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**Europe as Unfinished
Business: The Role of
Lithuania in the 21st
Century's Continent**

Discussion Paper

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1999

Dr. h.c. mult. Valdas Adamkus, Jahrgang 1926, seit Februar 1998 Präsident der Republik Litauen, emigrierte 1949 in die Vereinigten Staaten von Amerika. Nach seinem Studium der Ingenieurwissenschaften an der Universität von Illinois arbeitete er in zahlreichen Umweltprojekten und wurde schließlich Leiter der Fifth Region (Mid-West) Environmental Protection Agency in Chicago. Neben seiner beruflichen Tätigkeit organisierte Valdas Adamkus aktiv den Protest gegen die Besetzung Litauens. So war er u.a. Mitglied des Vorstandes der „Lithuanian Community (LC)“ in den USA, Vorsitzender des „American Lithuanian Council (ACL)“ und Vorsitzender des Organisationskomitees der „World Lithuanian Games“ von 1983. 1989 erhielt er die Ehrendoktorwürde an der Universität von Vilnius sowie der Universitäten von Illinois und Indiana für seine Projekte im Umweltschutz.

Dokumentation eines „ZEI-Europaforums“
am 20. November 1998

Valdas Adamkus

Europe as Unfinished Business: The Role of Lithuania in the 21st Century's Continent

Change and search for a new identity mark present-day Europe. We have disappointed the skeptics who doubted the Europe's power to unite. We have stepped over the line which divided Europe into two, artificially created worlds of the West and the East. The process of integration, which started in 1948, has gathered such momentum today that common values and joint solutions have permeated our daily life.

In the West and East, North and South of the continent, European unification has become the power which shapes our internal and foreign policy. Lithuania considers itself a part of the process and is committed to active participation in it. I am deeply convinced that Lithuania, which is striving for progress and modernity, should broaden its role in the European community of nations as European integration is the largest modernization project in this century.

The European Union, which today unites 15 members and 11 associated countries, is the most distinct, although unfinished, entity of European unification. It builds a social model for Europe, ensures its economic development, and promotes human creativity. The current fifteen member states have established the common market, and eleven of them will introduce a single currency next year. I believe that the success of the European Union urges us to deepen and broaden cooperation among the actors concerned.

Lithuania integrates into the Union not only by expanding its political, economic and cultural contacts with the member states, but first and foremost by reforming in principle its institutions as well as political, economic and even cultural systems.

Not only do geographic location, cultural identity and security concerns determine Lithuania's firm commitment to participate in the European processes. It is also a matter of our history and of our future.

Were it not for a tragic turn of history in this century, Lithuania, just like other Baltic countries, would today be an integral part of all current European, the European Union included. The underlying western democratic values of freedom and self-determination guided us throughout the inter-war period and the years of Soviet occupation. They also steer us today, after our return to the world of Western values. Some of you may not be aware that out of the Central and Eastern Europe armed resistance to occupation lasted the longest in Lithuania and was suppressed only in 1953. Adherence to the same principles led us through a non-violent resistance up to our independence in 1990.

You may think that I am driven by emotions and romanticism. Yet the history sustains the Lithuanian people in their daily work and creative endeavors. Just like any other mature and future-oriented state, Lithuania seeks today to preclude itself from repeating mistakes of the past and searches for ways to enhance democracy and promote socio-economic development. We are looking for highways to the future and the European Union is just the right car to drive.

The strength of our determination stems from our experience, gained while fulfilling the requirements for EU membership. By consistently implementing the criteria set by the European Commission, Lithuania has succeeded in becoming one of the most dynamic economies in Central and Eastern Europe. Economic reforms, liberalization of trade and expanded economic contacts facilitated the growth of GDP, which has increased more than three times since 1993. The present 6 % annual growth of GDP testifies that we are on the right track.

Other macroeconomic indicators of Lithuania are no less illustrative. Annual inflation with a current 2.2 % rate during the last nine months, is close to the EU average; foreign investments this year will increase two-fold, reaching 2 billion US dollars. Recovering industry provides for a growing number of new jobs and a stable unemployment level. Integration-driven restructuring of the national economy has established a solid foundation enabling resistance against the ripple effects of the Russian economic crisis. We have shown that Lithuania is painted on the map in the same bright colors as other Central European states.

Political, economic and social progress made by Lithuania was noted in the annual progress report on the applicant countries, issued by the European Commission a couple of weeks ago. The European capitals that I visited recently, also acknowledge that Lithuania has made a substantial qualitative leap.

It is my belief that the current pace of progress qualifies Lithuania for an invitation to accession negotiations with the EU without delay. The European Commission report does not recommend Lithuania for immediate talks. It is an unexpected, yet not discouraging, conclusion as it makes us proceed with greater dedication and consistency with reforms in which Lithuania itself has a vital interest.

Lithuania is fully aware that integration and EU enlargement is a two-way process, the outcomes of which should satisfy all the parties concerned. May I assure you that we do want to be strong enough to participate in the European Union, and we want to participate in a strong European Union.

Therefore Lithuania aims to be issued a concrete negotiation timetable at the Vienna European Council. We want to have a road map showing the route towards the EU membership in order to pursue a policy of mutual benefit.

I also believe that membership of the Baltic States and Poland would strengthen the role of the Baltic Sea region – a most dynamic European region – in the European Union. Lithuania could also contribute to expanding the network of EU relations with the Eastern European states of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and other CIS countries as well as to promoting their

greater openness. We envision Lithuania as a European Union state of advanced technologies and open economy, which is actively engaged in spreading EU values and interests eastwards.

On the eve of the 21st century, Europe faces a number of unfinished business. European integration is only one of them. Equally important to the continent is the process of transatlantic integration which enhances the European zone of stability and security, and provides favorable conditions to the prosperity of the Euro-Atlantic community.

Membership in the North Atlantic Alliance is among the priorities of the Lithuanian foreign policy. It is endorsed by major political parties and the public at large. Such unanimous support springs from our perception that the values of democracy, human rights, the rules of law and market economy, on which we base our daily activities, are the principles followed by our partners in the Euro-Atlantic community. Lithuania is confident that it can guarantee the viability of these values only through affiliation to their primary sources.

The invitation of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic to join the North Atlantic Alliance has already had a positive impact on security and stability in Central Europe and the Baltic Sea region. We expect that the Alliance will adequately evaluate the progress made by other candidate countries and will invite the best qualified candidates from the North and the South, Lithuania included, to the second round of enlargement.

Already today the prospective membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures has an essential impact on the reform of the national defense system and on our policy of constructive relations with our neighbors. Our commitment to our European partners stimulates the search for avenues enhancing the zone of democracy in the region. Lithuania's efforts pursue first and foremost national interests. We, however, trust that our attempts are noticed and supported by Western democracies.

I can assure you that Lithuania comprehends the role of Russia in the future Europe. You, I believe, also understand its significance. The present time poses a complex yet important task of assisting Russia in realizing that its future lies in co-operation with Europe, based on partnership and mutual

confidence. We also have to help Russia understand that we, the nations of Europe, are interested in the constructive involvement of Russia in the ongoing processes on the continent.

Russia is currently living through a complicated period. I have in mind not only the economic crisis, but a more profound and time demanding reform of thinking and values. I have a personal impression that most of the Russian people still view the contemporary world through a prism of outdated images, which failed the test of time and led to an understandable psychological discomfort.

Today the people of Russia have to change, suddenly and radically, their attitude toward NATO which they treated as an aggressive block for long decades. They should be patiently and openly explained that today NATO is different, as different are challenges that threaten the security of states and nations. It is gratifying that the values of democracy, freedom of the individual, and market economy gradually permeate the mentality of Russia's young people. I sincerely believe in their capacity to break through in their minds and attitudes.

Lithuania successfully models its policy vis-à-vis Russia. A particular role in our bilateral relations is played by the Kaliningrad region. It is in our interest that the socio-economic development of this district keeps us with the level of Lithuania, Poland or other Baltic countries. We wish to live next to a reliable and economically sound neighbor. We also expect to involve Russia more actively into the expanding framework of regional cooperation.

I believe that close integration of Lithuania into the Euro-Atlantic structures will facilitate the consolidation of our relations with Russia and will enhance stability in the entire region. On many occasions I have underlined and would like to reiterate that Lithuania's membership in NATO and good neighborly relations with Russia are compatible and mutually enforcing. I am convinced that Lithuania has proved by its current policy that accession to NATO is not directed against any country.

Good relations with neighbors, along with our aspiration to join the European Union and NATO, constitute the basis of our present-day foreign

policy. I am confident that the essence of the European integration, in broad terms, stems from the ability of states to compromise over the issues of concern. I am delighted to note that Lithuania cultivates relations with its neighbors on the principles of mutual confidence and understanding.

I would like to single out the dynamics of the Lithuanian-Polish relationship. Just like Germany and France, and later Germany and Poland, we have managed to overcome the mistrust and historical wrongs between the two nations, and established the model of relations marked by mutual affection, respect and cooperation to the benefit of shared goals.

Institutionalization of Lithuanian-Polish relations has probably no analogies in Europe. Its framework includes the Presidents' Consultative Committee, Joint Parliamentary Assembly, Joint Governmental Council, Joint Forum of Lithuanian-Polish Municipalities and joint peace-keeping battalion LITPOLBAT. I believe that the spirit of partnership will find grassroots support and will reveal itself in direct people-to-people contacts.

I am no less certain that Poland will continue to play a significant part in the region. By keeping our channels with Poland always open, Lithuania has a good possibility of influencing regional policy in Central Europe and enhancing the spirit of confidence in its relations with other countries.

Equally important are Lithuania's relations with its northern neighbors of Estonia and Latvia. I would like to assure those who doubt the potential of cooperation among the three Baltic States. This is not the case indeed. We are keen to expand a pragmatic partnership under economic, transport, infrastructure and other projects. Our states are united in their goal of the membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures. Success of one is the victory of all three.

On the other hand, we acknowledge that, while being similar, each of us is different. Therefore, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia diverge in tactics, although they have the same strategy. Lithuania, which identifies itself with Central Europe, considers that its interests will be best satisfied through a constructive multi-vector policy.

I wish to emphasize the development of relations with Germany, which is pivotal to Lithuanian foreign policy. The united and strong Germany emerges today as one of the most powerful states on the continent, the economic gravity of which ensures the progress of European integration. I am confident that the Government of the Federal Republic has an interest in balancing out the status of the countries to the west and east from Berlin, and accelerating the eastward enlargement of the Union. Lithuania is indeed grateful to Germany, an advocate of the Baltic States, for its unceasing support of Lithuania's aspiration to joining the Union.

We also count on further active German support of our efforts to integrate into the North Atlantic Alliance.

At the end of this century, the development of relations between Lithuania and Germany illustrates how, on the basis of confidence, equality, and market economy, a wide and dynamically expanding network of bilateral relations can evolve from almost nothing in eight years. Today Germany is the most important trading partner of Lithuania in the West and ranks among the largest investors. Over the last five years, the trade turnover between our countries has increased six times, and during the first half of this year exceeded 770 million US dollars. Lithuania is Germany's main commercial partner in the Baltics.

It is gratifying that we have established a stable structure of commercial, economic and political relations. It demonstrates that the two partners have well-defined interests and a clear-cut vision of the future. It is my belief that Germany has an interest in Lithuania, with its well-developed infrastructure and services network. Likewise, Lithuania considers Germany an important actor on the regional, transatlantic and no doubt, global arena.

Let me conclude by outlining the importance of Baltic regional cooperation, which acquires a new role in the context of deepening integration. The Baltic Sea, once a dividing factor, unites us, the states of different economic development and of different affiliation with the European Union. The Baltic Sea is becoming the Sea of integration, stability and confidence. It is imperative to subject the potential of regional cooperation to the

strengthening of European integration and establishment of stability in Europe.

Seeking to exploit and expand the potential of the Baltic cooperation, Lithuania actively participates in the work of regional bodies. This summer Lithuania assumed the chairmanship in the Council of the Baltic Sea States.

Productivity of the Council and successful implementation of projects undertaken are Lithuania's focus during its presidency. In addition, we work on specifying and intensifying the Council activity through cooperation in the fields of economic integration, civil security, human rights and environmental protection. We also pay special attention to the fight against illegal immigration and smuggling of drugs and arms.

Another priority of our chairmanship in the Council, is the development of transport and energy infrastructure projects, among which the Baltic Sea gas pipeline network and electricity grid, as well as the realization of road transport project *Via Baltica* are the major tasks. We are also interested in supporting regional cooperation in the field of small and medium sized businesses.

I do not doubt that broader regional relations and dynamic development of the Baltic Sea region would accelerate integration into Europe and produce added value to our integration into the European Union.

Creation, just like integration, is a never-ending process. Today we witness new areas emerging which are subject to integration. Today we can hardly set boundaries for the creation of Europe.

However, by saying an “unfinished business of Europe” I have something different in mind. I am thinking of the process which shapes the values of tomorrow and lays the foundation for the next century relations. This process should provide a level playing field for all who will live in 21st century Europe. If the right of a nation to participate is curtailed by impeding its integration into the existing European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, such a nation may stand in the way of the new Europe towards an accelerated integration.

It is my belief that in the European map of the 21st century Lithuania will be marked as a part and creator of the united Europe.

ISSN 1435-3288

ISBN 3-933307-30-9



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