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LITHUANIA IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT:

NATIONAL SECURITY AND DEFENCE POLICY DILEMMAS

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AND DEFENCE POLICY DILEMMAS**

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13.

TALKING “WITH” OR “ABOUT”? *THICK* RECOGNITION IN LITHUANIAN-RUSSIAN RELATIONS

Gediminas Vitkus*

Introduction

In Europe, there are two approaches to Russia. You can conditionally call them the “critical” and the “pragmatic”. The latter approach has more supporters than the former. This is also confirmed by the statements of politicians and academic studies. The most recent example of such a division is a Decision of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe of 26 June 2019 to return the voting right to Russia. At that time, delegations from most European national parliaments were in favour of such a proposal, specifically following a “pragmatic” approach, while “critical” delegations from Ukraine, the Baltic states, Poland and Slovakia remained in the minority (Erlanger, 2019).

Thus, Lithuania officially takes a “critical” attitude towards Russia. Compared to other European Union member states, Lithuania even belongs to the category of the strictest “critics” of Russia. At such a political attitude, such a decision seems quite fundamental. In this respect, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 did not bring anything new, meant no turns, just further consolidated this position, giving its supporters new strong arguments. On the other hand, in the sense of the “Russian issue” (foreign policy actions), it still remains “open”. This is confirmed not only by the retention of Lithuania and several other states in the minority of the Council of Europe, but also by the internal political context. Lithuanian Prime Minister Saulius Skvernelis also called for a “more pragmatic” relationship with Russia in his time, following the initiative to resume the work of the Russian-Lithuanian Intergovernmental Commission (Grytėnas, 2018). Finally, it is no secret that public opinion is in favour of the idea of “better relations” with Russia (Krupavičius, 2018).

This is why, in this context, there is a practical political question of the conditions under which it is possible and whether it is generally feasible for Lithuanian foreign policy towards Russia to turn from a “critical” position to the so-called “pragmatic” one. In other words, the question would be what should happen, what should change or what obstacles should be removed so that relations between Lithuania and Russia, even if they do not return to normal, would at least begin to improve and move towards mutually beneficial neighbourhood cooperation. In a deeper academic sense, it would be a question of what determines in general and what is needed for bad interstate relations to start improving, warming up or,

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ultimately, for the countries to simply reconcile. In other words, the answer to the question is what are the causes of bad relations and hostility between states and how and under what conditions they could be eliminated.

1. What is Wrong with Lithuanian-Russian Relations?

If you ask politicians and diplomats why Lithuanian-Russian relations are bad, it is no doubt that you would have to hear a “mirror” response from opposite sides. Lithuanian foreign policy makers are likely to answer that Russia is to blame for that and could probably provide a full list of arguments and facts, one of the most solid of which is the annexation of Crimea (ELTA, 2019). If you ask Russian diplomats the same question, then their answer would be that Lithuania itself is primarily to blame for bad relationships (Interv’ju Posla Rossii v Litve A. I. Udal’cova mezhdunarodnomu informacionnomu agentstvu “Rossija segodnja”, 2019).

The answers of politicians and diplomats are clear. And what are the answers of academics-researchers of Lithuanian-Russian relations? First of all, it should be noted that although recent relations between Lithuania and Russia have certainly been explored and from different perspectives, but the answers to the question why Lithuanian-Russian relations are bad basically can be divided into two categories. The first category refers to geopolitics and *Realpolitik*. Russia’s geopolitical position, its exceptional size and power simply encodes it to be expansive, aggressive and naturally threaten its smaller and weaker neighbours (Statkus, Motieka, & Laurinavičius, 2003, pp. 41-44) (Laurinavičius, Motieka, & Statkus, 2005, pp. 311-340). Because of Russia’s strategic interests in the Baltic Sea region, it behaves harshly and even aggressively (Grigas, 2013, p. 9). From this perspective, bad relations between Lithuania and Russia were seen more as an independent than the dependent variable. Researchers, focusing on one or other aspects of the Lithuanian-Russian relations, accept the bad relations between Lithuania and Russia as a kind of constant, which does not require further attention and problematisation. Researchers are usually more interested in issues related not to why Lithuania has bad relations with Russia, but how it should live with it, deal with it and solve such problems as choosing the right foreign policy strategy and tactics (Paulauskas, 2005) (Vitkus, 2006) (Lopata & Statkus, 2005); development of appropriate defence policies (Kaukas, 2015); ensuring energy security and independence from Russia (Šatūnienė, 2003); information security (Jurgelevičiūtė, 2006a) (Jurgelevičiūtė, 2006b); Russia’s soft power (Česnakas & Isoda, 2019) hybrid war management (Bajarūnas & Keršanskas, 2018) etc.

The second category emerged under the influence of Constructivist approach. Its response to the poor state of Lithuanian-Russian relations refers to the incompatibility and even antagonism between Lithuanian and Russian identities. Gražina Miniotaitė stated that the image of a hostile and antagonistic Russia has become an integral part of Lithuania’s identity, determinative of all its other foreign policy choices (Miniotaitė, 1998). Dovilė Jakniūnaitė has linked Russia’s aggressiveness towards its neighbours (including Lithuania) with an inadequate understanding of its borders and territory (Jakniūnaitė, 2007). Finally, when

looking deeper into Lithuanian and Russian identities, Jakniūnaitė even saw their paradoxical similarity, i.e. their liminality. According to the researcher, this “dual liminality shapes the interdependence and antipathy and the quest to deny each other’s images of identity and security” (Jakniūnaitė, 2013, p. 42).

Constructivist studies of Lithuanian and Russian foreign policy, without a doubt, provide new and exciting insights, allowing a deeper understanding of the causes of these countries’ bad relations and hostility. However, bearing in mind that the countries’ identities are much less stable entities than their geopolitical situation, the possibilities and conditions for identity changes should also be considered. If it can already be accepted that country identities can change and transform relatively quickly and easily, then it’s not just worth asking what specific political practices enable and establish a stable hostile relationship (Jakniūnaitė, 2015a, p. 100) or “how have Lithuanian-Russian relations remained tense for a decade” (Jakniūnaitė, 2015b, p. 71), but also under what conditions that hostility of identities could change or be transformed or even eliminated?

From this perspective, one interesting thing can be noticed in the insights of almost all researchers. Whatever the basic theoretical postulates (geopolitical or constructivist) one or another researcher follows, each of them touches upon the subject of recognition in one way or another and captures the fact that both sides of the disagreement refuse to recognise what is important to the other side. Most often, those disagreements primarily concern the interpretation of past events. For example, Russia refuses to recognise the fact of Lithuania’s occupation and dismisses the related claim for damages. In turn, Lithuania refuses to recognise the importance and show respect to the commemoration of the victory of the Soviet Union against Nazi Germany on May 9, which has been very prominent in recent decades. And those acts of non-recognition concern not only history but the present. Lithuania does not recognise the legitimacy of the annexation of Crimea or Russian-sponsored Abkhazian and South Ossetian independences. Meanwhile, some Russian political figures generally suggest that the legal recognition of the Baltic states be reviewed or withdrawn altogether. True, Moscow’s official position is different, however, the development and promotion of such ideas is probably not accidental.

In other words, researchers almost universally agree that relations between Lithuania and Russia are bad to a large extent because one side or the other does not recognise something (different geopolitical interests or different identities). However, this is usually acknowledged by the authors as given, and the phenomenon of recognition itself is not discussed in detail. Therefore, in this case it is worth asking, but what does it really mean to recognise or not to recognise something? When do the parties recognise each other? How do countries that recognise each other, nevertheless, do not recognise something? Is it possible to talk about the level and quality of recognition? How does (non) recognition interact with the quality of interstate relations? Can changes in the existing recognition regime also affect the quality of the relationship?

Therefore, the article originally takes a closer look at the very phenomena of recognition in international relations and the theories explaining it. Later, we will

return to Lithuania-Russia relations. They will be reviewed from this perspective with the aim of clarifying its relation to the quality of the interstate relationship.

2. Theory of Recognition in International Relations

Until recently, in international relations studies, recognition of states is frequently understood excessively formally and in simplistic terms as a one-off political decision that, once made, is very rarely ever withdrawn.

On the one hand, though it is a political decision, but in its form, it is a legal act. Therefore, the problems of recognition have been the focus among international law scholars. The main problem, which has been discussed in law research circles, was a question of recognition criteria for new states, i.e. the criteria by which a political entity may be recognised on the basis of the proclaimed state. Two schools were formed: declarative and constitutive (Lauterpacht, 1947) (Menon, 1994). Essentially, they argued about who creates the state – events in the entity on earth, or the very fact of recognition, because without recognition, the entity with all criteria will still not be a state.

For a long time, this debate seemed to be a formalism of low interest for international relations theory, since for international relations theory states are unquestionably given. What was more important to traditional theory was not how states emerge, but how they interact. On the other hand, it would not be fair to say that this sub-theme has been completely eliminated in international political studies. Although the recognition of new states is a legal act, but it is up to politicians to decide on it. It's easy to imagine that politicians consult lawyers on recognition criteria; however, it would be difficult to believe that they make their decision solely on the basis of the lawyers' opinion. Politicians undoubtedly also take into account the interests of their nation, geopolitics, security, economy and positions of other countries. There are many cases in history where states are concerned not only with their own interests but also with the stability of the international system as a whole, so they even coordinate and harmonise their decisions on the recognition of new states. (Fabry, 2010) (Coggins, 2014). Non-recognition or Recognition can equally be a means of competing between states and fighting for influence and power. Finally, nowadays, decisions of states to recognise new political entities as states are also increasingly influenced by humanitarian moral aspects, especially when legal recognition allows for the de-escalation or termination of conflicts.

Therefore, it can be said and not only in the context of law but also in the context of international relations studies there are theories explaining the recognition of states. On the one hand, they are based on versions formulated by lawyers, but gives realistic/conservative or liberal/idealistic interpretations, respectively. Realistic will be closer to the declarative and liberal – to the constitutive theories. But, of course, there is no consensus, because international relations are not about formal criteria, but about explaining the motivation behind political decisions. However, in any way, the problem of recognition studies in international relations studies remained peripheral, because its object is quite narrow – political entities without

recognition and aspirations. As one might know, the problem of “unrecognised” states (Österud, 1997) (Caspersen, 2008) cannot compare in its importance with research on the politics and relations of the major political actors. Finally, it is nothing strange that the theory of recognition thus understood has little to say about Lithuanian-Russian relations or rather the cause of their poor quality.

However today, research on the issue of recognition is no longer confined to such a narrow traditional concept. Already at the end of the last century, along with the constructivist turn in the study of international relations, a much broader concept of recognition began to emerge, which first came to the study of international relations from Hegel’s philosophy. Hegel, in his book “Phänomenologie des Geistes” (Hegel, 1807/1997), developed the intersubjective ontology of human nature from his predecessor, Fichte (Fichte, 1800 / 1982). Hegel, based on another idea formulated by Aristotle that a human is a social being, emphasises the significance of personality recognition, or, more precisely, its struggle for recognition. The basic idea of Hegel is that, namely by interacting and recognising each other, the self-consciousness of individuals acquires their own self and freedom. Conversely, if the struggle for recognition of self-awareness is unsuccessful, its freedom and wholeness are denied (McQueen, 2019).

This philosophical idea of Hegel is not only philosophical, but has its social as well and the political dimension. For example, it is fully reflected in the problems of modern “unrecognised states”, and in the debate on theories of declarative and constitutive recognition of states. For political entities who believe they are all who seek to become states, it is vital to obtain the recognition of other states. Meanwhile, the failure of recognition aspirations means a qualitatively inferior lifestyle and the inability to enjoy many privileges provided by full membership of the international community. Therefore, constructivist international political sociology unlike theories of international law and international relations, looked at the phenomenon of cross-border recognition more broadly. Constructivism has directed the problem of recognition research its role in the birth/death of states, its importance for the overall survival of the states, to the quality of their relationship. By the way, this turning point was discussed in detail and presented at an international symposium published in *the Journal of International Theory* (2013, 5 (1)).

It even allowed for the development of an alternative to the traditional theory of international relations, at the centre of which is the constant “Hegelian” struggle of states for recognition. Its outlines, drawing on the work of previous theorists, were persuasively outlined by Eric Ringmar (Ringmar, 2002) (Ringmar, 2010). According to him, traditional interpretations of relations between states (realism or liberalism) are often problematic because “matters of interests and pay insufficient attention to matters of identities” (Ringmar, 2002, p. 115). Meanwhile, if, according to him, we were to rely on a different “non-rationalist, interpretation of the fundamental logic of world politics”, we would find that states are, in fact, concerned not only with their “national interests” but, above all, the establishment of their own identity for themselves, “according to this logic, states not only pursue their ‘national interest’, but also — and before anything else — they seek to establish identities

for themselves. In fact, questions regarding a state's identity must always be more fundamental than questions regarding its interests” (Ringmar, 2002, p. 116).

Identity is more important than many other things, because without it, people wouldn't know who they are. However, constructing an identity is not always an easy thing to do. Sometimes it turns into a real struggle because it takes at least two steps to overcome. First, it is up to them to decide for themselves who they are. Secondly, it is necessary for other people to recognise this created identity as such, not as something different. This applies not only to separate individuals, but also to states which, as collective beings, would not exist if, on the one hand, they did not define their identities and, on the other, they did not seek to be recognised as such by others.

If countries conditionally can be compared to individuals, then the formation of their identities can be understood by drawing on the same intellectual tools, which are interpreted by the formation of identities of personalities. According to Hegel in “Phänomenologie des Geistes”, it can be understood as personal narratives/narratives about oneself. Collective entities, like states, are first and foremost communities of narrators who construct and possibly believe in a narrative or stories about themselves. But that is not enough, because narrators don't know if their visions are right or wrong, are persuasive or disturbing. Therefore, the second step is needed – to tell your narratives to others and find out their reaction. And only if others believe it and admit it, only then can it be said that the identity of the state will be established.

Therefore, according to this theory, global politics can be conceptualised not as a race for power (realism) or a race for wealth (liberalism), but as a perpetual and never-ending struggle for recognition. In this context, the legal recognition of the state is that it is a very important, but nevertheless just one narrow aspect or element of the fight for recognition. Indeed, the struggle for recognition is perpetually and not only in legal terms, but also in all other political, social, ideological and even psychological aspects. For states, the fostering and renewal of their identities and seeking recognition is an ongoing process of exceptional importance.

The introduction of such a concept of broader recognition in the course of international relations has led not only to the taking of empirical research on the grounds of recognition, practitioners and dynamics of specific states, but also to further develop the recognition in the international relations theory that would go beyond the frames of narrow legal declaratory and constitutive theories or political realism and liberalism debates (Agné, Bartelson, Erman, Lindemann, & Herboy, 2013).

The aim was primarily to respond to the need for a more detailed classification of recognition manifestations. In considering the inevitability of the global state, Alexander Wendt distinguished between formal and comprehensive recognition, describing them with the picturesque epithetuses of *thin* and *thick* recognitions. The recognition of *thin* is essentially a formal recognition of equality and autonomy within a defined community. In this case, one state recognises another as a separate and independent entity – but not more. Everything else is *thick* recognition. It means that one state recognises the extraordinary, specific character, uniqueness;

this is a property of the other state (Wendt, 2003, pp. 511-512). Accordingly, Wendt notes that the struggle for *thin* recognition always has a clear purpose and an easily identifiable end, if the states seeking formal recognition finally receive it. Something else is *thick* recognition, which has no well-defined purpose. Therefore, the struggle for recognition is permanent and everlasting, because the identity itself is constantly in a state of change and in interaction with the other identities. Therefore, the recognition of *thick* is volatile and constantly evolving, difficult to measure and constantly redefined, but always highly desirable (Wendt, 2003, pp. 511-512).

Ringmar, in his own way, concretised the expression of this form of recognition, distinguishing four basic wishes posed by states seeking *thick* recognition – they want that their narratives are presented about (1) attention, (2) respect, (3) diversity and (4) recognition of affiliations. Respectively, according to Ringmar, in the face of disapproval, there are three ways to react. The first option is to accept criticism, to acknowledge that those around us are right and we are not in fact what we are. States usually take that step after losing wars or other terrible events. Then they rethink themselves, raising new narratives and performing image rebranding. Secondly, it is possible to seek recognition by re-adopting the criticism, but without changing the basic idea of reforming its image, for example, to undertake economic reforms, to reform the political system, to release political prisoners, etc. Finally, the third one can continue to follow the old image, but also to take new measures to make the recognition and critics will be forced to change their opinion. In interpersonal relationships, using force can do little to help, but in interstate, it has a greater chance of success and is therefore more frequently used – and often very successful, because no one judges or criticises the winners (Ringmar, 2010, pp. 7-8).

The problem of recognition thus understood in the academic literature is now widely studied. For example, the fact that *thick* recognition is directly linked to the quality of relations between states has been highlighted by Lindemann. In his book, “Causes of War”, he showed that the cause of the war may be non-recognition, which is defined as an attack (imaginary or real) directed against the state’s created own image (Lindemann, 2010). In turn, Lisa Strömbom (2014) and Karl Gustaffson (2016) explored the interesting idea of how gradual implementation of *thick* recognition can help resolve protracted conflicts. However, it has not been possible to detect analysis of the Lithuanian or Baltic relations with Russia from this perspective. Therefore, given the heuristic potential of this concept, further attempts will be made to see the causes of the poor quality of Lithuanian-Russian relations by assessing their state of mutual (*thick*) recognition.

3. *Thick* Recognition in Lithuanian-Russian Relations

As we have already noticed, the notion of recognition/non-recognition often resonates in the works of Lithuanian-Russian relations researchers. However, it did not receive particular attention because the emphasis was primarily on the fact that the parties’ interests or identities conflict and try to deny each other. The

question that attracted most of the researcher’s attention was how to deal with this situation.

Meanwhile, from the perspective of recognition theory, this situation can be described as the refusal of the parties to grant each other thick recognition. In other words, the poor relations between Lithuania and Russia can be explained by the fact that both sides do not recognise more than they recognise each other’s identities. In the current situation, it would be difficult to talk about total non-recognition. Lithuania and Russia formally recognise each other as subjects of international law, maintain diplomatic and economic relations, but not more. Mutual recognition is very *thin*. Meanwhile, such elements of thick recognition as attention and respect for different identities are rudimentary and increasingly fading. The countries not only cultivate identities that are not only different, but they also deny each other are logically incompatible and provoke indignation and protests. For example, Russia salutes and celebrates the liberation of Vilnius and Kaunas from the Nazis; meanwhile, Lithuania is angry and protesting. Lithuania solemnly buries partisan commander Adolfas Ramanauskas-Vanagas, and threats of reprisals from Moscow are heard. It is not surprising, therefore, that in this context, ideas and suggestions arise to withdraw even “formal” recognition. While Lithuania has never considered this idea, but some members of the Russian Duma were recently proposing to withdraw recognition of the Baltic states. However, Lithuania retaliated – Lithuania’s President Grybauskaitė called Russia a ‘terrorist state’ etc.

On the other hand, there is no need to let go of the fact that identity/self is not a variable affixed once and for all. These are not material variables (territory, population, economic capacity or size of the armed forces), which are relatively stable. Identities, whatever fixed and clear they are, are much more volatile and can change very quickly as they respond to other identities. Theoretically, it is possible that hostile identities can flip in just over a day. It is only enough for one of interacting parties to raise the elements, not dividing but uniting the identities.

Well-known is the example of Mikhail Gorbachev, showing how it is possible to end the Cold War and change the international system by purposefully modifying some elements of identity. There are more examples of reconciliation between nations and states. For example, French-German, German-Polish reconciliation, which became the political foundation of European integration. These reconciliations actually made for a very complex operation politically, but very simple in theory – changing the mode of mutual recognition of identities. However, when analysing the relations between Russia and Lithuania, these examples may not be the most appropriate, as more or less comparable sizes occur. On the other hand, examples of reconciliation can also be found in asymmetric relationships, which usually receive less attention. The most striking example here is Ireland and the United Kingdom. However, it took some time – the first official visit of Queen Elizabeth II of the UK to Ireland after the announcement of independence in 1922 only happened in 2011 (!).

Finally, there are moments in the Lithuanian-Russian relations where a kind of discourse has been cultivated different than now, when several high-level political

meetings have taken place. From this point of view, the official speeches or other statements that should have been drafted in such a way as to humiliate neither oneself nor others are particularly interesting. These sparse summits between the top political leaders of Lithuania and Russia, and the speeches and accompanying discourse being developed during them, are an important source for identifying possible manifestations of *thick* recognition in bilateral relations. Demonstrating *thick* recognition in such cases is simply inevitable, because otherwise such visits would be not possible at all.

Three such cases will be discussed below: 1) Vytautas Landsbergis' visit to Moscow on 29 July 1991 and a meeting with Boris Yeltsin, the then President of the then Russian Soviet Socialist Federal Republic (RSFSR). During that visit, Lithuania and the RSFSR signed the "Agreement on the Foundations of Interstate Relations"; 2) The official three-day visit of President of Lithuania Algirdas Brazauskas to Moscow on 24-26 October 1997, during which Brazauskas and Yeltsin signed agreements between Lithuania and Russia on the delimitation of the state border and the delimitation of the exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf in the Baltic Sea; 3) The official three-day visit of President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus to Russia on March 29-31, 2001, including negotiations with Russian President Vladimir Putin, and visiting St. Petersburg and Kaliningrad. No new contracts were signed during the visit; however, a joint statement by Russia and Lithuania was issued.

3.1. Vytautas Landsbergis' visit to Moscow in 1991

The official meeting between Vytautas Landsbergis and Boris Yeltsin on July 29, 1991 was, without a doubt, an exceptional event in the history of bilateral relations. First of all, because of the agreement "On establishing the fundamentals of mutual international relations" establishing mutual international recognition. The text of the agreement contains abundant provisions establishing mutual equality and mutual respect between the parties and a commitment to mutually beneficial cooperation. However, the visit of the Lithuanian delegation was and continues to be interesting, as the expression of *thick* recognition in the speeches made by the leaders during the signing of the agreement.

Two aspects of the relationship were particularly emphasised in Yeltsin's speech. On the one hand, Lithuania and Russia are connected by a deep historical tradition of close mutual relations, full of everything. As examples of good practice, Yeltsin has used the following personalities to reflect these links: "... Ivan Fyodorov, the great pioneer of the Russian press, worked on Lithuanian soil. Creative and political activity of Lithuanian poet Jurgis Baltrušaitis is related to Russia..." (Lietuvos aidas, 1991a). On the sad historical events, Yeltsin was laconic: "... the relationship between our nations dates back to the distant ages. It seems that everything that could have happened between us has already happened. But sometimes it seems to me: the most important, most interesting, meaningful times in the lives of our nations are just beginning. Few countries have such a complicated history like ours; few could withstand what our compatriots had to endure. By signing the contract,

we are opening a whole new page of our relationship... (Lietuvos aidas, 1991a)”.

As it was already mentioned, disagreements over historical assessments, a refusal to recognise each other’s deliverable versions is one of the main causes of conflict. However, the wording chosen for the Yeltsin’s speech seems to solve the problem relatively easily, because their content is, in principle, acceptable to both sides, whatever they think of the historical past. On the one hand, it does not directly acknowledge that there have been many wrong things, but on the other hand, it emphasises the vector of the future, because only the future will have any real meaning.

In the much shorter Landsbergian answering speech, there were no sensitive historical tours. However, from the perspective of the *thick* recognition theory, the interesting emphasis of the speaker on Russia’s special importance, or even a peculiar mission, is striking. Landsbergis said: “The agreement between Russia and Lithuania is of great significance, of fundamental importance to the two countries. But its meaning is wider; it goes beyond the scope of the bilateral agreement. Let Russia be a good example for other states not only with regard to Lithuania (which we are naturally also interested in), but in principle, let it be a good example of how to go into the future, into the world, where there will be more justice, hope and kindness to each other...” (Lietuvos aidas, 1991b).

Given the propensity of Russia’s identity as a great state to feel more important or better than others, a guide of sorts to others with a special mission, this was an interesting attempt. On the one hand, it shows proper respect for Russia and recognises its special role. On the other hand, given the birth of the new Russia, the aim is to cautiously prompt to it what the purpose and content of its new mission might be.

Of course, this small episode could have happened at all only because of the extraordinary situation in which Lithuania and Russia became strategic allies in the fight against the still-adherent central government of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, it demonstrates these forms of interaction and speaking practices, which can potentially be adapted to changes in the political climate.

3.2. Visit by President Algirdas Brazauskas to Moscow in 1997

It was an important visit – the first visit of the Baltic Head of State to Moscow after the collapse of the USSR, during which a long negotiated and very important agreement between the parties was to be signed on the delimitation of the state border and exclusive economic zones and the delimitation of the continental shelf in the Baltic Sea. Lithuania was the first of all the former Soviet republics to negotiate such an agreement with Russia. Interestingly, although this visit was very important and he received a lot of attention from the media in Lithuania, Russia and neighbouring countries, there is practically no available archival documentation that reflects important details of this visit. Therefore, first of all, we have to rely solely on journalist reports.

The visit was difficult and controversial, because the attitude of the Russian side was quite ambiguous. According to the Russian newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*,

it was a slap to the face that the Lithuanian President was not greeted at the airport by high-ranking officials, but by the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Protocol of the Russian Presidential Administration. On the other hand, reception in the Kremlin was warm and the planned signing of the agreement went smoothly. According to *Lietuvos Rytas*, “a statement by B. Yeltsin that Russia is the guarantor of the security of Lithuania and the other Baltic states, and even ready to defend them from attackers, briefly confused A. Brazauskas” (*Lietuvos rytas*, 1997). However, at the same time, the Russian side prepared the main surprise for the Lithuanian side. Yeltsin said that Lithuania should not expect any surprises from Russia. “And if Lithuania is in any danger, that country will have to deal with us.” In addition, Yeltsin did not limit himself to a verbal statement, but gave Brazauskas a signed statement, which was also to be forwarded to the Presidents of Latvia and Estonia. In a brief press conference later, President Yeltsin did not specify which countries in his opinion were threatening Lithuania’s security. “I don’t know it, President Algirdas Brazauskas knows it better. We will guard against anything the Lithuanian leadership will ask for” (BNA, LA, 1997).

The analysis of the text of the Russian presidential statement, which, incidentally, was not published in Lithuania, shows that the document affirms that Russia has an interest in the security and stability of its Baltic neighbours, as it has an interest among all the others in the Baltic states that the Russians living in peace have a peaceful and quiet life; that Russia treats Lithuania and the other Baltic states as neighbouring countries with whom they want to have closer economic, commercial, transport, energy and other relationships. Russia is therefore ready to provide the Baltic states unilateral security guarantees, which could still be reinforced with the accession of other countries or with a regional security pact and confidence-building measures (Prezident Rossijskoj Federacii, 1997).

Undoubtedly, even the untrained eye at first glance, in this flawless statement, could see a diplomatic trick to engage in the security policy of the Baltic states in such a way and to play if not decisive, then is at least a significant role in it. Therefore, from the theoretical point of view of *thick* recognition, Brazauskas had a difficult task indeed, to evaluate and respond appropriately to this controversial statement, to politely decline the service that is still politely but nevertheless quite persistently offered. Bearing in mind the historical experience of Lithuania with the Soviet Union guarantees already received in 1939 and the country’s strategic self-determination to achieve security integration into NATO and the European Union, this Russia proposal was in principle unacceptable. On the other hand, the maintenance of good neighbourly relations, the demonstration of respect for the partner in the warm relations with the Russian President, Yeltsin, i.e. all important intertwined elements of the Russian *thick* recognition made direct, open and categorical rejection of the offer impossible. Judging from press releases, Brazauskas got out of the situation, choosing diplomatic omission. He did not respond at the press conference about how he evaluates the Russian proposal. According to him, “security is on the agenda of every state, and Lithuania, like other states, has suffered much in this century” (Prezident Rossijskoj Federacii, 1997). Later, in Lithuania, commenting on the outcome of the visit at the press

conference, the Lithuanian leader said that the form of Yeltsin's statement on Russia's security guarantees to Lithuania has been unexpected. “I can't tell you how we will continue, but such an offer cannot be forgotten.” Brazauskas stressed that the formulations mentioned in the statement of the Russian leader did not mean that Lithuania was abandoning its foreign policy – membership of the European Union and NATO. “We are looking for security guarantees not only from the West but also from our Eastern neighbours. It is natural and logical” (Sakalauskaitė, 1997). Brazauskas stated that he does not think that Yeltsin's offer should be rejected immediately, without delving deeper into its substance and examining its consequences. On this occasion Brazauskas, at the same time, critically commented on his political opponents, who reproached him because of the too moderate reaction to the suggestion of Russia: “Some Lithuanian politicians have already managed to reject the Russian leader's statement with one sweep of the hand without even knowing what it says”, adding “that this approach to politics is not acceptable” to him (Lietuvos rytas, 1997). Finally, Brazauskas pointed out that that statement was addressed to all Presidents of the Baltic states, therefore, he will meet with Latvian and Estonian leaders in the near future and the Russian proposal will be considered.

This is how Brazauskas dealt with a rather difficult task – on the one hand, to maintain and demonstrate a respectful attitude towards Russia, recognise its importance and influence. And at the same time, on the other hand, avoid the “gifts” offered. As can be seen in Brazauskas' speech, a compromise can be heard, but the decision is delayed, by smartly using the fact that it is a proposal not only for Lithuania but for the other Baltic states. This provided the opportunity to delay the final answer and eventually “defuse” it in order to avoid open and direct “rejection” of the services offered by Russia. In exchange, Brazauskas emphasised the importance of economic cooperation and constantly stressed Russia is an important economic partner for Lithuania. This is how Brazauskas first “recognised” Russia as a key economic partner, but politely yet persistently ignored Russia's idea to become the patron saint of the Baltic states and “guarantor of security”.

Thus, the identities that were mutually recognised during this visit were quite different, but nonetheless politicians were successful in managing to find touchpoints and avoiding escalating those differences.

3.3. Visit by President Valdas Adamkus to Moscow in 2001

The last official meeting of the Presidents of Lithuania and Russia took place in 2001. The then Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus met in Moscow Vladimir Putin, who then was the president of Russia for just one more year.

The image of Russia, painted by Adamkus in his official remarks, had particularly attractive features. Adamkus has not spared good words about Russia, and its President and did not avoid the many signs of demonstration of recognition and respect, just as it is appropriate for the guest. In his speech at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), Adamkus called Russia “free,

independent and new”, regretting he does not speak Russian, emphasised the support of democratic Russia to Lithuania and the importance of the masterpieces of 20th-century Russian literature such as Mikhail Bulgakov, Anna Akhmatova, Joseph Brodsky, Alexander Solzhenitsyn and other writers who then became widely available after the collapse of the totalitarian system. Finally, Adamkus, in explaining Lithuania’s decision to seek NATO membership, even expressed the belief that “NATO’s door is not and will not be closed to Russia” (Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentas, 2001a). While visiting the Kremlin, Adamkus told Putin that “Your steps in building the democratic process in Russia is an example to follow for all those who care about the future of Europe” (Sakaluskaitė, 2001). In his toast at the official lunch, Adamkus called Russia a “great country”, “never ceasing to be one of the main trading partners” (Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentas, 2001b).

It is not known what Putin talked about when he met Adamkus and the Lithuanian delegation. In a public statement by the Russian president, the conversation sounded much more moderate; however, the emphasis was nevertheless on the positive. Putin’s statement to the press was very positive about the policy of granting Lithuanian citizenship to the Russian-speaking population. Also, it was recognised that there are large unused reserves and opportunities in the area of economic cooperation. It was acknowledged that Lithuanian membership in the European Union will cause additional problems, but they can all be solved through cooperation both directly with the European Union and with Lithuania. Optimism was also expressed regarding the Kaliningrad transit issues. Finally, differences in views were noted regarding NATO enlargement, but the right of each country to choose its own security policy priorities has been acknowledged. And in general, Putin summarised in his brief statement that there are more areas where opinions and positions overlap than those where they do not (President of Russia, 2001).

No new treaties were signed during the visit; however, a joint statement by the President of the Republic of Lithuania and the President of the Russian Federation was prepared and signed. That statement contains important wording on the security policy of the countries: “The Parties recognise the right of each state to choose its own paths of security while committing itself not to enhance its own security at the expense of the security of other states” (Sovmestnoe rossijsko-litovskoe zjavlenie, 2001). The wording is a compromise, concealing different opportunities of interpretations, but it nevertheless proved acceptable to both sides.

Thus, what happened during this visit was difficult to attribute to hostile and incompatible relationships. One side gave the other side at least a minimal recognition of each other’s uniqueness and distinctiveness. In this sense, Adamkus, from the media point of view, may have even slightly overstepped it (Sakaluskaitė, 2001), but such things are difficult to measure. In other words, the relationship between the two countries during the visit should be regarded as reasonably normal pragmatic communication. Nothing special. However, in the context of the further development of the relationship, such communication later became almost exotic. According to the testimony of the former president Dalia Grybauskaitė, her last encounter with the actual Russian leader Putin, then

the prime minister, in 2010 in Helsinki, was already marked by an exceptional demonstration of disrespect (Ulbinaitė, 2019, pp. 239-244) and prevented further pragmatic and mutually beneficial cooperation. One possible answer to why this might have happened is that both sides have lost even the slightest desire to give each other at least some signs of *thick* recognition.

Conclusions

This brief overview of three episodes of Lithuanian-Russian pragmatic cooperation at the highest level shows that, despite the very large differences between the identities, the complex historical past and serious disagreements, interaction or even cooperation between the countries is nonetheless possible. Identities are and will be different. However, they are very broad, so the points of overlap and mutually acceptable assessments at the desired and political will can always be traced. Therefore, it is worth repeating: there is no need to forget that identity/self is not a variable fixed once and for all. These are not material variables (territory, population, economic capacity or size of the armed forces), which are relatively stable. Identities, whatever fixed and clear they are, are much more volatile and can change very quickly as they respond to other identities. Theoretically, it is possible that hostile identities can flip in just over a day. It is only enough for one of interacting parties to raise the concept of not dividing but uniting the identities.

Therefore, from the theoretical point of view, there are no objectively insurmountable obstacles that would prevent Lithuanian-Russian relations from being transferred from a “critical” to a more “pragmatic” mood. It is just a matter of subjective attitudes, of the will of the living people, of political leaders, and of self-determination. Just like in Europe, different approaches to Russia are expressed. These different approaches – “pragmatic” and “critical” - are not the result of reinforced concrete construction, but rather the result of speaking and practicing of *thick* recognition practices. Therefore, although at first glance the relations between Lithuania and Russia is a diplomatic aporia, i.e. an insoluble task, because cherished identities simply deny each other. However, it should also be noted that although aporias cannot be resolved by logical reasoning, they can be resolved by active and determined action.

All we have to do is remember how the Cold War was almost completed in one go. Here, too, one can imagine a hypothetical situation that, one day, politicians come to power in Lithuania and Russia, who, without major problems, merely normalise relations between the countries by relying solely on political will to end gun fighting, economic sanctions, “war of words” etc. In this case, probably many or even all observers of Lithuanian–Russian relations would say that it’s a beautiful fantasy, but for a thousand reasons it could not be implemented. However, scarce examples of cooperation between Lithuania and Russia at the highest level show that, in fact, there are no objective obstacles to this. The essence of the matter – in the form of a proper *thick* recognition/mode that doesn’t just talk about each other, but also makes the choice to talk to each other.

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