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## South Asia and Lithuania

Interest in South Asia among Lithuanian scholars is rather low. For a long time the region has remained off the radar screen of Lithuanian foreign policy makers, who were largely focused on Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic integration and international consolidation issues. But the situation is changing and South Asia is emerging as an increasingly important political and economic partner for Lithuania. This article attempts to outline the general characteristics of the South Asia region, its geographical and geopolitical limits, and its current key issues, in the backdrop of which Lithuania's relations with the nations of the region are assessed. Arguably, at present Lithuania has little to offer in addressing the fundamental problems of the region, but its role in individual niches can be quite useful. Lithuanian exports of lasers and laser-related technologies to India, along with the growing number of South Asian students in Lithuanian higher education institutions, are brought in as two small but illustrative examples.

### Introduction

Interest in the South Asian region in Lithuanian academic research is still comparatively low. An entry of the query "South Asia" into the database of Lithuanian Academic Electronic Library (eLABa) returns 156 links, of which only 11 are in Lithuanian<sup>1</sup>. Only three links refer to authentic works by Lithuanian scholars: an academic article titled "Security dynamics within South Asian regional security complex" by Vytautas Magnus University graduate Ieva Karpavičiūtė (published in 2006)<sup>2</sup>, a BA thesis "India's soft power in Afghanistan" by Vilnius University graduate Goda Karazijaitė (published in

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\*\* Judgments and ideas presented in this article are, without any exception, the ideas of the author and can never be regarded as an official position of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania or that of the Departments of the said Ministry.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. eLABa's search page at: [http://elaba.lvb.lt/primu\\_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=ELABA](http://elaba.lvb.lt/primu_library/libweb/action/search.do?vid=ELABA) (visited on Oct 7, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> Karpavičiūtė I., „Saugumo dinamika Pietų Azijos regioniniame saugumo komplekse“ [Security dynamics within South Asian regional security complex], *Jaunųjų politologų almanachas*, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2006, p.46-79. The article available on internet at: [http://vddb.library.lt/fedora/get/LT-eLABa-0001:J.04~2006~ISSN\\_1822-9212.V\\_2.PG\\_46-79/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC](http://vddb.library.lt/fedora/get/LT-eLABa-0001:J.04~2006~ISSN_1822-9212.V_2.PG_46-79/DS.002.0.01.ARTIC) (visited on Oct 6, 2015)

2014)<sup>3</sup> and a Master's thesis "Buddhism modernization trends in the twentieth century South and Southeast Asia" by a graduate from Vilnius University's Centre for Oriental Studies named Ieva Bruzgelevičiūtė (published in 2008)<sup>4</sup>. Other Lithuanian-language links in the eLABa database refer predominantly to travel books, translations of various Soviet-time publications, etc.

From this perspective, a researcher choosing to delve into South Asian waters would face a difficult task. On the one hand, in the context of the prevailing ignorance she or he would need to accommodate the populist temptation to speak about 'a little bit of everything' with the strict requirements of academic discipline. On the other hand, the Lithuanian researcher of South Asia is hardly more advanced and knowledgeable than her or his inquisitive reader, therefore the outcome of their literary encounter is highly unpredictable. The ambassador's hat of course puts additional limitations on the character of the speaking. Therefore, this article deals with South Asia in most general terms, but through Lithuanian lenses: what is important for Lithuania and its contemporary geopolitics in a region containing one-sixth of the world's population?

The article consists of three sections: the first attempts to define the South Asian region, highlighting its general characteristics. The second aims to outline and catalogue the social, economic and geopolitical challenges faced by the South Asian nations. The third part is dedicated to the analysis of how these collective South Asian interests match with the individual interests of Lithuania. This comparison underlies the effort of developing a larger agenda for Lithuania in the South Asian region, which in the future may play an increasingly important role in the national foreign policy framework.

## 1. What does South Asia Represent?

The most common definition of South Asia includes seven countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Once subjects of the British Crown, these nations share a significant part of their modern political identity coming from the era of post-colonialism. In 1985, the seven nations formed a regional group, the South Asian Association for Regi-

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<sup>3</sup> Karazijaitė G., *Indijos švelnioji galia Afganistane: bakalauro darbas* [India's soft power in Afghanistan], Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2014.

<sup>4</sup> Bruzgelevičiūtė I., *Budizmo modernizavimo tendencijos XX a. Pietų ir Pietryčių Azijoje: magistro tezės* [Buddhism modernisation trends in the twentieth century South and South East Asia: a Master's thesis], Vilnius: Vilniaus universitetas, 2008

onal Cooperation (SAARC), which in 2004 was complemented by the South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA). For this reason, the seven countries are often called the SAARC Group.

Afghanistan joined the SAARC in 2006 and SAFTA in 2011. Interestingly, the World Bank also attributes Afghanistan to the South Asian region<sup>5</sup>. Afghanistan shares geographic proximity and close historical and cultural bonds with this region; however, these are equally true regarding the Central Asian states. Afghanistan's intermediary position is best explained by its geographical characteristics: the country is divided by several mountain ranges, attributing its river basins to different watersheds (one belongs to the Indus catchment area, another to the Aral Sea basin). Afghanistan is rather poorly integrated in the contemporary South Asian economic and security framework. It also has foreign (US) troops on its soil. Thus, Afghanistan best epitomizes what in regional security studies is called a "buffer state" – a country tucked in between different regions and lacking the power to pool them together into one whole<sup>6</sup>.

The United Nations Statistics Division includes Iran in the list of South Asian nations as per its classification of macro geographical (continental) regions<sup>7</sup>. The former British colony of Myanmar sometimes also ranks as part of the region, along with Mauritius, a tiny Indian Ocean island off the African coast, which 48.2% of population is Hindu<sup>8</sup>.

From the Lithuanian Foreign Service point of view, South Asia is divided into three parts: five nations (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka) are covered by the Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi<sup>9</sup>. The Lithuanian diplomatic representative to Pakistan and Iran is accredited from Ankara (Turkey), and a Lithuanian Special Mission operates in Kabul (Afghanistan).

This article follows the most traditional pattern of regional classifi-

<sup>5</sup> The World Bank definition of South Asia see here: <http://data.worldbank.org/region/SAS>

<sup>6</sup> Karpavičiūtė I., „Saugumo dinamika Pietų Azijos regioniniame saugumo komplekse“ [Security dynamics within South Asian regional security complex], *Jaunųjų politikų almanachas*, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2006, P.53.

<sup>7</sup> Composition of macro geographical (continental) regions, geographical sub-regions, and selected economic and other groupings, as defined by UN Statistics Division, <http://millenniumindicators.un.org/unsd/methods/m49/m49regin.htm>

<sup>8</sup> 2011 Housing and Population Census of the Republic of Mauritius, <http://www.govmu.org/portal/goc/cso/file/2011VolIIPC.pdf>, P.68.

<sup>9</sup> Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi is officially accredited to the Republic of India, People's Republic of Bangladesh and Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal. Accreditation to the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka is in the pipeline. Lithuania has no diplomatic relations with the Kingdom of Bhutan, however Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi has been designated as a contact point for this purpose.

cation, wherein South Asian region is composed of seven SAARC countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka (i.e. Afghanistan is not included). This approach is already gaining a foothold in the nascent South Asian school of Lithuania.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, given Afghanistan's special role in Lithuanian foreign policy, there is little reason to believe this definition of South Asia will be expanded in the future.

So, what do South Asian nations represent?

First, the South Asian republics are rather young political entities which have emerged in the wake of World War II, after the British Empire crumbled (see Table 1). Bhutan and Nepal have existed as independent kingdoms since time immemorial. However, in 1910 Bhutan signed a renewed treaty with British India wherein it gave up part of its sovereignty (delegated its foreign relations) to the British in exchange for the recognition of the new dynasty and increased subsidies. A similar contract was drawn with the newly independent Republic of India in 1949. Thus, the year 1949 can be considered a certain reference point defining Bhutan's current international status. In a similar manner, a Peace and Friendship Treaty was signed between India and Nepal in 1950. However, Nepal is currently undergoing a period of significant transformation: in 2008, the monarchy was abolished and a republic declared. Maybe some time in the future the Nepalese will officially refer to 2008 as the beginning of their state (republic); but the fact that it took five years to proclaim a new national day, the Republic Day, to replace the previously celebrated king's birthday, shows the scope of the complications experienced by Nepal during its current transition<sup>11</sup>. Future relations with India are rather unclear as well<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>10</sup> Karpavičiūtė I., „Saugumo dinamika Pietų Azijos regioniniame saugumo komplekse“ [Security dynamics within South Asian regional security complex], *Jaunųjų politologų almanachas*, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2006, p.58.

<sup>11</sup> Nepal picks May 28 as National Day, *Zee News*, [http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/nepal-picks-may-28-as-national-day\\_852177.html](http://zeenews.india.com/news/south-asia/nepal-picks-may-28-as-national-day_852177.html) (visited on Oct 12, 2015)

<sup>12</sup> For instance, in September 2015 India imposed a 'silent' restriction on the entry of certain goods to Nepal after the Nepalese Constitutional Assembly failed to address the Indian concerns and moved to adopt a new constitution. A BBC article on the subject available here: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34469494> (visited on Oct 9, 2015)

Table 1. General overview of South Asian nations<sup>13</sup>

	Independent since	Population 2015 (in thous.)	Area (sq.km)	Population density (per sq.km)	Medium age of population (years)	GNI per capita (World bank data 2015), US\$	HDI ranking 2014
Bangladesh	1971	160 996	147 570	1 103,59	24,3	1 080	0,558
Bhutan	*1949	775	38 394	19,90	26,2	2 390	0,584
India	1947	1 311 051	3 166 414	388,22	27,0	1 570	0,586
Maldives	1965	364	300	1 065	27,1	7 170	0,698
Nepal	*1950	28 514	147 181	180	22,9	730	0,540
Pakistan	1947	188 925	881 912	237,25	22,6	1 410	0,537
Sri Lanka	1948	20 715	65 610	309	31,8	3 400	0,750

\* Bhutan and Nepal exist as independent states since very long time. In their case, the dates signify the year when bilateral treaties with India were signed defining the current scope of Bhutan and Nepal's international position.

Second, the South Asian nations are among the world's most populous. India is home to the world's second largest population, Pakistan ranks as number six and Bangladesh as number eight<sup>14</sup>. South Asia as a whole has a population of 1.7 billion, which makes it almost one-fourth of the world's total population. Since 2005, the number of people in the region has grown by almost 20%, or by more than 250 million. In addition, the average age of a South Asian is around 26 years. The complicated demographic situation translates into a no less complicated social and economic environment.

Third, the majority of South Asian nations belong to the lower-middle-income group, as per World Bank's economic classification (\$1,046 to \$4,125 per capita)<sup>15</sup>. The Maldives is the only exception, with per capita income reaching \$7,170 in 2014<sup>16</sup>. However, this small island economy is heavily dependent on external income (tourism). In addition, higher per capita income does not necessarily ensure better social conditions for the people, as the compari-

<sup>13</sup> Sources: Wikipedia, UN World Population Prospects (2015), UN Human Development Report (2015)

<sup>14</sup> UN World Population Prospects (2015), [http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key\\_Findings\\_WPP\\_2015.pdf](http://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/Publications/Files/Key_Findings_WPP_2015.pdf) (visited on Oct 7, 2015)

<sup>15</sup> See World Bank list of countries and lending groups, [http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups#Lower\\_middle\\_income](http://data.worldbank.org/about/country-and-lending-groups#Lower_middle_income)

<sup>16</sup> The Maldives country page by World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/country/maldives> (visited on Oct 12, 2015)

son of the Maldivian and Sri Lankan Human Development Index demonstrates. Five out of seven South Asian nations score a Human Development Index lower than 0.6, which puts them in the category of medium to low human development (see Table 1).

South Asia's combined GDP in 2014 reached \$2.6 trillion, of which \$2.1 trillion was India's GDP (World Bank figures<sup>17</sup>). This amounted to 3.6% of the world's economic output. However, South Asian intra-regional trade accounted for only 5% of its total trade (while in the neighboring ASEAN region it accounted for 25%)<sup>18</sup>, amounting to \$820 million at the beginning of 2013<sup>19</sup>. From this point of view, South Asia continues to be an economically less integrated region.

## 2. South Asian Agenda

### 2.1. Regional Security Architecture

Although the security situation in South Asia has improved over the last decade, the level of mutual trust remains low. State borders remain largely non-delimited and non-demarcated (except for the naturally defined borders, such as those of Sri Lanka and the Maldives), while the Indo-Pakistani territorial disputes, which sometimes escalate to full-scale armed conflicts, pose the greatest threat to regional stability. Historical grievances mar the bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Pakistan (for the latter's attempt to forcefully suppress the Bangladeshi national movement in 1971), between Nepal and Bhutan (for the Bhutanese government's 1985 decision to expel the residents of Nepali origin, a total of around 100 thousand people), as well as between India and Sri Lanka. Against this background, India's recent decision to ratify the 1974 border agreement with Bangladesh and thus conclude a decades-long territorial dispute over the small enclaves along the border serves as a welcome exception (the treaty ratified in June 2015)<sup>20</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> See the World Bank database, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD> (last visited on Oct 7, 2015)

<sup>18</sup> See the World Bank database, <http://www.worldbank.org/en/region/sar/brief/south-asia-regional-integration>

<sup>19</sup> Data published by SAARC Secretariat, [http://saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity\\_id=5](http://saarc-sec.org/areaofcooperation/detail.php?activity_id=5). In comparison, Lithuania's trade only with Finland in 2013 was around \$930 million.

<sup>20</sup> For more details on the India-Bangladesh state border see: [http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/Publication-Docs/24529\\_LBA\\_MEA\\_Booklet\\_final.pdf](http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/Publication-Docs/24529_LBA_MEA_Booklet_final.pdf)

In political scientists' theories, the South Asia region is commonly defined as a bipolar region<sup>21</sup>. It has long witnessed fierce competition between India and Pakistan—a throwback to the Cold War era, where the US backed Pakistan and the USSR aligned with India. This situation has changed dramatically since, with Bangladesh divorcing with Pakistan, the USSR divorcing with its own existence, and the Indo-American relations moving to an entirely new level. India's demographic, military, economic and geopolitical weight puts the country far ahead of its neighbors. Many claim the only reason that Pakistan remains so important is its nuclear weapons and the unresolved territorial dispute over Kashmir, which continues to play a critical role in India's foreign and domestic decision-making. However, in the coming years, South Asia has the chance to transform into a unipolar (one power-dominated) region.

With Pakistan's importance fading, doors are opening for countries like China to fill the gap. The expanding Chinese investment in the Sri Lankan and Maldivian infrastructure has already caused certain caution in India, albeit suppressed<sup>22</sup>. In other parts of the region the hidden rivalry between the two Asian giants has turned into open competition. For example, after the 2015 devastating earthquake in Nepal, which wrought colossal damage and cost the lives of 9,000 people, the local and international media alike was speculating with great interest as to which country – India or China – will come to help Nepal more quickly and on a larger scale<sup>23</sup>. China has in principle ignored India's protests over the plans to build, under the framework of China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, a road through the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir<sup>24</sup>. The Sino-Indian border itself remains a story to be completed, occasionally causing increased tension due to the deployment of troops in the disputed areas. Containing China's influ-

<sup>21</sup> Karpavičiūtė I., „Saugumo dinamika Pietų Azijos regioniniame saugumo komplekse“ [Security dynamics within South Asian regional security complex], *Jaunųjų politologų almanachas*, Kaunas: Vytauto Didžiojo universiteto leidykla, 2006, P.60.

<sup>22</sup> „Storm in a port“, *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21646757-islands-largest-infrastructure-project-governments-first-big-test-storm-port>, also: Variyar M., „Chinese 'Land Grab' in Maldives: How India Can Counter Beijing's Expanding Sphere of Influence“, *International Business Times India*, <http://www.ibtimes.co.in/maldives-land-ownership-why-india-should-be-concerned-what-should-it-do-counter-china-640594> (visited on Oct 7, 2015)

<sup>23</sup> Seemangal R., „Disaster Diplomacy: After Nepal Earthquake, China and India Race to Give Aid“, *The New York Observer*, <http://observer.com/2015/05/in-nepal-china-and-india-engage-in-disaster-diplomacy/>, Bagchi I., „Nepal earthquake: India scores on aid diplomacy, China lags“, *The Times of India*, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Nepal-earthquake-India-scores-on-aid-diplomacy-China-lags/articleshow/47090553.cms>, Johnson K., „U.S., China, India race to send aid to earthquake-battered Nepal“, *Foreign Policy*, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2015/04/26/u-s-china-india-race-to-send-aid-to-earthquake-battered-nepal/> etc. (visited on Oct 7, 2015)

<sup>24</sup> „China and Pakistan just did something that will anger India“, <http://www.rediff.com/news/report/china-and-pakistan-just-did-something-will-anger-india/20150420.htm> (visited Oct 7, 2015)

ence is likely to demand increasingly more attention in the future, whereas the growing power game between Asia's (and the world's) two largest nations will undoubtedly affect the security situation of South Asia's smaller states.

## 2.2. Domestic Tensions, Terrorism

Complicated inter-state relations are just a piece in a larger security mosaic of South Asia. Virtually all of the nations of the region suffer from domestic tension, even if it has by and large remained under the government's control. For example, for seven years Nepal was a witness to a constitution-making drama, which has caused massive polarization and, by different estimates, brought the country to a political standstill<sup>25</sup>. The political dialogue between the Bangladeshi government and the opposition is practically broken, the latter making its case on the streets rather than through an institutionalized debate<sup>26</sup>. The Sri Lankan civil war ended only in 2009, leaving scars that will take time to heal and a legacy that still evokes calls for an international investigation<sup>27</sup>. The former president of the Maldives has been accused of power abuse and has been sentenced, a decision that has divided the Maldivian society and provoked mass protests<sup>28</sup>.

Various conflicts in India have been smoldering for decades now, with their intensity level going up and down at different times. Kashmiris, along with several states of the Indian North-East, claim larger self-rule. The government's response has been mixed. In August 2015, the Government of India succeeded in striking a peace deal with the separatists in Nagaland, thus effectively ending a decades-long unrest<sup>29</sup>. However, the ongoing Naxalite-Maoist insurgency in East India has already claimed a toll of almost 7,000 lives since 2005<sup>30</sup> and is showing no signs of improvement.

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<sup>25</sup> Sharma G., „Nepal plunges into turmoil as politicians scuffle over constitution“, *Reuters*, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/01/23/us-nepal-politics-idUSKBN0KW0DL20150123>

<sup>26</sup> Banyan T.J., „Why Bangladesh's politics are broken“, *The Economist*, <http://www.economist.com/blogs/economist-explains/2015/02/economist-explains-0>

<sup>27</sup> Flairclough G., Jayasinghe U., „U.N. report urges Sri Lanka to set up war crimes tribunal“, *The Wall Street Journal*, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-n-report-urges-sri-lanka-to-set-up-war-crimes-tribunal-1442410248>

<sup>28</sup> „Maldives ex-leader Mohammed Nasheed jailed for 13 years“, *BBC News*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-31881207>, also: „Maldives arrests leaders of opposition parties after violent protests“, *The Guardian*, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/may/02/maldives-arrests-opposition-leaders-imran-abdulla-violent-protests>

<sup>29</sup> Phelamei S., „Naga movement: A brief history and peace accord with the Indian government“, *ZeeNews*, [http://zeenews.india.com/exclusive/naga-movement-a-brief-history\\_2999.html](http://zeenews.india.com/exclusive/naga-movement-a-brief-history_2999.html)

<sup>30</sup> „Fatalities in Left-Wing Extremism in India: 2005–2015“, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, [http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data\\_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm](http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/india/maoist/data_sheets/fatalitiesnaxal05-11.htm) (visited on Nov 23, 2015)



Inter-communal relations represent another highly sensitive field, where a small sparkle can start a truly great fire. For example, in the 2013 clashes between Hindus and Muslims in Muzaffarnagar, North India, at least 48 people were killed and more than 50,000 forced to flee from their homes<sup>31</sup>. Overall, the country saw 479 riots in 2013, with 107 people killed and 1,697 injured<sup>32</sup>.

The security situation is even more complicated in Pakistan, where swaths of the country's territory have slipped out of government control and turned into hideouts for terrorists. The estimated death toll from the terrorist attacks in Pakistan since 2003 has reached 20,000 people<sup>33</sup>. Only during January–November 2015, a total of 1,172 people (312 military and 860 civilians) have been killed by the terrorists<sup>34</sup>. Pakistan's failure to get the situation under control is affecting the security of its neighbors, first of all that of countries like India. Also, lack of cooperation from the Pakistani authorities in investigating terrorist crimes only reinforces the neighbors' suspicions that the government may be directly involved in the conspiring and funding of terrorist activities<sup>35</sup>.

The developments in the immediate neighborhood (Afghanistan, Middle East) will continue to play a significant role in the overall security situation of South Asia. The rising tide of Islamic radicalism may not only destabilize Pakistan but also stir instability in India, home to one of the world's largest Muslim populations (172 million)<sup>36</sup>, Bangladesh (135 million)<sup>37</sup>, Sri Lanka (2 million)<sup>38</sup> and Nepal (1.2 million)<sup>39</sup>. The economically disadvantaged and culturally and politically suppressed South Asian Muslim communities can become an easy target for such terrorist organizations as the 'Islamic State'.

<sup>31</sup> „107 killed in riots this year; 66 Muslims, 41 Hindus“, *The Hindustan Times*, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/delhi/107-killed-in-riots-this-year-66-muslims-41-hindus/story-uqHMNT093ZqMa0WAsWdIpJ.html> (visited on Nov 7, 2015)

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> „Fatalities in Terrorist Violence in Pakistan: 2003–2015“, *South Asia Terrorism Portal*, <http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/countries/pakistan/database/casualties.htm> (visited on Nov 23, 2015)

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> See, for example, the official statement by India's representative at the UN General Assembly on Sept 30, 2015: [http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25873/Statement\\_by\\_India\\_exercising\\_Indias\\_Right\\_of\\_Reply\\_during\\_the\\_General\\_Debate\\_of\\_70th\\_session\\_of\\_UN\\_General\\_Assembly\\_September\\_30\\_2015](http://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25873/Statement_by_India_exercising_Indias_Right_of_Reply_during_the_General_Debate_of_70th_session_of_UN_General_Assembly_September_30_2015)

<sup>36</sup> 2011 Housing and Population Census of the Republic of India, <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/2011census/c-01.html>

<sup>37</sup> 2011 Housing and Population Census of Bangladesh, <http://www.bbs.gov.bd/WebTestApplication/userfiles/Image/National%20Reports/Union%20Statistics.pdf>

<sup>38</sup> 2011 Housing and Population Census of Sri Lanka, <http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/CPH2011/index.php?fileName=pop43&gp=Activities&tpl=3>

<sup>39</sup> 2014 Population Atlas of Nepal, <http://cbs.gov.np/atlas/>

## 2.3. Access to Natural Resources

South Asia is a predominately import-oriented economic region. All its members have demonstrated negative trade balance in the past decade<sup>40</sup>. The reasons are many. First, the region's population has been growing faster than the supply generated by local economic production. Since 2004, the population of South Asia has grown by 250 million. Second, the region depends heavily on the import of raw materials and energy resources. India alone imports about 4 million barrels of crude oil per day and ranks as the world's third largest oil importer<sup>41</sup>. All South Asian nations, except for Bhutan, produce less primary energy than they consume (see Table 2)<sup>42</sup>. For this reason, they are very sensitive to price fluctuations in the global energy market.

Table 2. **Economic characteristics of South Asian nations**<sup>43</sup>

	Average GDP growth during a given period		Total primary energy production (trillion Btu)	Total primary energy consumption (trillion Btu)	Energy balance (trillion Btu)	Agricultural land (% of total land area)	Foreign trade to GDP ratio (%)
Bangladesh	5.64%	(1994-2014)	850	1,094	-244	70.1	55.9
Bhutan	7.43%	(1996-2014)	66	52	14	13.6	--
India	6.01%	(1951-2015)	15,874	23,916	-8,042	60.3	54.2
Maldives	7.69%	(1997-2014)	0	15	-15	23.3	223.6
Nepal	4.40%	(1994-2014)	34	87	-53	28.7	45.7
Pakistan	4.92%	(1952-2014)	1,809	2,644	-835	35.1	33.8
Sri Lanka	6.58%	(2003-2015)	33	266	-233	42.9	57.9

In addition to oil, the South Asian nations also heavily import cotton (Bangladesh), gold (India), coal (India, Pakistan), and palm oil (Bangladesh,

<sup>40</sup> The trade balances of individual South Asian nations available here: <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/country-list/balance-of-trade> (visited on Oct 8, 2015)

<sup>41</sup> OPEC Annual Statistical Bulletin 2014, <http://www.opec.org/library/Annual%20Statistical%20Bulletin/interactive/current/FileZ/Main.htm> (visited on Oct 8, 2015)

<sup>42</sup> Data by US Energy Information Administration, <http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/index.cfm?topl=imp> (visited on Oct 8, 2015)

<sup>43</sup> Sources: TradingEconomics.com, US Energy Information Administration (<http://www.eia.gov>), World Trade Organization (<http://www.wto.org>).

Pakistan)<sup>44</sup>. The cultivated agricultural land area, ranging from 13.6% in Bhutan to 70.1% in Bangladesh<sup>45</sup>, is not sufficient to feed the growing armies of the population, therefore food items must also be imported. Dependence on imports adds to South Asia's overall vulnerability. This may explain why the individual trade policies of the South Asian nations are considerably protectionist and their intra-regional trade, despite formally abolish trade barriers, remains relatively low.

## 2.4. Demographic Challenges

South Asia is by and large an overpopulated region. The average population density stands at about 385 inhabitants per square kilometer, which is seven times higher than the world average. In several countries (such as Bangladesh, or the Maldives) the population density exceeds 1,000 inhabitants per square kilometer (see Table 1). Even where population density is statistically low, the country's geographical conditions, like the share of mountainous land area unfit for economic activity, must be taken into account.

The South Asian population is also very young. The median age across the region is 26 (see Table 1). Every year millions of young people enter the labor market demanding new jobs and high-quality education. It is no surprise that both the labor market and the education system in South Asia are under severe strain. The lack of job and education opportunities causes millions of people to move both inside the countries and abroad. As reported by the International Labor Organization, the registered outflow of migrant workers from Bangladesh in 2008 was 875,000; from India 848,000, and from Pakistan, Nepal and Sri Lanka around 250,000 each<sup>46</sup>. Yet, the scope of *internal* migration is even more overwhelming: in 2012, in India alone the number of internal migrants was 309 million, of which 70.7% were women<sup>47</sup>.

Rapid urbanization, scarce land resources and deteriorating ecological environment are among the other factors that cause people to move. Migration

<sup>44</sup> Data by The Observatory of Economic Complexity, see: <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/bgd/> (for Bangladesh), individual country data can be accessed by selecting a country in the Country search field.

<sup>45</sup> Data by World Bank, <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/AG.LND.AGRI.ZS> (visited on Oct 8, 2015)

<sup>46</sup> Wickramasekara P., „Labor migration in South Asia: a review of issues, policies and practices“, International Migration Paper No.108, Geneva: International Labor Organization, 2011, [http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed\\_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms\\_179642.pdf](http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---migrant/documents/publication/wcms_179642.pdf), P.8.

<sup>47</sup> *Internal migrants in India: the millions who cannot exercise their rights*, UNESCO New Delhi Office, 2013, [http://www.unesco.org/new/en/newdelhi/about-this-office/single-view/news/internal\\_migrants\\_in\\_india\\_the\\_millions\\_who\\_cannot\\_exercise\\_their\\_rights/#.VhZ6hk3ouM8](http://www.unesco.org/new/en/newdelhi/about-this-office/single-view/news/internal_migrants_in_india_the_millions_who_cannot_exercise_their_rights/#.VhZ6hk3ouM8)

not only reshapes the landscape of the cities and entire countries, but also creates a lot of new social tensions. These, in turn, seize the attention of the South Asian governments and further promote their self-centered, inward-looking approach.

Third, South Asian societies are predominately male-dominated. Only in Nepal and Sri Lanka is the sex ratio 93 and 95 males per 100 females respectively<sup>48</sup>. In Bhutan, this figure is 116, in India 107, in Pakistan 105, in Bangladesh – 102 males per 100 females<sup>49</sup>. There are many reasons why families prefer boys over girls. Part of those reasons are religious: for example, since the time of Rig Veda one son in a family is essential, as only a son can perform funeral rites for his father and thus ensure his safe transit to the other world<sup>50</sup>. Another key reason is the supposed financial and social burden imposed by a girl on the family. In South Asia, a dowry is a very big thing and the wedding costs normally fall on the bridal family's shoulders<sup>51</sup>. In order to prevent unwelcome (and often financially unsustainable) expenses, the parents opt for sex-selective abortions. For this reason, in countries like India ultrasound examination is officially forbidden.

In a male-dominated society, a different set of values evolve. For example, in South Asia, where the role of women is less prominent than in Europe, the consumer behavior is also different. Thus, media advertising focuses more on men-oriented than women-oriented products. These differences are important to know and understand for both companies and foreign governments which seek to develop closer contacts with South Asia region.

### 3. South Asia and Lithuania

The historical evidence of Lithuania-South Asia relations is rather scarce. It is established that the first Lithuanian to visit India, a Jesuit Andrius Rudamina, landed in Goa in 1625, together with a group of Portuguese missionaries<sup>52</sup>. The first European colonizers of the region brought to their homes

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<sup>48</sup> „List of countries by sex ratio“, *Statistics Times*, 2015, <http://statisticstimes.com/population/countries-by-sex-ratio.php> (visited on Oct 8, 2015)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Basham A.L. *The wonder that was India*, 3rd rev. ed., London-New Delhi: Picador (Indian ed.), 2004, p.161.

<sup>51</sup> Guilмото Ch. Z., *Sex-ratio imbalance in Asia: Trends, consequences and policy responses*, [https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/regional\\_analysis.pdf](https://www.unfpa.org/sites/default/files/resource-pdf/regional_analysis.pdf) (visited on Oct 8, 2015)

<sup>52</sup> *Vita et mors P. Andree Rudomina, ex litteris P. Benedicti de Matos, Socii Eiusdem in Missione Sinensi*, Archivum Romanum Societatis Iesu [Roman Archive of the Society of Jesus], 1638, Sin. 000, ff. 307r-308v.

various spices, precious stones, and other South Asian bounties, which later spread across the European continent and reached the royal court of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania<sup>53</sup>. The Catholic Church registries of the 18-19<sup>th</sup> century mention at least two Lithuania-born bishops of India<sup>54</sup>. A famous Lithuanian traveler, Antanas Poška, who came to India on a motorbike at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, left after him a vast legacy of publications on South Asia, which was later collected and published in a series of volumes<sup>55</sup>. However, these contacts could hardly resemble institutionalized interstate relations, as many South Asian nations became internationally recognized entities only after World War II, when Lithuania had already lost its independence (see Table 1).

Diplomatic relations between Lithuania and South Asia were mainly established in the 1990s (see. Table 3). The first country in the region to recognize the restored independence of Lithuania was Bangladesh (on September 7, 1991)<sup>56</sup>, and the first one to establish diplomatic relations was India (on April 27, 1992)<sup>57</sup>. Diplomatic relations with Bhutan are yet to be established, as per Lithuania's officially communicated interest to do so<sup>58</sup>.

However, the dynamism of the 1990s was followed by a decade-long pause, caused by a number of factors, including Lithuania's strategic focus on the objectives of Euro-Atlantic integration (EU and NATO membership). Lithuania's first envoy in South Asia was appointed only in 2008, when Lithuania decided to open its diplomatic mission in India (see Table 3). Currently Lithuanian diplomatic representatives to India, Bangladesh and Nepal are accredited from New Delhi and Pakistan is covered from Ankara.

<sup>53</sup> *A touristic brochure*, National Museum of the Palace of Grand Dukes of Lithuania (to be published in 2016).

<sup>54</sup> Bishop Mikołaj Szostak, O.C.D (1710-1773), Vicar Apostolic of Malabar, India, born in Vilnius, Lithuania, and Patriarch Władysław Michał Zaleski (1852-1925), Apostolic Delegate to India, born in Veliuona, Lithuania, see: <http://www.catholic-hierarchy.org/bishop/>

<sup>55</sup> Poška A. *Nuo Baltijos iki Bengalijos. Indijos palmių paunksmėje* [From the Baltic Sea to the Bay of Bengal: In the shade of Indian palm trees], Vol.6. Klaipėda: Vilko takas, 2009, taip pat Poška A. *Nuo Baltijos iki Bengalijos. Himalajų ledynuose. Tarp laukinių džiunglėse ir salose* [From the Baltic Sea to the Bay of Bengal: Crossing the Himalayan glaciers. Enjoying the company of savages in the jungle and on the islands], Vol.7. Klaipėda: Vilko takas, 2010.

<sup>56</sup> See the official list of countries with which Lithuania has established diplomatic relations: <https://www.urm.lt/default/lt/sarasas-valstybiu-su-kuriomis-lietuva-yra-uzmezgusi-diplomatinius-santykius> (visited on Oct 9, 2015)

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Lithuanian Government Decision No.611 of July 3, 2013, see: [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc\\_l?p\\_id=453226&p\\_tr2=2](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter3/dokpaieska.showdoc_l?p_id=453226&p_tr2=2) (in Lithuanian)

Table 3. Dynamics of Lithuania-South Asia relations<sup>59</sup>

	Diplomatic relations established in:	Lithuanian embassy opened (first ambassador accredited) in:	Trade with Lithuania in 2014 ( <i>thousands of euro</i> )	Trade with Lithuania in 2004 ( <i>thousands of euro</i> )	Exports from Lithuania in 2014 ( <i>thousands of euro</i> )	No. of visas issued by Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi (Jan 1, 2009 – Sept 30, 2015)	Of them, national (D) visas:
Bangladesh	1992	2011	5,269.4	622.9	4,461.4	166	28
Bhutan	--	--	0	0	0	0	0
India	1992	2008	61,755.1	33,130.6	16,350.6	4,149	1,035
Maldives	1999	--	43.7	0	43.7	0	0
Nepal	2005	2014	82.5	45	52.1	444	118
Pakistan	1994	2013	27,864.6	18,669.3	6,934.3	--	--
Sri Lanka	1996	--	3,522.6	2,834.4	420.7	325	193
Total:			98,537.9	55,302.2	28,262.8	5,084	1,374

Lithuania's trade with the South Asian nations in 2014 amounted to almost 100 million EUR, of which Lithuanian exports was around 30 million EUR. Over a decade, trade turnover has nearly doubled; however, it still remains comparatively low. In this respect, Lithuania is hardly different from the rest of the European Union, whose trade with South Asia in 2014 reached 100 billion EUR and equaled to only 2.1% of the EU's international trade<sup>60</sup>. During the seven years of its operation, the Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi has issued more than five thousand visas, of which 81% were issued to the Indian citizens. Of high dignitaries, only the Lithuanian Prime Minister visited India in 1995 and the Lithuanian President in 2001. Return visits from South Asia to Lithuania have been lower-level and even less frequent.

Why have Lithuania's relations with South Asia stayed passive and what keeps them from growing faster? To find an answer, one would need to revisit the broader South Asian agenda discussed earlier and check how much of it

<sup>59</sup> Sources: Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Statistics Lithuania

<sup>60</sup> Data by the European Commission Trade Division (EU Trade), <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/> (visited on Oct 9, 2015)

corresponds to Lithuania's capabilities to deliver. As it stands now, there seems to be little synergy between the two. Lithuania can hardly expect to be a game-changer in the developing new South Asian security architecture. Her experience can add only a limited value to addressing South Asia's fundamental internal security issues, such as domestic violence and the fight against terror. Lithuania has no natural resources which would be of strategic importance to South Asian economies. Finally, Lithuania is hardly capable of helping the region solve its immense demographic problems.

In a larger European context, Lithuania is no exception: a similar lack of synergy is experienced by many other EU members and, to a certain point, by the EU itself. The situation could change if the EU develops a more focused and better coordinated policy towards South Asia (for example, while the EU is India's largest trade partner, India still hardly reflects the EU as a single body). Also, Lithuania's persistent efforts to find individual niches for itself would also pay off.

A few success stories can already be noted. For example, in 2014 the largest Lithuanian export commodity to India was lasers and laser-related technologies. The growth in this product category was almost six times (see Figure 1). At present, lasers are mostly required by Indian universities and research institutes, but they can easily be adapted to larger industrial needs. Another success story is developing in the field of higher education, where education needs of the overpopulated South Asian nations are perfectly matching the excess in supply offered by the higher education institutions of Lithuania, a country of declining population. Thus, 81 students from South Asia studied in Lithuanian universities in 2012, 257 in 2013, and 404 in 2014<sup>61</sup>. During the most recent period of admission (May-September 2015), 346 visas were issued to prospective students by the Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi.

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<sup>61</sup> Data provided by Lithuanian national agency Education Exchange Support Foundation, <http://www.smpf.lt>, owner of the brand *Study in Lithuania*.

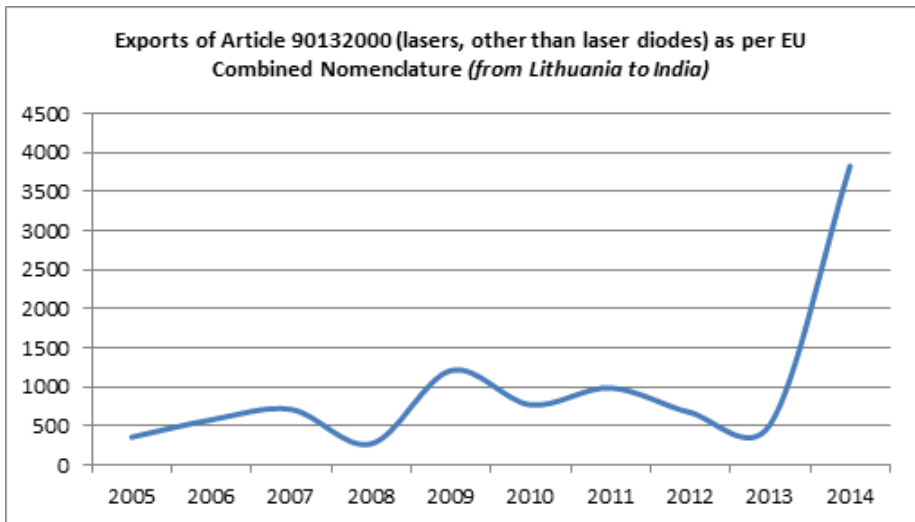


Figure 1. **Export of lasers from Lithuania to India**<sup>62</sup>

In the future, the following cooperation areas may emerge as potentially the most fruitful 'synergy points' between Lithuania and South Asia:

- The role of the EU and the United States as important 'balancing powers' should increase in the emerging South Asian security architecture. The diminishing role of Russia, which used to have strong positions in South Asia, will only facilitate this transition. While traditionally sharing a strong and robust relationship with the US, Lithuania as a member of the EU is directly involved in the EU policy making. Thus, new opportunities open up. However, tapping of these opportunities may be inhibited by the growing importance of China, which also wants a say in South Asia and with which everyone wants to maintain good relationship.
- Export of services, knowledge and technology. Although Lithuania is not particularly rich in natural resources, but it has accumulated considerable experience in the area of state reforms, which might be interesting to the South Asian nations. The technology applied in agriculture allows Lithuania to annually export agricultural products worth almost 4 billion EUR. Thus, along with lasers, other technologies could also find their way to the South Asian markets. Finally, given Lithuania's geographic location and strong traditions in transport and logistics, good cooperation prospects open up in these service sectors as well.

<sup>62</sup> Source: Statistics Lithuania



- While Lithuania is a demographically dwindling nation, South Asia suffers from massive overpopulation. In this respect, the benefits of mutually overlapping interests are already visible in the education field. Fruits of success can also ripen in the labor market, where a few small examples already tell a fascinating story. For example, since 2009 the Lithuanian Embassy in New Delhi has issued more than 1,300 national (D) visas, which are normally granted to persons going for study or working purposes (see Table 3). This number is already larger than the number of potential refugees from Syria and elsewhere, which Lithuania plans to receive as part of the EU designated quota. In proportional terms, Sri Lanka stands out as the single most significant source of labor ‘imports’ from South Asia to Lithuania. A well-considered and coordinated national migration policy would allow Lithuania to increase cooperation in this area on mutually beneficial grounds.

## Conclusions

In Lithuania, South Asia is still a region largely unknown and highly underexplored. Scarcity of available sources and publications in Lithuanian is the first thing a local Lithuanian researcher of the region would encounter. The government institutions too have started discovering South Asia only recently, after Lithuania opened an embassy in New Delhi in 2008. Before that, the contacts with the region were largely episodic.

In order to better understand Lithuania’s opportunities in South Asia, the region’s general parameters and the problems South Asia is facing must be taken into account. From the political point of view, South Asia is a comparatively young region, in which the majority of members have emerged as modern independent republics only after World War II. Practically all of the South Asian nations face serious social and political tensions, and their mutual cooperation is rather low. The South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA), which will soon turn 10 years old, has yet to deliver the expected results. Trade among SAARC/SAFTA countries in 2013 amounted to only \$820 million – roughly the same volume as Lithuania’s bilateral trade with Finland the same year.

South Asia’s self-centered approach is determined by a number of factors. First of all, the level of mutual trust in the region is rather low. The bipolar division of the Cold War era is still alive, even if India has all the potential to become the region’s dominant power. However, since China’s influence in the region is expanding, local actors may be prompted to go search for outside

support to balance it out. Second, issues related to the prevention of terrorism and curbing domestic violence, as well as ensuring access to natural resources and fighting demographic problems, make the domestic realm a natural priority. Foreign partners often are needed only as much as their involvement helps South Asian governments solve these domestic problems.

Lithuania's ability to detect niches of mutual interest will define the success of its future South Asia policy. A few success stories have already emerged, primarily in the fields of high technology (including scientific lasers, which are increasingly exported to countries like India), and higher education (which already benefits from the 'imports' of South Asian students to Lithuanian universities). Exports of other technologies (including agricultural technology) and services (education, transport, and tourism) can surface as the main areas of future cooperation. Needless to say, Lithuania's active involvement in the shaping of European and transatlantic policies towards South Asia would of course complement her own efforts to gain firmer ground in this increasingly important region.

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