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# Gabrielius Landsbergis' Foreign Policy Doctrine (2020–2024): Ideas, Strategic Priorities and Diplomatic Practice

The aim of this article is to evaluate the tenure of Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabrielius Landsbergis, through the lens of successes and failures on the international stage with selected countries. From a research perspective, Landsbergis's term at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will be analyzed in the context of continuity and change within Lithuanian foreign policy, framed by the neo-idealism approach. This analysis revealed that despite the lack of strategic guidelines for Lithuania's foreign policy, it was perceived by external stakeholders as relatively predictable and values-driven, particularly with regard to specific actions taken by the Lithuanian government towards China, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Taiwan.

## Keywords

Landsbergis, foreign policy, neo-idealism, Lithuania

## Introduction

In 2020, Lithuania faced the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic, which—particularly in the initial period following the assumption of power by the conservative Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats (TS-LKD), led by Gabrielius Landsbergis—had a direct impact on the country's economy and public sentiment. The new government's priority was to enhance the state's capacity to respond to

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various threats, not only the pandemic but also pressing international challenges. These included supporting Belarusians in their fight for freedom and democracy, maintaining policies of targeted economic sanctions against the Moscow regime in response to the occupation and annexation of Ukrainian territories by Russia since 2014, and strengthening the European Union (EU) and NATO membership prospects for Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine (Hyndle-Hussein, 2020).

The new cabinet planned adjustments in Lithuania's foreign policy, with the responsibility for implementation entrusted to the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabrielius Landsbergis. From the outset of his tenure, Landsbergis emphasized that Lithuania's foreign policy should continue to be guided by the principle of national consensus, ensuring the continuity of strategic geopolitical orientations. However, he also stressed the need to introduce new tools, increase activity, and strengthen the diplomatic service to address emerging challenges and better defend Lithuania's national interests (URM, 2020).

Furthermore, the new Minister of Foreign Affairs announced the implementation of a new foreign policy program grounded in the concept of a values-based approach. One of its most significant elements was the global promotion of democracy, "from Belarus to China," by emphasizing and monitoring human rights issues, particularly in regions where ethnic groups face persecution. Lithuanian political elites perceived this program primarily in the context of countering the pressure from authoritarian regimes, while also highlighting these issues for the international public. This approach also linked to Lithuania's own security, as the country frequently faces various forms of pressure from Russia and Belarus. Additionally, the new program envisioned the creation of new political and economic alliances while maintaining the Lithuania's Euro-Atlantic direction and strengthening regional cooperation (Hyndle-Hussein & Jakóbowski, 2021).

The research problem addressed in this paper is the analysis of the foreign policy of Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabrielius Landsbergis, examined through selected episodes from his term of office, with particular emphasis on the period 2020–2024. The aim of the article is to evaluate Landsbergis's tenure as Lithuania's foreign minister by examining his successes and failures on the international stage with selected countries. From a research perspective, Landsbergis's term will be analyzed in terms of his diplomatic activity and the values he has promoted in Lithuanian foreign policy, within

the framework of neo-idealism. This approach makes it possible to trace the directions and trajectories of Lithuanian foreign policy over the past four years. The article does not include a critical analysis of other factors, such as the minister's personal agency, decision-making processes, strategic balance, or domestic political conditions. Instead, it focuses on Gabrielius Landsbergis's policy through the lens of the values, ideas, orientations, and actions he represents. From the perspective of the ideas and values underpinning Lithuania's foreign policy, this issue remains under-researched, with a noticeable lack of scholarly literature devoted to this topic.

From a theoretical standpoint, this analysis is primarily inspired by the concept of neo-idealism. Neo-idealism is based on the conviction that foreign policy can integrate moral considerations into the (geo) political pursuit of national interests. It emphasizes that all democratic states, including smaller ones, have the right to self-determination and the freedom to voluntarily join "integration spheres" such as NATO or the EU, rather than being coerced into "spheres of influence" imposed by authoritarian powers (Heywood, 2006). Lithuania has been at the forefront of Europe's response to pressures from China over Taiwan and to Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. It has politically supported Taiwan in its conflict with China, led efforts to provide Ukraine with heavy weaponry, and was the first to back democratic Belarus while opposing the Lukashenko regime. These actions by Lithuania exemplify a neo-idealist approach.

The aim of this analysis was to verify the research hypothesis: despite the lack of detailed strategic guidelines for Lithuania's foreign policy, it was perceived by external stakeholders as relatively predictable and values-based, particularly with regard to specific actions taken by the Lithuanian government towards China, Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, and Taiwan. The research question is: What values and priorities shaped Lithuania's foreign policy under the leadership of Gabrielius Landsbergis as Minister of Foreign Affairs? The use of authentic sources, such as official statements, public speeches, and interviews previously published in Lithuanian and international media, enables a detailed analysis of the positions, attitudes, and values represented by Lithuania's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gabrielius Landsbergis.

Research on Gabrielius Landsbergis's foreign policy is innovative because it illustrates a shift away from traditional realism toward an approach grounded in democratic values, human rights, and the principles of international law. By analyzing Lithuania's

actions toward Ukraine, Russia, Belarus, and China, this research demonstrates how a small state can actively shape the normative international agenda, rather than remaining confined to a passive role. The innovative contribution of this research also lies in its examination of the role of Landsbergis's diplomacy in building Lithuania's image as a moral leader in the region. The most important contribution of this article to the scientific literature is its analysis of how a small state—lacking significant political, military, and economic resources—builds its position on the international stage through the promotion of values and ideas, as well as advocacy for peace, the promotion of democracy, and the provision of assistance.

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## 1. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In recent decades, numerous research studies have sought to reconcile structural theories with approaches focused on international actors, whose actions, behaviors, and values are grounded in the concept of neoclassical realism (Rose, 1998; Schweller, 2003; Rathbun, 2008; Ripsman et al., 2016; Hafner-Burton, 2017; Herrmann, 2017). Similarly, most studies on Lithuanian foreign policy adopt a structural perspective, basing their arguments on structural theories of international relations (Nekrašas, 2004; Šleivyte, 2009; Vilpišauskas, 2013). A major contribution to the literature on Lithuanian foreign policy is the 2014 book edited by Dovilė Jakniūnaitė (2014), which analyzes the development of Lithuanian foreign policy and its transformation through the prism of Lithuania's membership and activity in international organizations. The authors also highlight significant limitations of Lithuanian foreign policy, such as the absence of a long-term strategy for developing relations with Central Asian countries, including China, and insufficient coordination between various European Union policies.

A substantial body of literature on Lithuanian foreign policy has been analyzed through the lens of national interest, based on the premises of political realism (Statkus & Paulauskas, 2006; Jonavičius,

2021; Janeliūnas, 2021). Several researchers have attempted to analyze Lithuania's foreign policy through the actions of specific politicians who represented their views and interests (Laurinavičius et al., 2009; Nekrašas, 2009; Janeliūnas, 2019; Karpavičiūtė, 2022; Malužinas, 2022; 2023). However, other scholars have examined Lithuania's foreign policy through the ideas, visions, and doctrines articulated by Lithuanian political elites, including Karpavičiūtė (2013); Janeliūnas (2019); Biersztańska, (2022; 2025); and Malužinas (2024a; 2024b).

However, there is a lack of literature that analyzes the foreign policy of specific decision-makers through the lens of neo-idealism. According to Heywood and Riegg, neo-idealism involves the conduct of international policy by political actors based on the practical value of morality, particularly respect for human rights, national independence, and democratic order (Heywood, 2006; Riegg, 2010). Henderson observes that while democratic peace serves as empirical validation of neo-idealist principles in global politics, it often contradicts these principles in practice. Neo-idealism emphasizes the role of international regimes in reducing the likelihood of interstate conflict, ensuring global security, and stabilizing a democratic order founded on human rights (Henderson, 1999).

According to Morgenthau, neorealism differs from realism in that it is a political concept that emerged later, with realists recognizing that states need each other in order to cooperate, not only to pursue their own interests but also to consider the interests and needs of other states (Morgenthau, 1978). Henderson, meanwhile, highlights the functionality of this concept, viewing it as internal cooperation between international governmental organizations aimed at improving the standards of each country and implementing standards for the effective functioning of the global community (Henderson, 1999). As Riggs and Icoska argue, idealism and realism, while diametrically opposed as concepts, are both widely applied in attempts to understand international relations and the foreign policies of decision-makers who create and present their positions, attitudes, and values (Riggs, 1994; Icoska, 2015).

However, as Simon and Gartzke (1996) argue that although democratic states are more likely to form alliances with each other than would be the case, their behavior may result from common strategic interests rather than democratic values. Their analysis suggests that alliance formation is driven by practical considerations, such as shared security concerns or similar threat perceptions. This approach is typical

of Lithuania, which, since regaining independence and beginning to build a democratic system, has firmly supported the values, norms and principles of the international system, striving for integration into the EU and NATO structures in 2004. Therefore, as Henderson argues, membership in the alliance could result in both democratization of such a country and a simultaneous reduction of military danger (Henderson, 1999, p. 218). Moreover, Siverson and Emmons argue that this reflects the tendency of democratic powers to “protect weaker democracies” (Siverson & Emmons, 1991, p. 302). Meanwhile, as Keohane notes that although international organizations can increase the visibility of small states and enhance their security, their actual impact remains limited without the support of larger powers and coalitions of interests (Keohane, 1984). Krasner, in turn, emphasizes that institutional norms are rarely neutral—they usually reflect the interests of dominant states, which limits the autonomy and influence of weaker participants in the international system (Krasner, 1999). The example of Lithuania clearly illustrates the limitations of the neo-idealism theory: despite active membership in the EU and NATO and strong diplomatic engagement in support of Ukraine and its membership in the Alliance, Vilnius’s influence on the decisions of key actors remained limited. As Krasner (1999) notes, international institutions are structures reflecting the interests of the major players—thus, while Lithuania could publicly formulate ambitious demands, final decisions regarding Ukraine were made among countries such as the US, Germany, and France.

Despite criticism of neoidealism by many scholars, the analysis of Landsbergis’s foreign policy clearly shows that his diplomatic actions were consistently aligned with ideals rather than based solely on Lithuania’s interests. This will be illustrated with examples from his diplomatic activities concerning countries such as Taiwan, Belarus, and Ukraine. The selection of these countries reflects the determination of their politicians and peoples to advance democracy, protect human rights, and maintain peace in the region, particularly in the face of threats from aggressive and powerful authoritarian neighbors such as Russia and China. These examples serve to demonstrate a neo-idealist ethic of morality, principles, and actions aimed at defending Lithuania’s interests, such as promoting democracy and pursuing security and peace in the region.

## 2. Eastern Policy (Belarus)

Belarus remained an important partner for Lithuania only in the trade sector. However, political relations between the two countries deteriorated following the protests in Belarus in 2020–2021, triggered by the falsification of presidential election results and the subsequent arrests and exiles of opposition figures. In response, Minister Landsbergis proposed to Belarusian opposition leader Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, who was residing in Lithuania, the establishment of representative offices of the Coordinating Council abroad, with its headquarters in Vilnius. Landsbergis's initiative aimed to initiate the delegitimization of the Lukashenko regime and promote pro-democratic changes in Belarus. In 2021, Landsbergis granted diplomatic status to the Representative Office of Belarusian Democracy under Tikhanovskaya's leadership in Vilnius (Rzeczpospolita, 2021). According to Landsbergis, the representative office was given a status similar to that of Lithuania's information offices abroad during the Soviet occupation, before the country was officially recognized (TVP Wilno, 2021a).

In June 2021, Lithuanian-Belarusian relations worsened when a migration crisis was triggered in Lithuania as a result of actions by the Belarusian regime. Landsbergis publicly blamed President Lukashenko for this, viewing it as a form of hybrid warfare directed against Lithuania in retaliation for its support of the Belarusian opposition. At the EU level, Landsbergis called for sanctions against Belarus for its role in facilitating illegal migration, urging the EU to exert pressure on Iraq and Turkey to stop the flow of migrants and thereby compel the Minsk regime to halt its use of migrants to target Lithuania. According to Landsbergis, the EU must be firm with regimes that exploit migrants as a weapon to carry out hybrid attacks. Therefore, Lithuania pushed for the preparation of a fifth sanctions package against Belarus (Tvn24, 2022). In November 2021, the expansion and introduction of new EU sanctions in response to the hybrid attacks and the instrumental treatment of migrants by Belarus could be considered the most significant "practical" outcome of Landsbergis's efforts, which were rooted in political interests (Council of the European Union, 2021). Landsbergis warned that if Minsk continued transporting migrants, Lithuania would propose new sanctions at the EU level. "Our policy should generally discourage authoritarian regimes from using people as a tool of political blackmail throughout the EU" (TVP Wilno, 2021d).

He also appealed to EU leaders, emphasizing that engaging in talks with Lukashenko was a dangerous path, as the Minsk regime consistently disregarded the rule of law and agreements, while pressure on civil society and human rights violations continued to worsen. Later in 2021, when it emerged that Lithuanian railways were transporting Belarusian potash despite sanctions, Landsbergis publicly announced his willingness to resign from his position as foreign minister (TV3, 2021). On the international stage, he called for the imposition of economic sanctions by both the US and the EU on Belarus, to ensure their implementation in legal and financial terms.

Another significant shift in Landsbergis's approach occurred following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. From that point, Landsbergis began to highlight Belarus's critical role in European security. According to Landsbergis, the imposition of new sanctions on the regime in Minsk was essential because Russia was using Belarus to circumvent EU sanctions. He pointed out that the Lukashenko regime allowed Russian forces to launch attacks on Ukraine from Belarusian territory, making it clear that Belarus could no longer be considered a neutral state (Dudzińska, 2022).

Support for the democratic forces of Belarus remained a crucial point in Landsbergis's agenda throughout his tenure. Regarding political prisoners in Belarus, he stressed that sanctions should not be eased until human rights violations in the country cease. In line with this, in 2024, Lithuania initiated proceedings at the International Criminal Court (ICC) to investigate crimes against humanity committed by the regime in Minsk. That same year, Landsbergis was awarded the highest honor by the Belarusian democratic forces for his efforts in support of the Belarusian opposition on the international stage (TVP Wilno, 2024)

### 3. Eastern Policy (Russia)

The concept based on a value-oriented policy was also applied to relations with Moscow. In 2021, after the mass protests by opposition forces in Russia and the arrest of their leader, Alexei Navalny, Landsbergis became one of the harshest critics of Moscow on the international stage, while also demanding EU sanctions against the Moscow regime for human rights violations and those responsible for

the arrest. According to Landsbergis, the EU should unite and send a clear signal to Russia that such actions would not be tolerated and would lead to appropriate practical measures (TVP Wilno, 2021b).

The continuation of Landsbergis' assertive policy towards Russia, while maintaining a clear strategy of taking decisive political and economic measures—including individual sanctions on Russian political elites—was evident when, at the beginning of 2022, Russia gathered around 100,000 soldiers near the Ukrainian border. During this period, Landsbergis emphasized the need for a firm EU-NATO policy towards Russia: “We must finally learn from history that concessions to aggressive politicians can only increase tensions and lead to greater aggression. I do not rule out that Russia's aggressive policy in Europe could lead to war” (TVP Wilno, 2022).

The international structural conditions changed drastically in 2022–2024. The Russian military invasion of Ukraine caused the threat from Russia to become the primary focus of Landsbergis' foreign and security policy. As a result, Landsbergis concentrated on strengthening national security and deterring Russian aggression in Ukraine by: 1) drawing greater NATO attention to ensuring security guarantees on the eastern flank through the implementation of new economic sanctions packages against Russia; 2) regularly urging the EU to phase out Russian oil; and 3) suspending Russia's membership in international institutions. According to Landsbergis: “A united approach to sanctions against the aggressor is needed now more than ever, and if we promise that the sanctions will be unbearable, they must be. If we fail to stop Russia's aggression with economic means, then the international order will need to be defended on the front lines, and the cost will be the lives of the men and women who defend it” (TVP Wilno, 2022d).

On the international stage, Landsbergis convinced Western partners that Lithuania had no red lines when it came to imposing sanctions on Russia. His statement translated into real actions by Lithuania, which was the first to refer the issue of crimes against humanity committed by Russia in Ukraine to the International Criminal Court. Lithuania also joined the Ukrainian case against Russia before the International Court of Justice, requesting an arrest warrant for President Putin and the Russian Commissioner for Children's Rights, Maria Lvova-Belova, and the establishment of a war crimes tribunal. Additionally, Lithuania was the first EU country to completely sever its import of Russian gas (Klaipeda, 2022).

One of the biggest disappointments in Lithuania's foreign

policy towards Russia came in 2023 when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs under Landsbergis unsuccessfully attempted to restrict the transit of goods through its territory to Kaliningrad. The blockade was immediately lifted under pressure from the European Commission. In 2024, Landsbergis found himself on Russia's list of individuals wanted for "hostile actions against Russia."

#### 4. Eastern Policy (Ukraine)

In Lithuania's foreign policy from 2020 to 2024, a special role was given to the Eastern Partnership, which primarily focused on relations with Ukraine. In 2021, during his visit to Ukraine and Moldova, Landsbergis emphasized that Lithuania's foreign policy priority was to actively support the efforts of these countries to join the EU and NATO, as well as to assist in the necessary reform processes. Furthermore, in relations with Ukraine, Landsbergis supported the diplomatic efforts of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to seek a peaceful resolution to the conflict in Donbas. At the same time, he condemned Russia for supporting groups in Donbas and for its policy in eastern Ukraine (TVP Wilno, 2021c).

However, with the Russian invasion of Ukraine, particularly in 2022–2024, pro-Ukrainian rhetoric began to dominate. On the international stage, Landsbergis actively called for military and political support for Ukraine and for imposing sanctions on Russia. He consistently emphasized that "today there is only one path: we must support Ukraine because the battle for Europe will take place there. We are at war, defending our state in Ukraine. If we do not defend the European security architecture in Ukraine, the front line will very realistically move to the streets of Vilnius" (LRT, 2024a).

He also strongly supported Lithuanian projects to aid Ukraine, including training Ukrainian soldiers in the operation of American anti-tank weapons. He carried out a series of visits, meetings, and bilateral talks to seek partners for supporting Kyiv in countries such as Germany, Spain, Israel, India, the USA, Japan, North Macedonia, the UK, Norway, Sweden, Kazakhstan, and Egypt. Everywhere, he emphasized that Ukraine's partners should secure it by all available means. He viewed Russian aggression as a threat to the security of Lithuania and the entire world.

In May 2022, after Russia's blockade of the port of Odessa, which was a strategic gateway for grain transport, Landsbergis initiated a coalition of countries to assist Ukraine in shipping Ukrainian grain from the port of Odessa on the Black Sea. The initiative was supported by the UK's Foreign Secretary, Liz Truss. According to Landsbergis, Ukraine was protecting not only Europe's security but also a significant portion of the world's grain resources (TVP Wilno, 2022f). At the end of 2022, for his contributions to supporting Ukraine, President Zelensky awarded Landsbergis an honorary prize. In 2023, he was also honored with Ukraine's State Order.

That same year, after Russia's withdrawal from the Black Sea Grain Initiative, Landsbergis submitted a proposal to the European Commission, calling for the strengthening of an alternative route for the export of Ukrainian grain through Lithuania. He offered a solution—a green corridor through Poland to Klaipeda. In October 2023, Lithuania, Poland, and Ukraine agreed to transfer control of Ukrainian grain from the Ukrainian-Polish border to the port of Klaipeda (Trans.info, 2023).

In 2024, as Western allies' support for Ukraine became increasingly fragmented, inconsistent, and often politically conditional, Landsbergis decided to take a more active stance on the international stage, urging and convincing the West to provide military support to Ukraine. His goal was to make this support long-term and strategic. In spring 2024, Landsbergis publicly backed the proposal of French President Emmanuel Macron to send NATO troops to Ukraine. In the fall, just before the end of his term, Landsbergis appealed to NATO countries, stating: "It may become necessary to send troops. By the end of the year, North Korea is actually doing it. We are still lagging behind, reacting to escalation instead of reversing its course. We need to return to the idea of sending troops, better late than never" (LRT, 2024b). In Landsbergis's view, the Baltic states, which are among Ukraine's most engaged allies, would face an existential threat if Ukraine were to capitulate. His support for Ukraine—including the use of American long-range missiles for attacks on Russian territory, the possible deployment of Western soldiers, as well as pressure on NATO to decide on Ukraine's membership—were perhaps the most visible signs of Lithuania's intensified foreign policy. These decisions and actions aligned with the common stance of the Baltic states and Poland.

At the end of his term, Landsbergis stated: "We have reached a point where it can honestly be said that the strategy of supporting

Ukraine over the past three years, over a thousand days, has failed. Peace through de-escalation is a strategy that is collapsing. We need a new strategy, one based on the position of strength. A strategy that the Baltic states, Ukraine itself, and other countries that truly support Ukraine are calling for – we need strength” (TVP Wilno, 2024f).

## 5. Western Policy (Germany)

With Germany, it was possible to establish more active and flexible political relations. However, from the beginning of his term, Landsbergis actively criticized Berlin, which, between 2020 and 2022, remained dependent on Russian energy. Germany was one of the countries blocking EU sanctions on the import of Russian oil and gas, sanctions which Landsbergis strongly advocated. After the decision by the German energy company Uniper to choose the Lithuanian oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal operator KN (AB Klaipėdos Nafta) to manage the emerging LNG terminal in Wilhelmshaven on the North Sea coast, Lithuanian-German relations were strengthened (TVP Wilno, 2022g).

After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Berlin’s growing anti-Russian stance and solidarity with Ukraine led to closer cooperation with Lithuania in the area of security. In April 2022, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock declared that Berlin was ready to contribute to the creation of a NATO brigade in Lithuania. The following months brought a dispute over the interpretation of the announcement—the government in Berlin maintained that most of the brigade would be permanently stationed in Germany, while Landsbergis insisted on the version that called for the permanent deployment of German forces in Lithuania. Moreover, in 2023, Landsbergis was skeptical of the proposal by German Defense Minister Boris Pistorius, which suggested that NATO should decide on the deployment of the brigade. At the same time, Landsbergis publicly increased pressure on Berlin to expedite the plan to deploy the German brigade to Lithuania. This was an unprecedented approach to communicating with Berlin, maintaining a tone of pressure and leverage. Landsbergis emphasized that Lithuania was already preparing to receive a brigade-sized unit and was working on the necessary infrastructure: “If Germany does not fulfill its promises, Lithuania should look for partners who will send

a brigade" (Delfi, 2023). This rhetoric by the minister was primarily aimed at strengthening Lithuania's security and reinforcing NATO's eastern flank.

The declaration by Minister Pistorius in June 2023 that Berlin was ready to increase the number of stationed military forces in Lithuania from 1,000 to 5,000 on a permanent basis can be considered the most significant practical outcome of Lithuania's diplomatic efforts.

During his tenure, Landsbergis did not shy away from directly criticizing Berlin regarding arms deliveries to Ukraine, as Germany's contributions, measured as a percentage of GDP, were far behind those of the U.S., Poland, and the Baltic states. From 2022 to 2024, Landsbergis openly called on Germany to provide Ukraine with Leopard tanks and air defense missile systems. In 2024, he publicly criticized Berlin for its lack of political will to compensate EU member states that were directly assisting Ukraine through the European Peace Facility (EPF). He stated, "Germany's reluctance to contribute more funds to the EU's overall military aid fund for Ukraine is deeply regrettable. There is a principle of European unity, which is why we are here today. Of course, we can do bilateral things, but for a country like mine, it's much harder to support Ukraine on a bilateral basis than to be part of a group of 27 countries" (Lrytas, 2024b).

Furthermore, during his tenure, Landsbergis repeatedly criticized Chancellor Olaf Scholz's attempts to establish contact with President Putin. In Landsbergis' view: "Let the chancellor's appeal be the last breath of the failed strategy of trading land for 'peace' with a genocidal dictator" (TVP Wilno, 2024g).

## 6. Central and Eastern Europe (Poland)

Since Landsbergis assumed the position of Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lithuania's bilateral relations (compared to those under Minister Linas Linkevičius) have been most intensive with Poland (Raś, 2020, p. 2). In his official statements and public speeches, Landsbergis consistently emphasized Poland's strategic importance in strengthening the region's defense security, including plans for the defense of the Suwałki Gap. Poland is directly involved in enhancing the security of the Baltic region, actively participating in NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission and engaging in joint military exercises

(Kuczyńska-Zonik, 2024).

From the outset of his term, Landsbergis has managed to establish more active and flexible political relations with Poland. During his tenure, he cautiously tried to balance between Poland and the EU regarding the rule-of-law conflict with Warsaw. Avoiding direct criticism of the Polish government at the EU level, Landsbergis argued that potential EU sanctions against Poland over the rule-of-law conflict could lead to the country's departure from the bloc, which would result in "very sad outcomes for both the EU and Poland" (TVP Wilno, 2021). This stance was likely influenced by external structural factors, which required him to shape, deepen, and strengthen strategic relations with Poland. Similar to the leaders of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia, Landsbergis focused on enhancing defense cooperation with Poland in the region.

This was especially evident after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 and the explosion of a Russian missile on Polish soil. Landsbergis publicly appealed to NATO countries, stating that Poland should be prioritized for additional arms and should be the first to receive more capabilities to strengthen NATO's eastern flank in order to better protect its border (Business Insider Polska, 2022).

Between 2022 and 2024, Landsbergis sought to intensify cooperation with Poland, exemplified by the regular exchange of state visits between Warsaw and Vilnius. During his term, Landsbergis presented the expansion of contacts with Poland almost as a remedy for the security crisis on NATO's eastern flank. Political considerations, which included ensuring regional security, strengthening European defense capabilities, coordinating positions ahead of the 2024 NATO summit in Washington, and military support for Ukraine, clearly prevailed. Ultimately, the new Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Radosław Sikorski, decided to increase the scale of planned cooperation with Lithuania.

Although Poland remained a key strategic security ally for Lithuania, during Landsbergis' tenure, there was a significant shift in the coordination of foreign policy with President Gitanas Nausėda, which affected the dynamics of bilateral relations. From 2023, the President and the head of Lithuanian diplomacy exchanged accusations over who was to blame for the unfilled ambassadorial position in Poland. It was not until September 2024 that the President of Poland, Andrzej Duda, received the credentials of the Ambassador of the Republic of Lithuania, Valdemaras Sarapinas (Lrytas, 2024a).

## 7. Asian Partnership (China)

China has always been an important partner for Lithuania in the economic and trade spheres. Following a new program based on a values-driven foreign policy, Landsbergis initiated a process of seeking new markets in Asian countries such as South Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan, aiming to strengthen democratic processes, freedoms, and human rights in the face of increasing threats from China. From that point, Lithuania sought to create a global network of political contacts and diversify its trade in the Indo-Pacific region. According to Landsbergis: “We started looking for partners in the Indo-Pacific even before the Chinese attack, because we suspected that sooner or later undemocratic regimes would exploit our trade dependencies. With the onset of Chinese economic pressure, our program had to be implemented much more quickly. We began by showing solidarity and support for Taiwan, which strives for democratic life and individual freedoms, developing relations with Japan, and strengthening ties with other democracies in various regions of the world” (LRT, 2024a).

One of the manifestations of this initiative was Lithuania’s withdrawal from the 17+1 format in 2021, its recognition of the persecution of the Uyghur minority in China as genocide, and Landsbergis’ announcement of the opening of a representative office of Taiwan in Vilnius under the name “Taiwan,” which was officially opened in November 2021. In response to challenging the “One China Policy,” the regime in Beijing imposed economic reprisals against Lithuanian entities, including Lithuania being removed from China’s customs systems, which hindered Lithuanian companies’ trade with China. Moreover, China restricted access to its market for products from other countries, such as Germany, whose goods contained Lithuanian components. Politically, China downgraded its diplomatic relations with Lithuania to the level of *chargé d’affaires*, withdrawing its ambassador from Vilnius, and suspended the issuance of visas in Lithuania (Malužinas, 2024, p. 60).

The opening of the representative office contributed to Landsbergis’ personal popularity and enhanced his image on the international stage. In 2021, “The Economist” included Lithuania among the candidates for “Country of the Year 2021” for its stance on democratic values. In the same year, “POLITICO” referred to him as the “dragon slayer,” and in 2022, he was named one of the 28

most influential leaders in European politics (Malužinas, 2024, p. 61). Despite Gabrielius Landsbergis's growing international popularity, his decision to open a Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius led to a crisis in Lithuanian foreign policy and a dispute between the Minister of Foreign Affairs and President Gitanas Nausėda, who emphasized that he had not been consulted on the mission's name. The main source of the conflict was differing interpretation of the decision's significance and its implications for relations with the People's Republic of China, forcing Landsbergis to seek both alternative and traditional allies (Dudzińska, 2021).

In 2022, Landsbergis pushed for a significant increase in Lithuania's diplomatic activity within the European Union regarding EU-China relations. During meetings with EU leaders, he urged the EU to respond to China's pressures on Lithuania. Additionally, at the EU level, he advocated for strengthening the cohesion of the Union. In Landsbergis' view, the existing 17+1 format led to fragmentation and divisions among EU countries. He argued that the EU should adopt a more unified foreign policy towards China (Hyndle-Hussein & Jakóbowski, 2021). According to Landsbergis: "The conflict between Lithuania and China is already a European issue. When European companies become targets of pressure on Lithuania to force a change in policy, we consider this a European problem. It requires a European solution" (TVP Wilno, 2022c). In January 2022, the European Commission filed a complaint with the World Trade Organization (WTO) regarding China's trade pressure on Lithuania, and the implementation of the EU's Anti-Coercion Instrument (ACI) in 2023 can be seen as the most important "practical" outcome of these efforts by Landsbergis, which were grounded in political interests.

One of the biggest disappointments in foreign policy during this period was the failed attempt to revive relations with China. In 2023, Landsbergis did not meet with Taiwanese Foreign Minister Joseph Wu, who was visiting Lithuania in November that year. During Wu's visit, Landsbergis advocated for the urgent need to engage in pragmatic dialogue with Beijing, while also emphasizing that Lithuania adheres to the "One China" policy, meaning that the country does not have official contacts with Taiwan. Lithuania did not want to escalate the conflict with China (TVP Wilno, 2023). In 2024, when the Chinese embassy stopped issuing visas to Lithuanian citizens, Landsbergis was unable to explain why Beijing took this action or whether it was a temporary tactic. It became clear that any hopes for a "reset" in

relations with China were unfounded.

Landsbergis' efforts to significantly increase Lithuania's diplomatic activity in the Indo-Pacific region were reflected in the expansion of diplomatic representations. Between 2020 and 2022, Lithuania opened embassies in Australia, South Korea, and Singapore, while India established its embassy in Lithuania. In 2023, Australia also opened a trade office in Vilnius.

## 8. Transatlantic Relations (USA)

During Landsbergis' tenure, the United States remained Lithuania's key strategic partner in both security and economic matters. The economic sphere gained particular significance in Lithuania's foreign policy, especially after Beijing's economic coercion against Lithuania. The diplomatic conflict between Beijing and Vilnius, coupled with Landsbergis' stance, played a crucial role in strengthening relations with Washington, aligning Lithuania more closely with the U.S.' anti-China rhetoric. This shift in focus towards the U.S. helped Lithuania bolster its security and trade interests, while navigating the challenges posed by China's increasing pressure.

In response to China's hostile actions, the Biden administration offered Lithuania significant financial support, including a \$600 million long-term export credit line and a memorandum of cooperation with the U.S. Export-Import Bank. This agreement aimed to facilitate trade in U.S. goods and services, either of American origin or produced in the U.S. In the security sphere, the United States also provided Lithuania with \$58 million in 2021 to enhance its defense capabilities, improve interoperability with NATO forces, and train military officers (U.S. Embassy in Lithuania, 2024). In 2022, following a meeting with U.S. Trade Representative Katherine Tai, Landsbergis expressed gratitude for the U.S. commitment to collaborating with the EU and Lithuania to address forced diplomatic and economic actions. He emphasized that Lithuania stood united with like-minded partners in upholding shared values and principles in the face of coercion (TVP Wilno, 2022b).

With the Russian invasion of Ukraine, particularly between 2022 and 2024, Landsbergis publicly increased pressure on the United States to support Ukraine, strengthen NATO's deterrence and defense, promote democracy and human rights, and deepen Lithuanian-

American cooperation. In February 2022, after a conversation with U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Landsbergis stated, “Nice words of support will not blow up Russian planes and tanks. Kyiv needs not only political and economic support but also military assistance in the face of Russia’s invasion” (TVP Wilno, 2022e).

It can be stated that during President Biden’s administration, the communication style with Washington did not change significantly. Landsbergis maintained a tone of pressure, emphasizing the need for support for Ukraine, as well as the security concerns of the countries on NATO’s eastern flank.

The strategy aimed at addressing the security challenges of Lithuania and the region was also of significant importance with the upcoming U.S. presidential elections. Landsbergis publicly declared the need for Lithuania and the region to prepare for survival if Donald Trump were to win the election. From the outset of the U.S. election campaign, Landsbergis cautiously tried to balance his position between candidate Joe Biden and Trump, avoiding taking sides in the criticism of either the Republican or Democratic candidates. His stance was influenced by structural factors that necessitated continued attention from the U.S. on Lithuania and Ukraine. After Trump’s victory in November 2024, Landsbergis stated that the election of Trump would initiate many changes on various international fronts. He emphasized that Lithuania had never abandoned its contacts with the Republican Party. “We have done a lot in this direction. We have really good relations with the Republican team” (TVP Wilno, 2024).

## Conclusions

The concept of “new idealism” is based on a moral approach to the geopolitical realization of national interests. Its essence lies in the belief that all democratic countries, including small ones, have the right to self-determination, and their existence should be based on law, the rule of law, peaceful conflict resolution, human rights, freedom, and democracy as measures of political order and social development. Lithuania’s foreign policy under Landsbergis from 2020 to 2024 can be characterized as values-driven, standing in contrast to a policy guided solely by national interests, such as “Realpolitik.” In Landsbergis’ view, the deepest interest of Lithuania is a global order in which small

states, like Lithuania, can survive and exist in a safe environment. The new foreign policy of Lithuania from 2020 to 2024 was primarily aimed at achieving this objective.

In summary, it should be noted that Landsbergis' foreign policy did not seek to fundamentally alter Lithuania's overall foreign policy. The key focus remained the Euro-Atlantic orientation, particularly with countries such as the USA, Germany, and France, alongside strong regional cooperation with Poland, Latvia, and Estonia. However, certain priorities and strategic goals were reoriented, notably enhancing cooperation with Ukraine in opposition to Russia and Belarus. Additionally, Lithuania's foreign policy pivoted toward the Indo-Pacific region, seeking partnerships with countries such as Taiwan, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Singapore, at the expense of its previous relations with China. This reorientation was initiated under Landsbergis' leadership in 2020.

Lithuania's new foreign policy in 2020–2024 emphasized several important issues and priorities, based on both Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific orientations. Some of them have continued to this day: the direction towards the Eastern Partnership countries, the concentration of the minister's efforts to help Ukraine fight Russia's military aggression, the outcome of which has a direct impact on the security of Lithuania and other countries of the eastern flank. Strengthening relations with Latvia, Estonia and Poland can be considered a relatively new priority, representing a transition to a strategic partnership (of a new quality) in response to growing geopolitical threats. Today, the above countries are among the main supporters of Ukraine. Another change was a significant reduction in relations with Russia and Belarus. Lithuania played a major role in shaping the EU sanctions policy against the Minsk and Moscow regimes for crimes against humanity committed by Russia in Ukraine and human rights violations by the Belarusian authorities against their citizens. Landsbergis-led diplomacy also significantly weakened relations with China in 2021–2024, in favor of establishing a strategic relationship with Taiwan, which helped develop economic ties. Table 1 summarizes the main changes, adjustments and achievements, as well as failures of Lithuanian foreign policy during Landsbergis' term of office.

Table 1. Characteristics of changes, achievements and failures in the foreign policy of the Republic of Lithuania in 2020–2024.

Country	International factors	Domestic factors	Type of change	Effect
Poland	Increased security threats from Russia and Belarus	Increased security requirements  Strengthening regional cooperation	Expanding and strengthening strategic bilateral relations in the area of security	Intensification of political contacts;  Regularity of mutual state visits
USA	Russia's aggression in Ukraine	Traditional pro-American orientation	Maintaining security guarantees	Development of economic cooperation.  Greater US involvement in the region in terms of security and the energy sector.  Intensification of relations in the political dimension.
Germany	Increased security threats from Russia and Belarus	Strong pro-EU and Euro-Atlantic orientation.  Strengthening regional cooperation.	Change of purpose – new quality partnership	Intensification of relations in the security dimension.  Greater involvement of Germany on the eastern flank, including the declaration of increasing the number of German soldiers stationed from 1,000 to 5,000 on the territory of Lithuania.
Ukraine	Russia's aggression in Ukraine.	Responsibility for Lithuania's role in the region; values-driven policy.	Aspirations to the role of regional leader in shaping the EU's eastern policy.  Continuation of the goal: to bring Ukraine closer to NATO and the EU.	Active involvement in supporting Ukraine. Lithuania ranks 7 <sup>th</sup> (in terms of GDP) among all countries that have been involved in helping Ukraine.  Acting as the main advocate for Ukraine in the international arena, which helps strengthen its own international position.  Failure to invite Ukraine to NATO.

Belarus	Increased security threats from Russia and Belarus.	Responsibility for Lithuania's role in the region; values-driven policy.	Breaking off diplomatic and trade relations.  Aspirations to the role of regional leader in shaping the EU's eastern policy.	Supporting democratic processes in Belarus.  Migration crisis on the borders of Poland, Lithuania and Latvia with Belarus.  Introduction of EU sanctions against the Belarusian authorities in response to their violations of human rights and in connection with the armed conflict in Ukraine.
Russia	Increased security threats from Russia and Belarus.	Increased security requirements.	Breaking off diplomatic relations	EU sanctions against Russia in response to its military aggression against Ukraine and its human rights violations.  To become independent from Russian raw materials.
China	Undermining the current international order based on international law and values.  US-China rivalry.  Attempts to take control of Taiwan.	Desire to seize the opportunity; values-driven policy.	Weakening of diplomatic and trade relations.	Chinese economic retaliation against Lithuanian entities.  Attacks on Lithuania's position in global supply chains.  Withdrawal of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia by withdrawal from the 17+1 initiative.  Support from the European Commission for Lithuania in its crisis in relations with China and implementation of the instrument for counteracting coercive measures (ACI).

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