

## Summary

Polish-Lithuanian relations after regaining independence and sovereignty at the turn of the 80s and 90s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, proved rather complicated as their determinants were both old and modern history and the position of local minorities in both countries. These factors influenced current policies of the two countries, their safety and economics in the double dimension: internal and bilateral. In the last thirty years, subsequent Polish governments in the relations with the Republic of Lithuania took decisions which were often ad hoc and risky, motivated by politics and not by a long-term perspective directed at fulfilling one of the basic aims of the Polish state, i.e. guaranteeing the Poles in Lithuania all rights granted to them by collateral treaties and in international conventions. It was especially evident, when in the wake of the conflict with Brussels, Poland started to seek Lithuania's support using diplomatic methods, which was perceived by many Poles living in this country as an attempt to sacrifice their interests on the altar of so-called small European politics. It is worth mentioning that the bilateral relations at the time improved, especially when in the summer of 2019 the formation called *Akcja Wyborcza Polaków na Litwie – Związek Chrześcijańskich Rodzin* joined the government of Saulius Skvernelis, who represented a political party similar in programme to the coalition of right-wing parties which have been in power in Poland since 2015.

For years, Polish-Lithuanian relations concerning the Polish minority have been characterised by dynamics and consequence from Lithuania, and by statics and ad hoc reactions from Poland. It was especially visible when the Democratic Left Alliance (SLD) and Polish People's Party (PSL) coalition was in power. The Lithuanian side, despite announcing a strategic partnership with

Poland on numerous occasions, for nearly thirty years *via facti* systematically and persistently have put into practice a plan to assimilate (Lithuanise) the Poles in the Vilnius Region by posing obstacles to Polish education there. Poland, in turn, for decades has made it principle not to act without sufficient support of Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. When the Lithuanian laws, implemented rules and administrative practice concerning the return of the land, education, higher education, Polish language learning and the spelling of Polish names severely limited Polish state of possession, Polish authorities, regardless of the political option in power, presented reactive and ad hoc thinking. They responded *de casu ad casum*, usually sluggishly, and were sometimes entertained by dangerous illusions, like in spring 2010, when the Lithuanian parliament announced sanctioning Polish spelling of surnames, or in 2006 when a purely political decision to buy Możejki Refinery by Polish Orlen was taken.

Polish policy in the region was a fiasco: neither the Promethean one in the spirit of Giedroyc, nor the strict, pragmatic one led from a position of strength by Radosław Sikorski and his successors, Witold Waszczykowski and Jacek Czaputowicz (with the stipulation that the last two mentioned ministers were not the actual heads of Polish diplomacy in view of the decision-making body). Against this background, conciliatory policy of president Aleksander Kwaśniewski, which concentrated on the accession of both countries to NATO, energetic policy of Lech Kaczyński and firm policy (in its phraseological meaning) of Bronisław Komorowski did not improve the situation of the Poles in Lithuania. On the other hand, limited activity of president Andrzej Duda in contacts with Lithuania did not go beyond the scope defined for him and his office by the leaders of the ruling party. The activities undertaken by subsequent Polish presidents and governments within the last thirty years, were terminated by the reluctance of Lithuanian politicians to Polish minority's demands caused by Polish autonomous movements in the Vilnius and Soleczniki regions in 1988-1992. The Lithuanian side was afraid that granting even minor concessions to the Poles in the Vilnius region could lead to the return of the autonomous movements, which would threaten internal cohesiveness of the Lithuanian state.

To sum up, in spite of diplomatic activities undertaken by subsequent Polish governments, which encompassed sending *ballons d'essai* or using *ventilare* method (which in the language of diplomacy means a possibility to solve difficult problems), the influence of Polish-Lithuanian relations in their different phases in 1990-2019 on the situation of Polish minority was limited or none. Their genesis and following stages were dominated by the indecisive stance of the Polish government towards the Lithuanian act of independence and autonomous initiatives of the Polish minority, which the Lithuanians considered as *mala fides* and as an attack on the integrity of their country. The Polish authorities were unable to question this attitude, even if from

the Polish perspective it was highly disputable. The attempts to solve the problems of Polish minority in Lithuania, which for many years engaged considerable funds, resembled St Vitus Dance and Polish diplomacy appeared to be absolutely helpless on that front.

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