

*Vaidotas Urbelis\**

*General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania*

# The Relevance and Influence of Small States in NATO and the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy

Small states are important and visible players in international politics. Their power is limited, and their economy and military capability may not match those of their larger neighbours, but small states enjoy certain advantages that increase their abilities to influence international politics. This article tries to show and explain how small states can act and exploit their advantages in a wider international arena. The main aim is to show ways and methods for small states to act and pursue their policy goals. This article analyses the behaviour of small states inside two major European security actors: NATO and the EU. Several examples will be presented in detail, namely, air policing in the Baltic states and the Lithuanian Presidency in the European Council. These examples clearly show the achievements and failures of small states in international politics.

## Introduction

Europe is a continent of small states. Many citizens of Lithuania would claim that being a small state means lesser influence and low visibility in the international community. This feeling is even more exaggerated by the lesser coverage global mass media gives to the leaders of small countries. Small states leaders' claims about their countries diplomatic victories are usually accepted by the public with a certain degree of scepticism and irony.

Small states have limited influence in international affairs. To a certain extent such pessimistic view are true. However small states can become much more than negligible actors if they actively pursue their agenda and consolidate all elements of their national power to achieve their desired objectives. Their influence is noticeable in such organisation as the EU and NATO. Small states' military or economic power cannot match that of the bigger countries

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\* Dr. Vaidotas Urbelis is an Associated Professor of the Political Science Department of the General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania. Address for the correspondence: Šilo 5a, LT-10322, Vilnius, Lithuania, tel. +370-5-2103569, e-mail: vaidurb@gmail.com

but their consistency, relentlessness and stubbornness could bring excellent results. Well executed policy could transform a small state into important actor in international politics.

Small states' power, and their role in alliances and other international organisations are a frequent topic in international relations studies. Reiter and Gartner, Keohane, Hey, Walt<sup>1</sup> and others created a theoretical framework for the analysis of small states' behaviour and motivations within larger international formations. Burden sharing arrangement with alliances, including NATO, became especially relevant after the Cold War when defence budgets of many European countries started dwindling.

This article takes a different perspective on the activities of small states in the international arena. The scope of this analysis will not cover the reasons for their membership or power balance within or outside the EU and NATO. Instead of focusing on "why", the question "how" will drive the analysis in this article about small states' behaviour. This article tries to describe and explain methods and instruments for how small states can maximise their power inside the EU and NATO.

Small states can exert their influence in many different ways. Neorealists would claim that they can bargain using their relative power, especially on the questions for which they have strong national interest. Small states biggest advantage would lay in their geography, specific natural resources or amalgam of coalitions. Neoliberals would assume that small states can utilise their soft power, persuasion and appeal to common values<sup>2</sup>. This article utilises these different theoretical insights to explain ways or strategies how small states could achieve their objectives.

The main object of this analysis is the behaviour of small states within the EU and NATO. The analysis of the EU will be limited to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CSDP). Although NATO and the EU are not identical organisations there are certain important features that allows for them to be analysed together in one article. First of all, overlapping membership - twenty-two countries are members of both organisations. The Danish opt out prevents it from participating in the military activities of CSDP; however, the non-EU member Norway can join various EU military initiatives. The most overlapping members are small European states.

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<sup>1</sup> Reiter E., Gartner H., eds. *Small States and Alliances*, Physica, 2001, Keohane, R. O. "The Big Influence of Small Allies", *Foreign Policy*, 1971, 2, p.161-182, Hey J.A.K., ed., *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy*, Lynne Rienner Pub, 2003, or more general type books as Walt S. M., *The Origins of Alliances*, Cornell University Press, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Honkanen K., "The influence of small states on NATO decision making process (The membership experience of Denmark, Norway, Hungary and the Czech Republic)", FOI, 2002, p. 27-28.

Secondly, central bureaucracy plays an important role in driving the decision making process within these organisations. Brussels based bureaucracy facilitates better decision making by providing impartial and unbiased advice to member states. Thirdly, in both organisations one country plays a leading role. The existence of one leader (the US in NATO and France in the EU CSDP) helps to move forward with new initiatives or reforms. Finally, NATO and the EU are democracies where respect for individual opinions and consensus building are fundamental features of their political culture. This is a factor of particular significance for the small states.

Despite many similarities, obvious differences between the two organisations are evident. NATO primarily deals with security issues while the scope of the EU's activities is much wider. CSDP is only a small part of the EU's activities. The EU is a supranational organisation with different decision making procedures. In NATO all decisions are made on the basis of consensus while under the Lisbon treaty in several areas, such as structural cooperation or approval of Chief Executive of the European Defence Agency (EDA), CSDP decisions could be made under qualified majority rule.

These differences could impact the role and the methods for how small states behave inside the EU and NATO; however they do not preclude common analysis. The overarching behaviour pattern of small states would definitely remain the same - it is to utilise all possible means to pursue their national interests, e.g. by shaping decision making and implementing agreed-upon policies within these organisations.

In this article the term small states are understood as all nations that are below the all nations that are below the defence spending of 10 billion USD are considered small states.<sup>3</sup> This includes all members of NATO except the US, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Canada, Turkey, Spain and the Netherlands. In 2015 Poland also exceeded this barrier. This list is almost identical to de Wijk's analysis on "Security Implications of NATO Transformation for Smaller Members"<sup>4</sup>. De Wijk clearly emphasized that the main features of small states are easily recognised by their inability to maintain a full spectrum of military capabilities and limited abilities to project military power in distant regions of the world. Small states are dependent upon larger countries' military capabilities as only they can provide the framework that small states can plug into with their available assets.

<sup>3</sup> Urbelis V. "Implication of Smart Defence Initiative for Small Members of NATO", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, 2003, vol. 11, p. 9–27.

<sup>4</sup> Wijk R. de, "Security Implications of NATO Transformation for Smaller Members" in Setälä M., ed., *Small States and NATO*, Atlantic Council of Finland, 2005, p. 17–23.

Denmark is a perfect example of a small albeit influential country. For example: several years ago two NATO senior officials—the Secretary General of NATO and the Chairman of NATO Military Committee—were both Danes. Denmark is one of the most active NATO countries in international operations, development assistance and international outreach programmes. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia affiliated their Land forces brigades to the Danish division, which acts as a framework for preparation of Baltic States officers for their positions in higher headquarters<sup>5</sup>.

Considering the importance of the role Denmark plays today, it may be surprising that during the Cold War Denmark was known as the “footnotes state”. Denmark earned the title due to its resistance to many decisions, especially on nuclear matters<sup>6</sup>. However after the Cold War Denmark transformed itself and became one of the leaders in NATO. Today, Denmark’s voice is critically important when discussing the future of NATO operations, exercises or finances.

The Danish example proves that size is not a key determining factor in international politics. Small states are not merely servants of the bigger ones; they can push and shape decisions according to their wishes and interests. They can do this in several ways: by including relevant security issues into wider political agenda, or by making impact upon implementation of already existing agenda.<sup>7</sup> This article will look at both aspects of decision making.

## 1. Solidarity and the Principle of Consensus

NATO and the EU countries are members of one democratic club of nations. By treaties and by the virtue of their commitments they are obliged to take into consideration each other’s security concerns. In NATO Washington Treaty Article 5 commitment is explicitly stated—that an attack against one country is attack against all. Nothing is stronger than the bond of common defence. This does not mean that countries must agree on every question. Disagreement on the war in Iraq led to deep rifts in transatlantic relation; however, commitment for common defence remained rock solid. All countries enjoy an equal level of protection, their size and geography is not important. EU countries are tied by perhaps weaker, although from moral point of view

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<sup>5</sup> Wammen N. “Close allies and friends - Ten years on” in Vestenskov D., ed., *10 Years after NATO membership - an anniversary in the shadow of a crisis*, Royal Danish Defence Institute, p. 12.

<sup>6</sup> Small States in NATO: Influence and Accommodation. A thematic summary of the panel discussion” in Setälä M., ed., *Small States and NATO*, Atlantic Council of Finland, 2005, p. 27–28.

<sup>7</sup> Honkanen K. Op.cit, p. 16.

important solidarity which declares that “The Union and its Member States shall act jointly in a spirit of solidarity if a Member State is the object of a terrorist attack or the victim of a natural or manmade disaster.”<sup>8</sup>

Solidarity and common values constitute the backbone for the security of NATO and EU member states<sup>9</sup>. Small states are full-fledged members of this security community and club of nations, where their point of view must be heard and evaluated. Such common sense of solidarity precludes most powerful members of these organisations from unilaterally imposing their will upon smaller members, which take full use of such arrangement.

The history of NATO and the EU shows several attempts by bigger states to increase their role in these organisations. When during the EU’s constitutional convention, France and Germany in a joint letter proposed to set up a potentially powerful new post of president of the European Council, the small states reacted to it by naming them as an attempt to perform “institutional coup d’état” and to create “systemic oligarchy” within the EU<sup>10</sup>. Small states made crystal clear that the equality of all member states is the underlying principle of European integration. In 1958, the French President sent a letter to the US President and the British Prime minister where he suggested the three states would form a ‘directorate’ within NATO<sup>11</sup>. This initiative failed because of the resistance by the small member states and by the US.<sup>12</sup>

The support of small states is important for bigger countries from a political perspective. The inclusion and participation of small member states in different operations, sanction regimes or other activities legitimises bigger states’ policies, makes their decisions more acceptable to the wider international community. For the NATO operation in Libya in 2011 the participation of Bulgaria, Denmark, Greece, Romania, as well as partners from Jordan, Qatar, Sweden and the United Arab Emirates was of critical importance. France and the EU have also sought the participation of small countries’ contributions in their military actions in Africa.

US behaviour in NATO deserves special mention. US dominance by sheer numbers is huge—the US defence budget constitutes 70 percent of the total budgets of all NATO member states. However in practise US policy is ex-

<sup>8</sup> Lisbon Treaty, [https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/legal/pdf/en\\_lisbon\\_treaty.pdf](https://www.ecb.europa.eu/ecb/legal/pdf/en_lisbon_treaty.pdf).

<sup>9</sup> The importance of solidarity concept was clear since the establishment of the European Community. Spinelli A., “Atlantic Pact or European Unity”, *Foreign Affairs*, 1962, 40 (2), p. 542–552.

<sup>10</sup> „Tyranny of the Tiny“, *The Economist*, 366 (8308), 23 January 2003.

<sup>11</sup> Honkanen K., op.cit., p.29.

<sup>12</sup> Pagedas C. A., *Anglo-American Strategic Relations and the French Problem, 1960–1963: A Troubled Partnership*, Frank Cass, 2000, p. 30–34.

tremely accommodating to the needs of small member states, provided small members assume an adequate degree of responsibility. Only in exceptional circumstance does the US force other Allies to agree on contradictory policies. US leadership in NATO is based not just on her power but on the ability to persuade and accommodate the interests of small member states. US flexibility provides small states with opportunity to shape and influence NATO's decision making. In the EU the two biggest European military powers, France and the United Kingdom, are also constantly seeking support from other countries. France's vision of a more united European defence requires the active support and participation from small member states.

From the formal perspective the principle of consensus provides small states with the biggest leverage for dealing with unwanted policies of more powerful allies. Several attempts to modify this rule in NATO have completely failed. EU CFSP is also largely based on the principle of consensus. In practice this means that any country can raise its representatives' hand or write a written note blocking any decision the organisation is going to undertake. All member states can say "no".

Sceptics would say that this system could lead to anarchy and chaos. Indeed, it is extremely difficult to align the policies of each and every sovereign country on every issue. National interests differ, so everybody must take into consideration each other's view. The popular saying in NATO and the EU is that "if everyone is unhappy with a decision, it means that we have reached a good compromise".

Striving to accommodate each other's views makes the principle of consensus less damaging to the effectiveness of decision making. It also brings another benefit: if a decision is made by consensus each ally has to fully comply with its provisions. When the text is agreed and it becomes official policy it takes another consensus to modify it. Once agreed upon, a policy statement could be easily transferred to other documents or statements. For example, NATO's Strategic Concepts' paragraph on energy security approved by the Heads of State and Government still stands today, proclaiming that NATO will "develop the capacity to contribute to energy security, including protection of critical energy infrastructure and transit areas and lines, cooperation with partners, and consultations among Allies on the basis of strategic assessments and contingency planning"<sup>13</sup>. Any country wishing to strengthen or weaken NATO's role on energy security would need another approval by all 28 members.

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<sup>13</sup> NATO, *Strategic Concept: Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_68580.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_68580.htm)

This NATO and EU tradition of basing their policies on “written law”, allows small states to block unacceptable suggestions or suggest acceptable bargains that would suit everyone’s interests. The bottom line of such bargaining policy is “if you accept our point A, we will accept your point B”. An even more drastic method may be blocking or the “taking hostage” of an unimportant issue by seeking to get a better deal in a more important domain. This is why nobody is surprised when during negotiations several completely unrelated issues become part of one big package. This “market place” approach allows small states to bargain and trade their less important issues for relevant ones.

Principles of solidarity and consensus building are important; however their significance cannot be overestimated. Small states do not block decisions whenever they want. They fully understand that their veto right should be used only in extreme situations; if too frequent used, it could damage the credibility and efficiency of both organisation. For example, it is common practice that a country which does not participate in an operation does not hinder others from making the necessary decisions on this particular topic. Land-locked countries avoid pushing too hard on maritime strategy and countries not active in the North rarely voice their concerns over Arctic strategy. Each small state knows the limits of its influence and limits its decision shaping efforts to the most important issues.

## 2. Active Policy and Prioritisation

Many European small states pursue very active foreign and security policy and use it as leverage to promote their interests in other areas. For example, the NATO mission in Afghanistan provided a good opportunity for small states to prove their resolve, solidarity and demonstrate military capabilities. Some of them even paid a high price for it. During the operation, Denmark, Estonia and Norway suffered proportionally very high casualties<sup>14</sup>, while small countries such as Hungary or Lithuania were leading Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Poland in 2003 became a leading nation of the South Central Occupational (Stabilisation) zone in Iraq. Norway and Belgium were very active participants of NATO operation in Libya, each providing 6 F16 fighter jets and additional personnel. Small states were active in EU missions in Mali,

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<sup>14</sup> Jakobsen P. V., Ringsmose J. “For our own security and for the sake of the Afghans. How the Danish public was persuaded to support an unprecedented costly military endeavor in Afghanistan” in de Graaf B., Dimitru G., eds., *Strategic Narratives, Public Opinion and War Winning domestic support for the Afghan War*, Routledge, 2015, p.138–140.

Democratic Republic of Congo and in Somalia. This devotion of small states to common operations makes their opinions more visible and relevant to the wider international community.

Small states pursue active policies on internal NATO and EU matters. They present proposals, initiate discussion and raise important problematic issues. Small states have every right to initiate discussion on topics which are of great relevance to their security, thus forcing all others to analyse and take a clear stance on one or another issue. Sometimes, these are difficult questions but there is no way for bigger countries to avoid them. For example, in 2008 Lithuania and Poland forced energy security into NATO Summit in Bucharest agenda. Some countries were not satisfied with the emergence of this topic and remained neutral, while others actively resisted. As in most cases, after long debates compromise was found reflecting NATO's new role in assuring energy security.

Another great example was "Green defence" initiative proposed by Denmark and Lithuania. The main reason for this initiative was simple: NATO's armed forces are huge energy consumers. The ability to implement Green defence proposals could save money and increase operational efficiency<sup>15</sup>. In 2013 Danish and Lithuanian ministers in a joint letter introduced these ideas to their NATO colleagues. Most NATO countries in general reacted positively. Even sceptics did not obstruct the initiative, since it was highly uncontroversial. Green defence was rapidly integrated into the NATO agenda and was even mentioned by the NATO Wales Summit declaration in 2014<sup>16</sup>. The NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence became part of this initiative.

NATO's involvement in the Balkans is another great example. The overwhelming majority of countries in the region are concerned with the possibility of escalation of violence and instability in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. They insist that an international presence must be maintained in the region because small neighbouring countries would not be able cope with the consequences of possible instability. Active and well targeted information campaigns by the small Balkan countries remain important to preserve NATO's and EU committed to the security of the region.

During NATO enlargements, small countries played an important role in persuading bigger powers to enlarge the Alliance. Denmark, Poland and others exerted constant pressure on the US and governments of major European states to admit new member states to NATO in 2004. Obviously, enlargement

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<sup>15</sup> Denmark and Lithuania promote Green Energy and Defence Initiative at NATO Ministerial, <http://nato.mfa.lt/nato/en/news/denmark-and-lithuania-promote-greenenergy-and-defence-initiative-at-nato-ministerial>.

<sup>16</sup> NATO, Wales Summit declaration, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm).



could not have happened without the US leadership, but small NATO countries laid the ground for positive decisions. Quite recently in 2014 two other small NATO member states, Croatia and Slovenia, led the debate about the invitation of Montenegro. Both cases simply exemplify the fact that small countries can initiate and even frame the political debate over very important issue, such as NATO enlargement. At the same time, without the support of bigger powers, especially the US, their influence is limited. It is worth remembering that despite all efforts by their supporters, Montenegro has not yet received an invitation to join NATO until 2015.

An extremely successful example of small states policies is the NATO Baltic air policing mission in the Baltic States. Since the beginning of the NATO air policing mission in 2004, the mission was considered of a temporary nature. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia were not satisfied with this arrangement; they were seeking a permanent solution. However, when they started negotiations with other allies, they soon realized that the biggest contributors to the mission were not eager to accept a long term commitment. Some member states even questioned the need for such a mission. Considering these unfavourable circumstances, the Baltic States decided to act proactively and to prepare a study which would consider all possible options, including procurement of fighter aircraft, for conduct the air policing mission. In the study force requirements, basing options, types of aircraft and other parameters were extensively analysed. The study led to the conclusion that the current model of air policing, namely deployment of aircraft to the Baltic states, remains for foreseeable future the most effective and cost efficient way to perform the mission.

The result of this study was consequently presented to capitals of major NATO allies. Discussion with the Allies showed that two issues remained unsolved: lack of training facilities for incoming aircraft and financial burden sharing. The last issue was quickly solved as the Baltic States allocated an additional 5 million euros annually for host nation support<sup>17</sup>. Training conditions were addressed by simplifying rules for low level and night flights, providing possibilities for air to ground training or organising more demanding exercises.

Presentation of the study and additional homework helped the Baltic States to address most of the requirements put forth by contributing nations. Sceptics of air policing did not even dare to challenge results of the study. Baltic states with the assistance of the US and Denmark persuaded other allies that NATO must agree to make temporary NATO air policing arrangement a

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<sup>17</sup> BNS, "NATO chief announces extension of Baltic air-policing mission without dates but with possibility of review", 21 May 2012.

permanent one. The Chicago Summit declaration in 2012 welcomed the “decision to continue the NATO Air Policing Mission in the Baltic states, and appreciate the recent commitment by the Baltic states to enhance their host nation support to the participating Allies”<sup>18</sup>. It is important to note that the host nation support package prepared back in 2012 was successfully applied to the reinforcement of the Baltic air policing in 2014.

As this example shows, actively pursuing their priorities is one of the most important rules for the success of small countries. Clearly defined and persistently sought priorities can lead to amazing results unless these priorities collide with a strong opposition by larger Allies. Prioritisation remains important—small states cannot fight for their interests on multiple fronts. The establishment of very few but clear priorities guarantees unity of effort and less distraction to less relevant issues.

These priorities are determined by the history, geography and the neighbourhood of nations. Not surprisingly, Greece is usually concerned with the situation in the Middle East and terrorism, Norway and Denmark about the High North, the Baltics states and Poland about the Eastern Neighbourhood, Belgium about locally grown jihadism, and Bulgaria and Romania about security in the Black sea region.

Another strength of small states is their ability to specialise by selecting certain areas where they have special expertise<sup>19</sup>. Specialisation reflects countries’ military industrial base, history and traditions of the armed forces, even cultural environment. For example, Estonians always emphasize their knowledge of cyber issues, Lithuanians work on energy security and special operation forces, Denmark provides expertise on environmental protection and climate change, Latvians concentrate on strategic communications, etc. Specialisation allows small countries to accumulate expertise in one or another particular area, thus achieving respect and importance while discussing those issues in NATO and the EU. For example, the Czech Republic is doing that with CBRN and helicopter training. The Nordic states are important players discussing capacity building and humanitarian assistance; this comes as no surprise considering that their humanitarian assistance is worth 15 billion euros annually<sup>20</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> NATO, Chicago Summit Declaration, 2012, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_87593.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_87593.htm?selectedLocale=en)

<sup>19</sup> Laajava J., Burnes N., “Small States and NATO Facing the Contemporary Security Environment” in Setälä M., ed., *Small States and NATO*, Atlantic Council of Finland, 2005, p. 14.

<sup>20</sup> Brattberg E., “U.S.-Nordic Global Security Cooperation” in *Advancing U.S.-Nordic-Baltic Security Cooperation*, Center for Transatlantic Relations, p. 127.

The establishment of NATO Centres of Excellence reflects the geography of specialization. Centres for Cold Weather Operations (Norway), Cyberdefence (Estonia), Energy Security (Lithuania), Explosive Ordnance Disposal (Slovakia), Human Intelligence (Romania), Strategic Communication (Latvia), Chemical, Biological, Radiation and Nuclear Defence (Slovakia), Medical (Hungary), and Naval Mine Warfare (Belgium) allows small nations to play an important role in their area of interest. By maintaining centres of excellence in their territory, small states retain important leverage or even take leading roles in developing NATO policies in their area of specialisation. Such leadership could only be pursued if additional resources are allocated to the area of specialization so that the small county retains competitive edge over other countries in their area of expertise. As practice shows, in such case even bigger countries consult smaller allies before embarking on new initiatives in certain areas.

Active policy, clear priorities and specialization allows small countries to become important players in international politics. By accumulation of resources and expertise, they can become experts and leading countries in NATO and the EU. Such policy requires making stark choices about what is important and what is not. For example, before the Chicago Summit, Lithuania decided to fight only for three main issues: a permanent solution for the Baltic air policing, recognition of NATO energy security centre based in Vilnius and implementation of NATO contingency plans for the Baltic States. The downside of such rigid prioritisation is the risk of becoming a “one issue state” and the loss of understanding of a wider context in international environment.

### 3. Committees - the Place to Make Decisions

Committees are the main working tool in the EU and NATO. Decisions made by both organisations are discussed, analysed and finally drafted by various committees and subcommittees. Heads of states and governments or ministers usually approve well in advance prepared and staffed documents.

Countries are free to choose who represents them in one or another NATO or the EU committee. Capable and active representatives can bring enormous benefits to his or her country. Working bodies is the place where individual skills are no less important than the country of your origin. Small countries can take huge advantage by allocating the best and brightest personnel to the key committees.

Coordination of national positions in various NATO and EU committees is also easier for smaller member states. For a representative of small coun-

try it takes several phone calls to understand the capital's position on one or another issue, while bigger states perform long and difficult interagency process among key players—presidents or prime ministers' offices, ministries of defence and foreign affairs.

Such flexibility explains why representatives of small states usually are very forthcoming and unified during discussions with bigger member states. Informal and personnel relations are also much stronger in smaller states. It is possible to know almost everyone working in the Lithuanian Ministry of Defence with staff of three hundred people. In the Pentagon with 30 thousand people, personal familiarity is much more limited. Small and flexible staffs and personal knowledge provides small states with a key advantage over bigger countries.

Flexibility makes formations of coalitions easier. In order to enhance their power and promote their interests, small states usually embark upon formation alliances of like-minded nations inside NATO and the EU<sup>21</sup>. Small states understand that there is not much they can achieve alone, and that they must act together if they want to remain visible.

A good example of such tactics was the initiative to enhance NATO's visibility inside the Alliance. An initiative was started by Norway in 2009, which drafted three pages of proposals on how using exercises, defence plans, training and education NATO can be brought closer to their citizens. Norway emphasized that for NATO operation in Afghanistan must remain the priority but NATO cannot be associated only with Afghanistan, NATO must be visible for ordinary citizens at home. Immediately after Norway, Lithuania decided to prepare a non-paper which was later supported by Latvia and Estonia. Finally, the Czech Republic submitted its proposals. In the beginning, bigger NATO members with high degree of scepticism reacted to this initiative. It took many committee meeting and informal discussion to start implementing most of proposals. Various military activities such as exercises or defence planning that we see today is to a certain degree the result of NATO visibility initiative undertaken five years ago.

Implementation of similar initiatives requires skills and dedication by the staff members of small countries. They must be able to make their case and persuade often uninterested colleagues from other countries about the usefulness of his or her suggestion. This requires good communication skills and a deep understanding of the international environment and excellent knowledge of foreign languages.

Knowledge of foreign languages is extremely important for communi-

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<sup>21</sup> Setälä M., ed., *Small States in NATO*, p. 27.

cation and public relations. Representatives from Anglo-Saxon and Nordic states enjoy natural advantages<sup>22</sup>. Their representatives also are able to win many positions inside NATO HQ and EU's External Action Service because of good knowledge of foreign languages, especially English. Countries from Southern Europe retain advantage for positions that require proficiency of French. In theory international staff serving in NATO and the EU must remain neutral and impartial however they background remains important while preparing and implementing political decisions.

The importance of language and negotiating skills cannot be overestimated. When key decisions are made, national interest and national power remain key factors. During most high level meetings, size and power matter much more than diplomatic skills. However, using well prepared tactics and taking advantage of inherited flexibility, small states can achieve important results. These could be tactical gains albeit in important areas for small states.

#### 4. Presidency of the Council of the European Union - Small States' Experience

The Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the second half of 2013 for Lithuania constituted a challenge of exceptional importance. For the very first time in its history, Lithuanian officials had to chair meetings, prepare documents and provide logistical support for EU related events in Lithuania and Brussels. The presidency tested Lithuanian abilities to shape and influence EU decisions, propose new initiatives and lead the debate on important security issues. It might be safely assumed that other small states enjoyed similar experience during their Presidency.

After adaption of Lisbon treaty, the role of the Presidency in the area of CSDP country decreased. Lisbon treaty introduced the position the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and created EEAS to support his/her activities. However, the relation between the Presidency and the the EEAS was not clearly defined. The range of opinions on the balance of responsibility was extremely wide. One camp dominated by European bureaucrats argued the Presidency in CSDP does not exist and

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<sup>22</sup>Setälä M., ed., *Small States in NATO*, p. 25. More information on the language proficiency of the European could be found at European Commission, "Europeans and their languages", *Special Eurobarometer* 386, 2012.

all functions are responsibility of EEAS. The other camp argued that CSDP remains primary prerogative of member state and EEAS should perform clearly defined supporting role. Not surprisingly bigger member states tried to support the Presidency, seeing it as leverage to counter increasing dominance by the EEAS.

Debate about the future of European defence became increasingly heated before the Council's discussion on defence at the end of 2013. The EEAS and member states were preparing a set of proposals to be agreed upon by the Council. Several examples illustrate the Presidencies' abilities to influence EU decisions at the highest political level.

#### 4.1. EU's Eastern Partnerships

Eastern partnerships were one of the main priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency, including in the area of CSDP. Preparation for implementation of this priority started long before the official start of the Presidency, several expert level meetings and seminars with other EU nations and six partner nations were held in the first half of 2013.

After informal discussions, Lithuania developed a non-paper— several pages of practical proposals about how to move forward with EU Eastern partnership policies within the CSDP. These ideas were presented during the first event of the Lithuanian presidency, the high level seminar “Taking CSDP Partnerships Forward: the Case of Eastern<sup>23</sup>”. This event drew a great deal of attention, with several ministers from smaller EU and partner nations participating. Ideas from the seminar were later presented and discussed during informal EU ministers and policy directors meetings.

Eastern partnerships were discussed in parallel with with other urgent issues, such as civil war in Syria (at that time few people have anticipated Russian aggression in Ukraine). As expected, the Conclusion of the Council in December reflected several ideas proposed by the Lithuanian presidency, but most of the decisions were postponed for additional work. This corresponds to the larger picture, as the Vandecasteele study showed the Lithuanian presidency exerted an influence in 9 cases out of 34 analysed in the study on Lithuanian Presidency<sup>24</sup>.

During the Lithuanian presidency, Lithuania together with Hungary, La-

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<sup>23</sup> Vandecasteele B., “Influence of the Lithuanian Presidency of the EU Council on the EU relations with countries of the Eastern Partnership”, Abstract of the PhD paper, [www.academia.edu](http://www.academia.edu), p.56.

<sup>24</sup> Vandecasteele B., Op.cit. p. 65.

tvia and the United Kingdom established a Trust Fund to financially support participation of the Eastern Partnership countries in joint CSDP related activities<sup>25</sup>. The Fund did not attract wide participation from the EU members but some partner nations took advantage of the fund to stimulate their activities within the CSDP. Interestingly, the formal procedures about the establishment of the Fund were completed only in 2014, one year after the end of the Presidency.

The Eastern partnership policy serves as a perfect example of how a small but active country can use existing circumstances, i.e. Presidency of the Council, to push forward its agenda. Lithuania's partial success was supported by the fact that no major European power had big issues with moving forward with this agenda. The lack of enthusiasm by some other members was suppressed by proposing initiatives in other areas that would satisfy their needs. The assistance of EEAS in balancing different agendas was of huge importance.

## 4.2. Energy Security

Energy security was another priority of great importance to the Lithuanian presidency. Considering that before 2013 energy security was not even discussed as a part CSDP, Lithuanian ambitions to promote energy security in CSDP were modest.

The main aim was to introduce debate on this subject, explain links between energy and defence, and discuss the possible role CSDP can play in this regard. Methods of work were similar to those of Eastern partnerships - seminars, discussion inside working groups and high level meetings. However, tactics was completely different. If Eastern partnerships were discussed at the political level, energy security was kept as an expert level discussion. NATO Energy Security Centre of Excellence tried to play an important role in promoting NATO-EU dialogue; however, institutional differences limited its wider role in this debate.

As a result of the Lithuanian presidency, energy security became a part of the CSDP routine, with most of the work done at the European defence agency (EDA), which received a wider role in looking at the defence aspect of the energy security debate.

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<sup>25</sup> KAM, „Kuriamas fondas ES Rytų partnerių gynybai stiprinti“, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/kuriamas-fondas-es-rytu-partneriu-gynybai-stiprinti.d?id=66424700>.

### **4.3. European Union Battle Groups**

The future and relevance of the EU Battle groups (EUBG) was discussed long before the Lithuanian presidency. At political and experts levels the main issue with EUBG was well known – the EUBGs had existed already for ten years; however, they had never been used. Small and big states had to tackle this issue in the run up to the European Council in December of 2013. Under such circumstances the role of presidency was clear as it had to continue previous efforts to drive the debate and come to possible solutions.

During several seminars and high level meetings strong disagreement among member states emerged. EU countries could not agree on deployment option and when actual crises hit there was no political will to use EUBG. Discussion clearly showed that neither the presidency nor the EEAS had the power to impose any decision upon the use of force to any EU member state. Then the time for real decisions came, and sovereign nations followed their own national interests with little regard on the status of CSDP. The presidencies role under such circumstances remained very limited.

### **4.4. NATO-EU cooperation**

Cooperation between two major European security organisations has continued for several decades. Although informal dialogue between staffs of NATO and EU remains active, formal relations between NATO and the EU remain frozen due to unsolved crises between Turkey on the one hand and Cyprus/Greece on the other. Lithuania clearly stated that with all possible means it would support NATO-EU cooperation with the understanding that these relations are part of a wider political debate. No special activities on behalf of the presidency were conducted.

### **4.5. European Security Strategy**

The European Security Strategy (ESS) was approved in 2004. The first sentence of this document reads “Europe has never been so prosperous, so se-



cure nor so free”<sup>26</sup>. This statement was true ten years ago but became completely irrelevant in 2013. War in Georgia, cyber-attacks and economic downturn showed that Europe must reflect upon its current security priorities. Lithuania, with the support of several other small European countries like Sweden, made this point very clear from the beginning of its presidency. Few countries disagreed with the fact that ESS was outdated; however, not everyone was keen to start a new long debate over the document. No decisions were made in 2013. It is only after the emergence of so-called Islamic State and Russian aggression in Ukraine was a decision made to start thinking about a new ESS. The role of the presidency in this debate remained limited.

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All of the above-mentioned examples prove that small states can have a role by taking the presidency of the EU Council, but its possibilities to influence decision making are limited. Small states can quite easily introduce a topic on the agenda (as it happened with energy security) but when national interests come into play the role of the presidency disappears (as it happened with the use of EUBG). The presidency’s powers are also limited in terms of influence on wider political debates such as NATO-EU dialogue. If political debate is less divisive, presidencies can move with a wider reaching proposal, as happened with Eastern partnership initiatives. Later events in Ukraine clearly showed that in this respect the Lithuanian presidency left a long-lasting impact on the overall European security.

## Conclusion

For small states, membership in alliances and other international organisations remains the key tool to pursue their national interests and influence the behaviour of bigger powers. Small states may not enjoy the advantage of relative power but their strength lies elsewhere. Small states can be extremely flexible, responsive and focused. An active and relevant small state can become an important player if it uses wisely available resources and establishes clear priorities. The modus operandi of small states can be different. They can put their ideas into agenda, they can try to pursue others, they can build coalitions, block decisions and launch support campaigns.

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<sup>26</sup> European Security Strategy: A Secure Europe in a Better World. Council of the European Union, 2009, p. 27.

This article clearly shows that the power of the state cannot be made mathematically equal to the size of its territory, strength of the armed forces and economy. Other components of national power are of equal importance—e.g. participation in crises management operations, negotiating skills, qualified personnel and others. Small states could take advantage of several structural characteristics of international organisations, namely, the principle of consensus.

The influence of small states should not be overstated; their power has its limits. Their room for manoeuvre is limited when key national interests of the bigger powers are at stake. Big countries are less likely to change their position when vital national interests are discussed; however, they are quite flexible when a small state takes the lead on less relevant issues. The Lithuanian presidency of the EU Council shows the possibilities and limitations for moving forward with the new ESS or the EUBG.

Small states face a clear dilemma. They can allocate substantial resources to pursue and push their policies with the understanding that most of them will fail or they can act in a passive mode and just try to stop initiatives they do not like. Prioritisation is a key to solving this dilemma; and, the establishment of clear priorities allows a small state to remain a significant player on important national interests to its security and avoid being overstretched with issues of minor importance.

*Vilnius-Mičionys, April 2014*