithuania in the international arena. While earlier they were determined by the value (democratic approach), which was a reflection of American realism, today an increasingly important factor is the personality of the president, who does not always positively influence the changing policy of the country. The results of the research contribute substantially to the understanding of foreign policy processes taking place in Lithuania and the region in general.

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The assumption of power by D. Grybauskaitė in 2009 was considered by many analysts as an opportunity for Vilnius to reconsider its traditional foreign policy priorities based on the principles of pro-Americanism, globalism, and Russophobia. Lithuanian politicians were also driven by the new geopolitical situation in Europe and the world: the foreign policy concepts of the principal strategic partners of the Republic of Lithuania (RL) changed, which deprived the latter of an important foothold in tackling global international issues as well as hope to gain support in protecting national interests. Thus, challenged by these circumstances, D. Grybauskaitė was forced to develop a “new foreign policy”.

According to the current president, the problems and vulnerability of Lithuania stemmed from the fact that the country “had a single vector foreign policy — “either the USA, or no one”. Today I hope to make a turn towards a multi-vector foreign policy, so that it has several vectors: USA as a guarantor of security, and Europe will find us on the map, especially its North as our priority, our neighbours. Thus, I aspire, to bring about equilibrium; but it will take some time, and such changes cannot be rapid” [1].

Since Grybauskaitė was prone to abandon the classical principles of identifying the priorities of Lithuanian foreign policy, the expert community expected something of a revolution in the field of foreign policy. In 2010, the president declared that “this year will be a year of establishing my foreign policy priorities” [2]. However, Grybauskaitė’s 2010 annual report showed that she would not produce a radical change in the field of foreign policy. Moreover, all in all, everything said in the report followed the concept developed as early as 2004 (further EU and NATO integration and good relations with neighbours) and did not suggest anything new [3]. Thus, the 2010 and 2011 annual reports of the president, which paid limited attention to foreign policy issues, produced an ambiguous reaction among political observers. Today it has become obvious that Grybauskaitė faced both the absence of a coherent team (emphasized by the resignation of the Lithuanian foreign minister, Vygaudas Ušackas, in January 2010), and the problem of forming a clear foreign policy course (Lithuanian ex-foreign minister Ušackas even called Grybauskaitė’s foreign policy “vectorless”) [4]. Without suggesting a viable alternative, or a succession strategy, the president’s foreign policy has been sharply criticised recently for the lack of clear priorities that can be shared by the political elite of the country.

Over a long period of time, the principal strategic partner of Lithuania was the *United States of America*. The first steps Grybauskaitė took showed that her foreign policy would not follow V. Adamkus’s pro-American tradition. For example, once, having called Lithuania a “hostage” of the US policy, Grybauskaitė added: “the USA is still our important partner in the field of security and in the framework of NATO, but Lithuania will not be an implement of the US or Russian foreign policy. Lithuania will carry out its own foreign policy” [5].

Moreover, at the initial stage of her presidential term, D. Grybauskaitė refused to attend a dinner organised by Barack Obama in Prague, having sent the prime minister to replace her. In the interview to the Austrian newspaper *Die Presse*, D. Grybauskaitė openly questioned the actions of the western coalition in Libya, stressing that they went beyond the UN mandate [6]. However, political experts believe that for RL, as a member of the UN and a close ally of the USA supporting the idea of transatlantic unity, it is irresponsible to make such statements.

Summing up the issue of Vilnius policy towards the USA, one can say that the general background of Lithuanian-American relations has turned from positive to tense which poses a threat to their strategic character. At the same time, the connections with “old Europe” did not reach a new level. In July 2010, the famous Lithuanian political observer, R. Valatka wrote, “Berlin, Paris, and Moscow want to drive a wedge between Lithuania and the USA, and Lithuania had to abandon its foreign policy, and that is what did happen” [7]. The strongest criticism against D. Grybauskaitė focuses in this case on the fact that, having broken away from the USA, she has not yet offered a strategic alternative.

Similarly controversial (and almost conflict) situation has been developing within the relations between Lithuania and *Poland*. The problem is the national minority in the Vilnius region and the RL in general. The Polish are not satisfied with the fact that they cannot write their names in IDs and the names of streets in the areas of dense settlement of the national minority in the Polish language. Moreover, they also oppose the Law on education for the national minority schools, according to which the students of non-Lithuanian schools will have to take the same level Lithuanian language examination as Lithuanians from 2013, and certain subjects (first of all, history and geography) will be Lithuanised. At the same time it is evident that, as a strategic partner, Poland is more important for Lithuania than Lithuania for Poland. First of all, today the Republic of Poland is a priority partner of the USA in Europe. Thus, close ties with Warsaw can give the Republic of Lithuania an opportunity to draw the attention of the USA to its problems and vice versa. Secondly, Poland is a “big” European state that has greater influence in Europe than the RL. In other words, through losing Poland, Lithuania loses an important partner and the influence in the EU and NATO. Thirdly, Lithuania needs Poland to participate in the construction of a NPP in its territory and the creation of a “power bridge” between the states. But if the relations between the countries deteriorate further, Poland may decide to construct a NPP on its own and/or collaborate in this field with Russia, which builds a NPP in the Kaliningrad region (mass media disclosed the information on Russian-Polish negotiations about the purchase of power generated by the Baltic NPP).

Thus, Lithuania taking a strict position regarding the Polish minority, acts unwisely. At the same time, the position of the Polish foreign minister, R. Sikorski, who expects first steps from Lithuania, is absolutely logical [8].

However, the foreign minister of Lithuania, Audronius Ažubalis, when commenting on the Polish residing in the RL fighting for their rights, said that national minorities should not become hostages to short-sighted populist games, heated up by a „third party“ [9].

Thus, the potential of Lithuanian-Polish relations accumulated under V. Adamkus, has been exhausted, and the irrational “stubbornness” of Lithuania may have serious strategic repercussions.

The position of Vilnius towards the post-Soviet countries, the relations with which were a trademark of the ex-president Valdas Adamkus, has changed noticeably. Under V. Adamkus, Lithuania actively cooperated with *Georgia* and *Ukraine* in the framework of the US strategy of bringing democracy to the East aimed at their rapid Euro-Atlantic integration. This position can be either supported or opposed, but it was clear and consistent. As D. Grybauskaitė assumed power, the situation changed, which was heralded by a phrase ascribed to the president: “We sign partnership agreements with the poverty-stricken, and confront the decision-makers” [10]. Apparently, as a result, Georgia and Ukraine were forgotten by Vilnius as significant partners. Another misunderstanding was Lithuanian policy towards Belarus, which was not free from president’s idiosyncrasies. *Belarus* is important for Lithuania, at least, because it ranked first in terms of transshipment through the Klaipeda port in 2010 [11]. Moreover, Vilnius has always seen itself as a mediator between the EU and Minsk. Thus, when the attitude of the EU towards Belarus started to change (for the better, in the context of its increasing confrontation with Moscow), Lithuania found itself in the vanguard of establishing ties with Minsk. Just remember the mutual visits of the presidents of the two countries! It gave rise to negotiations on the construction of a liquefied natural gas terminal in Lithuania and the shipment of Venezuelan oil to Belarus through Klaipeda. However, soon D. Grybauskaitė’s pragmatism went beyond the EU values. As Reuters reports, at a meeting with European diplomats she said that A. Lukashenko was a guarantor of economic and political stability, as well as Belarusian independence [12]. The Lithuanian approach proved to be unwise, as a result of which the RL lost its face having relied on A. Lukashenko’s promises too much.

Finally, let us focus on *Russia*. It is worth noting that the outer animosity of Lithuania towards Moscow decreased as D. Grybauskaitė assumed power, but the relations between the two countries did not get off the ground. An issue that is worth paying special attention to is the Lithuanian perspective on the Baltic NPP. V. Putin invited Lithuania in the person of its president to participate in this project, but D. Grybauskaitė refused categorically [13]. The issue is complex, especially, in the context of the interests of Lithuanian energy security and its plans to construct the Visaginas NPP. However, a categorical position is not the best decision in this case. As the president of Lithuania, A. Grybauskaitė must minister to the needs of Lithuanian citizens, who are reluctant to pay three times as much for power. The Visaginas NPP, if it is constructed anyway, will not be able to guarantee low prices. Thus,

“burning the bridges” with Russia in the context of cooperation in the framework of the Baltic NPP project (even if limited to power transit) is, at least, unwise. K. Prunskienė is considered in Lithuania an openly pro-Russian politician. However, she was right to say that “Lithuania did not even discuss this Russian proposition... The decision to such an important for Lithuania issue as an increase of energy potential of the Baltic region and the connection to Western European power networks without losing the established connections with Russia and Belarus is feasible and will make it possible to supply the country with cheaper power. Alas, people are still being scared with the chimera of the Russian threat, which we cannot get rid of and which has truly done service to the conservatives and mass media as a means of intimidation” [14]. Finally, D. Grybauskaitė expressed her support for the minister of energy, A. Sekmokas, who confronts Gazprom and for whom the opposition organised a failed interpellation. First of all, the Russian gas monopolist is dissatisfied with the fact that Lithuania chose the most radical variant of meeting the requirements of the third EU energy package aimed at separating the gas supplied from the distribution infrastructure. To a great extent, it is the reason why Gazprom refuses to lower gas prices for Lithuania, but the president of the country — through supporting a “contentious” minister emphasizes that she is not bothered by this circumstance. In view of the negative tendencies, one is prone to believe that it will be quite difficult to improve the relations with Russia.

Conclusion

The assumption of power by D. Grybauskaitė in Lithuania gave rise to many expectations — both in the field of internal political regulation and the overcoming the large-scale economic and social crisis deteriorated by the increasing social unrest and foreign policy.

The president demonstrated the qualities of a tough and principled leader right after the inauguration, accompanied by a considerable shuffle within public authorities, chief prosecutor’s office, judicial system, and the structures of State Security Department. However, she did not only meet the expectations of Lithuanian citizens, but also caused understandable anxiety among the elite. Moreover, Grybauskaitė dared to question the significance for modern Lithuania of ex-president Adamkus’s foreign policy, which was based on cooperation with the USA supported by joint military operations in the framework of implementing American strategic interests. Having abandoned the single-vector foreign policy, Grybauskaitė focused her political efforts on the formation of a pro-European component of Lithuanian foreign policy. Today the bulk of criticism against Grybauskaitė stems from the fact that having abandoned the classical principles of Lithuanian foreign policy she failed to offer an alternative foreign policy strategy clear for the political elite of the country. The national security of Lithuania and its foreign policy are in direct correlation with the relations with three external figures — the

Russian Federation, the United States of America and the Republic of Poland. The last two years have seen considerable cooling in relations with the USA and Poland, which can pose a problem to the successful implementation of Lithuanian own national interests and objectives. The situation is deteriorated by the improbability of normalization of relations with Russia under the conditions of the ongoing restructuring of energy sector and an open opposition with Gazprom. After the presidential elections of 2010 one could not rely on close cooperation with Belarus either.

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