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National Minorities and the Security of Lithuania in the Existing Political and Historical Context

1. Introduction

The ethnic factor plays a significant role in the security policy of multi-ethnic states. At the same time, it may constitute one of the main sources of conflict. This apparent paradox can be attributed to the right of peoples to self-determination, which naturally leads to an increased sense of national consciousness among particular groups. Ethnic origin and the resulting national identity contribute to the cohesion of states; however, under certain conditions, they may also have a disintegrating effect.

For many local communities, national identity remains a matter of great importance. In this context, subjective self-identification plays a crucial role. Internally consolidated ethnic groups, such as the Polish and Russian communities residing in Lithuania, undoubtedly possess a strong sense of collective identity. In their efforts to preserve their national distinctiveness, these groups may at times enter into conflict with state authorities.

The aim of this article is to discuss the conditions that may be conducive to the potential involvement of national minorities, including the Russian-speaking population, in separatist activities and other centrifugal tendencies. Accordingly, the main research problem is formulated as follows: how relevant are ethnic and linguistic identities among certain groups of Lithuanian citizens in the context of the security and territorial integrity of the state?

For the purposes of this study, the following hypothesis is proposed: national and linguistic minorities may constitute a convenient base – and at the same time a favourable substrate, particularly in propaganda terms and in the international dimension – for initiating and undertaking actions, including by external actors, that can be defined as centrifugal forces directed against the Lithuanian state.

The article adopts the character of an analytical study. It draws in part on Lithuanian and Russian source materials, as well as expert analyses addressing the issue outlined in

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the title. Addressing this problem requires a comprehensive approach to the question of national minorities inhabiting the territory of Lithuania. Verification of the proposed hypothesis necessitates a broad reference to the country's ethnic and linguistic structure, as well as an analysis of the position of national minorities within the functional system of the Lithuanian state.

2. Tradition of Independent Statehood

Around the afternoon of the Middle Ages, the Lithuanian people's state occupied a vast territory. However, at the height of their power, they faced a threat that seriously endangered their statehood. From the north-west, they had to confront the hostile and expansive Teutonic State and, from the east, the robust and fast-growing Grand Duchy of Moscow. To respond to the emerging threat, in 1385 in the village of Kreva, Lithuania formed a personal union with Poland. Under its provisions, the Lithuanian duke Władysław Jagiełło married the heiress to the Polish throne, Queen Jadwiga of the Capetian House of Anjou, and undertook to baptize Lithuania[1]. After Christianization, the conditions for Lithuania's political isolation in the international arena was lifted[2]. The victorious war of 1409–1411 against the Teutonic Order reduced its military threat, and in the following decades Lithuania significantly expanded its territory. In 1413, the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland and the Grand Duchy of Lithuania concluded the Union of Horodło which confirmed that the two states would pursue a common foreign policy[3]. Joint Polish-Lithuanian parliaments and diets were also established, and the Lithuanian Catholic nobility was treated on a par with the Polish one. In the following centuries, the bonds between the two states were made even tighter. This culminated in the conclusion of the real Union of Lublin in 1569. It gave rise to one state organism, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth[4]. A federal state was established with one monarch, coat of arms, foreign and defence policy, and currency. The only areas that were not merged were the treasury, offices, judiciary, and armed forces. In addition, the territories of today's Ukraine, were to be administered by the Crown of the Kingdom of Poland. In Polish historiography, this is a breakthrough event that marked the beginning of a new stage in the development of Polish statehood, while from the viewpoint of Lithuanian historiography, it heralded the decline of the Lithuanian state as an independent organism. Under the act of the Union of Lublin, all Lithuanian nobility was equated in rights with the nobility of the Crown, which made the political life of Lithuania similar to the Polish one. This led to a rapidly progressing Polonization of the entire noble class in Lithuania[5]. At the beginning of the

1 A. Kasekamp, *Historia państw bałtyckich*, transl. Anna Żukowska-Maziarska, Warszawa 2013, p. 10.
2 A. Eidintas, A. Bumblauskas, A. Kulakauskas, M. Tamošaitis, *Historia Litwy,* Wilno 2013, p. 46.
3 J. Bukowski, *Dzieje reformacyi w Polsce od wejścia jej do Polski aż po jej upadek,* t. 1, *Początki i terytorialne rozprzestrzenienie się reformacyi*, Kraków 1883, p. 333.
4 S. Kutrzeba, W. Semkowicz, *Akra Unii Polski z Litwą 1385–1791,* Kraków 1932, p. 367.
5 Rimantas Miknys, Ogląd historyczny stosunków polsko-litewskich na przebiegu wieków, http://www.stosunki.pl/?q=content/ogl%C4%85d-historyczny-stosunk%C3%B3w-polsko-litewskich-na-przebiegu-wiek%C3%B3w [accessed 24 September 2024].

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18th century, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth experienced political depression. It was when the first signs of undermined independence became apparent. The end of common Polish-Lithuanian statehood came with the three subsequent partitions of the country by its neighbouring powers, Austria, Prussia, and Russia. The partitions, the defeats in subsequent national risings aimed to recover the common state, Moscow's anti-Polish policy, the emergence of modern European societies during the Napoleonic Wars, and the spread of nationalist ideology made the emerging Polish and Lithuanian nations turn against each other as political opponents[6]. After the partitions, Lithuanian lands became part of the Russian Empire. Due to the historical background, including the national risings mentioned earlier, in which Lithuanians were also active participants, the tsarist regime treated the inhabitants of Lithuanian lands more harshly than the population living in the areas of today's Latvia and Estonia[7].

Owing to favourable international circumstances, after the end of the Great War, Lithuania proclaimed independence. The last stage of its struggle for independence was overshadowed by the Polish-Soviet War of 1912–1920. The nationality of Vilnius and Central Lithuania was disputable. Ultimately, these lands were taken over by the "rebellious" Polish troops commanded by Gen. Lucjan Żeligowski. The seizure of the Vilnius region and its incorporation into the Polish state sparked a lasting Lithuanian-Polish dispute in the period that followed. Lithuania, together with the other Baltic states, Latvia, and Estonia, took steps to ensure their security. However, the Lithuanian-Polish disagreement over Vilnius and differences in the perception of actual threats stood in the way of reaching full concord among them. For Estonia, Soviet Russia was a major potential threat, while for Latvia, it was both Russia and Germany. The Lithuanians saw Russia as a counterweight to Poland, which began to tighten its relations with Latvia and Estonia. Lithuanian-German relations were not illustrative either. They were clouded by Lithuania's occupation of the Klaipeda region after the Great War. These relations even worsened after Adolf Hitler's rise to power in Germany. Given the foregoing, and aware of the declining position of the League of Nations since the mid-1930s, Lithuania sought international security by declaring its neutrality. At the beginning of the 1920s, there was a commonly shared opinion that the Baltic states, despite their efforts, were not able to endure on their own as sovereign state entities. The Lithuanians succumbed to the ultimate power of German and Soviet totalitarianism. As a result of the secret protocol appended to the Ribbentrop–Molotov Pact, the Baltic states fell under the ruthless sphere of influence of the Soviet Union which incorporated them as Union republics in 1940. In the spring of 1941, the armed forces of the Baltic states were transformed into the local corps of the Red Army, and most of the unyielding senior officers were executed[8]. At the beginning of 1944, as the Red Army was nearing the

[6] *Ibidem.*

[7] A. Kasekamp, *op. cit.,* p. 82.

[8] G. Motyka, R. Wnuk, T. Stryjek, A. Baran, *Wojna po wojnie. Antysowieckie podziemie w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w latach 1944–1953,* Gdańsk–Warszawa 2012, p. 17, 35, 57.

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borders of pre-war Lithuania, most soldiers of Lithuanian paramilitary units formed by the Germans deserted and created armed underground resistance[9]. Striving to suppress the independence movement, the Soviet authorities launched a programme of collectivization of agriculture, nationalization of the economy, and deportation of individuals suspected of nationalist sentiment. Pursuant to the provisions of the Tehran and Yalta Conferences, the Baltic states were returned to Soviet Russia. Once again, favourable circumstances to regain independence occurred at the turn of the 1980s along with the progressive disintegration of the Soviet state. The Lithuanian march for independence ended successfully with the collapse of the USSR in December 1991.

Lithuania regained its independence and its legal and international subjectivity within the borders of the former Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic (LSSR). Today, it is an independent, multi-party, and democratic parliamentary republic[10]. The tripartite division of powers is the mandatory element of the country's political system[11]. Foreign policy is framed jointly by the president and the government[12]. The political system is rested upon the amended Constitution[13] of 25 October 1992. According to its fundamental law, Lithuania is a republic with one nationality and one official language. After 1991, a multi-party system dominated the Lithuanian political scene, its balance being subject to frequent changes. Lithuania is a member of many international organizations, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU)[14]. While under the Soviet rule, the Lithuanian economy was a vital component of the economic system of the Soviet Union with significant military production[15]. Free Lithuania followed the route of far-reaching privatization and made towards free market economy[16]. The economic success that followed was attributed to bold reforms[17]. Ever since the collapse of the USSR, the main goal of the Lithuanian

[9] A. Kasekamp, *op. cit*., p. 143.

[10] Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/konst/litwa.html [accessed 24 September 2024].

[11] A. Maciejvski, *System sądownictwa w Republice Litewskiej*, „Kwartalnik IUSTITIA" 2011, nr 4, http://www.kwartalnikiustitia.pl/system-sadownictwa-w-republice-litewskiej,718 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[12] Rząd i polityka, https://www.pl.mfa.lt/pl/pl/witamy-na-litwie/o-litwie/rzad-i-polityka [accessed 24 September 2024].

[13] Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, https://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/konst/litwa-a.html [accessed 24 September 2024].

[14] Członkostwo Litwy w organizacjach międzynarodowych i w ich organach wybieralnych, https://www.urm.lt/default/pl/polityka-zagraniczna/organizacje-miedzynarodowe/czonkostwo-litwy-w-organizacjach-miedzynarodowych-i-w-ich-organach-wybieralnych [accessed 24 September 2024].

[15] Thomas Grennes, *The Lithuanian economy in transition*, "LITUANUS" 1994, Vol. 40, nr 2, p. 16–58, https://www.spauda2.org/lituanus/archive/1994/1994-nr02-LITUANUS.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

[16] Litwa, gospodarka, https://encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/Litwa-Gospodarka;4574639.html [accessed 24 September 2024].

[17] O. Osica, *Od radzieckiej republiki do strefy euro. Gospodarka Litwy wciąż na fali wznoszącej*, „Portal Gospodarczy", https://www.wnp.pl/rynki-zagraniczne/od-radzieckiej-republiki-do-strefy-euro-gospodarka-litwy-wciaz-na-fali-wznoszacej,328367_1_0_0.html [accessed 24 September 2024].

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security policy has been to maintain independence and sovereignty as a state. Initially, the dominant view was that the security policy should be based on neutrality. However, the Lithuanian elite quickly came to realize that Moscow would not be willing to narrow its influence in the region. In 1992 and 1993, the former Red Army units (after 1991, renamed as the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation) left the territory of Lithuania[18]. The goals set at the dawn of independence were to be achieved through membership in NATO and the EU, which was endorsed unanimously by the Lithuanian political class[19]. The integration process ended in 2004 when Lithuania became a full member of both organizations. Recognizing the fundamental threats to its own sovereignty in the rise of neo-imperialism surfacing in the security policy of the Russian Federation, Lithuania is an active promoter of the strengthening of NATO's eastern flank and increasing the U.S. presence in this area. The Lithuanian armed forces are undergoing intense reorganization and modernization[20]. In addition to military spend, the authorities are regularly increasing their support for organizations working for state defence.

3. Ethnic Structure

The heart of the emerging Lithuanian nation was the territory between the Neman and the Neris rivers. Linguists have established that the Lithuanian language separated from Latvian around the 7th century A.D., but it made its way into the native literature relatively late. Initially, the literature was dominated by Old Russian and later, after the Union of Lublin, by Polish. The first book in Lithuanian, *Catechism*, by Martynas Mažvydas was published in 1547, and the first significant literary work, the poem *Metai* by Kristijonas Donelatis, around 1750. Both pieces were printed in Prussia[21]. The Grand Duchy of Lithuania ("GDL") spread over a vast territory inhabited by Slavic peoples. The Polish language was indispensable to participate in social life. It was promoted by, among others, Polish settlers. As a result, already in the 16th century, the Lithuanian upper classes would speak Polish, and some of the nobility would actually regard it as their mother tongue. Polish quickly reached the status of a national language. Reliable data on the linguistic and ethnic structure of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth before its disintegration is scarce. 1650 saw the first census of taxpayers. It showed that the population of the duchy numbered ca. 4,700 thousand people[22]. It is difficult to tell precisely what the percentage of Lithuanians and other ethnic groups in this population was. In the native Lithuanian lands, i.e. in Samogitia and Aukštaitija, the number of

[18] J. Kozakiewicz, *Polityka bezpieczeństwa państw bałtyckich,* Kraków 2003, s. 14.

[19] Constitutional Act on Non-Joining by the Republic of Lithuania of any Post-Soviet Eastern Alliances, https://e-seimas.lrs.lt/portal/legalAct/lt/TAD/TAIS.21154?jfwid=1clcwot6i3 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[20] Lithuanian Defence System: Facts and Trends, http://kam.lt/en/defence_policy_1053/important_documents/lithuanian_defence_system_facts_and_trends.html [accessed 24 September 2024].

[21] A. Eidintas, A. Bumblauskas, A. Kulakauskas, M. Tamošaitis, *op. cit.,* p. 15–16, 64.

[22] A. Rachuba, *Litwini*, [in:] *Pod wspólnym niebem. Narody dawnej Rzeczypospolitej*, eds. M. Kopczyński, W. Tygielski, Warszawa 2010, p. 25–27.

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Lithuanians was estimated at ca. 1,500 thousand. Given that they were in minority outside these areas, the other nations altogether accounted for up to 65% of the total population. Another census in Lithuania was held in 1789. It reported that the territory had been inhabited by ca. 3,850 thousand people. Based on this data, at the beginning of the 20th century, a theory was put forward that the most numerous ethnic groups in the region were: Belarusians (37%), Poles (26%), Lithuanians (20%), Jews (10%), and Russians (3.6%)[23]. It should be assumed that among the local people declaring Polish nationality, a significant percentage of them were linguistically and culturally polonized Lithuanians and Belarusians. A relatively comprehensive census was carried out in 1790. It showed that the population of Lithuania amounted to ca. 3,600 thousand, of which Lithuanians accounted for 1,240 thousand (35%). Based on some general estimations of Polish statisticians, in the pre-partition period, the number of Lithuanians in the GDL did not exceed 25% of the total population.

After the partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, Lithuania was annexed by tsarist Russia. As an administrative province of the Russian Empire, the territory of present-day Lithuania embraced Kaunas and Vilnius Governorates and part of Suwałki Governorate; today's Klaipeda County became part of East Prussia. Piotr Eberhardt, who studied the 1897 census and other sources on the ethnic structure of the Lithuanian lands, assumed that at the turn of the 20th century today's territory of Lithuania had been inhabited by 2,761.3 thousand people[24]. According to his estimates, and based on the declared language, the most numerous groups were: Lithuanians – 1,635.9 thousand (59.2%), Poles – 482.3 thousand (17.5%), Jews – 362 thousand (13.1%), Germans – 119.7 thousand (4.3%), Russians – 95.4 thousand (3.4%), Latvians – 35 thousand (1.3%) and Belarusians – 26 thousand (0.9%). Because the territory of present-day Lithuania is larger than before WW2, in order to have a full picture of the ethnic situation in its part of Europe in the interwar period, it is necessary to combine the data from the 1923 Lithuanian census in the Kaunas region, the data from the 1931 census in the Second Republic of Poland, and the data from 1925 on Klaipeda County[25]. Now, it can be inferred that the territory roughly equal to today's Lithuania was inhabited by 2,715.1 thousand people, including: 1,833.6 thousand Lithuanians (67.5%), 443 thousand Poles (16.3%), 222.5 thousand Jews (8.2%), 99.2 thousand Germans (3.7%), 60.5 thousand Russians (2.2%) and 15.3 thousand Belarusians (0.6%). In 1940, Lithuania, including the Vilnius region, was transformed into the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic. According to Soviet data, it was populated by ca. 2,880 thousand people[26]. According to the first post-war census of 1959, the population of the republic totalled 2,711.4 thousand, including 2,150.8 thousand Lithuanians (79.3%), 231 thousand Russians

[23] *Ibidem*, p. 27–30.

[24] P. Eberhardt, *Między Rosją a Niemcami. Przemiany narodowościowe w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej w XX w.,* Warszawa 1996, p. 35–32.

[25] *Ibidem*, p. 42–44.

[26] С. Сулькевич, *Территория и население СССР*, Москва 1940, p. 55–56.

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(8.5%), 230.1 thousand Poles (8.5%), 30.2 thousand Belarusians (1.1%), 24.7 thousand Jews (0.9%) and 17.7 thousand Ukrainians (0.6%)[27]. The 1970 census reported the total population of the LSSR at 3,128.2 thousand[28]. That figure represented the following nations: 2,506.7 thousand Lithuanians (80.1%), 268 thousand Russians (8.6%), 240.2 thousand Poles (7.7%), 45.4 thousand Belarusians (1.4%), 25.1 thousand Ukrainians (0.8%) and 23.5 thousand Jews (0.7%). Another census of 1979 showed the population numbering 3,391.5 thousand, including 2,712.2 thousand Lithuanians (80%), 303.5 thousand Russians (9.7%), 247 thousand Poles (7.3%), 57.6 thousand Belarusians (1.7%), 32 thousand Ukrainians (0.9%) and 14.6 thousand Jews (0.4%)[29]. According to the last census under the Soviet rule (1989), the population of Lithuania totalled 3,674.8 thousand, including 2,924.2 thousand Lithuanians (79.6%), 344.4 thousand Russians (9.4%), 258 thousand Poles (7%), 63.2 thousand Belarusians (1.7%), 44.8 thousand Ukrainians (1.2%) and 12.3 thousand Jews (0.3%)[30]. After regaining independence, further significant demographic changes occurred. They were mainly driven by the re-emigration of the Russian, Belarusian, and Ukrainian population that decided to leave Lithuania for various reasons[31]. After 1991, the Lithuanian authorities held two general censuses[32]. According to the 2001 census, the population of the country totalled 3,484 thousand, including 2,907.3 thousand Lithuanians (83.4%), 235 thousand Poles (6.7%), 219 thousand Russians (6.3%), 42.9 thousand Belarusians (1.2%), and 22.5 thousand Ukrainians (0.6%). According to the 2011 census, Lithuania was home to 3,043.4 thousand people, including 2,561.3 thousand Lithuanians (84.1%), 200.3 thousand Poles (6.6%), 176.9 thousand Russians (5.8%), 36.2 thousand Belarusians (1.2%), and 16.4 thousand Ukrainians (0.5%).

[27] Всесоюзная перепись населения 1959 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР, Литовская ССР, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_59.php?reg=7 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[28] Всесоюзная перепись населения 1970 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР, Литовская ССР, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_70.php?reg=8 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[29] Всесоюзная перепись населения 1979 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР, Литовская ССР, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_79.php?reg=8 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[30] Всесоюзная перепись населения 1989 года. Национальный состав населения по республикам СССР, Литовская ССР, http://www.demoscope.ru/weekly/ssp/sng_nac_89.php?reg=8 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[31] P. Eberhardt, *Przemiany narodowościowe w państwach bałtyckich na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, „Rocznik Nauk Społecznych" 2009, nr 1, p. 104.

[32] Data from the censuses of 2001 and 2011 after: "Lietuvos gyventojai 2011 metais," p. 20, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Lietuvos_gyventojai_2011.pdf/8321a3c1-c8b9-4468-825c-52a7b753f281 [accessed 24 September 2024].

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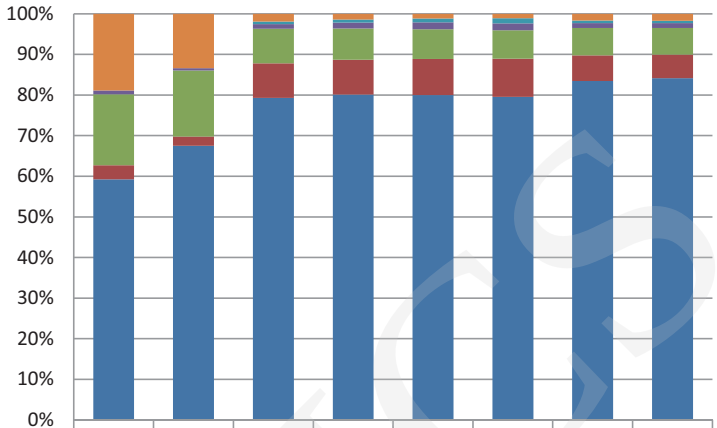

	1897	1923-1931	1959	1970	1979	1989	2001	2011
Others	521.7	362.7	51.6	42.8	39.2	40.2	56.5	52.3
Ukrainians	0	0	17.7	25.1	32	44.8	22.5	16.4
Belarusians	26	15.3	30.2	45.4	57.6	63.2	42.9	36.2
Poles	482.3	443	230.1	240.2	247	258	235	200.3
Russians	95.4	60.5	231	269	303.5	344.4	219.8	176.9
Lithuanias	1635.9	1833.6	2150.8	2506.7	2712.2	2924.2	2907.3	2561.3

Chart 1. Permanent National Minorities in Lithuania's Ethnic Structure

Own study based on: P. Eberhardt, *Przemiany narodowościowe na Ukrainie XX wieku,* Warszawa 1994; Demoscope Weekly, http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2017/0711/index.php [accessed 24 September 2024]; Lietuvos gyventojai 2011 metais, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/documents/10180/217110/Lietuvos_gyventojai_2011.pdf/ 321a3c1-c8b9-4468-825c-52a7b753f281 [accessed 24 September 2024].

4. The Polish Minority

The Polish ethnic presence in the area of today's Lithuania began with the union of the two states. Polish settlement, especially in the Vilnius region, began as from the 16th century and gained momentum after the 1569 Union of Lublin. With successive acts of union, Lithuanian political life started to resemble its Polish counterpart, and Polish culture and language gradually claimed the dominant role and replaced the Ruthenian vernacular and influence[33]. These processes led to a significant bottom-up Polonization of these land and its people, especially the upper social classes. The common religion was seen as, if not stimulating, then at least not hindering the process. The 19th century saw the emergence of a lower-class Lithuanian national movement. It aspired to separate the future of the Lithuanian nation from the Polish state and everything that was Polish.

[33] J. Subocz, *Litewskie spojrzenie na Wielkie Księstwo Litewskie i stosunki z Polakami*, Projekt: Historia a teraźniejszość. Dziedzictwo Rzeczpospolitej Obojga Narodów a aktualne stosunki polsko-litewskie. Seminar II. 15–16 December 2012, 1, http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/projekty/pliki/IESW-121-02-08.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

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As a consequence, after the Great War, Lithuanians strove to reduce Polish influences by fostering a separate national culture.

In the reborn Lithuanian state (Kaunas Lithuania), the Polish population was indigenous. The concept of Polishness was undesirable from the viewpoint of the authorities. They considered it necessary to regain the allegedly polonized Lithuanians back to the bosom of Lithuania. Poles were denied the status of a national minority. This approach prevailed throughout the interwar period, and Lithuanian political parties generally perceived the Polish population as a threat to Lithuanian independence. Both Poles in Lithuania and Lithuanians in Poland played a role in the political gamble between the two countries; it remained so until the outbreak of WW2[34]. After Lithuania's annexation by the USSR, Moscow launched a large-scale programme of Sovietization of the local populace. After its re-occupation by the Red Army, on 22 September 1944, the Polish communist authorities and the government of Soviet Lithuania signed an agreement on the displacement of Polish citizens from the territory of the LSSR and the Lithuanian population from Poland. As a result, a significant part of Lithuanian Poles moved to Poland. The agreement provided for the relocation of Poles and Jews, who were Polish citizens before 17 September 1939 and who wanted to move voluntarily[35]. An important issue was the determination of Polish nationality. The Polish side recommended the principle of national self-determination of the person concerned or testimony of nationality by two witnesses. In contrast, the Lithuanian side required evidence in writing, which was particularly difficult to meet in rural areas. Moreover, in the personal identification documents in Lithuania in the years 1939–1941 and under the German occupation, the nationality section was often left blank or the holder of documents was forced to enter Lithuanian nationality. In addition, the Lithuanian side, guided by narrowly understood own economic interests, did not wish to be deprived of the population indispensable for the economic purposes and still owing food supplies, taxes, and other fees. At the end of 1946, the Lithuanian authorities recognized the displacement as finished, even though about half of those who wished to leave had actually left. According to available data, 379.5 thousand Lithuanian residents declared their willingness to move to Poland, and, until 1 November 1946, only 171.1 thousand had done so[36]. After 1946, in some districts of the Vilnius region, indigenous Lithuanians and Russians settlers were still a minority. Finally, the status of the Polish minority was regulated through the Resolution of the Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of Lithuania on Measures to Improve Working Conditions among the Polish Population of the LSSR dated 1 October 1950. The Polish language remained the language of instruction at school; the Polish press and pedagogical publications were permitted along with political and popular science literature. The second wave of

[34] K. Buchowski, *Polacy w niepodległym państwie litewskim 1918–1940*, „Dzieje Najnowsze" 2000, nr 32, p. 145–146.

[35] A. Srebrakowski, *Polacy w Litewskiej SRR 1944–1989,* Toruń 2001, p. 81.

[36] *Ibidem*, p. 102.

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relocation of Poles from Lithuania took place in 1955–1959. Over the four years, 46.5 thousand people left for Poland[37].

After WW2, the Poles remaining in the LSSR were generally regarded as enemies of the Lithuanian state. According to the official policy of the republic's authorities, they were Lithuanians who had been subject to Polonization in previous centuries. Therefore, they were constantly harassed with a view to forcing them into Lithuanization. Because of that policy, the majority of the Polish population did not sympathize with the republic in which they lived. In their opinion, the LSSR was an imposed system which had to be grudgingly tolerated in order to survive in your own little homeland. The fate of the Polish minority in Lithuania was also determined by the approach of the authorities of the Polish People's Republic, which saw no need to rekindle Polishness among them[38].

In 1994, the Republic of Lithuania and the Republic of Poland signed a Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness and Friendly Cooperation. It recognized the Polish minority in Lithuania and the Lithuanian minority in Poland as well as guaranteeing them a number of rights and freedoms[39]. This does not mean that the Polish minority in Lithuania do not face any major problems. Lithuanian Poles are the second largest ethnic group after Lithuanians. However, their share in the total population of the country has been gradually dwindling. According to successive censuses, the percentage of Poles was, respectively: 1897: 17.5%, 1918–1940: 16.3%, 1959: 8.5%, 1970: 7.7%, 1979: 7.3%, 1989: 7%, 2001: 6.7%, and in 2011: 6.6%.

In censuses after 1991, data on mixed marriages was not collected. According to statistical surveys conducted in 2001–2002, ethnic Lithuanians constitute the highest percentage of Poles' relatives. The 2011 census showed that out of 200.3 thousand Poles, 154.4 thousand considered the Polish language native (77% of the total Polish community), 20.3 thousand (10.1%) pointed to Russian as their mother tongue, 17.6 thousand (8.8%) declared Lithuanian, 5 thousand (2.5%) declared two languages, and 2.7 thousand (1.3%) were not able to point to any mother tongue[40].

Poles are an indigenous ethnic group, mainly concentrated in the Vilnius county (23% of the population). In Vilnius District, Poles account for slightly more than 52%, in Vilnius 16.5% and in Šalčininkai District 77.7% of the total population. Major groups of Poles can also be found in the counties of Utena (4%), Olita (1.9%) and Kaunas (0.5%). The vast majority of Poles, as many as 177.4 thousand (88.5%), are Roman Catholics, 1.3 thousand (0.6%) are Orthodox, and 20 thousand (10%) did not declare any religious affiliation or refused to answer this question[41].

[37] *Ibidem*, p. 104.

[38] *Ibidem,* p. 118.

[39] Traktat między Rzecząpospolitą Polską a Republiką Litewską o przyjaznych stosunkach i dobrosąsiedzkiej współpracy, http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19950150071/O/D19950071.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

[40] Population and social statistics, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymai1 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[41] *Ibidem.*

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In Lithuania, the number of schools teaching classes in Polish is decreasing dramatically. In the school year 2003–2004, there were 75 such schools plus 52 with multilingual classes (Lithuanian-Polish, Polish-Russian, Lithuanian-Polish-Russian). In 2011, their number dropped to 49 teaching in Polish and 41 with a multilingual curriculum. The Polish community was concerned about the new law of 2011 which raised the number of hours taught in Lithuanian in primary and lower secondary schools in areas inhabited by national minorities. At the university level, there is a possibility to do Polish studies (Polish philology) at the Pedagogical University of Vilnius and at Vilnius University[42].

In general the Polish minority is not among the best educated social groups[43]. According to the 2011 data, 138 individuals out of 1,000 population held a higher education degree. For comparison, the same ratio for Lithuanians was 216 and for Ukrainians 283. The figures for post-secondary schools were also alarming. In this group of learners, the ratio for Poles was 152, for Lithuanians 168, and for Ukrainians 261. In terms of employment, Poles generally do not occupy high official positions and are not seen in prestigious professions on the labour market[44]. According to the 2001 data, only 4.6% of Poles held clerical and managerial positions, while the same figure for Lithuanians was 8.6%. About 8.5% of Poles were employed as specialists in various industries. This employment category was dominated by Lithuanians at 15.8%. Based on research, 56% of Poles considered speaking fluent Lithuanian as a particularly important factor in getting a good job.

Lithuania-based Poles are a relatively well-organized community. They have representatives in the Lithuanian parliament. In the 2012 election, the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania (AWPL) exceeded the 5% threshold to enter the Lithuanian parliament for the first time with eight deputies[45]. According to estimates, approximately 17–21 thousand votes for AWPL were cast by Russians and Lithuanians. The head of EAPL was elected MEP in 2009[46]. In the parliamentary election of 2016, AWPL was

[42] Arvydas Matulionis, Vida Beresnevičiūtė, Tadas Leončikas, Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, Kristina Šliavaitė, Irena Šutinienė, Viktorija Žilinskaitė, Hans-Georg Heinrich, Olga Alekseeva, *ENRI - East Research Report*, t. 8, *The Polish Minority in Lithuania*, The Institute for Ethnic Studies is a division of the Lithuanian Social Research Centre (LSTC) 2011, p. 18, http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/ENRI_Polish-in-Lithuania.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

[43] Population and social…, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymai1 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[44] Arvydas Matulionis, Vida Beresnevičiūtė, Tadas Leončikas, Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, Kristina Šliavaitė, Irena Šutinienė, Viktorija Žilinskaitė, Hans-Georg Heinrich, Olga Alekseeva, *op. cit.,* p. 18–19, http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/ENRI_Polish-in-Lithuania.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

[45] A. Malewska, H. Malewski, *Proces formowania się podmiotowości politycznej społeczności polskiej na Litwie,* [in:] *Tendencje rozwojowe myśli politycznej i prawnej*, eds. M. Maciejewski, M. Marszał, M. Sadowski, Wrocław 2014, p. 214.

[46] A. Bonusiak, *Aktywność polityczna Polaków na Litwie i Ukrainie na przełomie XX i XXI wieku: studium przypadków*, „Polityka i Społeczeństwo" 2014, nr 1, p. 67.

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one of the few parties to keep the same number of seats. Given lower turnout and the smaller number of voters, the Action actually improved its result, which indicates continued and high support[47]. The process of empowerment of the Polish community has recently reached a new level. However, the potential change in AWPL's strategy aimed to secure the status of a nationwide party may lead to divergence of interests between the party elite and the general minority[48]. The situation of the Polish minority and the Lithuanian government's approach to this group is a complex issue. It depends on the general international situation, the dynamic security situation of Lithuania and Polish-Lithuanian bilateral relations. Certainly, the mounting sense of threat from Russia will bring Vilnius and Warsaw closer, and the activities of AWPL, which happens to be suspected of being pro-Russian, may create a negative image of Poles in Lithuania.

5. Russians and the Russian-Speaking Population

Unlike Poles, Lithuanian-based Russians are not an indigenous population. In terms of settlement, they can be roughly divided into three main groups: those whose ancestors arrived between the 16th and early 18th centuries, descendants of the settlers from the Russian Empire and the interwar period, and Soviet migrants. The first wave were mostly religious refugees (so-called Old Believers)[49]. The next one was tsarist officials, professional military personnel, and skilled labour, and after the October Revolution, emigrants and refugees supporting the Whites[50]. In the Soviet period, Lithuania attracted primarily political and administrative officials, professional servicemen, and highly-qualified scientific and technical personnel. There was also a large group of settlers arriving from the far corners of Soviet Russia to help rebuild the population after warfare losses. In the decades that followed, Lithuania became an attractive destination due to its standard of living, which was significantly higher than in other parts of the Soviet Union.

According to successive censuses, the percentage of Russians was, respectively: 1897: 3.4%, 1918–1940: 2.2%, 1959: 8.5%, 1970: 8.6%, 1979: 9.7%, 1989: 9.4%, 2001: 6.3%, and in 2011: 5.8%. This population began to rise after 1940. This was attributed to, but not only, the extermination of the Jewish residents, the terror of the German occupier, the post-war displacement of the Polish population, and a significant outflow of representatives of all ethnic groups who did not fully accept the new communist reality. This trend actually continued until the collapse of the Soviet rule. The processes related to industrialization and centralization of the economy also triggered economic migration, mainly of the Russian and Russian-speaking population. Between 1959

[47] Na nic się zdały wyborcze manipulacje. Sukces Polaków na Litwie jest naprawdę wielki!, https://kresy24.pl/na-nic-sie-zdaly-wyborcze-manipulacje-sukces-polakow-na-litwie-jest-naprawde-wielki/ [accessed 24 September 2024].

[48] A. Malewska, H. Malewski, *op. cit.,* p. 238.

[49] Adherents to the old rite of the Orthodox Church who had separated the Russian Orthodox Church after its former reform.

[50] J. Pivoriene, *Ethnic minorities in Lithuania*, "Sociológia a spoločnos" 2016, nr 1, p. 11.

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and 1989, the number of ethnic Russians in Lithuania increased substantially to reach 9.4% of the total population of the republic. Taking into account the Russian-speaking population in general, i.e. also Belarusians and Ukrainians, this percentage was 12.3%. The political circumstance of the Russian-Soviet ethnic presence had serious consequences[51]. The Russian-speaking population, in the most part, settled in large urban agglomerations. For political reasons, the local Russians held most prominent positions in the republic's administration and economy. During the Soviet period, their number in Lithuania quadrupled. However, from a purely demographic point of view, this did not mean a threat to the ethnic structure of the country. For this reason, after 1991, the Lithuanian authorities, resting assured about Lithuanians' influence over the development of their own country, offered citizenship to all permanent residents, regardless of their ethnic origin and duration of stay[52].

In the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet state, the outflow of the Russian and Russian-speaking population gained momentum while the Lithuanian element became stronger. The process was first heralded in the 1989 census. For the first time since the incorporation of Lithuania into the USSR, the percentage share of ethnic Russians in the general population of the republic had decreased. This trend became even more apparent after the regaining of independence in 1991, as shown in the data from the 2001 and 2011 censuses. After 20 years of independence, the number of ethnic Russians dropped to 176.9 thousand, which was 5.8% of the total population of the country, compared to 9.7% in 1979. Currently, Russians are the third largest ethnic group following Lithuanians and Poles. Most of them live in the counties of: Vilnius: 83.3 thousand, Kaunas: 19.8 thousand, Klaipeda: 35.3 thousand and in the city of Visaginas (11.7 thousand)[53].

According to the 2011 census, the Russians in Lithuania declared speaking the following mother tongues: Russian (87.2%), Lithuanian (9.1%), Polish (0.2%), and Belarusian (0.06%)[54]. Moreover, 4.1 thousand (2.3%) chose two mother tongues, and 1.9 thousand (1.1%) did not declare any. When analysing data on religious denominations, Lithuania-based Russian are much more diverse. Orthodoxy prevails (51.5%), while Roman Catholics and Old Believers account for 11.8% each. The followers of other churches and religions taken together revolve around 1%, and those who do not confess any religion account for ca. 23%. The Russian and Russian-speaking minority is guaranteed Russian as the language of instruction at schools. In the school year 2003–2004, there were 59 such schools plus 87 with multilingual classes (Lithuanian-Russian, Polish-Russian, Lithuanian-Polish-Russian). In 2011, their number dropped to 34 teaching in Russian and 63 with a multilingual curriculum. The Lithuanian

[51] P. Eberhardt, *Przemiany narodowościowe w…,* p. 100.

[52] J. Pivoriene, *op. cit.,* p. 11.

[53] Visaginas (formerly Sniečkus) – a town located near the Ignalina nuclear power plant in the eastern part of Lithuania.

[54] *Population and social*…, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymai1 [accessed 24 September 2024].

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Russians can study the Russian language and literature at Vilnius University and at the Pedagogical University of Vilnius[55]. This minority is among the best educated ethnic groups[56]. According to the 2011 census, the tertiary education ratio was 246 per 1,000 of the Russian population. This is superior to Lithuanians (216) and Poles (138). As regards post-graduate schools, Russians were ranked average (203) between Ukrainians (261) and Lithuanians (168). The number of Russian-speaking secondary school leavers did not differ from the national average. Data on the social status of the Russian minority show that Russians usually see themselves as the representatives of the lower (38.1%) or middle class (38.2%)[57]. Every fifth person of Russian descent places themselves in a higher social class. In terms of employment, 6.5% of the Lithuanian Russians are senior officials and managers, 13.9% are specialists in various industries, 11.7% work in services and commerce, and 18.6% are skilled workers and craftsmen. The above data demonstrates that the Russian minority does not differ significantly from the Lithuanian majority in terms of access to employment. In theory, belonging to that particular ethnic group is not seen as an obstacle in finding employment, yet about 20% of Russians believe that it is an important aspect in landing a decent job.

Political activity is not the strongest point of the Russian minority. They are reluctant to engage in political life and tend to support Poles politically. This is visible in subsequent parliamentary elections, in which, also thanks to the votes of the Russian diaspora, the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania enjoys better and better results[58]. The Lithuanian Russians are not always able to define themselves in terms of political colour and usually reduce themselves to cultural life while avoiding politics[59]. Yet, over time, slogans reminding of the Soviet past seem to garner less and less interest among them. This is due, but not only, to a higher standard of living in Lithuania compared to the Russian Federation. This translates into greater loyalty to the country of residence. If the economic situation does not worsen, and there are no symptoms of economic improvement in Russia, the young generation of Lithuanian Russians can be expected to assimilate more deeply. However, due to the slow pace of assimilation processes, their first lasting effects will be visible in two or three decades. The situation of the Russian

[55] Arvydas Matulionis, Vida Beresnevičiūtė, Tadas Leončikas, Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, Kristina Šliavaitė, Irena Šutinienė, Viktorija Žilinskaitė, Hans-Georg Heinrich, Olga Alekseeva, *op. cit*., p. 18–19, http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/ENRI_Polish-in-Lithuania.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

[56] Population and social…, https://osp.stat.gov.lt/en/gyventoju-ir-bustu-surasymai1 [accessed 24 September 2024].

[57] Arvydas Matulionis, Vida Beresnevičiūtė, Tadas Leončikas, Monika Frėjutė-Rakauskienė, Kristina Šliavaitė, Irena Šutinienė, Viktorija Žilinskaitė, Hans-Georg Heinrich, Olga Alekseeva, *op. cit*., p. 18–19, http://www.ces.lt/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/ENRI_Polish-in-Lithuania.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

[58] A. Akińczo, *Dlaczego AWPL współpracuje z Rosjanami?*, http://zw.lt/wilno-wilenszczyzna/dlaczego--awpl-wspolpracuje-z-rosjanami/ [accessed 24 September 2024].

[59] A. Radczenko, *Rosjanie na Litwie. Problem dużego narodu*, http://kurierwilenski.lt/2010/06/25/rosjanie-na-litwie-problem-duzego-narodu/ [accessed 24 September 2024].

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and Russian-speaking minorities is partly an offshoot of Lithuanian-Russian bilateral relations, the core theme of which is the increasing level of aggression in Moscow's policy towards the post-Soviet states.

6. National and Ethnic Minorities and State Cohesion

After 1991, the Lithuanian authorities no longer perceived the local national and ethnic minorities as a major threat to the stability of the state. Lithuania does not attach too much attention to ethnic issues. The authorities have decided, with certain limitations, to accept the multi-ethnicity of the country and embed the culture of minorities in the national heritage. The 1989 Act on Nationality provided for the choice of citizenship for all interested individuals. The government is pursuing a policy facilitating internal adaptation and integration of minorities, owing to which the percentage of stateless persons is only 0.3% of the total population[60]. Still, there are some outstanding challenges to be tackled.

Lithuanians perceive the growing role of militarism in the security policy of the Russian Federation as the main threat to their security. This became apparent after the Russo-Georgian War in 2008 and raised concerns again after the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the internal armed conflict in eastern Ukraine. As a result, the Lithuanian authorities are cautious of potential centrifugal forces in the country attributable to the minorities. This is especially true of Lithuanian Poles and Russians. At the same time, the local Russians, Poles, Belarusians, and Ukrainians seem to arouse different types of anxiety each. All in all, the strengthening of internal stability and social integration has gained importance. Compared to the Polish minority, the Russian minority is less consolidated and organized, hence easier to assimilate into the Lithuanian setting. Poles have a much higher level of awareness of their own origin. Consequently, they promote their culture and identity more decisively. The Russian minority, or the Russian-speaking minority to be precise, is exposed to the propaganda and ideological message coming from Russia. The potential intensification of Russian information policy and propaganda may cause the attitudes of the Russian-speaking groups to become more radical, which may be conducive to the weakening of the state organism. However, Russia's influence on the Russian-speaking diaspora is not highly effective. Still, it is likely to undermine the multi-ethnic social integration. Russia is implementing projects intended for the young Russian-speaking generation. It supports organizations defending the rights of Russian people and stages information campaigns questioning Lithuanian statehood. Since 2017, it has increased its engagement in the promotion of the official Russian historical narrative aimed at Russian-speaking audiences in Lithuania. The Russian-speaking

[60] A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Strategie integracyjne wobec mniejszości narodowych i etnicznych na Litwie, Łotwie, w Estonii i Gruzji*, „ IEŚW – komentarz" 2016, nr 9, p. 1, http://www.iesw.lublin.pl/komentarze/KIESW-2016-9.pdf [accessed 24 September 2024].

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youth are reluctant to join projects organized on behalf of the Kremlin[61]. The Russian-speaking community is also used to incite inter-ethnic disputes. It should be expected that in the era of hybrid warfare, Moscow's endeavours will not weaken. The older generation of Lithuanians, brought up in the Soviet ideological and cultural paradigm, is still susceptible to Russian influences[62]. The Russian-language mass-media cover events organized by the Lithuanian far right (often little heard of) as manifestations of the growing popularity of extremist ideologies. They also disseminate content related to the status of the Polish community in the Vilnius region. They try to convince audiences that the Lithuanian authorities discriminate against the Polish majority in Vilnius, and Poland has not renounced its claims to this area[63].

The problem of national and ethnic minorities in Lithuania's internal policy surfaced with the independence of 1918. As from the 1920s, the Lithuanian authorities limited the rights of national minorities to use their mother tongue in administration. At the beginning of the 1930s, residents without Lithuanian citizenship were denied access to legal and permanent employment. In 1938, the Act on Surnames was passed. It introduced the Lithuanian spelling of names with a view to replacing the previous Russian, Polish, and German imports. Poles, the second largest minority after Jews, were treated relatively badly, and mutual relationships were overshadowed by the dispute over Vilnius and the Vilnius region. The third largest ethnic group, Russians, was evenly distributed throughout the country. They assimilated relatively well into the Lithuanian setting and did not suffer any particular harassment from the authorities[64].

After regaining independence in 1991, Lithuania faced the challenge of extremely painful reforms. Initially, the law regulating the rights of national minorities was the Act of the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic on National Minorities adopted in 1989, just before the collapse of the Soviet Union (amended in 1991)[65]. The act failed to define national minority and did not specify who should be regarded as member of such a community. The most important legal act which addressed ethnic issues was the 1992 Constitution enacted shortly after independence[66]. It provided that ethnic minorities had the right to foster their language, culture, and customs. Moreover, with the aid of the state, they can cultivate their own culture and provide education in their mother tongue. This wording, however, seems too general, and the brief content does not specify what

[61] *National Threat Assessments*, State Security Department of The Republic of Lithuania, Vilnius 2018, p. 38–39.

[62] A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Czego boją się Kraje Bałtyckie?*, http://www.new.org.pl/5492-czego-boja-sie--kraje-baltyckie [accessed 24 September 2024].

[63] *National Threat Assessments…*, p. 41–42.

[64] T. Białek, *Międzynarodowe standardy ochrony praw mniejszości narodowych i ich realizacja na przykładzie Białorusi, Litwy i Ukrainy*, Warszawa 2008, p. 199–201.

[65] A. Bobryk, *Odrodzenie narodowe Polaków w Republice Litewskiej 1987–1997*, Toruń 2005, p. 456.

[66] Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, http://libr.sejm.gov.pl/tek01/txt/konst/litwa-a.html [accessed 24 September 2024].

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kind of aid these communities can expect from the state. Moreover, the basic law does not grant minorities any significant privileges[67].

The shift in the geopolitical situation, including in Ukraine, led the authorities to intensify its work aimed at strengthening social cohesion and civic community. One of the goals was to mitigate the effects of Russia's influence on minorities, especially Russians and Poles. Lithuania understands the need to create favourable conditions to build a state community resistant to manipulation from outside. One of the initiatives undertaken after 2014 was the establishment of the Department of National Minorities in the Ministry of Culture. It is responsible for coordination of the national minorities policy[68]. The new security strategy 2014–2020 encourages national minorities to participate in social life and state integration as well as developing their ethnic identity[69].

7. Conclusions

Given the ethnic structure of Lithuania and the historical context, it should be stressed the geopolitical setting was the key determinant of change. During the period of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, the entire Grand Duchy of Lithuania was exposed to ethnic changes, including cultural and linguistic ones. Its population also became significantly polonized. The period of the partitions saw an influx of Russians and the beginning of Russification. However, initially, the newcomers did not significantly amend the ethnic structure. More profound changes in terms of Russianness and Russian-speakingness came after 1945 with the massive inflow of Russian-speaking people from within the Soviet Union.

After WW2, tens of thousands of Soviet citizens from various cultural backgrounds began to move to the territory of the LSSR. The vast majority were Russians and the Russian-speaking population. The Russian language, despite the formal equality with other republic's languages, quickly overshadowed Lithuanian as the official language of the Soviet Union. That did not mean that Lithuanian was completely pushed out of the public space. Due to the relatively small percentage of Russians in the total population of Lithuania, at least compared to other Soviet republics, Lithuanian was not jeopardized, despite Moscow's restrictive practices. The regaining of independence reversed the trend of the national identity, both Lithuanian and of other ethnic groups, fading away. In the new reality, Lithuanian regained its dominant position as the official language. What followed was the dwindling number of people using Russian for communication.

The statistical data set in the historic context and discussed in the article shows that political events had a significant impact on the changes in the ethnic structure of Lithuania. They were also driven by economic progress, which, for example, stimulated

[67] T. Białek, *op. cit.,* p. 206–207.

[68] Department of National Minorities of Lithuania, https://tmde.lrv.lt/en/national-minorities [accessed 24 September 2024].

[69] A. Kuczyńska-Zonik, *Dyskurs narodowościowy na Litwie w kontekście współczesnych wyzwań*, „Rocznik Instytutu Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej" 2016, nr 5, p. 291–292.

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economic migration attracted to higher standards of living. The collected historical material leads to the conclusion that there are periodic shifts in the Lithuanian ethnic policy towards approaching minorities as a destructive factor. Lithuania's security policy is hinged on the degree of assimilation of all citizens of the state. How effective it is can also depend on the activities of the neighbouring countries. The degree and direction of involvement in supporting compatriots from outside significantly determines the political activity of minorities, which, in certain cases, may undermine the Lithuanian security. The state authorities are making efforts to integrate all Lithuania-based ethnic groups. One of the main strategies is to encourage pro-state attitudes and a sense of social solidarity. The citizens are free to define their national identity; they enjoy the right to education in their mother tongue; they are free to establish organizations and associations and participate in public life. In return, the authorities expect the acceptance of ideas and values that are held dear by the state. This mainly concerns the domain of identification with the society and support for efforts to strengthen security in the broad sense. These initiatives reveal certain degree of pressure laid on minorities, yet, from the point of view of the state, they should be perceived as attempts to adjust the ethnic policy to the actual security conditions of Lithuania. Importantly, the annexation of Crimea and the conflict in eastern Ukraine did not lead to the imposition of any significant restrictions on Lithuania's minorities, yet it sensitized the state authorities to issues related to pro-state integration of the general public.

Demographic data on national affiliation highlight only some quantitative and qualitative relations, including the level of education or the social status of a specific group. Considering Lithuania's membership in NATO and the EU, as a democratic state with developing economy, it is expected to continue to strive for further assimilation of all citizens within the state, regardless of the ethnic context. The growing standards of living and the socio-political stability will certainly facilitate the integration of citizens at the state and social level, regardless of their nationality and language spoken.

Abstract: The article aims to discuss the likelihood of the potential involvement of the Polish or Russian minority in Lithuania in separatist and centrifugal action. The centuries-long subordination to Russia caused profound changes to Lithuania's ethnic composition. Given the historical context, it should be emphasized that the main driver of changes was the geopolitical setting. The regaining of independence made the Lithuanian elite face the challenge of addressing the problems of ethnic and national minorities in the context of state security.

Ethnic background and the ensuing national identity shape the cohesion of modern states but, at the same time, may disintegrate them in specific cases. The regaining of independence reversed the trend of the national identity, both Lithuanian and of other ethnic groups, fading under the Soviet pressure. The state authorities are making efforts to integrate all Lithuania-based ethnic groups. One of the main strategies is to encourage pro-state attitudes and a sense of social solidarity. This is an extremely

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important security factor given the neo-imperialist aspirations and undertones in the security policy of the Russian Federation.
Keywords: Polish minority, Russian minority, Russian-speaking population, nationality, separatism.

Mniejszości narodowe i bezpieczeństwo Litwy w obecnym kontekście politycznym i historycznym

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest omówienie prawdopodobieństwa potencjalnego zaangażowania mniejszości polskiej lub rosyjskiej na Litwie w działania separatystyczne i odśrodkowe. Wielowiekowe podporządkowanie Rosji spowodowało głębokie zmiany w składzie etnicznym Litwy. Biorąc pod uwagę kontekst historyczny, należy podkreślić, że głównym motorem tych zmian była sytuacja geopolityczna. Odzyskanie niepodległości postawiło elity litewskie przed wyzwaniem rozwiązania problemów mniejszości etnicznych i narodowych w kontekście bezpieczeństwa państwa.

Pochodzenie etniczne i wynikająca z niego tożsamość narodowa kształtują spójność współczesnych państw, ale jednocześnie w konkretnych przypadkach mogą je dezintegrować. Odzyskanie niepodległości odwróciło tendencję zanikania tożsamości narodowej, zarówno litewskiej, jak i innych grup etnicznych, pod presją sowiecką. Władze państwowe podejmują wysiłki na rzecz integracji wszystkich grup etnicznych zamieszkujących Litwę. Jedną z głównych strategii jest promowanie postaw propaństwowych i poczucia solidarności społecznej. Jest to niezwykle ważny czynnik bezpieczeństwa, biorąc pod uwagę neoimperialne aspiracje i podteksty w polityce bezpieczeństwa Federacji Rosyjskiej.
Słowa kluczowe: mniejszość polska, mniejszość rosyjska, ludność rosyjskojęzyczna, narodowość, separatyzm.

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