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WHAT DO WE TALK ABOUT WHEN WE TALK ABOUT NORTHERN EUROPE:
REGIONAL IDENTITIES IN LITHUANIA

ABSTRACT   The article examines Lithuanian regional identities with the emphasis on Northern European dimension. The key questions are: To what extent Northern European regional identity has been constructed among the Lithuanian political establishment (president, government, political parties) and how does this 'Northern European' idea look among other regional identities? The study will discuss instruments for the analysis of regional identity and will then delve into the inspection of political narratives of the Lithuanian president, two governments and political parties' programmes in 2012-2017. The content and discourse analysis of political narratives among leading political figures in Lithuania will constitute a matrix of politically imagined regional identities. The article argues that trilateral Baltic regional identity has dominated Lithuanian political narratives in recent years with broader Northern European identity seeping in the Lithuanian self-reflections and gradually distancing from Central and Eastern European regional trademark.

Key words: region, identity, Baltoscandia, Nordic, Baltic, Poland

1. INTRODUCTION

History had little mercy on small states in international relations. Apart from the temporarily sustainable ancient Greek city-states and the Italian cities in Renaissance, small political entities were swallowed by powerful states. The French Revolution, Enlightenment and ensuing national self-determination and de-colonisation have gradually eroded empires and opened the gate for a myriad of small states across the globe. Small powers in international politics gained salience with the end of the 20th century. The

collapse of the Soviet Union, the fourth wave of democratization and twin EU and NATO enlargements gave more voice and visibility to small powers, let alone their legal equality of sovereignty. However, small entities do not enjoy a vast array of choices. They are constrained by a considerable lack of economic, military and human resources, are not in charge of an international agenda, cannot guarantee their own security, yet appear to be regionally and internationally engaged for boosting their power, status, brand and reputation.

A theory of International Relations, Constructivism, raised timely questions about Cold War's underestimated values, norms, ideas and identities. The way we feel and see the world can affect our actions. People are not constrained by material factors and forces. A biblical duel between David and Goliath aptly reflects an empowering role of identity and beliefs. Ideas have no lesser value for politics, since ideologies mined in party manifestos, programmes or political addresses outline the scope for political action and serve as a certain imperative, whose implementation can be properly monitored. Political language is a pool of various ideational constructions including identities.

Small state identity matters, as it can affect country's foreign policy. Geopolitical vicinity, its (historical) assessment are oft embedded in the psyche of political elites, thus furnishing their collective identities. Perceptual aspects of small states accompany their regional identities resting on commonalities of 'Us' and differences from the 'Them'. Small states do frequently enjoy both larger clusters like the NATO and the EU, which provide protection from exogenous threats and cuddling up with smaller like-minded states, most frequently in the neighbourhood. Interaction with other states can shape countries' imaginations about others and ourselves. Regional identities can develop too; as collective distinctiveness of the past can differ later. Regional self-ascriptions describe boundaries of a region. Regions emerge through similarities among constituent elements, external pressures and shared perception of 'we-ness'. A condition for region's existence is state's ascription to it. Regional togetherness then is a sustained regional empathy and politically emphasised similarities and common concerns.

Sten de Geer raised commonalities among the Baltic and the Scandinavian states as the Baltoscandian confederation in 1928 and Kazys Pakštas furthered this concept in the 1930s. The Soviet occupation deprived Lithuania from its statehood until 1990 and only with the re-establishment of sovereignty Lithuania's Northern orientation hit the road.[1] The Nordic countries were active supporters of Baltic democratisation and their integration into the Western structures. Baltic-Nordic togetherness has been gaining prominence since the election of the new president Dalia Grybauskaitė in 2009. Lithuania never claimed to be a purely Nordic country. However, the northern orientation has been growing ever since with a number of symbolic acts. The first state visits of the newly elected president were to Sweden and Latvia and the president is a regular

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[1]   On the Lithuanian Northern European orientation, see also M. Jurkynas, "Litwa w Europie: partnerstwo z państwami Europy Północnej oraz – a nie lub – z Polską", transl. by A. Malevska, Forum Polska-Litwa, 2013, at <http://www.forum-pl-lt.com/index.php/pl/sprawy-miedzynarodowe/21-mindaugas-jurkynas-litwa-w-europie-partnerstwo-z-panstwami-europy-polnocnej-oraz-a-nie-lub-z-polska>, 9 October 2017.

guest at Nordic-Baltic midsummer fests organised in the country. Dalia Grybauskaitė has numerously mentioned Lithuania always oriented itself to the West and North and that direction should remain,[2] since the Baltic and the Nordic countries have common cultural traditions, values, challenges and the Nordic countries have always been good friends and reliable partners.[3] The Conservative party has also been a vocal supporter of Baltoscandian idea for a number of years. In 2011 the foreign minister Audronius Ažubalis waxed lyrical about the Baltic-Nordic region as 'divinely balanced' and 'awakening'.[4] The current Prime Minister from the ruling Peasants and Green Union, Saulius Skvernelis argued in November 2017 that we should speak not of a separate Baltic cooperation, but about the Nordic-Baltic format, which is excellent and Lithuania's future is here.[5]

There have been few studies of Lithuanian regional identities in the past,[6] yet virtually none nowadays. Lithuania can self-identify itself with several smaller regions, taking out of account the broad Western or European ones: Baltic, Northern European, Baltic Sea, Central (and Eastern) European. The moot questions therefore to ask are: To what extent Northern European regional identity has been constructed among the Lithuanian political establishment (president, government, political parties) and how does this 'Northern European' idea look among other regional identities? The aim of the article is to discern Lithuanian political discourses on Northern Europe ('Nordic-Baltic', 'Baltoscandia') among other regional narratives on Baltic, Baltic Sea region, Central (and Eastern Europe) and Poland in 2014-2017. The study claims that Lithuania has the strongest attachment to the trilateral Baltic regional identity, which seems to be gradually spilling over into a broader Northern European identity. The article addresses the importance of political discourse and regional identity in region-building and then explores regional narratives of the Lithuanian president in 2014-2017, governmental programmes of 2012 and 2016 and political party programmes before the general election of 2016.

[2]   "D. Grybauskaitė: Lietuva turi kuo didžiuotis", Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentė, 10 March 2014, at <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/d.grybauskaite-lietuva-turi-kuo-didziuotis/21689>, 9 October 2017.

[3]   "Vidurvasario šventė sujungia Baltijos ir Šiaurės šalis", Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentė, 16 June 2016, at <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/spaudos-centras/pranesimai-spaudai/vidurvasario-svente-sujungia-baltijos-ir-siaures-salis/25436>, 9 October 2017.

[4]   A. Ažubalis, "Bunda jau Baltoskandija", Delfi, 5 September 2011, at <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/politics/aazubalis-bunda-jau-baltoskandija.d?id=49288886>, 15 October 2017.

[5]   P. Gritėnas, "Premjeras S. Skvernelis po diskusijų Helsinkyje: 'Šiaurės ir Baltijos valstybių formatas yra mūsų ateitis'", 15min naujienos, 1 November 2017, at <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/pasaulis/premjeras-saulius-skvernelis-siaures-ir-baltijos-valstybiu-formatas-yra-musu-ateitis-57-875494>, 12 November 2017.

[6]   M. Jurkynas, *How Deep is Your Love? Baltic Brotherhood Re-examined*, Vilnius 2007, p. 203.

2. BIRTH OF THE REGION

Knowledge structures the world we live in.[7] Political actors holding certain knowledge disseminate notions about the reality and construct the truth in political language. Language describes and constructs reality with a number of ideas, norms, meanings and values. Utterances of policy makers, people with power, yield an understanding about different political norms and visions with collective identities included. A discourse, as a key story in political narratives, reveals dominant mental maps of political actors, constructs identity and sustains knowledge, and can influence their actions.[8] Identity is a perception about self and others ('us' and 'others'), and this reflection about 'self' comes from social interactions. Identity is overlapping and variable over time.[9] Togetherness emerges from sharing of mutually accepted norms, values and idea(l)s which draws a perimeter of a safe space.

Country's policy makers can foster commonalities with the other states considered similar and close in many dimensions. Ideas and words have an instrumental power,[10] as they sustain togetherness through shared images, visions and ideas. Regional affinities usually come from a fostered narrative about distinctiveness of a group.[11] Regions and their building can be considered like nation-building as Andersenian[12] imagined communities.[13] They surface when political elites as region-builders see their country as part of a region.[14] History offers a long card for memories to be shared and sustained (or silenced), and exalting similarities and/or muting contrasts is a process of deliberate region's construction.[15]

Region-building, first, via the development of regional identity is, as a rule, supplemented with establishment of common institutions, borders, myths and symbols that

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[7]   M. Foucault, *The Politics of Truth*, transl. by L. Hochroth, C. Porter, Los Angeles 1997.

[8]   T.A. van Dijk, "What is Political Discourse Analysis?", *Belgian Journal of Linguistics*, vol. 11 (1997), pp. 11-52, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/bjl.11.03dij>.

[9]   A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge 1999.

[10]   P. Bourdieu, *Sur la télévision*, Paris 1996.

[11]   A. Paasi, "Regional Planning and the Mobilization of 'Regional Identity': From Bounded Spaces to Relational Complexity", *Regional Studies*, vol. 47, no. 8 (2013), pp. 1-14, at <https://doi.org/10.1080/00343404.2012.661410>.

[12]   B. Andersen, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London––New York 1983.

[13]   A. Hurrell, "Regionalism in Theoretical Perspective", in L. Fawcett, A. Hurrell (eds.), *Regionalism in World Politics, Regional Organization and International Order*, New York 1995, pp. 37-73.

[14]   I.B. Neumann, "A Region-Nuilding Approach to Northern Europe", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 20, no. 1 (1994), pp. 55-74.

[15]   F. Kratochwil, "History, Action and Identity: Revisiting the 'Second' Great Debate and Assessing its Importance for Social Theory", *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 12, no. 1 (2006), pp. 5-29, at <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354066106061323>; J.W. Booth, "The Work of Memory: Time, Identity and Justice", *Social Research. An International Quarterly of the Social Sciences*, vol. 75, no. 1 (2008), pp. 237-262.

are born in the world of ideas (visible in political language) and everyday practices.[16] Political actors' attitudes about state's values, role, size and capabilities are important for country's international and internal actions.[17] Various interpretations of a region compete with each other and political elites decide which narrative turns into a discourse.[18] Small countries are first of all concerned with political sovereignty, military security and economic prosperity[19] and tend to participate in region-building and regional cooperation, since they makes them stronger.[20] Political actors as power centres develop discourses on regional affiliations, thus, region-building and key concerns and values of political establishment are embedded in the discourse.

Clusters of states and regional cooperation are far from popular in political narratives, yet ideas about the other, and especially neighbouring, countries allow us to discern regional associations. It is hardly surprising that regions can be envisaged from different points of view, ascribing different weight and role to a group of countries. Some regions can be seen as a 'good company' to keep with, the others – as to be dissociated from. Big international organisations and mega-regions like the NATO, the EU and so forth, are better equipped with instruments to render political, military and economic advantages and thereof govern regional attachments in political narratives. However, smaller regions can serve a litmus test for patterns of amity and enmity and reveal collective identities with certain values and attributes that feed in foreign policies.

The article employs elements of content analysis and the diachronic analysis of the discourse[21] and observes how regional identities among key Lithuanian political power centres have been developed and sustained over time, and how changes in regional identity construction have been mirrored in the language of the main political actors. Dominant political narratives on regions reflect structures of values, concerns, commonalities and othering from 'The Other'. Examination of political utterances and the establishment of dominant discourses on regional constellations is a 'blood test' revealing structures and vectors in foreign policy thinking. Sustainable structures about main attributes of regional belonging form a dominant discourse of regional identity. State authorities develop narratives, which enable us to reconstruct collective identi-

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[16] E.-K. Prokkola, K. Zimmerbauer, F. Jakola, "Performance of Regional Identity in the Implementation of European Cross-border Initiatives", *European Urban, and Regional Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1 (2012), pp. 104-117, at <https://doi.org/10.1177/0969776412465629>.

[17] Baldur Thórhallsson, "The Size of States in the European Union: Theoretical and Conceptual Perspectives", *Journal of European Integration*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2006), at <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036330500480490>.

[18] I.B. Neumann, "A Region-Building Approach", in F. Söderbaum, T. Shaw (eds.), *Theories of New Regionalism. A Palgrave Macmillan Reader*, London 2003; A. Paasi, "The Resurgence of the 'Region' and 'Regional Identity': Theoretical Perspectives and Empirical Observations on Regional Dynamics in Europe", *Review of International Studies*, vol. 35, supplement S1 (2009), pp. 121-146, at <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210509008456>.

[19] D. Vital, *The Survival of Small States. Studies in Small Power/Great Power Conflict*, Oxford 1971.

[20] A. Wivel, A.J.K. Bailes, C. Archer, "Setting The Scene: Small States and International Security", in iidem (eds.), *Small States and International Security. Europe and Beyond*, London 2014.

[21] M. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, transl. by A.M. Sheridan Smith, London 2002.

ties.[22] The analysis, in the form of content analysis, calculates regional indications in the president's statements, governmental and party programmes and provides the statistical distribution of regional references. Their frequency unveils a quantified importance of a region mentioned. Then the study, with the help of discourse analysis, delves into the analysis of the contents of regional manifestations with the aim to explore meanings ascribed to regions and to ascertain to what degree different political actors in Lithuania adhere their country to different regions and to establish coherence of regional imaginations across the narratives of political actors.

3. GOING NORTHWARDS: PRESIDENT'S VIEW

The analysis of political narratives in the period of 2014-2017[23] of the Lithuanian President Dalia Grybauskaitė[24] constructs a matrix of chief regional identities. 106 statements of the Lithuanian president come from a time span between 28 February 2014 and 23 February 2017.[25] For analytical and comparative purposes, the article singles out five regions. The first, alphabetically, is a 'Baltic region' consisting of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. The second is the 'Baltic Sea Region' consisting of the riparian countries around the Baltic Sea. The third area is 'Central Europe' representing either 'Visegrad Four' (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia) or formerly communist countries in the EU. The fourth region is 'Eastern Europe', which either consists of ex-communist states in Europe or refers to the countries outside of the EU, like the EU Eastern Partnership countries. The fifth region is 'Northern Europe' that embraces the Nordic states (or the Baltic-Nordic (Baltoscandian area).

Table 1. Regional References in Presidential Statements, February 2014 – February 2017, %

	Baltic	Northern Europe	Baltic Sea	Eastern Europe	Central (and Eastern) Europe
President	69.8	13.2	9.4	5.7	1.9

Source: Author's calculation.

22   T. Goldberg, D. Porat, B.B. Schwarz, "'Here Started the Rift We See Today'. Student and Textbook Narratives between Official and Counter Memory", *Narrative Inquiry*, vol. 16, no. 2 (2006), pp. 319--347, at <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/ni.16.2.06gol>.

23   The starting point was Russia's occupation and annexation of Ukrainian Crimea in early 2014.

24   She was elected in 2009 and re-elected in 2014 for a five-year period.

25   Statements of the President of Lithuania, at <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/prezidentes-veikla/kalbos/6588/2017-02>.

The analysis reveals that regions are not a popular topic across the presidential narratives. The number of regional references in a three-year period was – 53.[26] For instance, 'Lithuania' has been mentioned 841 times!

The distribution of regional references reveals the dominance of the trilateral 'Baltic' idea. The second most mentioned region was 'Northern Europe' with 13.2 per cent with other regional indications trailing behind. These findings do not differ from the earlier research of the author, as 'Baltic' regional mentioning overwhelmingly dominated over other regional clusters.[27]

Checking the proportionality and distribution of regional manifestations is useful only to a limited extent. It exhibits which regional ideas have been most often on the lips of political leaders, however, the calculated regional indications do not tell us anything on what is inside the numbers. Therefore, the next section unveils which ideas about regions Lithuanian president harboured. The level of self-attachment to a region and contents of regional images will help to discern regional identities. The analysis focuses on four cases[28] according to their popularity in presidential narratives.

3.1. LONG LIVE 'THE BALTIC'!

In the 'Baltic' idea the Lithuanian president has been stressing 'military cooperation and defence issues', 'Baltic Way', 'freedom', 'Baltic interdependence', 'energy security'. The security-oriented Baltic region has been most often in the president's texts, and the Lithuanian attachment to the Baltic constituency is very tangible.

Let us pave in our hearts a common way for the Baltic and Ukrainian freedom. Dear Lithuanian people, the Baltic Way is a success story of all of us. I congratulate you with the festive day. Long live the Baltic nations, free and strong![29]

We did it and we are no longer afraid, because we are not alone with our unpredictable neighbourhood. First, the Allies have stood by their word that the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of the Baltic countries is a continued concern of the United States and NATO. When necessity arose, we immediately received military and political reinforcement.[30]

The presidential discourse was based on common regional security, fighting for freedom, integrating into EU and NATO and getting rid of Soviet legacies. She saw Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as an integral part of the Baltic region. Russia, as the no-

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[26] Poland has been mentioned barely twice in President's statements throughout the period of analysis.

[27] M. Jurkynas, *How Deep is Your Love?...*, p. 203.

[28] Central Europe is barely visible in presidential narratives and does not provide sufficient ground for the examination of region's contents.

[29] "Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentės Dalios Grybauskaitės kalba Baltijos kelio 25-mečio minėjimo koncerte Katedros aikštėje", Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentė, 23 August 2014, at <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/prezidentes-veikla/kalbos/lietuvos-respublikos-prezidentes-dalios-grybauskaites-kalba-baltijos-kelio-25-mecio-minejimo-koncerte-katedros-aiksteje/20201>, 20 June 2016.

[30] "State of the Nation Address by H.E. Dalia Grybauskaitė, President of the Republic of Lithuania", President of the Republic of Lithuania, 27 March 2014, at <https://www.lrp.lt/en/speeches/state-of-the-nation-address/-2014/20827>, 3 April 2017.

torious 'Other', looms via the Baltic security worries and gloomy Soviet inheritance and Kremlin's assertiveness.

3.2. NORTHERN EUROPE AS BALTOSCANDIA

The Northern European idea has been *en marche* in the political language of Lithuania as the second most popular region. The messages on Northern Europe focused, on 'common Transatlantic security', 'business and FDIs', 'Scandinavian examples', 'energy links' and 'Nordic-Baltic regional cooperation'. Lithuania, according to the president, sees itself as part of the Nordic-Baltic arch.

The bonds of friendship that link Lithuania and Sweden are strengthened, first and foremost, by people-to-people contacts and cultural exchange. Several years ago, Lithuania made a well-considered decision to take on the Nordic direction as a model of secure, healthy and prosperous European path of development. We share the same cultural and social ideals, lifestyle and values.[31]

We once again ascertained that our primary and most secure foreign policy course is partnership with the European Union countries, the United States and cooperation within the NB8 framework – where we are trusted and respected. […] Investing in regional cooperation has proved to be especially effective: we are now part of the Nordic-Baltic (NB8) region – the economically strongest and the most secure region in Europe.[32]

We have made progress in the last several years: according to business conditions we have rose in the rating of 'Doing Business' to the 17ʰ place. We are among the Scandinavian countries.[33]

You have recognised our right to be independent and supported our striving to become NATO members and you are an example that self-determination of nations is an unconditional value. Strong Lithuanian and Icelandic partnership helps us to achieve common goals in the area of Transatlantic security and development of welfare of the Nordic region.[34]

The president produced a visible pro-Northern European narrative. Lithuania attaches herself to this region through the Nordic-Baltic image. The Lithuanian statements stress common security concerns, economic interdependence, let alone Baltic orientation to good Nordic practices. A feeling of equal partnership stands out too. Though Northern European orientation in Lithuania is not as glowing as the trilateral

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[31] "Toast Remarks by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at State Dinner in Honor of Their Majesties King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia of Sweden", President of the Republic of Lithuania, 7 October 2015, at <https://www.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/23875>, 3 April 2017.

[32] "State of the Nation…".

[33] "Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentės Dalios Grybauskaitės sveikinimas Investuotojų Forumo apdovanojimų dalyviams", Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentė, 14 March 2014, at <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/prezidentes-veikla/kalbos/lietuvos-respublikos-prezidentes-dalios-grybauskaites-sveikinimas-investuotoju-forumo-apdovanojimu-dalyviams/18897>, 4 April, 2017.

[34] "Islandijos prezidento Ólafuro Ragnaro Grímssono tostas, pasakytas Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentės Dalios Grybauskaitės surengtos iškilmingos vakarienės metu", Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentė, 10 March 2015, at <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/prezidentes-veikla/kalbos/islandijos-prezidento-lafuro-ragnaro-grmssono-tostas-pasakytas-lietuvos-respublikos-prezidentes-dalios-grybauskaites-surengtos-iskilmingos-vakarienes-metu/22279>, 2 April 2017.

Baltic one, 'go North' radiates commonalities. The othering with indications to Russia is expressed in Lithuanian security concerns in Northern Europe.

3.3. EASTERN EUROPEAN ATTACHMENTS

Lithuanian references to 'Eastern Europe' are scant. They mainly speak of geopolitical challenges, threats and security concerns outside the EU. Lithuania is concerned with conflicts in Eastern Europe, but does not see herself as part of it.

Our common task as a group of nations is to maintain undivided security – we have to put all our efforts to stop ISIS and al-Qaeda, to keep peace and security in Middle East, but same efforts should be directed to manage the geopolitical challenges in Eastern Europe. It is our duty to support peace, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. The threat arising to Ukraine must be urgently tackled.[35]

In the occupied parts of Ukraine gender-based violence has reached alarming levels. Women face physical and sexual abuse. The situation is very similar everywhere in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus, where we have frozen conflicts – Georgia, Moldova and Nagorno-Karabakh.[36]

[...] essential building block of a prosperous society is democracy. Lack of democracy is the main reason of conflicts, social and military upheavals, economic hardship, and other problems. Today the continuous threat to the development of our Eastern European partners – firstly Ukraine – particularly worries us.[37]

Lithuania does not cling to Eastern Europe anymore. It is either Central and Eastern European togetherness of fighting for freedom or a region that is beyond the EU's eastern borders. There is a sustainable concern about aggression of Moscow and conflicts in Eastern Europe, which has transformed since the 1990s the picture of successful post-communist transformation, Europeanisation and the Euro-Atlantic integration to imagery of marginalisation, corruption, muddling through and Russia's influence, which is not attractive for the Lithuanian president.

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[35] "Speech by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at the Debate of the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly", President of the Republic of Lithuania, 26 September 2014, at <https://www.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/speech-by-president-dalia-grybauskaite-at-the-debate-of-the-69th-session-of-the-united-nations-general-assembly/20510>, 22 March 2017.

[36] "Welcoming Speech at Regional Conference and Consultations on Implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the OSCE Region", President of the Republic of Lithuania Dalia Grybauskaitė, Chair of the Council of Women World Leaders, 20 April 2015, <https://www.lrp.lt/cwwl/chair-of-the-council/resources/welcoming-speech-at-regional-conference-and-consultations-on-implementation-of-unscr-1325-in-the-osce-region/21503>, 22 March 2017.

[37] "Remarks by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at the United Nations Summit for the Adoption of the Post-2015 Development Agenda", President of the Republic of Lithuania, 27 September 2015, at <https://www.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/remarks-by-president-dalia-grybauskaite-at-the-united-nations-summit-for-the-adoption-of-the-post-2015-development-agenda/6590/23784>, 22 March 2017.

3.4. WHERE IS THE BALTIC SEA REGION?

The Lithuanian narrative about the Baltic Sea area in comparison with the previous regional references is least developed and stresses energy security, history, culture and Nordic-Baltic cooperation.

> *We are taking up the Swedish principles of effective economy and sustainable development. We are learning solidarity, order and social responsibility, we are building a conscious society. Together we take care of the Baltic Sea, the main axis of our region. We will make our partnership even stronger by launching the NordBalt power link at the end of this year. It will contribute in a significant way to the energy security of the Baltic region, emerging as a symbolic and practical connection between our two nations. I firmly believe that working even more effectively as Baltic Sea neighbours we will further expand our markets and build our competitive advantages.*[38]

> *The Baltic States are joining the Western European electricity system. In addition to historical and cultural bonds, the Baltic Sea region will be linked to continental Europe by power bridges. We are delighted that the interconnections will increase the reliability of electricity supply, reduce energy costs and strengthen the Scandinavian business culture in the Baltic countries.*[39]

High politics is visible in the presidential language, and Russia's factor changed images about the formerly post-modern and collaborative Baltic Sea area. Lithuania randomly sees herself as part of the Baltic Sea region and uses this territorial image as a synonym for the Nordic-Baltic region.

4. REGIONS IN GOVERNMENTAL PROGRAMMES OF 2012 AND 2016

This article evaluates regional references and their contents in the two programmes of government of Lithuania in 2012 and 2016. The last two cabinets of ministers lasted full four-year long terms for the first time ever after the restoration of independence in 1990. The Social Democrats won the 2012 elections with 27 per cent of parliamentary seats (38 out of 141)[40] and led a left-of-centre four-party ruling coalition with Labour, Order and Justice and Electoral Action of Lithuanian Poles.[41] In 2016, Lithuanian

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[38]   "Toast Remarks by President Dalia Grybauskaitė...".

[39]   "Speech by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at the Official Launching of Interconnections NordBalt and LitPol Link", President of the Republic of Lithuania, 14 December 2015, at <https://www.lrp.lt/en/activities/speeches/speech-by-president-dalia-grybauskaite-at-the-official-launching-of-interconnections-nordbalt-and-litpol-link/24387>, 3 April 2017.

[40]   M. Jurkynas, "The Parliamentary Elections in Lithuania, October 2012", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 34 (2014), pp. 334-338, at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2013.08.019>.

[41]   The Polish party was ejected from the government in August 2014 due to disagreements between party's leader and Prime Minister. See more in M. Jurkynas, "Lithuania", in S. Habdank-Kołaczkowska et al. (eds.), *Nations in Transit 2015*, Freedom House, New York, pp. 393-413, at <https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/NIT2015_Lithuania.pdf>.

Peasants and Green Union became the largest parliamentary faction with 38 per cent of MPs (54 out of 141) and formed the 17th government with the Social Democrats.[42]

The programme of the Social Democrat-led government adopted in 2012[43] retained critical elements about former foreign policy of the previously Conservative-dominated cabinet. However, regional orientations have been explicitly made. The programme includes almost 19 000 words and regional references are miniscule. Five regions collected barely over 30 indications. However, 'Baltic' idea dominates with 44 per cent of regional manifestations, followed by the 'Northern European' profile with 28 per cent. 'Baltic Sea Area' comprises 26 per cent and 'Eastern Europe' – 3 per cent of all regional manifestations. 'Central European' idea is not represented at all. 'Poland' has been mentioned 10 times in the programme.

The 'Baltic' idea refers solely to Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia and encompasses aspects of priority in foreign policy making, common energy security, NATO involvement, Soviet legacies of people's forceful deportations to Siberia and common projects of infrastructure.

485. We will seek that the NATO air policing mission that has been carried out in Lithuania since 2004 stays permanent air policing mission of NATO in the Baltic countries. 495. First of all we will shape the foreign policy of our state, who is part of the Baltic region […] 534. […] Russia's obligations to the Council of Europe on compensations to deportees from the Baltic States and descendants thereof.

The Northern European discourse focuses on Lithuanian future towards more dynamic relationship for the promotion of national interests first of all with Nordic and the Baltic States including other countries with overlapping agendas in EU and NATO. Security, defence, energy, economy are key areas of the 'northern' narrative.

24. […] Relations with the Nordic countries have cooled off.

495. We will greatly focus on relations with the United Kingdom, including regional cooperation between the Nordic and Baltic States and the United Kingdom. Close cooperation with these states creates conditions for enhancing our leverage in the EU and reaching our required decisions. 529. We will encourage closer cooperation with the Nordic countries in the fields of economy, transport, innovations, climate change, conservation of the Baltic and North Sea ecosystems, security, and defence, which would contribute to the development and security of the entire European and Euro-Atlantic area; we will develop cooperation under the current e-PINE initiative.

The Baltic Sea region has been mentioned in the programme quite frequently too. Its main references encompass the Nordic-Baltic axis, European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and transport projects:

529. As a state of the Baltic Sea Region, we will seek that greater focus is given to closer and more concrete cooperation among the Baltic and Nordic (NB8) states. It would allow achieving, by joint efforts, a better representation of the common interests of the states of this

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42   Idem, "The Parliamentary Elections in Lithuania, October 2016", *Electoral Studies*, vol. 47 (2017), at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.04.001>.

43   *Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania for 2012-2016*, at <http://lrv.lt/uploads/main/documents/files/en_16_programme.pdf>, 8 September 2017.

region [...] *530. While implementing the European Union Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region, we will enhance the role of Lithuania as an active member of the Baltic Sea Region.*

Eastern Europe is barely mentioned and is presented as a region of neighbouring states that Lithuania is not part of, yet acts in:

526. Situation in the neighbouring states has a direct impact on the long-term security of Lithuania. With a view to ensuring security, stability, and respect for human rights and freedoms, as well as strengthening democracy in the Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia, we will seek to make use of instruments at the disposal of the OSCE, as the largest regional organisation. 539. We will encourage the inclusion of Armenia and Azerbaijan into the East Partnership programmes, and we will support development of peace, stability, and democracy in this region.

Poland is considered as a country relations are not best with, yet is very important with other countries to improve relations for partnership in the EU, NATO and Baltic energy security.

24. Relations with Poland have deteriorated especially.

308. We will continue and complete the construction of electricity transmission interconnections with Sweden and Poland (the 'NordBalt' and 'LitPol Link'). We will build a gas interconnection between Lithuania and Poland and we intend to apply for EU funding for this project. 495. We will strengthen partnership with the EU member states. First of all we will shape the foreign policy of our state, who is part of the Baltic region, towards active relations with the Nordic and Baltic States, Germany, and Poland, with which objectively we have common political and economic interests.

In turn, the programme of the 17th government[44] from 2016 with almost 43 500 words is not sprayed with regional references either. They amount to 28 indications altogether. The 'Baltic' and 'Northern European' notions occupy 25 per cent each, 'Baltic Sea region' took 21 per cent, 'Central Europe' and 'Central and Eastern Europe' – 7 per cent each and 'Eastern Europe' – 14 per cent share of regional indications. In the programme, there were nine references to 'Poland'.

Again, like in the previous programme, the Baltic idea was predominant. It mainly spoke of energy and geopolitical security and transport links.

94.8 [...] *Lithuania's electricity system as well as that of other Baltic states, is still a part of the Russian power grid. 305. Lithuania will consistently work for greater Baltic unity and cooperation* [...]

Nordic references were also popular with images of the Scandinavian model for national agreements with interest groups, good and strong political and economic relations between Baltic and Scandinavian states, R&D and trust.

149. [...] *trusted the Nordic countries that were responsibly committed to culture, who served models to carry out reforms and establish collegial advisory expert structures. 305. Lithuania will consistently work for* [...] *stronger political and economic ties between the Baltic and Scandinavian countries.*

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[44]   *Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania for 2016-2018*, at <https://lrv.lt/uploads/main/documents/files/XVII%20Vyriausybes%20programa_EN20170112.pdf>, 20 September 2017.

The Baltic Sea region is seen only as an area for energy security.

94.12. taking into consideration the benefit of the Klaipėda LNG terminal for the whole Baltic Sea region, we will seek financial contribution from the EU and/or other beneficiary countries in the region [...] *of the long-term safety, diversification and competitiveness of the region's natural gas supply.*

Central (and Eastern) Europe is not mentioned much and refers to declining investments, geopolitical security and rights of employees:

195.5. we will pay due attention to the development of the regulation of employment relations. We will seek a consistent and the most competitive regulation in Eastern and Central Europe, while ensuring proper safeguarding of workers' rights. 306. We will endeavour by all means possible to strengthen the transatlantic ties and strive for an increasingly close relationship between Europe and the United States of America (USA). It is necessary to achieve regular deployment of the US and other NATO members' military units in Lithuania and other countries of Central Europe.

Eastern European references embrace energy security, potential threats and neighbours in the EU's Eastern Partnership.

94.9. [...] *we will not accept the electricity produced by that plant* [Astravyets] *and will, as soon as possible, synchronize our power networks with the Western grids and separate them from the Eastern market. 299.* [...] *This would mean* [...] *the availability of timely assistance from the partners in the event of threats at the eastern border of the EU and NATO. 307. Our strategic objective is to make sure that NATO's attention to the eastern members of the Euro-Atlantic community* [...]

References to Poland in the current government's programme encompass health care examples, energy and transport interdependence and common interests in the EU. In most of the cases, Poland has been mentioned within a larger Baltic Sea regional framework.

94. [...] *strategic energy projects. These include the Klaipėda Liquefied Natural Gas (hereinafter referred to as LNG) Terminal, electricity links to Sweden and Poland. Another project for the gas interconnection with Poland is being developed* [...] *304. More sustainable integration into the Euro-Atlantic community and reinforcement of security in the East and Central European region are impossible without good relations with the Baltic and Scandinavian countries, Poland and other countries in Central Europe. 305.* [...] *On the basis of common security and economic interests and mutual respect, we will seek an open bilateral dialogue and cooperation with Poland in addressing the existing problems. 335.3.* [...] *We will cooperate closely with the Baltic States, Poland, the USA, West and North European countries and NATO partners in the development of joint capabilities for defence planning, high alert and capacity building.*

Table 2. Comparison of Regional References in governmental programmes, 2012-2020, %

	Baltic	Northern Europe	Baltic Sea	Central (and Eastern) Europe	Eastern Europe
16th (2012-2016)	44	28	26	0	2
17th (2016-2020)	25	25	22	7	14

Source: Author's calculation.

One should take into account that the governmental programmes come from slightly different political backgrounds: the Social democrats led the first programme and largely the Agrarians wrote the last one. A comparison of two governmental programmes unveils a stress on Baltic unity and cooperation. Lithuanian governments see their country as part of trilateral togetherness with small states of Latvia and Estonia. The connecting line of attachment is geopolitical and energy security vis-à-vis Russia. Northern European ideas have grown in salience across governmental programmes and emphasised the Baltoscandian character of trust in Nordic-Baltic cooperation in hard and soft security and orientation to the good economic and social Nordic practices. The Baltic Sea region lost its significance moving from the Nordic-Baltic axis to energy security concerns. Central (and Eastern) Europe does not figure in the programme of 2012 and in 2016 it encompasses transatlantic security aspects. Last yet not least, Eastern Europe is understood as entirely a region with is outside the EU, pestered by threats and geopolitical instability, which Lithuania is eager to fight with. As for Poland, it is most of the time included in the larger group of countries (Baltic, Nordic, Germany and the US) and encompasses military security concerns brought up by Russia's assertiveness and bilateral energy and transport links.

5. REGIONAL VECTORS IN PARTY PROGRAMMES OF 2016

Twelve parties and two coalitions participated in two rounds of the general 2016 election. Six parties stepped over the 5-percent threshold in the multi-member constituency. The number of effective electoral parties dropped from 8.3 to 7.4 whereas the number of effective parliamentary parties decreased from 5.3 to 4.4, indicating moderately fragmented party system and just a few relevant political parties. Lithuanian Peasants and Green Union won over 38 per cent of parliamentary seats and formed a coalition[45] with the Social Democrats who had 12 per cent of MPs after the elections.

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[45] In October 2017 the LSDP faction at the parliament split due to internal disagreements about continuation of the coalition with the Agrarians. The government is *de facto* minority coalition for the time being in November 2017.

Table 3. Results of the General Election in October 2016

Party	Votes* (%)	Total Number of MPs**	MPs (%)
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	21.7	31	22.0
Lithuanian Peasants and Green Union	21.5	54	38.3
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	14.4	17	12.1
Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania	9.1	14	9.9
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Union of Christian Families	5.5	8	5.7
Party 'Order and Justice'	5.3	8	5.7
Others	18.4	9	6.4

Source: Lietuvos Respublikos vyriausioji rinkimų komisija [Central Electoral Commission of Lithuania], at <http://www.vrk.lt>.

* In multi-member constituency only.

** After two rounds in single-member constituencies.

Among six Lithuanian parties that have coalition potential the first four, lined up along their faction's size at the parliament, had elaborated party programmes with sections or ideas on international politics and foreign policy.[46] The smallest parties, Polish Electoral Action and Order and Justice had virtually zero mentioning of regional groupings.[47] Therefore, the examination of programme contents includes the Agrarians, the Conservatives, the Social democrats and the Liberals.

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[46]   The Agrarians had 22 regional references and Poland, beside, has been mentioned 10 times. Corresponding numbers for Conservatives were 113 and 49, for Social Democrats – 6 and 1 and for the Liberals – 22 and 7.

[47]   Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija-Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjungos, "Rinkimų programa LLRA-KŠS", at <http://www.awpl.lt/?p=4768&lang=lt>; Tvarka ir Teisingumas, "Seimo rinkimų programa 'Lietuva. Čia mūsų namai'", at <http://tvarka.lt/lt/apie-mus/seimo-rinkimu-programa-2016>.

Table 4. Comparison of Regional References in Party Programmes, 2016, %

	Baltic	Northern Europe	Baltic Sea	Central (and Eastern) Europe	Eastern Europe	Sum (approximated)
Peasants' and Green Union	50.0	31.8	4.6	9.1	4.6	100
Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats	45.1	25.7	8.9	15.9	4.4	100
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	50.0	16.7	0	16.7	16.7	100
Liberal Movement of the Republic of Lithuania	50.0	22.7	4.6	4.6	18.2	100
Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania- Union of Christian Families	0	0	0	0	0	0
Party 'Order and Justice'	0	0	0	0	0	0
AVERAGE,* %	48.8	24.2	4.5	11.6	11.0	100

Source: Author's calculation.

* Average among the first four parties.

The Agrarians[48] emphasised Baltic energy and geopolitical security, NATO involvement and strengthening of cooperation. Poland is seen as part of geopolitical security solutions. As for the Nordic dimension, the party sees it as good practices to follow in cultural and financial management and cooperation and essential in Nordic-Baltic defence integration, including UK. In general, the Nordic region goes hand in hand with the Baltic one and the Visegrad region is seen as a different from the Scandinavian one. Eastern Europe is an area of geopolitical challenges for the Baltic States and Poland. The latter is considered important in terms of transport, gas and electricity network development. The party acknowledges that relations with a strategic partner, Poland,

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[48]   Lietuvos Valstiečių ir Žaliųjų Sąjunga, at <www.darnilietuva.lt>.

must be renewed on different political levels based on mutual respect and common interests.

The Conservatives were most outspoken about three Baltic States, which are connected especially via geopolitical, military and energy security vis-à-vis Russia. The party programme accentuates Lithuania as service centre of the Nordic-Baltic area, good Nordic practices of public management, strengthening of cooperation with the Nordic states, using the Enhanced Partnership in Northern Europe (EPINE), reviving 'Northern arch' between Nordic-Baltic countries and UK. Poland is closely attached to the Baltics and at times to the Nordic states in terms of NATO involvement and military security, which could turn, according to the Conservatives, NB8 into NB9 and expand in political, cultural and economic dimensions. Former Estonian president Toomas Hendrik Ilves also claimed in 2014: *you're not 'Eastern Europe' any more. Poland is Northern Europe!*[49] On the other hand, TS-LKD sees now Nordic-Baltic and Visegrad blocs as separate, yet possibly bound by geopolitical security issues because of assertive Kremlin. Central and Eastern Europe is considered as a platform for Lithuania's future as 'best of' in many economic aspects and as an area, where Russia still poses threats. Finally, Eastern Europe is the territory outside the EU and pestered by geopolitical challenges.

The Liberals[50] stressed cooperation among the Baltic States. The Scandinavians are regarded as future partners of stronger military, environmental, human rights and development cooperation and good examples of choice for social services. Lithuania is considered as part of the Baltic Sea Area and Central Europe too. In turn, Eastern Europe is an area of dangerous processes that jeopardise Lithuanian national security. Poland, according to the Liberals, is a strategic country with which cooperation has so far been minimal.

The Social Democrats[51] were not generous on regional references, yet the party paid the biggest attention to the Baltic region in their programme. The 'Baltic' idea implies Baltic unity, cooperation with the Nordic states: *Good relations with friendly states must be developed along real actions. We have to closely cooperate with neighbouring states with which we are connected through common democratic values, history, culture or interests.* [...] *Social Democrats will further strengthen unity and cooperation with the Baltic states and strengthen political and economic relations between the Baltic and the Scandinavian states.* The LSDP emphasises stationing of US military troops in the Baltic and the Central European states. 'Eastern Europe' refers to the Eastern Partnership countries.

[49]   "President Toomas Hendrik Ilves at Warsaw University, March 19, 2014: '25 Years After: the Evolution of Mental Geography in Europe'", President, 19 March 2014, at <https://vp2006-2016.president.ee/en/official-duties/speeches/10030-president-toomas-hendrik-ilves-at-warsaw-university-march-19-2014/index.html>, 11 October 2017.

[50]   Lietuvos Respublikos liberal sąjūdis, "Rinkimų programa 2016", at <http://www.liberalai.lt/rinkimai/rinkimu-programa>, 16 October 2017.

[51]   "Lietuvos socialdemokratų partijos programa 'Saugi, solidari ir teisinga Lietuva'", LSDP, at <https://www.lsdp.lt/apie/programa/>, 16 October 2017.

CONCLUSIONS

The inspection of the discourses on regional ascriptions across the political narratives of the President, the programmes of the government and the mainstream political parties, on the one hand, revealed a distinction between strengthening orientation towards Northern Europe and, on the other, distancing from Central (and Eastern) Europe. Even the Baltic Sea area is frequently understood as an area for the Nordic-Baltic (Baltoscandian) region. All main Lithuanian political actors examined first and foremost identified Lithuania with the trilateral Baltic region consisting of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. Baltic regional identity is dominant across all three analysed actor-groups, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Moreover, the Baltic region, so far the most popular in the Lithuanian political language, finds itself increasingly as part of a broader Northern European regional constellation as the Nordic-Baltic cluster. It comes as the second most prevalent regional affiliation. The Lithuanian political establishment distance their country from Central (and Eastern) Europe or, marginally, connect to it through common geopolitical security concerns. Long gone are the days of good Central (and Eastern) Europe, where rapid post-communist transformation took place. It is over and Lithuania does not see itself as part of it, since Eastern Europe, in particular, moved eastwards.

Findings of the examination of regional identities in the presidential statements reveal that geopolitical security concerns, Russia's assertiveness and aggression and Soviet political, economic, energy-related and other legacies dominate virtually all regional attachments. The next most popular region is 'Northern Europe'. Lithuania, according to the president, feels closely attached to this area via the Nordic-Baltic Eight concept referring to defence cooperation, security, freedom, Nordic-Baltic political and economic cooperation and examples of good governance. Compatibility of 'Baltic' and 'Northern European' images across the narratives of Lithuanian political actors is very close.

The concept of 'Eastern (and Central) Europe' is far from popular and positive. Getting freedom from the Soviet Union in the late 1980s unveil Lithuanian detachment from this region. Images of the 'Baltic Sea Region' are rare and the notion of 'Central Europe' is barely visible in presidential narratives. The 'Baltic Sea Area' accentuates low politics (environment, transit, and logistics), security concerns and... the Nordic-Baltic region.

The governmental programmes focus on Baltic togetherness via geopolitical and energy security vis-à-vis Russia. Attachments to Northern Europe stress the Baltoscandian character of trust in Nordic-Baltic cooperation in hard and soft security and orientation to good Nordic achievements. The Baltic Sea region is even less popular and encompasses Nordic-Baltic cooperation and energy security. Central (and Eastern) Europe reflects only in 2016 programme and talks of Transatlantic security. Eastern Europe, in turn, is an area outside the eastern EU borders.

Political parties retain similar attitudes compared with the previous political actors. The 'Baltic' idea is dominant with the emphasis on geopolitical, military and energy se-

curity, NATO involvement and strengthening of cooperation due to aggressive Russia. The second most referred region is Northern Europe, which embraces good practices to be followed in public sector management, social affairs, culture and finances and military and defence collaboration. The Baltic sea region and Central Europe are rarely pronounced in terms of geopolitical security and Eastern Europe, again, is considered as an area of geopolitical challenges beyond the EU's borders.

In a nutshell, geopolitical and even ontological security has remained as DNA of Lithuanian regional identities to a great extent, and the Northern European orientation is wanted to be known for a good company that Lithuania keeps.

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