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Visegrad, Nato and EU

The difficult balancing acts of the new EU member states

Tomas Kavaliauskas outlines the reasons why the countries of "new Europe" such as Lithuania and Poland took a pro-war stance and considers the implications for the relations to "old Europe" and within Nato.

The main error committed by Western Europe, Kavaliauskas argues was to integrate the newcomers only in the areas of economics and culture while politically classifying them still as "post-socialist countries", who are only slowly awakening to the values of "true" democracy. Meanwhile, Kavaliauskas questions the sense of moral superiority of the new members who like to pride themselves on the notion that they will restore Europe's moral emptiness and replace consumerism with spiritual values.

The new member states, he concludes, must continue to tread carefully between Western European attitudes and their own to eventually bridge the gaps.

1.

Even before the Vilnius 10 supported the US attack on Iraq, the notion was hovering amongst Lithuanian intellectuals that both Lithuania and other post-socialist countries – once they join the EU – will deliver Western Europe with a sense of freedom from Central Europe¹, or will simply infuse that value into the materialistic West. This thought was updated during the US president's visit to Vilnius, when Bush in Vilnius City Hall square on a crisp November morning in 2002 unequivocally emphasized the price Lithuania's paid for its liberty. In this context, when the crowd was shouting "thank you" both in English and Lithuanian thanking for an invitation to join NATO and was ceaselessly waving flags of America, Lithuania, and NATO, the words that touched upon Lithuanian honor were proclaimed by the smiling US president: "You don't have to thank. NATO needs you!"

Soon afterwards, the Vilnius 10 proved America was indeed in need of this new NATO member – disregarding the opinion of those who cover the costs of billions of Euros in order to accept and integrate post-socialist countries into Europe – by lending its voice for the war in Iraq. Soon after the war in Iraq, when the US Congress approved the list of new NATO members, Bush in a welcoming ceremony emphasized that these new members of post-socialist countries proved their right to join NATO not only through words but also through action.

However, the tension between the US, and its allies Britain and France, Germany and Russia before the attack on Iraq was so high that according to the US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, the Vilnius 10 position split Europe into two parts: old and new.

Committing itself to such foreign politics in early Spring in 2003, Lithuania suddenly became politically emancipated: In a sign of solidarity with other post-socialist Central European countries it challenged old Europe. Lithuania's political status suddenly altered – poor beggars turned into equal partners of Paris and Berlin, demonstrating that the opinion of Middle Europe has to be taken into account seriously.

Chirac meanwhile rushed to name the Vilnius 10 as irresponsible children. Moreover, the French president even threatened with possible complications of becoming EU members. However, the Anglo-Saxon TV channels CNN and BBC reacted immediately with a positive evaluation of Central Europe for taking a pro-American stance. CNN and BBC marked that values of this European region were formed under the coercive regime of the former Soviet Union; therefore it is natural that today Central Europe goes along with America – the country that guarantees Europe's security and thanks to which seven new post-socialist countries will become NATO members.

It did not take long for Lithuania to notice that Iraq is not the only object of conflict. The conflict between old Europe and the US was also a matter of who will become dominant in global politics. Paris and Berlin showed their insatiable thirst for their own say, while London was remaining faithful to Washington. On an economic level, Lithuania trusts old Europe and submits to the directives of Brussels. Nevertheless, on a political level, Lithuania figured out connotations of a Chirac – Schröder – Putin political trinity. While the Lithuanian politician Rolandas Pavilionis, who has been against Lithuania's integration into NATO, was calling his nation for creativity instead of armament and with a serious face on local TV raised the question "Who is threatening Lithuania?", implying that Russia is no longer a threat, Vilnius had wise enough politicians who realized that in Moscow there are enough deputies who are still thinking along the lines of "lost" territories, but who are unable to get them "back" merely because of their current inability to act imperialistically in the Baltic region.

In other words, the Vilnius 10 supported the position of the US and Britain not out of the honest conviction that the regime of Saddam Hussein has to be changed or that there was an urgent need to take out his alleged weapons of mass destruction, but out of its diplomatic common sense not to demonstrate solidarity with those who – while shaking Putin's hand – don't even notice that hand shakes are exchanged across territories of the post-socialist countries. Chirac's reaction to the decision made by the Vilnius 10 revealed the French insistence on the presupposition that only Central Europe must ask for Western Europe's opinion, but not vice versa. Therefore, this "disobedience" of Central Europe could be seen as a "No" to the teacher-pupil model as the Vilnius 10 stood against the model of an hierarchical relationship that was lacking mutual respect.

This "No" has a much deeper meaning when one thinks of a wider context of how Central Europe for centuries has been labeled as culturally inferior and civically underdeveloped.

Egidijus Vareikis, a delegate of Lithuania's government, has shared this experience when in 1990 – 1991 during one of the pompous receptions, a delegate of a NATO country somehow blurted out: "We have visitors from Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, – visitors who not so long ago were our deadly enemies... Now they are with us and even want to become members of NATO."² According to Vareikis, such Western thinking is related to the Soviet

studies known as Sovietology. This popular Western discipline was inadequate to the real experience that Central Europeans had to undergo during the cold war era. People of this region did not forget their real history. And yet, Western Sovietologists were unambiguously treating them under a derogatory label – *homo sovieticus*. Supposedly, the Soviet–Marxist state existed due to the conscious support of its ideological citizens. Thus, the very collapse of the former Soviet Union was treated as a miracle, but not as a result of preserved nationalist spirit. Naturally in this sort of context a Lithuanian, Latvian, Estonian, Pole or Hungarian cannot help to be appalled by such words as "now they are with us". Central Europeans have always been relating themselves to the West. Unfortunately, the West had not realized this but had to discover it. When Vareikis shared his inner discomfort with the colleagues from the "block", he found out that they – Poles, Hungarians, Latvians, Estonians – had experienced the same discomfort as if they all were traitors of their Marxist ideology desperately attempting to get a piece of the West's well-being apple pie. Needless to say, this was in 1990–1991.

Today it is self-evident that Lithuania is with the West; nevertheless old Europe only now is starting to realize that Lithuania also has a stance of its own when a conversation turns out to be political. Chirac's verbal lashing of Vilnius 10 because of Lithuania's America-friendly position before the outbreak of the war in Iraq would have been humiliating if it had not revealed France's political impotence: "Vilnius 10 lost a good chance to remain silent." Also cranky Germany reacted against Poland's participation in post-Husseinian Iraq. Berlin asked: "Where does Poland intend to join? – the US or the EU? Thus, there is no coincidence that even in *Le Monde diplomatique* the French leftist B. Margueritte wrote on Poland: "[...] philo-Americanism wants to be a Trojan horse of Washington inside the union."³

It seems that so far post-socialist countries have been integrated into the European Union only on the levels of economics and cultural exchange. In the political domain, unfortunately, there remains in the Age of Enlightenment Voltaire's invented paradigm of the other Europe – Europe that is "uncivilized" and "barbaric". The 18th century Western Europe needed an extra political and cultural pillar to support its elite status quo. That pillar was doomed to become the "invented" barbaric Central and Eastern Europe. After all, the project of European Enlightenment was supposed to confront injustice and intolerance. Larry Wolff in his book *Inventing Eastern Europe*⁴ contends that Voltaire, Rousseau, Diderot and other French thinkers had a draft of a new philosophical geography map in mind. They were creating a new "plan of civilization".⁵

Kornelia Slavova, professor at Sophia University, while analyzing a negative linguistic connotation of the word "Bulgarian" in an American lexicon, discovered that namely Voltaire in his *Candide* created a negative Bulgarian image that has no substance to it. Bulgarians were doomed to become the primitive other of the enlightened Europe until today when Bulgarians became a euphemism for anarchists and gays.⁶ Having in mind this context, Bulgaria's participation in the Vilnius 10 acquires a symbolic meaning in deconstructing the myth of the "invented" Europe as well as creating a new political Europe as equipose to the old one. Bulgaria helped the Vilnius 10 to make "the landlords of civilization" face the other firm position and realize that not only old Europe has the continent at its disposal even though it laid the foundation for the EU expansion. But the truth is that old Europe is more than France and Germany. It also includes Britain and Spain and their American stance was so different. It follows that Europe has two old Europes: pro- and anti-American. Whatever

implications it may have in the future, one of them is already obvious: these divisions are a stimulus to form a new political consciousness in this ideologically fluctuating continent.

However, whatever positions were maintained by the governments of "various Europes", people of both "old Europes" marched in the streets expressing their will to protect Iraq from an American invasion. The demonstrations were massive. The position of the Vilnius 10 became a significant equipoise to the anti-American hysteria in Western Europe. It is worth mentioning that in Middle Europe there was not even a single demonstration of such sort. Not in Lithuania, certainly, because this country does not have an anti-American tradition. It is no coincidence that Bush visited Lithuania's capital Vilnius in 2002: Anti-Americanism for Lithuania would be too much of a political luxury: Russia – the source of Lithuania's suffering during its occupation – was, is, and will always be geopolitically too close. It was also understood what comprises the foundations of NATO, that has been forfending Europe after the World War II and thanks to which the seat of NATO is financed in Brussels. Poland, after showing its active participation in post-Husseinian Iraq, immediately dared to change the tone of its voice discussing these matters with morally prostrate Germany. Poland with its population of forty million received strong support from the US – the defense secretary Rumsfeld at the beginning of June in Brussels once again reminded everyone that there is an old and a new Europe. The latter, according to Rumsfeld, values freedom. In any case, Vilnius 10 lent a hand to the US and Britain squeezing France and Germany into a corner. Berlin and Paris rushed to smooth down rickety relations with America: it was once again agreed upon being allies in case there is a threat of mass destruction weapons.

After such a political shift in France and Germany's position, it is easy to imagine how politically neutered Lithuania would have been if this country along with other post-socialist states would have shown solidarity with anti-American moods of Western Europeans. One can only imagine the sense of impotence on behalf of the Vilnius 10 and its catholic-like meekness if Central Europe kneeled down in front of those who have a major say in terms of Central Europe's integration into the EU.

2.

A Lithuanian can only be proud of Lithuania's current foreign politics strategy. Nevertheless, even Lithuania has double standards. Lithuanians right after Bush's visit in Vilnius elected a new president Rolandas Paksas, whose election campaign sponsor is the notorious Russian businessman Borisov, who is tied to a mafia-like organization of the 21st century that has interests in Lithuania's strategic objects. No wonder that Putin called Paksas "our man". Paksas on the other hand immediately granted Lithuanian citizenship to Borisov, thereby undermining the very values of citizenship. Moreover, during a press conference in Saint Petersburg on the date of its 300 years jubilee, Paksas was the only president who talked in Russian instead of his native Lithuanian in front of all European presidents and prime ministers. Such a gesture was not even reflected in Lithuania's media; but more importantly it raises the question: What happened to the great political spirit of Lithuania?

When at the end of October 2003, Paksas and his presidential advisors were suspected of criminal ties with the 21st century organization and the BBC called it the Lithuanian "Paksagate", this only proves that Lithuania has a democracy and that this state is capable of learning from its own mistakes.

While Putin was demonstrating his dictatorship by arresting Khordakovsky, disregarding the side effects of such an arrest (e.g. *Yukos* shares dropped and the world questioned Russia's progress in terms of democracy) Lithuania's intelligence did the opposite – and went after its president. If no one dared to question Putin's authority and correctness on judicial grounds in Russia, so in Lithuania there were no problems in discussing the possibility of Paksas stepping down. If in Russia there were signs of a totalitarian regime, since the link between the coming elections and Khordakovsky's arrest and his sponsoring parties of the opposition are clear to every political analyst, so in Lithuania there were signs of a strong democracy, a democracy that is not afraid to question its president. It seems that Lithuania is demonstrating its ability to learn from its own mistakes.

However, a political stance should not be confused with cultural and economical everyday life. It is not worth to be anxious over the countrymen's disbelief that membership in the EU will guarantee a better life quality, not so much over nicknaming Brussels as the second Moscow, and not over the myth that supposedly in the EU national identity will be lost, or over the argument that the EU is good only for politicians but not for an average person, or that Europe has already been telling what to do, how to act, how to live, and that foreigners will purchase everything that we own... A much deeper feeling of moral anxiety came up in a private discussion when a Lithuanian essayist discussing the matters of Vilnius 10 said: "There is no need to thank old Europe for the opportunity to join the EU – Europe needs us! We are the giving spirit." But does it not seem like a flash of post-social majesty mania? True, we are bringing some spirit into the old Europe, but one should not turn it into an absolute paradigm.

It is rude and against the spirit of citizenship when one refuses to thank in public discourse for what one gets and will receive from Western Europeans thanks to the money that the citizens of old Europe earned. After the fall of Berlin Wall, the citizens of West Germany had to bear the burden of constantly rising prices and shrinking social programs funds: at first, a sacrifice had to be made for the "rehabilitation" of East Germany, then billions of Deutsch Marks began to flow into the EU budget. Of course, what Lithuania will get from that budget will be no charitable money. It is going to be an investment. Economically perked-up Lithuania in future will have to make its contribution to the common budget of the EU, i.e. return "a loan". Thus, gratefulness here is needed in order to admit who we are at the moment – beggars of the old Europe. Equal we have become only in terms of foreign politics.

The thought that Western Europe will learn a lot about values from its new members in the EU was also expressed by pope John Paul II. The West is supposedly too materialistic and in need of a spirit. It almost sounds like that Hegelian Geist, only this time it has to be catholic and post-socialist. Consumer society supposedly no longer knows what it means to be spiritual. It is very likely that the pope had meant his native Poland of forty million Catholics would counterbalance secular moods.

One should be watchful when someone opposes materialistic goods with the spirit per se. For instance, Dostoyevski in his ideologically subtle *Legend of the Grand Inquisitor* downgraded and stigmatized earthly bread and masses that cannot become the chosen ones due to the very principle of their weakness. Supposedly the ideal of Christ can be successfully followed only by the few. Masses hunger for bread not spirit, especially the masses of the West. This Russian classic, skeptical about the achievements of the Industrial

Revolution in Western Europe, in an inverse way raises the spirit at the expense of materialism. Soviets continued this tradition and called capitalism and the Western states "rotten". Is not that aforementioned desire to "infuse" spirit into the old Europe nothing but a new subtle variation of a Dostoyevskian spirituality? Does it not presuppose a certain messianistic function of Lithuania and Central Europe? This kind of function raises the self-esteem by implying that post-socialist states know more about freedom than Western Europe, which has been fostering democratic traditions for centuries.

If it is sufficient that supermarkets are loaded with goods and that cobblers get to work on time, then there is no doubt that Lithuania had a civic society ten years ago. Lithuanians were more organized than other Soviet republics even during the Soviet times. In terms of self-discipline and orderliness, Lithuanians have always excelled Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. But is that a sufficient achievement? Not Eastern European countries, but old Europe dictates the new standards. The direction of orientation is West, not East. Thus, if we take a close look at the quality of everyday co-existence, we will see that the constellation of a civil society network in this country is still rather primitive. Lithuanian world-view or Weltanschauung is sometimes a reminder of a pre-civil state. Everyday experience provides so many phenomena that bespeak of hysteria, anger, frustration, disrespect, and confusion of values. One can witness for instance on a quite a spectacle when a ticket inspector asks to see tickets on a trolleybus (Lithuania's popular public transportation within the territories of the cities). Passengers tell them either to find another job or be ashamed for giving a fine to those who do not have a ticket. Shouting, verbal abuse, shoving and pushing in front of everyone including children is not an uncommon scene, which is the outcome of the inability to comprehend civil roles and functions. Objective criteria are easily replaced by moralization. It reveals how far Lithuanian mentality still is from the everyday Western living standards. If the principles of liberty and democracy play a key role in Lithuania's government and in literary magazines as well as publications on culture, everyday life is still full of other examples.

It is no surprise that the inner politics of the state are also unstable and keep fluctuating. With the wind of change, politicians rush to exchange their seats in different parties. When the time comes for new elections, people get confused. They blindly vote for new candidates while overlooking elective programs. Kaunas, the most Lithuanian city in terms of Lithuanian patriotism and population, in the course of eleven years managed to substitute its mayor five times. The son of a well-known mafia leader even found an empty seat for himself in the Kaunas municipality. This kind of cultural-political phenomenon suggests that applied and professional ethics in Lithuania have not been implemented in practice. Behavior codes of business ethics are still on a conceptual level. People assume that business and ethics are two spheres that cannot be reconciled.

These phenomena bespeak of a confusion in values – be it moral or political. Lithuanians have not learned to fight for beliefs with consistency. Not out of pragmatism but out of mere conformism. According to W. James, pragmatism means not only that all truths are right, but also the fact that by acknowledging and tolerating the truth of the other, one remains faithful to one's own truth, to one's own convictions and values. L. Kohlberg proved that moral maturity is a matter of gradation, not an abstract. Thus, would Lithuania get a positive grade for its moral maturity on the scale from zero to ten?

3.

Western Europeans have cultural wars as much as Lithuanians once in a while get involved into cultural wars with Poles or Estonians. But on a larger scale of euro-cultural variety these micro-collisions require a sense of some national ground. One has to be proud of one's identity in order to show cultural resistance. Smaller, weaker, formerly occupied countries tend to be both politically and culturally aggressive just as large countries.

Leonidas Donskis has noticed that the experience of nations that suffered from occupation and political humiliation share certain tendencies in their historical consciousness: in Eastern and Central European thinking, this consciousness remains both a Russian apocalyptic historical philosophical construct (a catastrophic interpretation of the world) and Fukuyama's new understanding of the end and final meaning. L. Donskis in his book *Between Imagination and Reality* argues that a nation that had to endure historical suffering has developed a desire to fight for its recognition by creating messianistic goals. In other words, victimized consciousness acquires new forms of messianism.⁷ Lithuanians are proud of their Vytautas, the Great historical period. The state was an empire from sea (Baltic) to sea (Black). On the other hand, Lithuanians also do not miss a chance to position themselves as victims of a geopolitical situation. The sea appears as a leitmotiv of power and unjust suffering. When a conversation touches issues dealing with the consequences of the secret Ribentrop–Molotov pact, the sea is turned into the culprit for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, i.e. it should have been in the East, because then the Baltic sea would have separated the country from Russia and Lithuania and would have been a part of Scandinavia, thus avoiding Soviet regime.

But the attitude changes when one looks back into the 13th century. Here, politicians and historians rejoice since historical grandeur becomes identified with the current identity. Thus, it is not surprising that sometimes Lithuanian politicians as well as philosophers and essayists no longer want to discuss the country's backwardness in Europe. They are sick and tired of the idea that Lithuania has to live up to European standards, while always dragging behind the leaders. They have also claimed that Lithuania's independence will end on the day of its joining the EU. They believe that this time we are giving away our independence by ourselves. Such ideas are being published as interesting and attention worthy by the leading cultural magazines. There are authors, who write ceaselessly about the project of Lithuania's exceptional status and its unique historical–political characteristics. Sometimes those ideas sound a lot like those of the French Enlightenment, except that this time the other is the old Europe, which is about to get a dose of Middle Europe's spiritual values. Old Europe is treated as barbaric, since supposedly it knows nothing but consumerism. It would be nice, if those Lithuanian intellectuals as well as the pope, who has so much faith in his catholic Poland, did not forget where ethics became a subject of science rather than an object of religious mystification. This reminder is more significant than it may seem: if human values become mystified and separated from everyday experiences, there is a good chance that once again Europeans will find a way to destroy their well-being; but if universal human values remain an object of science, explained and based on the advance of sociology, psychology and cultural studies, then there is a good chance that the continent will flourish. Mass destruction takes place only where reason is absent.

4.

Looking back, it is important not to overlook Lithuania's day to day reality: the economical situation, rustic culture, massive alcoholism in the villages, crying newborns in garbage containers. Historical grandeur is easily being ripped apart from current sociological, economical, psychological issues. There is still so much protectionism, from getting a job at a supermarket to becoming an advisor of president Paksas. The criteria that are used for distributing funds for cultural projects are more often a matter of mysticism than of objectivity. No wonder that countrymen believe that business and ethics are not compatible.

True, the extent of those problems is far smaller than those in Eastern European countries such as Belarus, Ukraine, Moldavia, and huge territories that stretch endlessly in Russia, isolated from the splendor of the Kremlin stars. Lithuanians cope with their problems faster and more effectively than their neighbors in the East. If it were otherwise, Lithuania would not be joining the EU and Lithuania would not be considered as one of the best prepared for entering the Union. There is no doubt that Lithuania shares a different Baltic mentality than Slavs in the East. The problem arises where there is a gap between foreign policies and the quality of everyday life: there is will to romanticize Lithuania's nation in order to mask its being in a gray zone. Let us add to the glory of the past Vilnius 10 mission of the day and Lithuania will turn into the center of Europe providing "a plan of civilization" for the barbaric West. However, currently the function of the Vilnius 10 has faded away – it is history. America is in deep trouble fighting against invisible terrorists in Iraq, sacrificing its soldiers everyday. America had to ask Europe and Japan for financial help to maintain its presence in this Muslim country. It seems that everything has turned upside – down: France and Germany have to agree on giving Europe's tax payers' money to the US just because Bush's democracy cannot prevail in post–Husseinian Baghdad. But old Europe spoke out against the war in Iraq in the first place. The hysteria about American dominance, common in Europe and in the United States before the war, is today more justified than it was then. Moreover, it seems that France and Germany have won the moral war against Bush and Blair's arguments since Hussein did not possess weapons of mass destruction.

These issues are not merely political but also emotional–political. Chirac was critical of the Vilnius 10 because the well–being of post–socialist Central Europe depends not only on guarantees of freedom, but also on a strong Euro in relation to the US dollar, which is so related to the growth of the EU economy, without which post–socialist countries would not be able to match the requirements of NATO. It might be the case that both old and new Europe were right in protecting their interests.

Post–socialist countries have more than one generation of citizens who have experienced the nightmares of the Soviet regime. This experience is priceless since it infused the ability to value freedom. It is no surprise that Lithuanians are more sensitive to the alleged dangers of Russian origin. As Vilnius 10 has proved, Lithuania along with other post–socialist states can balance Western European emotional–political attitudes. People who had to pay the price for the occupation's humility and victimization are more apt at deciphering coded threats. It is something that old Europe has to learn to appreciate. Lithuanians, on the other hand, should never forget to thank those who initiated the European Union enlargement. Without political–economical ethics, Middle Europe may remain the "Bulgaria" of Voltaire, an affix to the "plan of civilization" whether it agrees or not.

The very existence of such arguments suggests that there is a gap between old and new Europeans. They have different experiences, but the same democratic goals. What is needed is a mutual dialogue, patience, and the will to understand each other's worries. After all, we all belong to one big Europe.

- ¹ It is more important not to confuse the former with "Eastern Europe", because Eastern Europe does not include the Baltic states.
- ² Egidijus Vareikis, *Dinozaurdjanti Europa* (Europe turning into a dinosaur), Vilnius, Strofa, p.70–71.
- ³ Bernard Marguerite, "La Pologne malade du liberalisme", in: *Le Monde diplomatique*, October, 2002, p.17.
- ⁴ Larry Wolff uses the term "Eastern Europe", whereas the author of the text has chosen Central Europe in order to distinguish these two different regions as distinct ideologically, politically, economically, and emotionally.
- ⁵ Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, Stanford University Press, 1994.
- ⁶ Kornelia Slavova, "What's in a Name? The Functioning of the Label 'Bulgarian' in the American Imagination", Selected Conference Papers, Blagoevgrad, Bulgaria, October 18–21, 2001, p.74–75.
- ⁷ Leonidas Donskis, *Tarp vaizduotos ir realybės* (Between Imagination and Reality), Vilnius: Baltos Lankos, 1996, p.198.

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