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**NATO EXPANSION AND LITHUANIAN SECURITY.
IS THERE AN OPTION OUTSIDE?**

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An attempt to answer the question posed by the title of this presentation does not appear to be as easy or simple as the question itself might seem to suggest. From purely theoretical academic or scientific perspective, the answer perhaps could be the easiest one: yes, there is an option and not the only one. It becomes a bit more complicated if one couples the latter with a historical empirical perspective and tries to apply both theory and practice in simulating future developments. Finally, from purely political point of view, some could regard the question, at best, being a provocative one or, at worst, put under a sort of taboo. I personally see it as a perfectly legitimate and important question to be debated within a security community of my country. I do believe it is taken in Lithuania with increasing seriousness.

1. Options for Lithuanian security policy

The mid of 1993 could be seen as a turning point in Lithuanian security debate, the result of which has been the official application for a full-fledged membership in NATO submitted by Lithuania in January 1994, several days before the Brussels Summit launched the PfP programme. Ever since, Lithuania has been steadily and actively following the chosen strategy of integration into the Alliance. Let me briefly trace back the origin of this policy.

Immediately before and after independence, the idea of Baltic neutrality was widespread and popular in Lithuania. Soon, however, the concept was abandoned as unsatisfactory and insufficient in light of Lithuanian security requirements. The value of neutrality is also cast into doubt by our historical memory: in the interwar years all three Baltic countries de facto pursued policies of neutrality which led to the demise of independence in 1940.

At some point the idea of favouring the development of an eventual trilateral defence alliance among the three Baltic states emerged. Ideas of establishing a "NATO-bis" (a collective defence organisation of Central European countries, including the Baltics and perhaps even Ukraine) were also put forward. Finally, primarily for geographic, as well as cultural and historical reasons, the idea of close relations with the Nordic countries was promoted. There were also modest attempts to suggest a policy of manoeuvre, or balancing, calling Lithuania a "bridge between East and West". Those, however, were put aside after Russia's parliamentary elections in late 1993.

All in all, none of the mentioned options proved to be realistic or viable for laying a foundation for Lithuania's security. That is why it has made a clear choice: to seek membership in NATO.

A brief excursion to the theory might offer some explanations. Conventional thinking on security

strategies of small states seems to focus on the twofold choice between some form of detachment from the surrounding international setting (ranging from neutrality or non-alignment to policy of balancing) and, on the other hand, a formalized security arrangement through alliances with each other or with one or more large states.

This classical twofold strategic choice is lodged in an understanding of international politics as an interstate anarchy of sovereign states with an unequal power basis. Though one may question whether the latter characteristic has remained unchanged during recent years, such traditional perspectives on policy choices seem to have informed the security planners in Lithuania.

This leads me further to explore on the question of:

Why membership in the Alliance?

Our attitude towards NATO is determined basically by three sets of interrelated factors. The first has to do with our geopolitical situation and historical experience; the second is NATO itself (widely recognised NATO's political and military efficiency and its growing importance for an emerging security architecture); the third lies in the very logic of the Euro-Atlantic integration process.

Let me dwell shortly upon each of them by drawing your attention to the following points:

first, although located in rather stable Baltic Sea region and confronted with no direct military threat, Lithuania perceives some security risks which, due to its geopolitical situation as well as political, economic and military uncertainties in its neighbourhood, may at some point in the future grow into threats to its national security;

second, the lessons of Lithuanian history as well as the rather tight limits on national material and human resources teach us that a small nation like Lithuania is not able on its own to ensure an effective defence in case of an external military threat or attack and that it should consequently rely upon a collective defence arrangement;

third, we view NATO as such a collective defence arrangement which has proved its political efficiency. We attribute that efficiency to the basic democratic values which constitute the foundation for and are protected by the Alliance. Lithuania shares those values too;

fourth, in view of the new tasks which NATO is presently assuming in order to deal with new security challenges and prove its relevance in the new security environment, Lithuania feels able and wishes to make an active contribution to these efforts.

These considerations, make Lithuania not just willing, but rather eager to join the Alliance. Over time, a full consensus among major political parties within the country has been achieved for this ultimate goal. Moreover, since NATO made the principle decision to enlarge, Lithuania seems to have abandoned all eventual alternatives for membership in the Alliance.

In what context?

More importantly, however, (here I come to the third factor determining our policy towards the Alliance) our policy towards this membership is understood as a component of the overall national strategy of integration into the Western or - as some call it - Euro-Atlantic security community. The course towards NATO, therefore, runs parallel to the course towards the European Union and WEU. The process must also be seen as interrelated to cooperation within forums in which Lithuania is already a member, such as the OSCE and NACC.

Yet while we are content to see the OSCE and, to some extent, NACC maintain and expand their roles as forums for comprehensive and inclusive international security dialogue, the pan-European approach seems neither realistic nor practical; Lithuania places no faith in it as a credible collective security arrangement. Only a policy of full integration into strong multilateral institutions while maintaining the best possible relations with all our neighbours, can provide a credible guarantee for Lithuania's overall security.

In this light, obviously, our membership in NATO would be a critical contribution, but not the only one. Similarly, the PfP is seen as part of a broader set of available practical instruments facilitating our integration: the "Europe agreement" with EU (since 12 June 1995) and Associated Partner status in WEU (since 9 May 1994) are crucially important incentives, as Lithuania prepares for eventual membership in these organisations. The PfP, on its part, effectively reinforces these efforts with a parallel development - both political and military - in the field of defence.

(Another aspect / dimension of the process is that Euro-Atlantic integration is no longer merely an objective of Lithuania's foreign policy - it has also become a priority in our internal matters.)

It is precisely in this context that I have to try and answer the question posed by the title of my presentation. To some extent it complicates a clear-cut answer, but gives rather flexible guidelines as to where and how Lithuanian security policy is likely to be heading. Also, within this context, it is the irreversibility of NATO's and EU's enlargement, that to an equal degree stipulates and limits consideration of any security options outside NATO.

Following further the logic of this context, the only alternatives to Lithuanian integration into Euro-Atlantic security community are either isolation or "reintegration" into the Russia-dominated CIS space. In reality, however, a course towards the former would most likely lead to the latter. The latter option, for obvious reasons (determined by the Lithuanian people and fixed in our constitutional bills), is excluded from Lithuania's policy planning agenda.

On the other hand, the very logic of the correlative components within our overall integration strategy allows for a much more flexible approach as we turn to discuss, for instance, whether Lithuania's security has a future without NATO membership?

2. Realities: Simulating the Future

Since the time when the issue of enlargement first began to dominate the Lithuanian security debate, we have come to realise the complexity of it and, thus, more rationally assess our own ambitions and realities.

In light of the assumption (which is a likely fact) that NATO will soon move towards the decision to admit new members, and understanding that certain countries will accede earlier than others, Lithuanian policy planners must consider three possible scenarios:

1. Lithuania is in the first detachment for accession to the Alliance;
2. Lithuania is a country which is "unlikely to join the Alliance early"; and
3. Lithuania's access to NATO is denied.

The first scenario is the optimistic one - "we are in", so in the context of our current discussion does not represent an item for debate. While the third scenario is pessimistic, the second is regarded as the more realistic one. The eventuality of the latter two developments is stimulating a search for other options.

What if the Process Stops?

Let me start with the pessimistic assumption that the outcome of NATO enlargement would not match our policy expectations, as NATO closes the process. This, firstly, would eliminate a critical Atlantic component from our integration strategy; secondly, although with the EU door open, would make any future advancement in our status within the WEU as a very unlikely and complicated matter (because the latter has a formal link with NATO, with Article 5 of the two organisations ultimately related); thirdly, and more importantly, stopping the process after an initial enlargement could give two misleading signals: one to Russia, namely that the West recognise Lithuania as belonging to a zone of special Russian interests; one to Lithuania, to renationalise its security policy, leading it to believe that it would have to rely purely on its own resources in response to any eventual intimidation, let alone a military one. This could certainly destabilise the relatively good relations between the two countries.

In the context of circumstances described, however, a solution would have to be found anyway.

As I mentioned earlier, in the foreseeable future, Lithuania alone has little chance of substantially enhancing its defence capabilities. Thus, a model of self-reliant military defence can hardly be treated as a security policy option.

Hypothetically, another alternative could take the form of a politico-military arrangement, with partners in the broader Baltic Sea region. However, the region seems too diverse to allow for similar solutions. Nordic states, which lead the economic and political process in the region, are rather cautious about regionalisation of security problems, even within such a moderate international fora like the OSCE. It would be more than naive to expect Germany to change its

(and NATO's) political line of disapproval of any alternative military security arrangements in Europe. Moreover, Russia apparently would find such an arrangement provocative.

One cannot rule out altogether the possibility that Lithuanian politicians, still, guided by the perception - right or wrong - of an immediate threat from the East, would favour and apparently opt for a "middle solution". The idea of a Baltic defence union, unsuccessfully put into practice during the interwar years of independence (signed on 12 September 1934, the trilateral Baltic Entente agreement was to last only till 1939), and recently rejected as a security option in favour of NATO membership, might well come to dominate the political thinking of all the Baltic states again.

On the one hand, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have such shared security problems, such common strategic interests and such limited resources that such an arrangement might seem to stand a chance of success. If it were expected to materialise, however, some vital preconditions would have to be met. Firstly, the Baltic states would have to learn the lessons of their history (the failure of the Baltic Entente in the 1930s), namely that any attempts at integrating their military structures and combining their defensive resources must be preceded by close coordination of domestic and foreign policies; and secondly, the existing approach of Western countries towards the build-up of Baltic defence establishments would have to change radically, for any Baltic effort to undertake such a joint defence project without the substantial support of Western governments would likely fail.

On the other hand, it would be difficult to predict the outcome of such an eventual independent aggregation:

firstly, in general, such mutually supporting arrangements by a number of small states are not felt to generate enough centralised defence or deterrence capability to offer adequate protection;

secondly, there is hardly any ensurance against the risk of the whole endeavour ending in isolation and neutralisation of the Baltic states and causing difficulties in cooperation with neighbours.

A hope of counterbalancing those risks could be provided by early membership of all three Baltic states in the European Union. This factor should certainly be added to the list of preconditions described earlier.

Gradually Towards, but Formally Outside

The realistic scenario confronts us with an alternative to early membership in the Alliance: gradualism. This alternative of gradually approaching would challenge us to correct our integration strategy making its NATO component "the long-term objective". If NATO enlarges and leaves the door open, however, this would make Lithuania more secure. Firstly, a precedent of accession would be set. This would give our government the opportunity to identify and study the problems that newly admitted NATO members face, and try to solve them in advance. Secondly, the geographic proximity of an enlarged Alliance (given our common border with Poland, of course,

provided it is in the first tranche of enlargement), would provide some strategic incitement to feel more secure.

However, if we really are serious about gradualism, the latter alternative should be given substance by a meaningful policy. That is why one can talk about an option which, due to its mid-term nature, should be described as the Lithuanian "not-yet-in-NATO" security policy.

Without going into details, the following points could be named as the critical components of such a policy:

1) Lithuania should seek to attain full membership in EU and Observer status in the WEU around the time as NATO makes its first enlargement, and undertake all needed domestic and external developments to that end. There is an understanding that the inclusion in the EU of Lithuania and the other two Baltic countries would be a comparatively light burden for the present member states, as the small and fast-changing economies are easier to prepare than are those of most other Eastern European states. Early membership in the European Union would add clarity to Lithuania's international position and strengthen its security. Even if it would not bring formal security guarantees it is fairly clear that what happens to one member state is the concern of all.

2) It should pursue effectively expanded and qualitatively deepened cooperation with NATO (both under the PfP programme and outside it) and bilaterally with its members. (The PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP), for instance, should go beyond peacekeeping and cover defence planning with frank discussions of the threats to security and agreement on the ultimate purpose of that planning. A streamlined, clear and comprehensive set of both technical and political criteria for membership in NATO should be sought, in order to enhance the general predictability of future developments. An intensification of the assistance to the building up of Lithuanian armed forces should be activated.)

3) Lithuania should strengthen and upgrade sub-regional and regional security and defence cooperation with the other two Baltic countries, Nordic states as well as Poland. (The Lithuanian battalion - a component in the Baltic Peacekeeping Unit - should be made available and ready to participate in eventual CJTF missions. A NATO compatible air-space control and defence system, combined with other Baltic and possibly Nordic countries, should be created. The Lithuanian-Polish Peacekeeping Battalion should be formed and made ready for eventual missions.)

4) In accordance with its national interest, Lithuania should undertake all possible domestic developments and use all possible diplomatic means to moderate both NATO nations' and Russia's attitude towards our future membership in the Alliance.

In fact, the mid-term outcome of the policy described would bring Lithuania to the current status of Sweden and Finland. Some have already suggested that there is a perfectly workable and respectable "Scandinavian" model of security for Lithuania; Finns now call it "military non-alignment", and Swedes go further to describe it as "military non-alignment to be able to stay neutral in the event of war". Both countries emphasise that this policy has replaced neutrality, as

it no longer corresponds to their security requirements. This strategy preference, however, has been formed in the long-standing national context of societal traditions and political institutions. At the same time, the overall political process in Europe is likely to reveal further directions for the search of security decisions in these Nordic states.

In the meantime, a policy option based on non-alignment does not seem to attract the Lithuanian security debate. Though it might be given some consideration, as a merely temporary solution, NATO membership is likely to remain the long-term Lithuanian security policy objective.

This may be a very rough presentation of our policy priorities in the realistic scenario. None of these objectives, however, has a vivid chance of being achieved without support and encouragement from the Euro-Atlantic security community.

I would like to emphasize this point. It is critical that before decisions are taken on the first round of enlargement the NATO members develop and forge a visible and articulated integration policy with regard to those aspiring but not likely to be among the first invited to join NATO.

From a Lithuanian perspective, such a policy should:

- formalise the continuation of NATO enlargement process (by recognising the countries which are aspiring for NATO membership and have made a steady progress in meeting the requirements for it);
- provide for an expanded and deepened set of PfP activities and an enhanced cooperation beyond PfP;
- contribute to an eventually broad congruence of integration processes into NATO, the EU and the WEU (by taking account whether or not the aspirant has signed a Europe Agreement with EU and enjoys appropriate status within WEU, or has the prospect of doing so in the foreseeable future.);
- formalise the process of self-selection and recognise it as a key element of NATO enlargement.

Such a policy would be as effective in replacing the somewhat vague and ambiguous Alliance's rhetoric about an open door as it would represent a true test of NATO's intentions in the enlargement process.

3. Conclusions

The issue of NATO enlargement continues to dominate Lithuanian security debate. Any discussion of policy options other than NATO membership should be seen in the political context which clearly reflects the scenarios suggested earlier. We have "the pessimists", currently perhaps in minority, who feel our prospects in NATO are wishful thinking, and, therefore, are most active in

contemplating alternative options. They tend to emphasise Baltic trilateralism as the best of all possible security decisions for Lithuania. "The realists" favour NATO membership, but realistically assess it as a long-term objective. They are eager to consider any temporary policy option which would enhance Lithuanian security and in due time integrate it into NATO. Early EU and WEU membership and deepening of relations with NATO are seen as the main objectives of such a policy. The third group - "the optimists" - feel that a precondition for the credibility of the policy aimed at ultimate, early and full membership in the Alliance, is its steadiness and solidness. Their views on NATO's enlargement are based on the "regatta" principle, whereby all prospective members are given a simultaneous start and proceed at their own speed. In other words, the question "who", they insist, should be answered first. It is the optimists who are the least outspoken when openly discussing other eventual policies.

The juncture of 1996 and 1997 is going to be important, if not decisive, to our security debate. As it seems today, Lithuania is not likely to be among the first invited to join the Alliance. The question is, though, if it should be taken for granted that the realistic scenario is going to take place. There is a risk that the door which seemed to be open might appear just to be made of glass, transparent but nonetheless closed. To avoid such an uncertainty one has to work out an option based on a two-way street policy which would allow a credible and confident development formally outside but gradually towards NATO. The sooner this happens, the better.

For the time being, I hope the Lithuanian politicians and policy-makers are conscious that statements about "never" and "forever" might turn out to be counterproductive to our diplomacy and, what is more important, not necessarily helpful to our long-term interests.