

POLONAISE ON LITHUANIAN HISTORIC FLOOR



ČESLOVAS LAURINAVIČIUS

SENIOR RESEARCH FELLOW
AT THE LITHUANIAN INSTITUTE OF HISTORY

The Baltic Civilization Institute created three years ago by the Amber Bridge Fund under the patronage of Russian Academician Alexander Chubaryan accumulated scientific research and fundamental works of historians from most countries of Northern Europe. In the brief period of time the e-library of the institute received first joint publications by staffers of the Chubaryan's Institute of General History at the Russian Academy of Sciences and distinguished professors from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

The Amber Bridge received a courtesy from Česlovas Laurinavičius, Professor of the Lithuanian Institute of History, who provided his new research. Our Vilnius colleagues translated it from the Lithuanian language.

HEART OF THE PROBLEM

Our relations with practically all the neighbors cannot be called good. In 1990-1991 the Russian intelligentsia sided with us and was a powerful ally who helped regain independence. Today there is no ally any more. From Poland, our so-called strategic partner, I have recently heard a description of Lithuania which greatly resembles the 1935 statement of Hitler about us. With Latvia which does not differ much from us in its policy towards neighbors we do not have an agreed sea border (which is a separate story that began with the construction of an oil terminal in Butinga and confirms rude provincial conscience which acknowledges only the position of force). It may be a paradox, but our relations have not been deteriorating only with Belarus of late (as they are already at the bottom line). I will focus on relations between Lithuania, Poland, and Russia as the triangle has deep historic traditions.



Stasys Krasauskas

PREAMBLE

Firstly, the talk is not about foreign policy in its classical sense but rather about relations between neighboring countries that are reflected in public space. In our times public diplomacy comprises a major part of the whole foreign policy.

Secondly, it is necessary to explain our identity position. I am a supporter of a national, democratic Lithuanian state. Lithuania in its current borders is an invariable entity for me. The Lithuanian people are the main subject in the state. The Lithuanian state is the only place in the world where Lithuanians can exist as a political community. The political system – democracy (according to acting Constitution) is an inviolable value. Foreign policy strategic choice is NATO and EU membership because they are democratic institutions and Lithuania mentally better relates to the western civilization. Consequently, membership in the organizations should strengthen the Lithuanian state rather than weaken it.

On the other hand, I consider the present-day Lithuanian state not only a political project but also a result of the whole complicated historic development. A specific of the Lithuanian state is that it is located at the junction of western civilization and Russian Orthodox civilization. Such a position presupposes instability and is a reason for the choice of membership in western organizations as a stabilizing factor. However I believe the location at the junction of civilizations should be both a problem and an advantage. The main evidence of the advantage is the very fact of the creation of the Lithuanian state: as far as I know, it happened differently from what they claim today that the West had allegedly backed the creation while the East was against. Most likely it was due to the difficult interaction between them. Therefore, I believe

the international function of Lithuania is to further develop or at least support the interaction, but in no way to transform it into confrontation.

I believe it necessary to explain our identity as different options exist. For example: a) we are a part of Europe; the present-day Lithuanian state is a cast of the die and its emergence is not binding for anyone: the Lithuanian people as a political community are a fiction and only groups of interests matter; b) Lithuanians are not a state ethnos and it would be likely safer for them to live under the Russian protectorate. Other identity options also exist and all of them unfortunately are the realities of modern Lithuania.

Thirdly, the state rather than the political system is definitely the main subject on the international arena although it may look otherwise sometimes. Respect to another state is the basis of communication; domestic political system of the state is secondary and has to unite allies and prevent the emergence of adversaries to the maximum.

FOREIGN POLICY PARADIGMS

I will quote influential Henry Kissinger who I believe is the most respected foreign policy expert. He outlined two basic paradigms:

Free balance paradigm

It manifested itself differently in the process of historic development but after the Cold War it acquired the form of good neighborhood concept. Good neighborhood is one principle in the triad (along with democratic political system and a free market) which conditioned our membership in NATO and EU. The good neighborhood concept is important from the security point of view for the whole Central and Eastern Europe and specifically for Baltic countries. When we prepared to join NATO experts explained to us: good relations with neighbors mean not only consuming security but also ensuring it. It actually means the inviolability of borders, economic cooperation, and a free discussion in the sphere of ideas. Consequently, all countries of Central and Eastern Europe which received independence followed the good neighborhood concept and signed agreements with neighbors. By the way, some of the countries additionally agreed to jointly distance themselves from negative history in their relationship. Lithuania did it with Poland and Germany. The main thing provided by good neighborhood is a possibility to freely balance as the balance is the basis for the survival of any living being, i.e. the basis of security.

Strict alliance paradigm

The paradigm rejects the balance. Henry Kissinger lists the strict alliance as the main reason for confrontation and potential hostilities. In case of Lithuania the transition to a strict alliance coincided with accession to NATO and EU. But I will dare say the organizations do not suggest a rejection of free balance as practically each of their members has its own policy and its own free balance boundaries.

Lithuania is an exception. In foreign policy, at least in the public space, it portrayed itself as the most ardent advocate and supporter of western democratic values. This political commitment of Lithuania is confirmed by its involvement in ideological campaigns which

precondition confrontation in the context of international politics. By the way, although the confrontation campaigns in which Lithuania is involved target the so-called "non-democratic regimes" Lithuania experiences their negative impact not only in relations with Russia and Belarus, but also with other countries, mostly with Poland.

IDEOLOGICAL CONFRONTATION CAMPAIGNS

Democracy expansion to the East

In one of the campaigns Lithuania was obsessed with a bee in the bonnet and wanted to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, i.e. based on historic reminiscences to unify the territories currently belonging to Ukraine, Belarus, and Poland. It actually meant to ignore the system of existing states, historic and political realities with all resulting consequences. In other words it was a potential change of borders, transformation of de-facto existing national identities, ignoring Belarus as a state, and confronting Russia.

Today the campaign has exhausted itself however nostalgic reminiscences of its so-called positive aspects can still be found in the public space. They mostly recall allegedly good relations

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with Poland during the campaign. However they were good mostly because some Polish circles hoped the restoration of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania would transform the identity of nationalistic Lithuania into the identity of Rzeczpospolita and the problem of "Lithvins" which has troubled the Poles since 1883 would be finally resolved. **(Rzeczpospolita was a federal state of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania which existed up to 1795 when Poland was divided between Russia, Austria, and Prussia – ed.).**

The idea of restored Grand Duchy of Lithuania was mostly advocated by the leftist government and one of the supporters of the paradigm has recently told me it allegedly aimed at barring the growth of ethnic nationalism in Lithuania. Accord-

ing to the logic, it is easy to replace a really existing state with a pet project. Today they seem to have dropped the idea of a restored Grand Duchy of Lithuania however other ideological confrontation campaigns are in place.

Equating Stalinism with Nazism

The ideological campaign was in full swing in Lithuania when the rightists strengthened their positions in the government. There is no doubt their involvement in the campaign was due to both foreign and home policy interests.

The campaign equating Stalinism with Nazism was based on historic and clear similarity between Stalinism and Nazism specifically as mass extermination of people is concerned. But there were differences as well. Firstly, the systems had different aims: the Communist doctrine offered a Utopian aim of making all people in the world happy, but from the ethnic point of view it was indifferent and even altruistic. Nazism programmed the right for the future only for the Germans and representatives of the Arian race, i.e. the doctrine was completely egoistic. Another circumstance is also important: Nazism committed Holocaust while Soviet soldiers, whether you like it or not, opened the gate of Auschwitz.

However the talk is not about historic memory or theoretical discussion which I believe would help compare the systems and correspondingly assess them. The talk is about escalating a problem to achieve both historic and moral reflexes as well as political and legal consequences. Russia, as the native place of practical Communism, is declared responsible for Stalinist crimes. **The advocates of the idea are not interested either in the fact that Russia suffered more than any other country from Communism or that modern Russia is doing a lot to expand the democratic approach to its history.** The mentioned campaign is an ideological



preparation for a potential change in the balance of forces. We can only guess which consequences of the change may be in store for Lithuania.

We can partially identify the consequences if we deeply consider the logic of the mentioned campaign. The logic was aimed not only against Russia but paradoxically also against Lithuania. Although Lithuania together with Latvia and Estonia claimed leadership in the campaign the historic truth is as follows: the Baltic peoples, mostly Latvians and Lithuanians and to a lesser degree Estonians, played a major role in strengthening Bolshevism in Russia. (There were up to 300 thousand Lithuanian supporters of Bolshevism).

Another fact is even more important: after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution the independent states of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia were the first to recognize Soviet Russia while all other advanced democracies were unwilling to do it. Washington declared the documents about Baltic recognition of the Bolsheviks as null and void. But time has its own truth. Between 1920 and 1939 the agreements signed by Lithuania with Soviet Russia were a foreign policy legal basis and pillar for Lithuania. A question arises: how do these historic facts correlate with the condemnation of Russia? What the result of condemning Russia can be for the Lithuanian state? It seems it was another bee in the



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bonnet like in the campaign to restore the Grand Duchy of Lithuania when they gambled with the basics of the Lithuanian state as playing cards.

The Polish role also deserves attention in this context. Although Poland resolutely denounces Stalinism the role of the campaign in its state strategy differed from that in Lithuania. Poland noticed that the Lithuanian campaign to restore the Grand Duchy has exhausted itself (and took into account the changes in the US administration) and considerably amended its strategy. The relations

between Poland and Russia immediately began to improve while we have heard what the Polish political elite thinks about us in reality.

anian authorities were involved in the campaign against their will. Anyway the position of the Baltic republics in the pre-war period properly explains why only these three countries disappeared from the political map of Europe for long.

Similarity with the times is evident also in the home policy. Political forces in Lithuania of the times ceded to outside pressure in order to protect partisan rather than state interests – in order to keep or gain power. This circumstance undoubtedly promoted the grievous fate of the state.

HISTORIC SIMILARITY

The described contours of modern Lithuanian foreign policy resemble to me the policy of the inter-war period and the situation which emerged in the fourth decade of last century. At that time a confrontation campaign was developing under the banner of the “struggle of the European civilization against Asian barbarianism.” The campaign spread practically to the whole of Europe and specifically to the central and eastern part of it. However most of the countries succeeded to more or less balance the situation as they had standby diplomatic reserves and possibilities to backtrack in case the situation changes. Poland was specifically distinguished in this aspect. The only countries which unconditionally joined the campaign were the three Baltic republics. It is to be admitted that Lithu-

WHAT IS TO BE DONE?

1. Improve relations with Poland

First of all, I would like to mention the positive sides of our conduct: we did not respond with the same pop shots to the above mentioned Polish outbursts against us. It was a surprisingly positive manifestation of our behavior specifically if we recall the manners we demonstrate in relation to eastern neighbors or in a recent case with Austria (*reaction of the political establishment to Austrian refusal to extradite to Lithuania participant in the assault on the Vilnius TV tower Golovatov. Besides verbal insults, there were proposals to sever diplomatic relations and boycott goods - ed.*).

The main and visible reason of deteriorating relations with Poland is the situation with the Polish minority in Lithuania. Therefore, I would suggest the following guidelines (which may look unexpected) for the effort to improve relations with Poland (the Poles):

- Stop fanning up the issue of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. Whether you like it or not the consequence of the escalation may be the emergence of a stereotype that pre-war borders of Poland were legitimate. The stereotype is on the rise among the Poles in Lithuania and is advocated in the world academic literature (mostly of the so-called strategic partners). Therefore, there is no surprise that local Poles do not identify themselves with the Polish state;

- The dialogue with the Polish national minority in Lithuania should be based on democratic principles rather than unilateral decrees. It is necessary to create a corresponding legal base and atmosphere of accord for proper coexistence with the Polish minority. For that we have first of all to agree who we are – the Lithuanians in Lithuania – a title nation responsible for the state or a sack of potatoes with “Lithuania” inscription.

2. Find common language with Belarus

- Help those who cannot tolerate the existing system there (rather than those who want to freeload the assistance).

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- Respect the opinion of the majority of Belarussians who so far continue to vote for the existing regime in the country.

- Find a balance between respect to the state and criticism of the system.

3. Maintain good-neighborly relations with Russia

- Stop fanning up historic issues and compiling an endless list of accusations against Russia, begin to comprehend and assess our tragic role in the XX century, the role of the people and the state rather than separate groups.

- Respect the Russian people and the Russian state.

- In the standoff of global forces abide by allied commitments on condition they

do not hurt good neighborhood.

Naturally, such efforts demand strong will and well thought-out logic. But if we do not have a logic of our own we shall have someone else's

Translated from Lithuanian
by Galina Afanasyeva

Background: Distinguished Lithuanian historian and PhD Humanities Ceslovas Laurinavicius was born in 1952 in Kaunas. He graduated from the Vilnius University in 1977 and passed a study course in the Goteborg University. He lectured history at the history faculty of the Vilnius University, in the Lithuanian Institute of International Relations and Political Sciences, the Vytautas Magnus University, and Kaunas Technological Institute. He currently heads the XX century history desk in the Lithuanian Institute of History. He is the author of two dozen scientific books and a leading expert in the history of relations between the Soviet Union and Lithuania. He is the author of such fundamental research as *The USSR and Lithuania in World War Two*, *The USSR and the Lithuanian Republic. March '39 – August '40*.