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## A small state as an advocate of Ukraine in the international arena - the example of Lithuania 2022-2024

**Annotation:** The Republic of Lithuania is a state that plays an important role in the international community. Although it is not one of the most powerful states, its activity and consistent policy make it a significant player in the international arena. It is noticeable that the role of small states in international relations is growing as a result of changes in the international environment. The result is progressive globalization and collapse of the post-communist system evolving towards multipolarity. The aim of the article is to analyze the actions taken to build the security of the region in the international arena by Lithuanian foreign policy in the era of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This article attempts to verify the hypothesis that Lithuania is able to launch a process that can bring benefits to the entire region, and thus contribute to building international peace and security.

**Keywords:** small country, security, diplomacy, NATO, EU, Ukraine, Baltic region, Lithuania

### Małe państwo jako adwokat Ukrainy na arenie międzynarodowej - przykład Litwy 2022-2024

**Streszczenie:** Republika Litewska jest państwem, które odgrywa ważną rolę w społeczności międzynarodowej. Pomimo, iż nie należy do grona najpotężniejszych państw, jednakże swoją aktywnością i konsekwentną polityką staje się liczącym graczem na arenie międzynarodowej. Zauważalnym jest fakt, iż rola małych państw w stosunkach międzynarodowych rośnie w wyniku zachodzących zmian w otoczeniu międzynarodowym. Rezultatem tego jest postępująca globalizacja i załamanie się postkomunistycznego systemu ewoluującego w kierunku wielobiegunowości. Celem artykułu jest analiza podejmowanych działań na rzecz budowania bezpieczeństwa regionu przez Litwę na arenie międzynarodowej w dobie rosyjskiej inwazji na Ukrainę. W niniejszym artykule starano się zweryfikować hipotezę, która zakłada, iż Litwa jest stanie uruchomić proces, który może przynieść korzyści całemu regionowi, a tym samym przyczynić się do budowania międzynarodowego pokoju i bezpieczeństwa. Zastosowaną w pracy metodą badawczą była analiza zawartości treści,

a także Case study, która umożliwiła zbadanie pojedynczego procesu, jakim jest polityka zagraniczna Litwy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** małe państwo, bezpieczeństwo, dyplomacja, NATO, UE, Ukraina, region bałtycki, Litwa.

### Introduction

Global efforts intended to meet the challenges posed by threats to international security increase the significance of small states, especially from Central and Eastern Europe. The world has not seen a greater security crisis on the European continent for three generations. Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022 loosened the nuclear arms non-proliferation regime, led to an increase in global spending on the military<sup>1</sup> and lowered the nuclear arms application threshold<sup>2</sup>. As regards nuclear weapons, it should be noted that the taboo on nuclear arms use is gradually disappearing from the Kremlin's rhetoric and military doctrine. On the other hand, a positive political phenomenon is the fact that the Western states united to support Ukraine. Moreover, a joint comprehensive plan for imposing a package of sectoral sanctions against Russia was implemented, which aimed at weakening the capacity of the Russian regime to finance the war in Ukraine.

Almost 12 months of multilateral efforts of the Western states directed at stopping the Russian invasion (including diplomatic contacts) started to gradually bring actual results. However, despite efficiency of imposed sanctions and determination of the Western states, in the meantime Russia was able to develop new-generation weaponry, including the hypersonic arms, as well as gain new arms supply from Iran and North Korea<sup>3</sup>.

Summit of the Council of the European Union in December 2022 resulted in the implementation of the ninth package of economic and individual sanctions against Russia, however, without detailing the specific involvement of the relevant parts or the schedule for achieving the objectives. Despite that, another package of sanctions enabled both large and small states to conduct direct bilateral and multilateral talks and agree upon preliminary actions to build trust which will, eventually, lead to the construction of an international system. As a result, the status of such states in the system of international relations will increase.

Lithuania initiates such actions and constitutes a permanent example for the international community. The state has become the most ardent supporter of the Ukrainian cause not only in the region but in the whole world. Its quick reaction and loud expression of support for Ukraine are conditioned by both the country's

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<sup>1</sup> Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) estimates last year's military spending to amount to 2,113 billion dollars.

<sup>2</sup> The war resulted also in the decrease in industry production, disruption of supply chains, increase in food and fuel prices as well as the escalation of tensions on international financial markets and in political relations.

<sup>3</sup> *Rosja zwiększa zakupy broni od Iranu i Korei Płn.*, PAP, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1424595%2Crosja-zwieksza-zakupy-broni-od-iranu-i-korei-pln.html> [accessed: 15.10.2024].

experiences of resistance against the Soviet regime and the security aspects in the region. Support for Ukraine is a manifestation of Lithuania's aspirations to become a regional leader in shaping the Eastern policy of the West. It is also an act of moral responsibility towards greater involvement in favour of its southern neighbour's independence aspirations. This is how Lithuania's status and trustworthiness as a reliable partner in international relations are bound to increase.

For the last decade Lithuania has been promoting its policy based on democratic values and support for nations in the post-Soviet area to gain sovereignty, and working on framing in the so-called Marshall Plan for Ukraine. Moreover, Lithuania is one of the most active countries striving to develop the Eastern Partnership. To meet that purpose, Lithuanian political elites have met more than 70 times with representatives of NATO and the EU states in different formats (bilateral, trilateral, even multilateral) to consider that issue on wider international forums.

Lithuania's activity resulted in granting Ukraine the exceptional status of candidate for membership in the European Union and its commitment to establish closer cooperation with Ukraine helps to maintain stability and security in Europe.

The present article is composed of three parts, devoted, respectively, to the rising significance of small states in international relations, Lithuania and its international role in the security crisis triggered by the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the evolution of its foreign policy.

The article sheds light on the efforts of a small state (Lithuania) towards negotiating UE and NATO's support of all kinds (including military) for Ukraine before the Russian military invasion of 24 February 2022. Engagement in support for Ukraine enables the small state to strengthen its international status as well as manifests Lithuanian aspirations to gain the role of a regional leader in shaping the EU's Eastern policy.

The aim of the present article is to analyze the actions undertaken by the architect of Lithuanian foreign policy following the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. We try to prove that states without significant military and economic resources, small in demographic and geographic terms, can nevertheless contribute to the strengthening of regional trust and predictability. Moreover, given goodwill and persistence, both superpowers and small states can agree on issues related to their individual and joint interests. The present article attempts to assess key decisions and actions taken within the foreign policy of the Lithuanian Republic, together with an evaluation of their significance and direction. Such an approach enables establishing positions and priorities in Lithuania's foreign policy in building its status and role in the international system.

The present research was based on such sources as expert reports, official statements, public appearances and published interviews in Lithuanian and foreign press, which enabled establishing positions, attitudes and values represented by Lithuanian foreign policy decision-makers. To accomplish the research objective, the method of case study was selected, which entailed having a more detailed look at the particular case and drawing conclusions on the reasons for change, course of action and results of Lithuania's foreign policy. The analysis demonstrated the way

in which Lithuania is trying to build its status (significance) as a regional leader and the instruments (political, diplomatic, economic, energetic) it uses for this purpose.

The starting point for the study is the hypothesis which assumes that 1) small states are capable of triggering the process which can bring benefits for the whole region and, as a result, contribute in some way to building international peace and security; 2) by leading active and effective foreign policy, which is oriented not only at national interests but also regional and wider joint interests, Lithuania contributes to building international security; 3) by playing the role of Ukraine's chief advocate on the international stage Lithuania proves that a small state is capable of exerting pressure on large states and superpowers to undertake necessary action to shape the regional security strategy and be ready to act in crisis situations; 4) Lithuania's efforts directed at drawing the attention of the international community and exerting pressure for it to take more determined action are starting to bring visible outcomes in case of Ukraine.

The theoretical basis for the research is the PIPP model, which is focused on estimating the international significance of actors in the international system. The model, designed by Andriy Tyushka, is based on two major types of actors in international relations – states and intergovernmental international organizations – in the process of decision-making on starting strategic cooperation. As such, the model is going to be implemented in the current study to estimate the role played by Lithuania in relation to its NATO and EU partners. The PIPP model comprises four factors of international status: power, influence, presence and performance. The final two factors most aptly describe the presence and activity of Lithuanian diplomacy and its particular political actors on the international stage, together with their role in different phases of the decision-making process in complex NATO-Russia-Belarus-Ukraine relations. The research methods applied in the study were content analysis and case study, which enabled the investigation of a single process (Lithuanian foreign policy) between 2022 and 2024.

The article can contribute to the development of research into foreign policy conducted by small states (especially in international situations) much beyond the case of Lithuania. As such, it is bound to be a useful guide for other political actors in the process of shaping effective geopolitical policy in times of international security crises and liberation from Russian influence.

### **The rising significance of small states in international relations**

International relations develop and evolve quickly. The end of the Cold War and the bipolar system transformed the world (only for a short time) into a dominating unipolar system, which is currently evolving into a multipolar one. The significance of regional superpowers and international organizations is rising. Even though not much attention has been devoted to small states, their potential significance is also rising due to increasing interdependence. This is reflected in the rise in the number of studies devoted to international relations, policy and significance of medium-sized and small states<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> C. Ingebritsen, I. Neumann, S. Gstohl, J. Beyer, *Small States in International Relations*. Washington 2006, p. 342; T. Long, *Small States, Great Power? Gaining Influence through Intrinsic, Derivative, and Collective*

It should be noted that the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw three waves of increase in the number of small states: after each of the World Wars and at the end of the Cold War. The reasons and results of these increases get their separate research coverage. For the purpose of the current study, it should be noted that together with the final fall of the post-Communist system and a resultant division in the hierarchical structure of international relations small states (such as the Baltic states) gained an increasingly greater degree of freedom of speech, choice and action in their foreign policy. It is only since recently that small states have been more of subjects in international relations. Due to the crises permeating the contemporary world researchers focus on particular countries, their capacities and limitations, both in terms of theoretical assumptions and practical policies.

Even though small states are the majority of the UN and NATO, not many of them lead active foreign policies which would try to influence regional development or international relations. Many researchers believe that small states are not necessarily weak ones despite quantitative limitations of their power (in terms of geographical, economic, military, psychological or informational factors, resources or population).

Sometimes their influence can be substantial, partly because small states can have a disproportionately large impact on such organizations as NATO and the EU if they operate actively and consistently and know what they want to achieve<sup>5</sup>. Additionally, it needs to be noted that membership in international organizations may give additional legal and political instruments of exerting influence on events or decisions. Keeping the nature of small states in mind, it is generally assumed that they are a driving force for the gradual development and consolidation of international law and the international system. Research shows numerous examples of successes and failures of small states, indicating at the same time internal and external factors that might have influenced their policies and choices (Thorhallsson<sup>6</sup>; Urbelis<sup>7</sup>; Vilson<sup>8</sup>; Jakobsen, Ringsmore & Saxi<sup>9</sup>; Janeliūnas<sup>10</sup>; Jakstaite-Confortola & Park<sup>11</sup>).

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Power, „International Studies Review” 2017, vol. 19, no. 2, p. 185–205.

<sup>5</sup> V. Urbelis, *Mažųjų valstybių veikimo būdai NATO ir ES bendroje saugumo ir gynybos politikoje*, „Lietuvos metinė strateginė apžvalga” 2015, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 60.

<sup>6</sup> B. Thorhallsson, A. Wivel, *Small States in the European Union: What Do We Know and What Would We Like to Know?*, „Cambridge Review of International Affairs” 2006, vol. 19, no. 4, p. 651–668; B. Thorhallsson, *Studying small states: A review*, „Small States & Territories” 2018, vol. 1, no. 1, p. 17–34.

<sup>7</sup> V. Urbelis, *Mažųjų valstybių veikimo būdai NATO ir ES bendroje saugumo ir gynybos politikoje*, „Lietuvos metinė strateginė apžvalga” 2015, vol. 13, no. 1, p. 59–75; V. Urbelis, *Išmaniosios gynybos pasekmės mažosioms Aljanso narėms*, „Lietuvos metinė strateginė apžvalga” 2013, vol. 11, no. 1, p. 9–29.

<sup>8</sup> M. Vilson, *The Foreign Policy of the Baltic States and the Ukrainian Crisis: A Case of Europeanization?*, „New Perspectives” 2015, no. 23, p. 2–18.

<sup>9</sup> P. Jakobsen, J. Ringsmore, H. L. Saxi, *Prestige-seeking Small States: Danish and Norwegian Military Contributions to US-led Operations*, „European Journal of International Security” 2018, vol. 3, no. 2, p. 1–22

<sup>10</sup> T. Janeliūnas, *Prezidento įtaka Lietuvos užsienio politikos formavimui: Galios centro pokytis D. Grybauskaitės prezidentavimo laikotarpiu*, „Politologija” 2019 vol. 94, no. 2, p. 8–55.

<sup>11</sup> A. Park, G. Jakstaite-Confortola, *Small State Status-Seeking: Lithuania's Foreign Policy Status Aspirations*, „Europe-Asia Studies” 2021, vol. 73, p. 1279–1302.

### What is a small state?

The analysis of a small state should start with providing its definition. There is wide literature on that topic. The most acceptable and common way of defining a “small state” is based on the criteria of population, territory, economy and the army. A characteristic feature of a small state is lack of its own army or an insufficient number of military personnel. Small territory and population carry far-reaching political and economic limitations. These factors lower the defensive capacity of such states, which means that small states are also those that cannot defend themselves when attacked from the outside. However, the present study adopts the framework of Piotr Bajda, according to which small states comprise countries with a population under 10,000,000 inhabitants, a territory under 80,000 square kilometers and the identification with this category by political elites<sup>12</sup>. In this perspective Lithuania meets all criteria of a small state – it has a population of 2,800,000 inhabitants (137<sup>th</sup> place in the world), the total territory of 65,000 square kilometres and the GNP of 68 billion dollars (86<sup>th</sup> place in the world).

Over the last few years some small states such as Lithuania have conducted active foreign policy and played an important role in international relations. For instance, in the years 2009-2019 Lithuania’s President Dalia Grybauskaitė largely contributed to strengthening the security of Lithuania and the region through implementing NATO’s defence plans and encouraging the Baltic States to prepare their own documents of this kind<sup>13</sup>.

The greatest and most significant diplomatic success of President Grybauskaitė were successful attempts to build an LNG terminal serving the Baltic States and Poland. Despite high building costs, it was a decisive step in liberating from Gazprom’s monopoly. Eventually, this move enabled free selection of gas suppliers, lowered the final price of gas and strengthened energetic independence. In effect, proper conditions for political independence.

The role played by Lithuania in international relations clearly demonstrates a positive impact of small states. The abovementioned cases also indicate that active foreign policy which is based on national and regional interests as well as a wider common good and which does not interfere with global or regional superpowers can be effective and beneficial. A comparative advantage of small states lies partly in the lack of egoistic motivation and the space for taking action, which may be missing in the case of great superpowers due to their political or strategic position or commitments.

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<sup>12</sup> P. Bajda, *Geopolityczne wyzwania małych państw europejskich*, [in:] *Geopolityka. Słowniki społeczne*, ed. J. Kłoczkowski, Kraków 2021, p. 337.

<sup>13</sup> According to Lithuanian political science researchers or the then-current minister of national defence Rasa Juknevičienė and former US ambassadors. As was evidenced by documents and correspondence between Vilnius and Washington revealed by Wikileaks, the then-current US ambassador Anne Derse called on Washington to respond as quickly as possible about what steps would be taken regarding NATO defence plans and security guarantees. See <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/penki-geriausi-dalios-grybauskaites-darbai-vienas-is-ju-buvo-pats-svarbiausias.d?id=79970647> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

A cumulative role of small states was shown through successful negotiations and adoption of a favourable political direction. For instance, a 2.8-million Lithuania had to fight hard to gain independence from Russia and was severely punished by its powerful neighbour for each step in that direction. This made Lithuanians highly sensitive to potential threats from Russia. To meet the country's needs for natural gas and to decrease dependence on Russian energy imports, Lithuania decided, as we already mentioned, to build an LNG terminal in 2012 and started to establish alliances with the Norwegian company Statoil and other potential gas suppliers. Besides, Lithuania's diplomatic efforts to increase energetic independence in the Baltic region resulted in the creation of a joint gas pipeline project with the neighbouring Poland. The Poland-Lithuania gas interconnector (GIPL) which was completed in 2022 enabled Poland and other Baltic States to overcome supply closure imposed on them by Gazprom<sup>14</sup>. Such examples clearly prove that despite being a small state, with high indicators of energetic dependence and vulnerability to threats, Lithuania can significantly contribute to the strategy of energy security in the region and serves as a good example for other states on how to be ready to manage on its own in crisis situations.

### **Lithuania's international role in the context of Russian invasion of Ukraine**

Even though few were aware of Lithuania's initiatives, most international observers keeping track of the country's foreign policy would agree that they were in the country's interest to contributing to stability and predictability of the region. On the other hand, voices of hesitation and cautiousness were heard in Lithuania, claiming that such a policy could have a negative impact on the country's relations with Russia and its allies. While the initiative was an important step in the country's foreign policy, Lithuania did not have a clearly sketched road map leading to the accomplishment of the objective.

Lithuanian leaders, especially the president, instantly saw direct and indirect threats from invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022. That was the reason why on a special sitting of the Lithuanian Seimas on 24 February deputies voted in favour of a resolution condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine and calling NATO and the EU to grant Ukraine the EU candidate status and to put the country under a plan for action for its membership in NATO. The deputies expressed instant readiness to provide Ukraine with military, economic, political, humanitarian and legal support.

Being aware of the fact that the security of both Lithuania and the remaining Baltic States is intertwined with stability in the Eastern part of Europe, the deputies believed that immediate support actions for Ukraine need to be taken, together

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<sup>14</sup> *Floating LNG terminal "Independence" sails into Klaipėda*, LRT- Lithuanian National Radio and Television, September 8th, 2015. Retrieved from: <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/73829/floating-lng-terminal-independence-sails-into-klaipeda> [accessed: 10.12.2023]; *Baltic leaders welcome Lithuania's "Independence" as energy security guarantee for all region*, LRT- Lithuanian National Radio and Television, September 8th, 2015, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/74087/baltic-leaders-welcome-lithuania-s-independence-as-energy-security-guarantee-for-all-region> [accessed: 10.12.2023].

with the implementation of political and economic reform, and Ukraine should be provided with humanitarian and developmental help while the issues of its sovereignty and territorial integrity need to be discussed on the forums of NATO, the EU, the OCSE and the UN. It was believed that the risk could be a chance to improve its own security and make sure that engagement in the Ukrainian cause would strengthen Lithuania's own international status. In other words, this was a form of preventive diplomacy.

The first actual occasion to disseminate these ideas and act towards their realization appeared soon when the international community started to prepare to condemn Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression on Ukraine.

Due to the initial lack of reaction and insufficiently constructive position of Germany and France, Lithuania decided to be the leader in proposing sanctions against Russia and advocating the Ukrainian cause not only in the region but in the whole world. The Lithuanian elites adopted the harshest attitude towards Russia, exercising continuous pressure on transatlantic allies to maintain a hard stance on Russia. On 14 March 2022 Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė said to Antony Blinken that the Western world should not only introduce existing sanctions but also expand them gradually<sup>15</sup>.

At the same time, Lithuania declared its readiness to resign from importing Russian gas. This strategy was based on the concept of pioneering in sanctions and setting an example for other European countries in energy security and the methods of coping with the upcoming energy crisis.

Judging by the EU's reaction to the Lithuanian initiative, initially the European Union did not take any decision on the high political level – neither to support nor to reject it. The reactions of EU officials seemed to indicate that the matter was considered on the medium level or even on the level of EU states. Lithuanians would not wait for the support of other EU partners and decided to completely stop importing Russian gas at the beginning of April 2022. This decision caused a so-called “domino effect” as at the end of April 2022 Latvia and Estonia followed Lithuania's footsteps and decided to stop importing natural gas from Russia. As a result, the whole Baltic region became less dependent on Russian energy resources<sup>16</sup>.

A key step towards broadening the range of sanctions against the Russian regime was exercising pressure by the Lithuanian government on Lithuanian and foreign companies to limit or break up economic and trade cooperation with Russia. Moreover, the government decided to freeze the assets of Russian entrepreneurs and citizens connected with the Kremlin regime. As a result, since 24 February Lithuania froze 3.224 million EUR, 1.368 million USD and 645,000 RUB and imposed sanctions against 11 companies and 5 physical persons. Latvia and Estonia followed suit later on<sup>17</sup>.

<sup>15</sup> K. Dudzińska, *Litwa wobec rosyjskiej agresji na Ukrainę*, „PISM Commentary” 2022, no. 57.

<sup>16</sup> M. Maluzinas, *Rola małych państw w promowaniu bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego: strategia Litwy*, „Przegląd Strategiczny” 2023, vol.16, no. 2, p. 158.

<sup>17</sup> A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Wpływy rosyjskich oligarchów w państwach bałtyckich*, „Komentarze IEŚ”, no.



The analyzed actions were not always fully supported by other countries and encouraging other states to join or expand a sanction package against Russia was not always successful, as was in the case of Hungary. One example situation was when the EU gave up imposing sanctions against the patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church, Cyril, Lithuania placed the Russian patriarch on the black list of sanctions against Russia with no special consultations. Another case was the state position to German pressure to erase the blockage of transit from Russia to Kaliningrad from the list of planning sanctions against Russian Federation. Lithuania's tough policy course continued to promote the concept of unanimous implementation and expansion of further economic sanctions against Russia which were based on a comprehensive political approach (for instance, through implementing visa restrictions for Russian citizens, dismantling Soviet monuments, making changes in the school curriculum and forbidding broadcast of Russian and Belarusian radio and television programs)<sup>18</sup>.

### **The effect of Russian invasion on Lithuania's policy towards Belarus**

The Lithuanian diplomacy directed its efforts also at drawing the attention of the international community and exercising pressure to take more decisive actions towards the regime in Minsk, which allowed Russian forces to attack Ukraine from its territory. The first step towards implementing the whole package of sanctions not only against Russia but also Belarus was President Nausėda's announcement during the special summit of B9 leaders in Warsaw on 25 February 2022.

During this summit President Nausėda put forward a working document that proposed a strategy of implementing another package of sectoral sanctions against Belarus, which was based on a consolidated and expanded list of new measures of EU directed at political elites of Belarus, companies and persons related to them (comprising, among others, transportation and banking/financial sectors). The working document emphasized the regulations for implementing EU sanctions which would prohibit transport of goods to and from Russia and Belarus as well as entry of Russian and Belarusian vessels to ports of the European Economic Area and impose limits on EUR currency transfer to Belarus and Russia<sup>19</sup>.

Acting under the diplomatic pressure of the presidents of Lithuania and Poland, on 8 April 2022 the Council of the European Union decided to implement new sectoral sanctions against Russia's closest ally, Belarus, which comprised among others partial prohibition of goods transportation into the EU territory. On 3 June 2022 the Council of the European Union implemented another set of sanctions, which comprised the Lithuanian demand to forbid provision of EUR banknotes to Belarus<sup>20</sup>.

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622 (134/2022), <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/wplywy-rosyjskich-oligarchow-w-panstwach-baltyckich/> [accessed: 10.12.2023].

<sup>18</sup> M. Maluzinas, *Rola małych...*, p. 160.

<sup>19</sup> *Sankcje na rosyjski i białoruski transport. Apel ministrów transportu Polski i krajów bałtyckich*, Polskie-Radio24.pl, March 24, 2022, <https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1223/Artykul/2926058,Sankcje-na-rosyjski-i-bialoruski-transport-Apel-ministrow-transportu-Polski-i-krajow-baltyckich> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

<sup>20</sup> Moreover, many Lithuanian companies which stopped their cooperation with Russia did the same in relation to Belarus. Lithuania started to limit the economic cooperation with Belarus before, due

It is important to note here that the Lithuanian president believed that the strategy of strengthening sanctions against Belarus would result in improving the internal security of the entire EU. Implementing expanded sanctions against Belarus was a joint diplomatic achievement of Lithuania and the Baltic States.

### The issue of Ukrainian grain exports

Lithuania is actively involved in helping Ukraine export grain as Ukrainian ports in the Black Sea are blocked by Russian warships, which destabilizes Ukrainian exports to the world markets. As is estimated by experts the export needs of Ukraine in the years 2022-2024 amounted to 18,000,000 tonnes of grain. Moreover, according to the EU estimates, in the economic year 2022-2023 Ukraine exported 31,000,000 tonnes of wheat, among others, to Algeria, Morocco, Egypt, Pakistan and Nigeria<sup>21</sup>.

Since the beginning of the Polish-Ukrainian dispute over grain import Lithuania tried to keep an equal balance to Warsaw and Kiev and it did not join the critics of Poland (e.g., Germany, France or the European Commission) when it decided not to prolong limits free grain trade with Ukraine. Lithuanian political elites called on Warsaw and Kiev to solve the conflict and return to dialogue. According to the Lithuanian standpoint, the only benefactor of disputes was Moscow<sup>22</sup>.

Moreover, Lithuania strived to weaken the international pressure exerted on the Polish political elites. As a result of Lithuanian-Ukrainian negotiations in October 2023 Ukrainian grain was transferred from the Ukrainian-Polish border to the territory of Lithuania, to the port of Klaipėda. What is more, railway transportation of goods between Klaipėda and Kiev started to grow, on the basis of the agreement of May 2024 on permanent transportation of goods<sup>23</sup>.

Thus, Lithuania used the increase of Poland's assertiveness in relations with Ukraine to adopt the role of the main advocate of the latter country on the international stage, as well as to become a leader of a struggle with the risk of hunger due to insufficient supply of Ukrainian grain to both developed and developing states. Moreover, the governments of Lithuania and Ukraine coordinate their efforts to increase logistical and financial support of the EU for Ukrainian grain export to Lithuania.

### Lithuania's diplomacy at the NATO summits in Madrid and Vilnius

During the July 2022 NATO summit in Madrid the members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization agreed upon a new strategy of NATO based on adapting the

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to the migration crisis on the border in spring 2021. This is why in February 2022 LTG Cargo stopped transit of Belarusian potassium fertilizers, see *Lietuvos Respublikos užsienio reikalų ministerija Tarptautinių sankcijų įgyvendinimas*, November 14, 2022, <https://www.urm.lt/sankcijos> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

<sup>21</sup> Rada Europejska, *Ekspert ukraińskiego zboża*, <https://www.council.europa.eu/pl/infographics/ukrainian-grain-exports-explained/> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

<sup>22</sup> T. Janeliūnas: *Rusijos baimė neturi tapti pagrindiniu pretekstu atidėti Ukrainos narystę NATO*, *Lrytas.lt*, <https://iq.lt/politika/t-janeliunas-rusijos-baime-neturi-tapti-pagrindiniu-pretekstu-atidelioti-ukrainos-naryste-nato/295776> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

<sup>23</sup> *Umowa ws. rozwoju kolejowego transportu towarowego pomiędzy Klaipėdą a Kijowem*, *Studium Euro-py Wschodniej*, <https://studium.uw.edu.pl/umowa-ws-rozwoju-kolejowego-transportu-towarowego-pomiedzy-klajpeda-a-kijowem/> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

Alliance to current threats from Russia and strengthening its capacity to defend and deter, which to a large extent included proposals of the Lithuanian delegation led by the President. Adopting a new defence strategy by NATO was a diplomatic success of both big and medium-sized powers as well as small states, which regarded it as an important step to strengthen the collective defence and deterrence in the Eastern Flank region<sup>24</sup>. A tangible result of the diplomatic activity of the presidents of Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia was a decision to establish four international combat groups which were stationed in Poland and the Baltic States.

Lithuania's priority for the Madrid Summit was obtaining security guarantees, both in terms of the country's own security as well as the regional one, thus contributing to strengthening the collective defence of the Alliance.

On the other hand, during the July 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius the Lithuanian delegation led by the President would strive most of all to ensure that allied actions strengthening NATO's visibility on the Eastern Flank would not be only of temporary nature but would be permanent with Ukraine as a key element of the security architecture of the region. To meet that purpose the Lithuanian president took active steps to set up a coalition of states to find supporters of Ukraine's accession to NATO by strengthening collaboration in the Baltic region. As a result, regular meetings with leaders of the three Baltic States (including Poland) were held and coordinated cooperation to undertake declarations and decisions on their strategy towards Ukraine took place during the Vilnius summit<sup>25</sup>.

Establishing the NATO-Ukraine Council with a special status granted to Kiev enables regular consultations and facilitates the country's integration with the Alliance, implementing a multi-staged support programme to help Ukraine replace post-Soviet military equipment and doctrines with the NATO ones, helping rebuild the arms industry sector or shortening Ukraine's accession process just to one stage are the most important "practical" outcomes of Lithuania's efforts based on geopolitical interests<sup>26</sup>.

The conclusions from the NATO summit in Vilnius satisfied neither Lithuania nor Ukraine due to the lack of invitation to NATO and lack of a clear membership path, which created a feeling of dissatisfaction in both Vilnius and Kiev. Most Lithuanian security experts and some politicians did not hide their dissatisfaction and criticized both the very summit statement and the role of the President in its drafting. As was assessed by Lithuanian experts, Lithuania, Baltic States and Poland had a much stronger position (as regards inviting Ukraine to NATO), however, this group of member states apparently did not manage to consolidate their position and their decisions were clearly influenced by the positions of more cautious states. Taking the facts above into account, this can indicate a partial failure

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<sup>24</sup> NATO 2022 *Strategic Concept*, <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

<sup>25</sup> M. Maluzinas, K. Kapranov, *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Goals and Their Possible Implementation During the North Atlantic Treaty Organization Summit in Vilnius in 2023*, „Athenaeum”, vol. 83, no. 3, p. 186–203.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibidem*.

of Lithuania's plans, which do not fully conform to the security interests (neither in military nor political terms) as the Ukrainian army would strengthen the Eastern Flank of NATO. However, the very Vilnius summit was of key importance for shaping the international image of Lithuania, as it contributed to increasing awareness of the international community of Lithuania's role in Ukraine's integration with NATO<sup>27</sup>.

On the other hand, despite the Alliance's acknowledgement during the 2024 Washington summit that Ukraine's integration with NATO is an irreversible process, the expectations of the country's invitation to join the Alliance were not met despite Lithuania's pressure. After all, this meant that in its transatlantic relations Lithuania was forced to conduct the policy of adaptation as regards Ukrainian matters (which meant decreasing efforts to achieve the adopted objective of giving Ukraine a quick path to NATO membership).

### Conclusions

The aim of the present article was to prove that even though Lithuania is a small state without significant economic and military potential, its activity can contribute to strengthening regional confidence and that with good will and persistence even great superpowers and small states can come to terms on issues concerning their individual and common interests. Lithuania's experiences in building regional security can be useful for other countries, including some small states and those entities which cannot be regarded as traditionally regional superpowers due to their geographical or geopolitical location or material capacity, but they do not want to be a dead point in the rising country free from influences of other countries.

In a wider context, taking their needs into consideration, small states can also trigger the process that can be beneficial for the whole region and, at the same time, contribute in some way to building international peace and security. Global practice shows that negotiations are much more than just simple bargaining.

As regards Lithuania's policy based on increasing the security of the region, so far the state has not been able to receive legally regulated security guarantees from NATO nor institutionalize its status in the international arena.

The analysis of Lithuanian activity on the international stage between 2021 and 2024 leads to the conclusion that it has been rather productive. Lithuania proved with its example that each side of the conflict has to undertake real efforts to understand well-grounded interests of the opponent and try to find solutions without jeopardizing those interests. Besides, Lithuania is a living example of how small states can lead active and effective foreign policies that are based not only on their own national interests but also on regional and wider common good. Without jeopardizing well-justified interests of big states or regional superpowers, this can lead to visible results (see Table 2).

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<sup>27</sup> A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Państwa bałtyckie po szczycie NATO w Wilnie*, „Komentarze IeŚ”, no. 906 (154/2023), <https://ies.lublin.pl/komentarze/panstwa-baltyckie-po-szczycie-nato-w-wilnie/> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

The analysis of the abovementioned effects leads to the conclusion that Lithuania gradually evoked an atmosphere of mutual confidence and dialogue, which sped up the common search for relations in the region that would be founded on cooperation and mutual benefit.

Table no. 1. Summary of Lithuania's achievements in multilateral foreign policy in 2024

| Country/<br>organization | Priorities   | Results   |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| <b>United States</b>     | Strengthening the military alliance with the United States   | Maintaining security guarantees<br>Expanding the US military personnel in Lithuania and the region<br>Enforcing adherence to tough policy on Russia<br>Enforcing declarations guaranteeing increasing security for the Baltic States  |
| <b>NATO</b>              | Maintaining transatlantic bonds to build the security of Lithuania and the region by strengthening the Eastern Flank | Enforcing adherence to tough policy on Russia<br>Adopting a new framework for security strategy<br>Intensifying political and practical support for Ukraine<br>Expanding currently active battalions of frontline military groups of allies in the Baltic region to brigades<br>Organizing the NATO summit in Vilnius in 2023 |
| <b>EU</b>                | Limiting Russia's economic and military potential and strengthening energetic sovereignty of Europe                  | Introducing tougher EU sanctions against Russia and Belarus<br>Active engagement of the EU in supporting Ukraine<br>Deciding to stop gas imports from Russia and speeding up the implementation of renewable energy resources and infrastructure construction plans   |

| Country/<br>organization | Priorities   | Results  |
|--------------------------|--|--|
| Ukraine                  | Bringing Ukraine closer to NATO and the EU and demanding a Marshall Plan for Ukraine | Granting Ukraine the status of EU candidate state by the Council of the European Union<br><br>Planning to introducing a no-fly zone over Ukraine by NATO<br><br>Gaining the status of the leader of countries spending the greatest share of its GDP for support for Ukraine between 24 January and 20 November 202228<br><br>Helping in Ukrainian grain transit in 2023 |

Source: Author's own elaboration.

These efforts can be regarded as Lithuania's contribution to peace and security in the region. In turn, this can be a necessary condition to claim the status of a regional leader as an organic part of the regional security structure, which would be constantly supporting the development of mutual trust and international security, demonstrating the contribution of a small single state to international security. In the context of the PIPP theoretical model, it can be concluded that the key element which caused Lithuania's success on the international stage was its active international position, including effectiveness reinforced by the permanent presence of the country and especially its president on international forums.

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<sup>28</sup> See Statista Research Department, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1303450/bilateral-aid-to-ukraine-in-a-percent-of-donor-gdp/> [accessed: 10.10.2024].

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