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Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda's Central and Eastern European Foreign Policy in 2019–2022: Continuation or Change?

The subject of this article is the foreign policy of the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda. The aim of this article is to analyse the foreign policy and its main objectives pursued in 2019–2022 by the President of the Republic of Lithuania, Gitanas Nausėda. The analysis attempts to answer the question of whether foreign policy is a continuation of previously pursued foreign policy activity or marks a change, and, in the case of the latter, to what extent has the policy changed? The author focuses his research on foreign actions towards the countries of the region (the Baltic States, Poland and Ukraine). The research is based on Gustavsson's model involving the analysis of various stages of foreign policy development.

Introduction

In 2019–2022, the Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda has had a significant impact on the style of Lithuanian foreign policy and the decisions made. Nausėda's presidency coincided with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis, conflict on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border and Russian aggression against Ukraine. Nausėda's term of office represents a continuation of the traditional security and foreign policy of the Republic of Lithuania. By initiating and demanding sanctions against Belarus and Russia for the 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Nausėda has become the most critical towards the Kremlin among all heads of state in independent Lithuania. His support for the full Euro-Atlantic integration of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia and increased political and diplomatic support has become a major priority of foreign policy. After years

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of tensions and disputes (2012–2019), even bilateral relations with Poland have become more intense. The result of this was undoubtedly pressure to find solutions to the unstable geopolitical situation caused by Lukashenko's hybrid war and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which prompted Nausėda to seek direct relationships with major geopolitical partners. The above changes in Lithuania's foreign policy deserve a deeper analysis and evaluation.

The subject of this article is an analysis of the changes of President Gitanas Nausėda's foreign policy in the period 2019–2022, and their scope and consequences. The article aims to analyse the causes, content and degree of changes in foreign policy pursued by President Gitanas Nausėda in 2019–2022. The paper assesses key decisions and changes to the direction of Lithuania's foreign policy. This approach reveals the foreign policy positions and priorities of the incumbent President. While analysing Nausėda's term of office, we develop an overview of Lithuanian foreign policy in regard to its continuity and changes. Such a perspective allows us to determine policy areas that have been revised or have remained unchanged over the past three years.

Selected cases have been examined based on the theoretical Gustavsson's model, which assumes the existence of different stages of foreign policy changes (Gustavsson, 1999). The selection of cases used in the analysis was based on events from 2019 to 2022, which were significant for the stability and security of Lithuania and the region as a whole. An important step was the use of official statements, public speeches and published interviews in domestic and foreign press to help identify positions, attitudes and values President Nausėda has subscribed to. In order to achieve the research objective, the analysis was based on a case study, which made it possible to examine a specific case in detail and draw conclusions about the causes of changes, the course and results of President Nausėda's foreign policy actions. This approach allowed us to reveal how Nausėda created policy and what instruments (including political, diplomatic, economic, etc.) he used for this purpose.

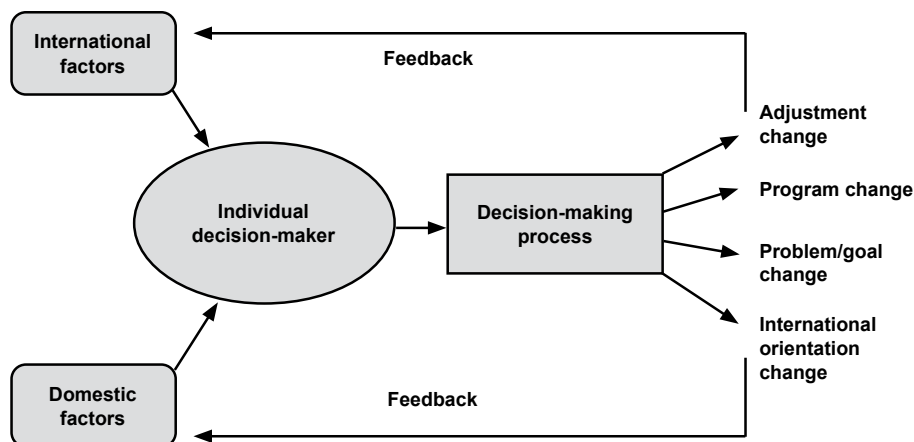
Theoretical Framework — Analysis of Foreign Policy Changes

The continuity and change in foreign policy have become a very inspiring challenge for a number of researchers and experts. This has resulted in a multitude of studies on the issue. Many scholars have pondered how changes (or differences) in a country's foreign policy can be recorded and analysed (Wordliczek, 2013; Janeliūnas, 2021; Hermann, 1990; Rosati, 1994;

Gustavsson, 1999; Welchs, 2005; Blavoukos & Bourantonis 2014; Hudson & Day 2019). In the article, the analysis uses the approach by Gustavsson, who, while explaining foreign policy changes, developed his own cyclical model of change based on the interaction of structures and actors in international relations. The model does not include a single determining independent variable that is capable of changing internal or external frameworks, nor those that can be a direct source of change that provides political actors with the impetus to react and adjust their foreign policy decisions and actions. It is also important to examine external signals to which individual policy-makers must respond instantaneously. According to Gustavsson, any external signal may also be limited by various institutional factors. In practice, however, such a process can result in foreign policy changes, from minor (adjustments) to extremely profound (changes in international orientation). As a result, such a transformation may affect the shape of the international or domestic structure (Gustavsson, 1999: 84-85). The approach and Gustavsson's model (a similar approach was presented by Tomas Janeliūnas (2021)) enables us to answer the research question concerning how Nausėda's foreign policy evolved during the analysed period.

The article can contribute to the development of research on the foreign policy pursued by state leaders (especially in emergency situations) and can go beyond the case of Lithuania. Simultaneously, it can provide important guidance to other political actors in the process of shaping an effective geopolitical policy in a period of international security crisis and building independence from Russian influence.

Figure 1. **The Dynamics of Foreign Policy Change** (redrawn by the author from Gustavsson 1999, Figure 2, License No. 4986361385885)



Gustavsson's concept is based on the traditional generalisation that both structure and policy-makers should be analysed and evaluated, while no structure or category can be decisive. As Giddens, one of the main founders of the 'structure theory', notes, political actors and structures do not oppose but complete each other (Giddens, 1986).

When analysing the implementation of selected foreign policy decisions, the dynamics of Nausėda's three-year presidency are clear. This corresponds to the concepts by Gustavsson and Giddens (especially the rationalist model), as there is a mutual interaction between the political actor and the structure (or internal and external elements). It is worth noting that in the case of Lithuania's foreign policy, it is somewhat more difficult to assess Nausėda's influence on the structure. However, the impact of the structure on the political actor is evident. Nausėda's position on certain issues has shown some minor changes.

The structure of the article was designed to synthetically present the evolution of Lithuanian foreign policy by the head of state. For this reason, the article — in addition to the introduction — is based on three other sections. The first section deals with the theoretical framework for analysing and reviewing the main vectors of Lithuanian foreign policy and its potential changes. The next section of this article is devoted to empirical aspects showing the evolution of Lithuanian foreign policy by the President with the CEE countries in 2019–2022. In the concluding part, the author tries to address the research questions and outline the most important conclusions.

Lithuanian Foreign Policy Directions

The study of the geopolitical situation in Lithuania indicates that Lithuania lies on the border of the continental geostrategic zone of the heartland. The strongest state in the zone is Russia, which, due to historical circumstances, can easily influence the Baltic States. For Moscow, this territory can also be a bridgehead to Central Europe (Elman, 2003: 7). The majority of scholarly works have analysed external threats, mainly the Russian foreign policy, and focus on state security, interests of Lithuanian political elites, as well as bilateral relations and transatlantic policy. Janeliūnas (2019: 10) noted that researchers had paid less attention to the so-called 'black box' of Lithuanian foreign policy. These included decision-making processes and relations between various political elites and domestic stakeholders. Since the subject of the analysis is Nausėda's foreign policy, the author does not focus on internal factors in the analysis, which is a different topic that needs a broader and deeper analysis.

The analysis of the literature draws our attention to the works by Nekrašas (2004), Šleivyte (2009), and Vilpišauskas (2013), which deal with structural or systemic factors that determine Lithuanian foreign policy. We should also mention works by Jonavičius (2021), Paulauskas, and Statkus (2006), which focus on the analysis of a specific political problem while trying to explain it from the perspectives of geopolitical and national interests. There are also works by Miniotaitė (2005) and Berg and Ehin (2009) that analyse Lithuanian foreign policy and its evolution from the perspective of structural and identity-related factors. These are inspired by constructivist theories. Lithuanian foreign policy and its processes of change from 2009 to 2021 are analysed from a similar perspective by Mickevičiūtė (2021) and Jakniūnaitė (2021). Foreign policy visions promoted by individual Lithuanian presidents are addressed by Janeliūnas (2019), Laurinavičius, Sirutavičius, Lopata (2009), and Nekrašas (2009). Several researchers, such as Gričius, K. Paulauskas (2004), Motieka, Statkus, Daniliauskas (2004), Paulauskas (2006), and Lopata and Statkus (2005), have attempted to discuss Lithuanian foreign policy from the point of view of security and potential threats from Russia. The latter research perspective helps to outline the basic directions of Lithuanian foreign policy and identify problems faced by Lithuanian political elites. However, this publication analyses Lithuanian foreign policy and the Eastern (Western) Neighbourhood and shows some changes in the position and policy of the Republic of Lithuania towards its eastern neighbours in 2019–2022. The analysis notes that Nausėda has been able to realise his role in the political practice. Some changes made by the incumbent president are caused by structural factors and national interests to provide security (Kojala & Ivanauskas, 2015).

Changes in Lithuania's Foreign Policy

After Nausėda took office in 2019, many experts believed that the newly elected president, whose position was weakened due to his lack of major political experience, would hold off on defining his presidency priorities until a new majority would emerge after the 2020 parliamentary elections. However, in the very first days after taking office, Nausėda set a clear-cut foreign policy strategy guided by values and courses of action of his choice. The president's priorities consisted of eleven key points:

1. **Further implementation of Western values:** Western lifestyle, market economy;
2. **EU centralisation:** support for EU federalisation and centralisation

projects;

3. **NATO shield:** NATO presence in Lithuania and increase in national defence spending as a percentage of GDP;

4. **Baltic orientation:** to strengthen closer cooperation with the Baltic States;

5. **Dialogue with Belarus and Russia:** attempting to establish economic cooperation;

6. **Open approach to China:** an opportunity to establish business contacts and the development of economic cooperation with China;

7. **First foreign visit to Poland:** an opportunity to strengthen cooperation with Poland, both on security and joint energy and logistics projects;

8. **Northern European format:** Baltic and Nordic formats, i.e. a potential orientation toward the Baltic and Nordic countries and a strategic partnership with the UK;

9. **Ukraine's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures:** A European Plan for Ukraine. According to Nausėda, Lithuania is one of few countries that take such an uncompromised responsibility and steps to support Ukraine;

10. **Focus on economic diplomacy:** increased resources allocated to foreign policy, opening trade attaché offices;

Climate change: declaration to support an EU initiative to address climate change (including the European climate bank) (Verslo Žinios, 2019).

Upon analysing the president's program outlined above, it can be concluded that from the beginning of his presidency, Nausėda wanted to give a concrete and definite direction for Lithuanian foreign policy and to clearly express the positions, attitudes and values he would represent during his presidency.

Baltic Orientation — the President's New Strategic Orientation

Foreign policy is a policy sphere in which the head of state of the Republic of Lithuania has significant powers, but under the Constitution — it can only be conducted jointly with the government. However, taking advantage of the weakness of the Skvernelis government, Nausėda took gradual steps to take control of foreign policy. As a result, he had to deal with a number of challenges in 2019–2022¹².

The first independent (without consulting the government) step in this direction was Nausėda's return. In 2019, the old concept of a 'regional centre' was promoted back in the days of President Adamkus. A larger focus on the Baltic States and Poland¹³ became a new theme in Lithuanian foreign policy. The primary objective of the new president was to strengthen defence and security cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region (BSR). According to Nausėda, there is a need for intensive cooperation to strengthen the region and neighbours in a changing geopolitical environment (LRS.lt, 2022). Therefore, the president adopted a vision according to which the Baltic States could be best suited to defend the EU's common values and security¹⁴. Nausėda assumed that for Lithuania, closer relations with the Baltic States and Poland could open new coalitions within the EU and NATO (Dudzinska, 2019: 3).

Nausėda made relations with the Baltic States a priority of Lithuania's foreign policy. It should also be noted that during the election campaign, Nausėda declared his desire to strengthen cooperation in the Baltic sub-region and recognise the need to create a strategic platform for quadrilateral cooperation. As part of the process, he pointed to ongoing projects that will benefit partner states, e.g. Rail Baltica, synchronisation of electricity grids, and the enhancement of NATO capabilities in the region. 'The strength of the Baltic States lies in their unity, which is why I am convinced that regular meetings of the presidents are the best platform for discussing strategic objectives of cooperation and future visions and challenges. We need to offer a joint monitoring of geopolitical processes and strengthen common positions while shaping EU and NATO policies', said Nausėda (Alkas.lt, 2019).

Attempts to change the previous policy resulted from domestic policy issues, so Nausėda (Park & Jakstaite-Confortola, 2021) decided to adopt the formula of the 'regional collective leadership' (in the Baltic States). At the same time, he rejected the formula of leadership based on personal authority, promoted by Grybauskaitė in 2014–2019 (Janeliūnas, 2021: 19).

Considering the influence of 'structural factors' on small states, which prompts the actor to react and initiate changes in decisions and actions, Nausėda's formula has contributed to a new concept of a community of interests in the Baltic sub-region¹⁵. The evidence of the above was regular meetings between the leaders of the three Baltic States and Poland to coordinate their key decisions concerning foreign and security policy. The best manifestation of the cooperation included Three Seas Initiative meetings in Tallinn (2020), Sofia (2021) and Riga (2022), and regular visits of the presidents of the Baltic States to Ukraine.

Following the implementation of key energy projects with the Baltic States (e.g. Baltic Synchronisation, LNG terminal, and Paldiski, NordEd and

BaltHub projects) (Kozłowski, 2022), which increased Lithuania's energy security vis-à-vis Russia. Pragmatic interests (primarily security) have transformed into a stronger identity, so much needed for a more intensive partnership on various 'soft policy' issues.

As Hyndle-Hussein notes, thanks to the collective approach promoted by Nausėda, the new cooperation strategy has made it possible to overcome mistrust in relations with the Baltic partners. During Grybauskaitė's presidency, divergent economic interests and competition reduced the effectiveness of the cooperation (Hyndle-Hussein, 2019).

Orientation toward Central and Eastern Europe

The pursuit of pragmatic relations with Russia and Belarus has become a relatively constant and recurring element in Lithuanian foreign policy. Still, during his election campaign, Nausėda advocated the possibility of dialogue with Minsk and Moscow. In November 2019, the president convened a meeting of heads of parliament bodies, as well as leaders of parliamentary groups, for informal consultations on the most relevant Lithuanian foreign policy issues. This foreign policy objective, however, did not imply a change of policy orientation and was rather short-lived.

As foreign policy chief and presidential adviser Asta Skaisgirytė admitted, with regard to Russia and Belarus, Nausėda was open to a dialogue with Moscow and Minsk at various levels, but not at a high political level, due to human rights violation, position on the construction of the nuclear power plant in Astravyets¹⁶, and Russia's geopolitical plans. A completely different position was taken by Foreign Minister Linas Linkevičius, who stated that nothing had fundamentally changed in Belarus and Russia since Grybauskaitė's presidency; however, the international environment had changed. Similar positions were taken by politicians of all parliamentary groupings, which rejected a basis for dialogue. Meanwhile, the president's chief advisor, while speaking on the issue of the Astravec nuclear power plant, stated that the president's position had not changed, and there could be no compromise as regards security. At the same time, according to the president, the dialogue with Lithuania could be beneficial for the country and Lithuanian national interests (Plikūnė, 2019).

According to interviews with Nausėda and his advisors, in many instances, the president was guided by intuitive rather than strategic choices of foreign policy priorities.

The political crisis in Belarus following the rigged presidential elections,

which escalated in August 2020, and later the migration crisis on the border with the country resulted in a definite break in diplomatic relations with Belarus. Nausėda openly criticised Minsk and took decisive diplomatic and political steps. The president supported the opposition to the Lukashenko regime and proved to be one of the main proponents of democratic transition in Belarus. In relation to the Belarus government, he became one of the strongest advocates of severe sanctions (including cutting off the Lithuanian port of Klaipėda for Belarusian oil company BNK) (Kalinskas, 2021). His initiative also mobilised other states in the region, especially Latvia and Estonia, to make concerted efforts to strengthen and coordinate their resilience to threats. The Baltic States created a list of Belarusian officials to be covered by sanctions, expressed their support for Poland's decision to initiate Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty, and declared their willingness to acquire a joint missile system. Finally, these actions prompted the EU to impose sanctions against Minsk (Raš, 2020: 1-2).

The shift towards eastern policy initiated by Nausėda and attempts at seeking direct contact with the leaders of Belarus and Russia failed to bring lasting changes to the international structure. However, they were enough to arouse scepticism and negative reactions in the internal structures of Lithuanian politics. As a result, Nausėda's position as an actor and his methods of dealing with Belarus and Russia dramatically changed.

Regarding the Eastern Partnership countries (especially the Associated Trio of Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova), Nausėda saw the need to increase Lithuania's active role in promoting Western values and norms. Nausėda's agenda changed to focus more on the value transformation and geopolitical orientation of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Caucasus region rather than on EU agenda-related initiatives. The objective of Nausėda's foreign policy is to support the integration of the Associated Trio into Euro-Atlantic structures and the implementation of democratic values as part of the Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova 2027 Strategy (Delfi.lt, 2019). It has been recognised that the enlargement of NATO to include the above-mentioned countries is crucial for the security strategy of Lithuania and the entire eastern flank.

The most important outcome of this process, following the establishment of the Lublin Triangle (Regionu naujienos, 2021) in July 2020, was the coalition of seven countries created by Nausėda in December 2020 to support democratically elected Moldovan President Mai Sandu. The most important result achieved by the coalition was the declaration of support by leaders of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Romania and Slovakia for Sandu's initiatives towards European integration and the strengthening of democratic reforms in Moldova (Prezidento komunikacijos grupė, 2020).

To further separate the Associated Trio from Russia's influence, Nausėda increased international pressure on the US and other transatlantic allies. The aim was to protect the security interests of the Eastern Partnership countries, especially Georgia and Moldova. Ultimately, his actions and results-oriented rhetoric proved fruitful, which resulted in the signing of the Association Agreement with Moldova and Georgia in 2022.

Another important change in Nausėda's approach toward the eastern orientation was Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022. He focused on the implementation of common goals of the regional initiative, as he was aware of even closer cooperation with EU and NATO institutions. Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, especially with the more intensive Russian disinformation and military operations, Nausėda has become one of the strongest advocates to extend sanctions against Russia and support Ukraine's cause¹⁷ not only in the region but also in the world. Nausėda has adopted the toughest stance towards Russia among world leaders, putting regular pressure on transatlantic allies to maintain a tough course towards Russia and moving away from the 'realpolitik' imposed by Angela Merkel. The plan to impose sanctions on Russia, which was agreed with transatlantic allies, aimed at placing an increasing burden on Russian energy exports, a crucial source of war financing for the Kremlin. The most important result of this programme was that Lithuania began to impose sanctions on its own: it was the first country in the EU to expel the Russian ambassador and the first to completely stop importing Russian oil, gas, and electricity. The programme also froze the Russian central bank's foreign exchange reserves and blocked the flow of goods and people to/from the Kaliningrad Region.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine strengthened Nausėda's conviction of the need to ensure energy security in the Baltic States as soon as possible. The threat that energy and gas supplies from Russia could be disrupted so strongly influenced Lithuanian foreign and security policy that it left Nausėda virtually no room for improvisation. Consequently, the president focused on the strengthening of the sub-regional energy security. This included getting more attention from the EU, finding new security partners in the region, putting more diplomatic pressure on the leaders of Poland, Latvia, and Estonia to speed up the disconnection from the common electricity system with Belarus and Russia (BRELL), and the synchronisation of electricity grids with those of continental Europe (Gaidamavičius & Pakėnienė, 2022).

One of the most important results of the process was the opening of the Gas Interconnection Poland-Lithuania in May 2022 (Forsal.pl, 2022). Despite their dependence on natural gas supplies, the Baltic States also decided to stop importing gas from Russia.

In the context of the Eastern policy, Nausėda's achievements include not only a new agenda and priorities in Lithuania's foreign policy (which encourage countries in the region to make a joint effort toward independence from Russia, causing the so-called 'domino effect') but also a change in the mechanism of foreign policy formation. Despite his promotion of a collective approach to cooperation in the region, especially after the invasion of Ukraine, it became important for Nausėda to increase his visibility and influence in the region. The aforementioned activities became a personal ambition and a challenge for Nausėda. Accordingly, he pursued an active policy based on direct contacts with many leaders of partner countries (including regular meetings with Andrzej Duda, Volodymyr Zelensky, Egils Levits, and Alar Karis, or visits to Moldova, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan).

While summarising changes in Lithuania's foreign policy, the long-standing focus on the Western Partnership has been complemented by the Eastern Partnership.

Relations with Poland

Since Nausėda took office, Lithuania's bilateral relations have been the most intensive with Poland, most probably due to structural reasons (Raś, 2020: 2).

After his inauguration as president, Nausėda's first foreign visit was made to Warsaw on 16 July 2019. This choice marked Nausėda's willingness to pay more attention to cooperation in the framework of the Three Seas Initiative¹⁸. According to the President, Poland was seen as the closest neighbour and the leader of the Initiative. Nausėda's positive attitude toward Poland was further expressed in the Lithuanian support for Poland's aspirations to join the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund.

It should also be added that one of the main priorities of Nausėda's foreign policy toward Poland was the development of infrastructure. The Lithuanian President emphasised the importance of investing in transport, e.g. Rail Baltica, Via Carpatia, and Via Baltica (Bučys, 2021). The symbolic dimension of the first steps taken by Nausėda underlines how important the strategic role of building an intensive partnership with Poland is¹⁹. The latter highlighted the strategic partnerships with Nordic countries within the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) Group.

Nausėda's choices and decisions to build active and flexible relations with Poland were also influenced by the attitude of President Valdas Adamkus (Grybauskaitė's predecessor) but also promoted by Lithuanian leaders' plans

for territorial defence (e.g. Suwałki Gap) and the Baltic Sea (within Northern Group and Baltops exercise, Northern Coasts and SUCBAS initiative), as well as energy cooperation (e.g. Klaipėdos nafta's cooperation with PGNiG). Nausėda regarded these goals as elements that enhance Lithuania's security (Raš, 2021: 2). It can be noted that Nausėda plays a reactive role in this respect. He actually initiated the first impulses and steps. The best evidence of this is the number of visits to Poland (10 visits in 2019-2022).

In 2020, Nausėda's communication and relationship with Poland became more intensive. The president wanted to appear as the closest ally who showed unconditional loyalty to Poland. This was confirmed when, in 2020, he refused to attend the 75th anniversary of the liberation of the German Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp in Jerusalem, and paid tribute to the victims during his visit to Poland. He also expressed his loyalty when he avoided direct criticism of Warsaw and refused to approve EU sanctions against Poland in the rule of law dispute. From the beginning of the Warsaw-Brussels dispute, Nausėda carefully balanced between the EU and Poland, and he did not side with the Polish government's critics, despite other EU leaders claiming that the rule of law should not be linked to the distribution of EU funds. It is, therefore, significant that being a leader with a strong pro-European affiliation, Nausėda was willing to disregard the rule of law issues in Poland.

As Pukszto notes, the Polish-Lithuanian coalition agreement contains a chapter on Lithuanian foreign policy, which emphasises that it is based on the principles of democracy and the rule of law. Based on the above, it can be assumed that Lithuania's policy toward Poland is guided by concessions, which indicates that Lithuania has little room for manoeuvre as Poland is an indispensable partner for their military and energy security (Irytas.lt, 2020). This has been confirmed by Lithuanian Ambassador to Warsaw Eduardas Borisovas: 'the larger the presence of US troops in Poland, the more secure Lithuania and the entire region are' (Baltic Review, 2019).

Nausėda's growing pro-Polish stance and solidarity with the Polish political elites increased mutual trust and corrected the previous perception of Lithuania focused on a single issue, i.e. the perceived threat from Russia.

Nausėda's support for the establishment of Fort Trump in Poland or Poland's proposal to initiate NATO's Article 4, his effort to defend Polish political elites against accusations of violating the rule of law and Nausėda's signing of a law on the spelling of non-Lithuanian surnames in identity documents, which strengthened the rights of the Polish minority in Lithuania are perhaps the most visible symbols of the will to intensify Lithuania's foreign policy while demonstrating a symbolic distinction from

Grybauskaitė's policy.

These episodes show that Nausėda tries to remain quite flexible in his choice of personal communication and leadership methods, often based on national interests and the need to adapt to external circumstances. As regards relations with Poland, there has been a particularly strong change in Lithuania's foreign policy, which has never been so intensive. As a consequence of the approach, foreign policy goals have been secured at bilateral, regional, and Euro-Atlantic levels. In conclusion, it can be said that Nausėda made a number of efforts to increase Lithuania's visibility, importance and role in policy-making in Europe, especially in the Baltic Sea Region. All this has taken place in the context of Russia's aggression in Ukraine. To some extent, his actions have been very successful. However, most of these changes are corrections and minor adjustments to the implementation of the foreign policy. This may confirm the view that Lithuanian foreign policy and the actions of Lithuanian leaders have less influence in a wider scope than the countries of the region (which is a result of Lithuania's size as a structural factor).

Conclusions

Fundamental changes and adjustments in Lithuania's foreign policy during Nausėda's term of office are summarised in Table 1. It is worth noting that Gustavsson's foreign policy change model can explain quite well some of the fundamental deviations from the typical Lithuanian stance. As Gustavsson points out, the model he developed illustrates the evolution of foreign policy over the shortest possible period (Gustavsson, 1999: 86). Based on the Gustavsson model, Nausėda has been rapidly building relationships with other countries to strengthen the region's security.

Table 1. **Characteristics of changes in the foreign policy of the Republic of Lithuania in 2019-2022.**

Country	International factors	National factors	Type of change
Baltic States 2019-2022	Increased security threats from Russia and Belarus	Strong pro-EU and Baltic orientation	New quality partnerships through building collective leadership
Poland 2019-2021	Poland-EU tension	Eagerness to seize the opportunity	Changing the target — a new quality partnership with Poland

Poland 2021-2022	Increased security threats from Russia and Belarus	Government and presidential responsibility for national interests (security)	Priority of security guarantees
Eastern Partnership 2019-2022	EU-NATO collaboration process	Responsibility for Lithuania's role in the region	Higher priority given to the EU agenda and enhanced harmonisation of Lithuania, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Latvia and Estonia's interests
Ukraine 2019-2022	Russia's aggression in Ukraine; Change in Ukraine's leadership	Strong pro-EU orientation; and Euro-Atlantic	Pursuing the goal: to bring Ukraine closer to NATO and the EU

Source: own elaboration

In the case of Lithuanian foreign policy, it should be noted that in 2021–2022, Nausėda sought new directions and areas for his activity regarding countries of the region in general and Poland in particular. The bilateral political crisis between Poland and the EU, as well as between Lithuania and Belarus, also opened the possibility for Nausėda to introduce a new goal for Lithuania. This was an even greater rapprochement with Poland as well as Latvia and Estonia. On the other hand, the war in Ukraine (as an international and domestic security crisis) led to increased efforts to bring back the attention of the US and Poland to Lithuania and the other Baltic States. In the case of Poland, it was a new programme (partly modelled on Adamkus' agenda), while in the case of Belarus, due to its deepening integration with Russia, a radical change in policy towards Minsk was made by introducing sanctions and making diplomatic efforts for its de facto international isolation. This means that after 2020, Nausėda's eleven-point program turned into a pro-Baltic (and anti-Russian and anti-Belarusian) orientation.

In conclusion, it should be noted that although there was a shift in some strategic priorities and goals, Nausėda did not seek fundamental changes in Lithuania's foreign policy. In most cases, foreign policy objectives were adjusted to the then international situation. Based on a pro-EU and Euro-Atlantic orientation, several issues and priorities emerged in Lithuanian foreign policy in 2019–2022. Some of them have continued until today: policy toward the BSR and the Eastern Partnership countries. The strengthening of relations with Poland and the other Baltic states can be considered a relatively new priority and a shift to a strategic partnership (new quality). Another change is marked by a rather significant freezing of relations with Belarus in 2020–2022.

In 2021-2022, domestic circumstances and an unstable international environment give the president more freedom of action. This enables Nausėda to take over the initiative in foreign policy and establish himself in

official positions (including representation in the European Council, NATO, and EU summits). The increasing geopolitical instability of the international environment prompts Nausėda to seek effective and alternative foreign policy solutions through even deeper cooperation with Poland and other countries in the region.

It should be mentioned that the dynamics in Lithuania's security environment created some freedom for Nausėda to manoeuvre his relations with the US. Russian aggression against Ukraine forced Nausėda to exert diplomatic pressure on NATO countries to pay special attention to the national security of Lithuania and the Baltic region.

It should also be noted that the elimination of threat from Russia and Belarus was at the top of Nausėda's current security agenda. In this regard, the president focused on national security goals, as well as those of the region, including increasing the defence budget, ensuring US/NATO security guarantees by increasing the number of NATO troops stationed in the Baltic states (including reinforcement of battle groups up to brigade level), finding new security partners, strengthening cooperation in the Baltic Sea Region, initiating and organising regular meetings of the leaders of the three Baltic States and Ukraine, and coordinating regional cooperation at the top level.

Relating the actual results of the research to the originally established research objectives — it can be concluded that:

- First, President Nausėda's activities have had the effect of mobilising other countries to act in favour of Ukraine and to develop a common position on further actions against Russia. Developing a common position is one of the key instruments through which the Baltic countries pursue a common foreign and security policy;

- Secondly, the president's actions and initiatives have contributed to intensification and rapprochement of Polish-Lithuanian relations, which should be assessed as one of the main changes in Lithuanian foreign policy;

- Third, Nausėda's regular pressure on the US led to the fact that the battalions of NATO forces stationed in the Baltics were significantly increased;

- Fourth, thanks to Nausėda's diplomatic instruments, the Baltic states and Poland, among them, have gradually freed themselves from Russian energy dictates, contributing to the region's political independence.

As for the change in the role of the President of Lithuania in foreign policy, the constitutional factors have basically not changed since 1993. However, making a distinction between the initiatives of the president and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the president's activity in the foreign policy sphere can be evaluated positively. Looking at statistics on who represented

Lithuania at NATO and European Council summits, it can be seen that only in the period from 2021 to 2022, the President represented Lithuania 18 times, while the prime minister did not participate in any of the summits. It should be mentioned that the prime minister represented Lithuania only once in 2022 at the Lublin Triangle Summit. On this basis, it can be concluded that in recent years, the president has taken the initiative in the sphere of foreign policy, which is, in fact, the domain of the government.

Foreign policy is the area where an incisive presence is most expected from the president. Thus, it puts the president in the spotlight. Despite his limited political experience, Nausėda took office in July 2019 as a result of changes in the international environment and post-pandemic events. He has become particularly active and exerted his influence on Lithuanian foreign policy²⁰. However, due to Lithuania's position in the geopolitical system, we can only expect the president to make adjustments in foreign policy as marked by a change in priorities and rhetoric.

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Notes

¹ According to contemporary researchers, several factors can be distinguished that favor the activity of Lithuanian presidents and the tendency to assume greater influence in domestic and foreign policy-making: a) a formally undefined coordination mechanism between the president and the prime minister; b) individualised Lithuanian political culture; c) additional circumstances that open a 'window of opportunity' for presidential activity. In the case of Nausėda, one can speak of options a and b.

² According to Nausėda, regional cooperation could involve more countries. In this case, Lithuanian relations with Latvia and Estonia would be part of some larger mechanism involving primarily Poland.

³ According to Janeliūnas, Grybauskaitė's international policy expressed a demand to take Lithuania's interests into account rather than those of the entire Baltic sub-region (Janeliūnas, 2019).

⁴ As Janeliūnas notes, without going into details, it is clear that according to military and economic criteria, Lithuania is practically inferior in all areas to Poland. The latter, due to its physical characteristics and the attitude of the powers, is much better suited to be a 'regional leader' (Janeliūnas 2019).

⁵ According to the Lithuanian government's official opinion, the construction of the power plant near the Lithuanian-Belarusian border is being built in violation of all norms, rules and international standards.

⁶ As Kuczynska-Zonik notes, Nausėda's and other Baltic States' involvement in helping Ukraine stems from real concerns regarding the change in the security architecture in the region as a result of the Russian aggression. Lithuania's security is closely linked to the stability in the Eastern Europe.

⁷ The Three Seas Initiative is an international economic and political organisation comprising Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Estonia, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Hungary. As of 1 February 2021, Lithuania became a full member of the Three Seas Initiative Investment Fund.

⁸ At the same time, she was also reluctant to make concessions to the Polish minority in Lithuania, thereby contributing to the deterioration of relations with Poland.

⁹ As Morkevičius notes, compared to 2022, G. Nausėda less focused on foreign policy and more on managing the coronavirus pandemic, social policy, and education (Jačauskas, Stankevičius 2021).