

Justinas Juozaitis**The General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania*

Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant in Lithuanian Foreign Policy: Objectives, Measures and Future Prospects

The article analyses Lithuanian foreign policy in respect of the Ostrovets NPP from December 2008 till 2019. The aim of the article is to examine the goals of the Lithuanian foreign policy, its measures and outcomes. The analysis of official documents and high-level meetings was used to achieve this aim. The documents helped to reveal the strategic and economic features of the Ostrovets NPP, the official Lithuania's position and its change. Meanwhile, the study of high-level meetings helped to determine the direction of Lithuanian foreign policy, its objectives, ways to justify them and means of their implementation. The study revealed that Lithuania opposed the construction of the Ostrovets NPP throughout the entire period under analysis, but initially it did that indirectly, emphasizing the issue of nuclear safety, and since mid-2016, the indirect resistance has gradually turned into a direct one - this nuclear power plant was considered a Russian geopolitical project. Although Lithuania's interests with regard to the Ostrovets NPP have not been consistently represented at the highest political level during the period being analyzed, the country's foreign policy can still be considered sufficiently effective. Lithuania successfully raised the issue of nuclear safety internationally, which eventually made Belarus to partially comply with Lithuania's requirements for the admission of international experts. When it comes to constraining the supply of Belarusian electricity, Lithuania was able to agree on a favorable scenario for the synchronization of electricity systems of the Baltic States through Poland, securing Warsaw's support. Nevertheless, attempts to constrain the supply of Belarusian electricity till the synchronization can only be effective if Lithuania succeeds in reaching agreements with Latvia and Estonia.

Introduction

The construction of the two units of the Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant marks the third attempt to develop nuclear power in Belarus. The first two attempts were unsuccessful. In the 1980s, the Soviet Union planned to build two nuclear power plants in Belarus, but these plans were adjusted by a disaster

* Justinas Juozaitis – a junior researcher at the Research Centre, General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of the Republic of Lithuania; PhD candidate at the Faculty of Political Science and Diplomacy, Vytautas Magnus University. Address for Correspondence: Šilo 5A, 10322 Vilnius; tel.: +370 5 210 3571, email: justinas.juozaitis@lka.lt

at the Chernobyl NPP on 26 April 1986. The second attempt to build a nuclear power plant was made after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1993. The Belarusian Council of Ministers developed a state programme to this end, but it had to be terminated due to a shortage of financial resources in 1998, having reached no significant progress. Belarus updated nuclear development plans in 2006 and subsequently secured a USD 10 billion loan for the construction of a nuclear power plant from Russia. This allowed Belarus to solve the problem of shortage of financial resources and to make a significant progress in the implementation of the Ostrovets NPP project, which is scheduled to be fully completed in 2020.

Lithuania regards the Ostrovets NPP as a threat to national security for three main reasons. First, Lithuania finds the location of the construction site of the Ostrovets NPP unacceptable. The Belarusian nuclear power plant is being built right next to the Lithuanian border (25 km) and near the country's capital, Vilnius (50 km). Second, this location poses even more threat due to incidents captured during the construction of the Ostrovets NPP and systematic efforts of Belarus to conceal them. Lithuanian authorities say they have information on six incidents, while the Belarusian Vice-Minister of Energy Michail Michadiuk publicly hinted 10 incidents, but has not commented them in detail. The lack of transparency is best illustrated by the fact that information on incidents known to Lithuania first appeared in public space rather than being reported by official Belarusian diplomatic channels. Finally, comprehensive Russia's involvement in the Ostrovets NPP project poses specific threats to Lithuanian national security, as this nuclear power plant helps Russia to interfere in political processes not only in Belarus, but also in the Baltic Sea region, and in Lithuania in particular.

Threats to Lithuania's national security encourage to get a better understanding of Lithuanian foreign policy towards the Ostrovets NPP. This is especially relevant given that political science literature pays little attention to the issue. Political scientists showed more interest in the strategic and economic features of the Ostrovets NPP,¹ its posed threats and possible responses,² the

¹ Please see. Gliubutė J. Molis A. (2012). "Prospects for the Development of Nuclear Energy in the Baltic Region", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 10. Frogant, A. Schneider M. (2018). *The World Nuclear Industry Status Report 2018*, Paris, London: A Mycle Schneider Consulting Project. Jirušek M. Vlček T. (2015). *Energy Security in Central and Eastern Europe and the Operations of Russian State-Owned Energy Enterprises*, Bruno: Masaryk University.

² Augutis J. et. al. (2017). *Lithuanian Energy Security. Annual Review 2015 – 2016*. Vilnius: Versus aureus. Česnakas G. ir Juozaitis J. (2017). *Nuclear Geopolitics in the Baltic Sea Region. Exposing Russian Strategic Interests Behind Ostrovets NPP*. Washington: Atlantic Council. Molis A. et. al. (2018). Russian Geo-Energy and the Baltic Response: Importance of Integration and Cooperation Initiatives. *Politologija* No. 3(91). Keturakis L. (2018). *Belarus nuclear plant: Moscow's new threat to the Baltics?* <https://integrityinitiative.net/articles/belarus-nuclear-plant-moscows-new-threat-baltics> 2018-08-29

impact of the project on relations between Belarus and Lithuania³ rather than the nuclear power plant being built in Belarus as an object of Lithuanian foreign policy.⁴ The change in the official position over time, the systemic and internal policy circumstances, and the consistency between the official position of Lithuania and its implementation have received particularly little attention, with little analysis of the outcomes of Lithuanian foreign policy.

Given the limited research of the topic and the relevance of the threats posed by the Ostrovets NPP, the article analyzes the Lithuanian foreign policy towards the Ostrovets NPP since December 2008, when Belarus decided to build a nuclear power plant near the city of Ostrovets. The study seeks to answer three sets of questions. First, what were the main goals of Lithuanian foreign policy towards the Ostrovets NPP, how have they changed over the last ten years and what circumstances have led to that? Second, what measures have been taken to achieve the goals set, how have they changed over time and what factors have led to that change? Third, what are the main results of Lithuanian foreign policy? In other words, the article aims to investigate the objectives, means and outcomes of Lithuanian foreign policy in relation to the Ostrovets NPP.

In order to answer these questions, the article draws on the analysis of official documents and the content of high-level meetings. The analysis of the documents allowed examining the formal economic and strategic justification of the Ostrovets NPP in Belarus, determining the official Lithuania's position towards the Ostrovets NPP and demonstrating its development. The analysis of high-level meetings that took place in the last ten years reveals the number of times that the Ostrovets NPP has been on the agenda of the most important meetings of Lithuanian politicians, for example, the years when the Ostrovets NPP issue was addressed more often and when it was less frequent, and allows distinguishing the key areas of activities of Lithuania (the countries or the international organizations with which the Ostrovets NPP has been discussed most often). The analysis of press releases issued after the high-level meetings also allows distinguishing the main aspirations voiced by Lithuanian representatives and the reasoning behind them.

³ Astapenia R. (2018). *Belarus-Lithuania Relations: Common Interests and the Nuclear Dispute*. Minsk: Ostrogorski Centre.

⁴ To some extent, Lithuanian foreign policy was analyzed in two studies. Please see: Jastramskis M. (2011) "Nuclear Ambitions of the Neighbors and a Possible Response from Lithuania", *Energy Security Highlights* nr. 1. Augutis J. et. al. (2018). *Lithuanian Energy Security. Annual Review 2016 – 2017*. Vilnius: Versus aureus. In a more detailed manner, Lithuanian foreign policy was analyzed in one article that was mostly limited to Lithuanian objectives towards Ostrovets NPP until the year of 2016. Please see: Juozaitis J. (2016). "Lithuanian foreign policy vis-à-vis Belarusian nuclear power plant in Ostrovets", *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* No. 35.

The research includes all meetings of the Lithuanian President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Seimas, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Minister of Energy or and the Minister of Environment held during the period under review, which directly or indirectly discussed the Ostrovets NPP project (there were 265 such meetings). Of course, press releases do not necessarily list all the topics covered. Sometimes the question of the Ostrovets NPP would hide behind such laconic wording as “Representatives of both countries discussed energy security issues”; however, the investigation, which covers a significant period, still allows distinguishing the most frequent aspirations and arguments of Lithuania. The combination of the two research methods also allowed examining how changes in the official position of Lithuania are reflected in the implementation of its foreign policy, which is especially important considering that the position of Lithuania changed substantially at the junction of 2016-2017.

The article is divided into four parts. In order to get a better understanding of the object of Lithuanian foreign policy, the strategic and economic features of the Ostrovets NPP were investigated first. Since the construction of a new nuclear power plant in Belarus would not have been possible without the comprehensive financial, political and expert support of Russia, the following section analyses Moscow’s strategic interests in the Baltic Sea region. The third and fourth sections analyze the Lithuanian foreign policy. First of all, the main official documents defining Lithuania’s position in relation to the Ostrovets NPP are reviewed, then analyzing the implementation of Lithuanian foreign policy at the highest political level. In this case, the main focus is on the frequency of meetings, the study of their objectives and the reasoning behind them, also looking into how changes in Lithuania’s official position affect the implementation of foreign policy. The third part presents a summary listing the key circumstances that affected the Lithuanian foreign policy and the fourth part examines the effectiveness of the Lithuanian foreign policy.

1. Development of Nuclear Energy in Belarus

The first signals of Belarus’s plans to build a new nuclear power plant appeared in 2005-2006. In January 2005, Alexander Lukashenko expressed his support for the development of nuclear power at the meeting of the Belarusian

Security Council,⁵ and on 2 August 2006, the Belarusian President voiced his support in public:

The construction of a nuclear power plant is an important factor for Belarusian energy security. We cannot do without it in the future. Yes, Belarus has suffered from nuclear power. But our decision to build a nuclear power plant should not be affected by radiophobia or other fears - it should be driven by scientific and economic calculations.⁶

This statement is chronologically significant, because previously Lukashenko publicly expressed either critical position on nuclear energy or avoided giving a specific answer. For example, on 2 May 2002, he said that Belarus had no plans to build a nuclear power plant in its territory,⁷ and on 27 April 2004, during the commemoration of the victims of Chernobyl, he stated that the priority of Belarus was renewable energy and solving major problems. Having said that, he summarized his position as follows: "We will talk about building some compact [nuclear - J.J.] power plant when the time is right. But a question is whether or not this will happen in our life".⁸ In 2006, not only Lukashenko's rhetoric changed, but also several nuclear-related documents were adopted. In July of 2006, the Belarusian Council of Ministers adopted the most important document, the Action Plan for Preparatory Works for the Construction of a Nuclear Power Plant,⁹ while the Ministry of Emergencies later adopted and approved various sets of nuclear safety rules, and other Belarusian authorities adopted several similar legal acts.¹⁰ Changes in the rhetoric of the President of Belarus and the adoption of new documents show that Belarus started preparing for the development of nuclear energy back in 2006.

When looking back from that year, the capability of Lukashenko regime to build a new nuclear power plant looked dim. Belarus tried to develop nuclear energy before, when the Council of Ministers developed a national programme for this purpose, but in 1998, it was suspended for a 10-year period because of "the citizens' attitude towards nuclear energy, the availability

⁵ James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies at the Monterey Institute of International Studies (2011), *Belarus Nuclear Chronology*, Monterey, 2011, P. 15.

⁶ Novikau A. (2017). "Nuclear Power Debate and Public Opinion in Belarus: From Chernobyl to Ostrovet's", *Public Understanding of Science* 1(14), 9. 8.

⁷ Belarus Nuclear Chronology, p. 9.

⁸ Беларусь сегодня, Вместе с народом, 27 April 2004. <https://www.sb.by/articles/vmeste-s-narodom.html> 2018-08-25

⁹ Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Belarus, Environmental issues in Phase 1 and Phase 2 of the nuclear power programme of the Republic of Belarus. <https://www-legacy.iaea.org/NuclearPower/Downloadable/Meetings/2012/2012-03-20-23-TM-Vienna/14.pdf> 2018 07 25

¹⁰ Ministry for Emergency Situations of the Republic of Belarus (2013) *National Report of the Republic of Belarus under Convention on Nuclear Safety*, Minsk. p. 68, 69.

of alternative energy sources and limited financial resources.”¹¹ In 2006, eight years after the decision was passed, the negative approach of Belarussians towards nuclear energy did not change significantly,¹² financing of the new power plant remained unclear, and imports of natural gas, which was called an alternative energy source, from Russia became more expensive, but remained significantly cheaper compared to market prices of that time. However, unfavorable conditions did not hinder the development of the project.

Reducing energy dependence on energy sources supplied from Russia became a strategic justification of the nuclear power plant to be built. On 14 July 2007, Lukashenko signed a directive on key areas of action to strengthen national economic security, planning to replace 5 billion m³ of natural gas imported from Russia by nuclear power and to strengthen the share of electricity in the final fuel and energy balance of Belarus.¹³ On 17 September 2007, the President of Belarus approved the Energy Security Concept, which saw nuclear power as a local generation source that will allow reducing the import of energy sources from Russia, which was the dominant energy supplier.¹⁴

Initially, this strategic direction seemed to reflect the prevailing political context, because in 2006-2007, Belarus was involved in a dispute with Russia, leading to Gazprom increasing the price of natural gas for Belarus to USD 100 per 1 000 m³, and on 8 January 2007, the Russian company *Transneft* cut off oil supply via the *Druzhba* (Friendship) oil pipeline for two days. Also, Russia's disagreements with Ukraine and Lithuania, when Moscow used energy as a means of political pressure against these countries, justified Lukashenko's aim to reduce the country's energy dependence on Russia. Conflicts between Russia and Ukraine in 2005 - 2006 over natural gas pricing provoked short-term

¹¹ Novikau (2017) op. cit. p. 7.

¹² Please see: Bobosov E. M. et. al. (1996) Отношения населения с возможностью развития атомной энергетики в Республике Беларусь. Минск: Институт проблем энергетики Беларусь, p. 9, 10. Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (2008) *The 'Feminine' Subject*, 2008 Vilnius <http://old.iiseps.org/e3-08-07.html> 2018-07-15. Шавель С. А. Мартищенко, Е. В. (2013) Динамика общественного мнения о развитии ядерной энергетики в Республике Беларусь. Социология, 2. р. 100. <http://elib.bsu.by/bitstream/123456789/97881/1/94-110.pdf> Independent Institute of Socio-Economic and Political Studies (2016) *Results of the Nation opinion poll conducted on June 2-12, 2016*, 2016 Vilnius. <http://old.iiseps.org/edata1.html> 2018-07-15. Тyt.by, Опрос: Почти половина белорусов отрицательно относятся к строительству БелАЭС, 23 May 2017. <https://news.tut.by/economics/544353.html?crnd=46645> 2018-07-21.

¹³ Президент Республики Беларусь (2007). О приоритетных направлениях укрепления экономической безопасности государства, Минск http://president.gov.by/ru/official_documents_ru/view/direktiva-3-ot-14-ijunya-2007-g-1399/ 2018-07-28

¹⁴ President of the Republic of Belarus (2007). *Concept of Energy Security of the Republic of Belarus (Decree of the President of the Republic of Belarus No.433)* <http://www.lse.ac.uk/GranthamInstitute/law/concept-of-energy-security-of-the-republic-of-belarus-decree-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-belarus-no-433/> 2018-07-28

supply disruptions to both Ukraine and Europe. Responding to Lithuania's long-standing position not to sell AB Mažeikių Nafta to companies associated with Russian government, Moscow was periodically cutting oil supply via the *Druzhba* oil pipeline, which was eventually closed by the Russian-owned *Transneft* in 2006. In light of Russia's actions both in Belarus and in its immediate neighborhood, some of the Belarusian political elite supported the inclusion of Western companies in the project for a new Belarusian nuclear power plant and called for using Western technology,¹⁵ but this idea was not implemented.

Strategic justification of the construction of a nuclear power plant became completely unrelated to the actual policy of Belarus, when Minsk decided to borrow most of the funds needed for the nuclear power plant from Russia (up to 90% of costs, or USD 10 billion), choosing *Atomstroyexport*, a subsidiary of the Russian state-owned *Rosatom*, as the contractor and committing to buy nuclear fuel sets from Russia throughout the lifetime of the Ostrovets NPP.¹⁶ Given that the lifetime of a nuclear power plant (design, construction, operation, its possible extension and decommissioning) is extremely long (approximately 100 years),¹⁷ these decisions not only do not diminish energy, political and economic dependence on Russia, but rather entrench them. It is also important to note that irrespective of the extent to which electricity generated at the Ostrovets NPP would allow Belarus to reduce natural gas imports from Russia, it will maintain a natural gas supply monopoly in Belarus, and Russian state-owned companies will also dominate the nuclear energy sector. Simply put, there is a clear contradiction between the official understanding and justification of the need for nuclear energy in Belarus, and the decision regarding the actual means of financing of its development, the technologies to be used and the selection of actual nuclear fuel suppliers and contractors.

In order to further discuss the model of financing of the Ostrovets NPP and to understand the strategic importance of the project to Belarus, discussing its economic feasibility is also important. Belarusian media emphasized that the electricity generated in the Ostrovets NPP would be cheap,¹⁸ which

¹⁵ Belarus Nuclear Chronology, p. 8.

¹⁶ Kaminskaya, M. "Minsk's cooperation agreement with Moscow on building Ostrovets NPP ratified in closed-door parliament hearing" *Bellona*, 3 November 2011. <http://bellona.org/news/ukategorisert/2011-11-minsk-cooperation-agreement-with-moscow-on-building-ostrovets-npp-ratified-in-closed-door-parliament-hearing> 2018-08-25

¹⁷ Carnino A. (2012). "The lifecycle of a nuclear power plant" Alonso A., ed. *Infrastructure and methodologies for the justification of nuclear power programmes*, Oxford: Woodhead Publishing Limited, p. 37-39.

¹⁸ Belta, *Electricity rates after Belarusian nuclear power plant launch revealed*, 14 May 2018.

will not only reduce electricity prices in the country,¹⁹ but it will also be competitive in Western European markets.²⁰ Even though such statements were sometimes echoed in influential Western publications,²¹ their reasoning is questionable.

First, assuming that Belarus will repay the loan to Russia, whose loans constitute the major share of investments required for the project, the electricity generated in Ostrovets NPP should be uncompetitive, even inside Belarus.²² According to preliminary estimates, electricity generated in the Ostrovets NPP should cost 5.81 USD cents per kilowatt-hour (ct/ kWh). This price was forecasted assuming that project costs would total USD 6.135 billion,²³ however, Ostrovets NPP construction estimate was already USD 11 billion by the end of 2017²⁴ exclusive of interest on the Russian loan.²⁵ Later, calculations were made again, when investments in the construction of a nuclear power plant were estimated at USD 11.61 billion, resulting in electricity generated at Ostrovets NPP priced at 8.03 ct/ kWh.²⁶

Such price of electricity production at Ostrovets NPP exceeds the lowest fixed electricity tariff for household customers set in the summer of 2018 (ranging from 6 to 9 USD ct/ kWh),²⁷ which also includes electricity transmission, distribution and other costs. Here, the average cost of generating electricity in Belarus, which, according to Belarusian officials is expected to be 6.81 ct/ kWh in 2018, should also be taken into account,²⁸ even though independent experts believe that the price should range between 4 – 5 ct/ kWh.²⁹ In any case, the price of electricity generated at Ostrovets NPP is higher than the average electricity generation price in Belarus. If the projected price of generating electricity at Ostrovets NPP is accurate enough, then the electricity generated

¹⁹ Belta, *Belarus ready to export nuclear power plant electricity to Poland, Ukraine*, 26 December 2017.

²⁰ National Centre for Marketing and Price Study (2018) *Belarus reports substantial increase in electric power export* <https://export.by/en/news/belarus-reports-substantial-increase-in-electric-power-export> 2018-08-21

²¹ Karasik T. "Lithuania's European Energy War" *The National Interest*, 18 July 2018

²² Dynier A. M. (2018). „The Importance of the Energy and Petroleum Industries for Belarus“, *PISM Bulletin* 110 (1181) p.2

²³ World Nuclear Association (2018). *Nuclear Power in Belarus* <http://www.world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-a-f/belarus.aspx> 2018-08-21

²⁴ Belta, *Belarusian nuclear power plant construction to cost up to \$11bn*, 12 October 2017.

²⁵ Morgan S. Belarus: Atomic power on the EU's doorstep, *Euractiv*, 24 May 2018.

²⁶ Korinny A. (2013). INPRO Assessment of the Planned Nuclear Energy System of Belarus. A report of the International Project on Innovative Nuclear Reactors and Fuel Cycles (INPRO). *IAEA Tecdoc Series* nr. 1716. p. 25 – 27.

²⁷ MyFin (2018). Тарифы на электроэнергию для населения в Беларуси, <https://myfin.by/wiki/term/tarif-na-elektroenergiyu-dlya-naseleniya-v-belarusi> 2018-08-12

²⁸ Belta, *Electricity rates revealed for after Belarusian nuclear power plant goes online*, 11 October 2017.

²⁹ Interview with an independent energy expert, 29 September 2018.

at the nuclear power plant will be competitive inside Belarus only assuming that Minsk will not repay the loan to Russia.

Second, the electricity generated at Ostrovets NPP should also be uncompetitive in the Lithuanian market, because the average electricity market price in the country has been lower than the Ostrovets NPP production prices forecasted in different studies. It was 4.79 euro ct / kWh in 2015,³⁰ 4.04 euro ct/kWh in 2016,³¹ 3.83 ct/kWh in 2017, and 3.613 ct/kWh in 2018.³² Of course, excess electricity generated at the Ostrovets NPP at night should be much cheaper, but this by no means justifies the nuclear power plant's economic feasibility (costs of generation of excess electricity are much higher than sales revenue). Nevertheless, the possibility of the actual sales price of electricity generated at the Ostrovets NPP being much lower than the forecasted price, if Belarus does not have to repay loan to Russia, cannot be excluded.

The latter arguments pose a question – if the economic feasibility of the Ostrovets NPP is questionable and the strategic justification is inconsistent, why is Belarus developing this project altogether? From the current point of view, there is no clear answer to this question, but some assumptions can be made. First, the construction of a new nuclear power plant will benefit the Lukashenko's regime in the short term because of influxes into the Belarusian economy.³³ This assumption would be even more likely if Minsk does not plan to repay the USD 10 billion loan to Russia. Second, the fact that the competitiveness of electricity generated at the Ostrovets NPP may increase with increasing price of natural gas imported from Russia should also be taken into account. Belarus generates much of the country's electricity burning natural gas imported from Russia, the price of which has gradually increased over the past 15 years (from USD 34 per 1000 m³ in 2003 to USD 144 per 1000 m³ in 2017³⁴), however it still remains much lower than the average import price in Lithuania (it was approximately USD 254 per 1000 m³ of natural gas in the first half of 2018³⁵) and prices in other European countries. If the price of natural gas supplied from Russia continues to rise, electricity generation at the Ostrovets NPP will become more competitive.

³⁰ National Commission for Energy Control and Prices, *Commission has set the electricity market price for 2015*, 11 September 2014.

³¹ National Commission for Energy Control and Prices, *Electricity market prices are declining*, 23 May 2016.

³² National Commission for Energy Control and Prices, *Electricity market prices are declining*, 16 October 2017.

³³ Power Technology, *Belarusian Nuclear Power Plant, Ostrovets*, <https://www.power-technology.com/projects/belarusian-nuclear-power-plant-ostrovets/> 2018-08-25

³⁴ Belta, *Belarus ratifies protocol on Russian gas prices*, 23 November 2017.

³⁵ National Commission for Energy Control and Prices (2018). *Natural Gas Market Monitoring Report*. <https://www.regula.lt/Puslapiai/naujienos/2018-metai/2018-rugsejis/pristatome-gd-rinkos-stebesenos-ataskaita.aspx> 24 09 2018

To sum up the discussion on the development of nuclear energy in Belarus, three key aspects should be emphasized. First of all, unfavorable public opinion and a shortage of financial resources encumbered initial plans of Belarus to build a new nuclear power plant in 2005-2007, but back then, the development of nuclear power could still be justified by a strategic interest in strengthening energy independence from Russia. Second, the comprehensive involvement of Russia in the Ostrovets NPP project allowed Minsk to solve the problem of financing the construction, but at the same time this was a move against strategic interests officially declared by Belarus itself, which have remained unchanged up until now.³⁶ Third, since the currently available information indicates that the long-term impact of the Ostrovets NPP on the Belarusian economy will be negative, public perception of nuclear energy is unfavorable, and Russia's participation in the project will further strengthen Belarus's energy dependence, it is difficult to name a rational motive for why Minsk is implementing this project altogether.³⁷

2. Russian Strategic Interests

The question raised in the previous section as to the motives behind the plans of Belarus to develop nuclear energy can be reformulated, looking at the Ostrovets NPP project from Russia's perspective. If Russia still has a significant influence on Belarus's economic and political processes, why does it fund the construction of a nuclear power plant near Ostrovets, even though there is a chance that it will be unable to recover the money lent? Unlike in the case of Belarus, there is a very specific answer to this question. The Ostrovets NPP project not only further strengthens Moscow's influence in Belarus, but it also helps to implement strategic Russia's interests in the Baltic Sea region.

First of all, the Ostrovets NPP helps Russia to fight unfavorable strategic energy projects implemented in the Baltic Sea region, thus preventing the Baltic States from fully integrating into the European Union's energy systems. On the one hand, such prevention manifests through attempts to distort the strategic purpose of the already functioning infrastructure. For example, Lithuanian electricity interconnections with Sweden (NordBalt) and Poland

³⁶ Постановление Совета Министров Республики Беларусь (2015). Концепция энергетической безопасности Республики Беларусь 2015 <http://www.government.by/upload/docs/file5a034ca617dc35eb.PDF> 22 08 2018

³⁷ Bentzen N. (2016). *Safety of Nuclear Installations In Belarus* <https://epthinktank.eu/2016/06/03/safety-of-nuclear-installations-in-belarus-plenary-podcast/> 2018-08-28

(LitPol-Link) are built to ensure electricity exchange between the Baltic States and other EU states. If these interconnections were used to supply electricity produced by the Ostrovets NPP to the European Union, Lithuania would not be able to use them to import electricity from Sweden and Poland, and would consequently have to increase electricity imports from Belarus and Russia (after the decommissioning of Ignalina NPP, imports meet most of electricity needs of Lithuania).³⁸ In such a case, Lithuania's energy dependence on Russia would increase, and investments in these strategic links would benefit Russia and Belarus rather than the Baltic States.

On the other hand, not only Russia seeks to distort the purpose of already implemented projects, but it also fights against strategic projects that are currently being implemented or obstructs the implementation of projects planned before. For example, Russia used the construction of the Ostrovets NPP and the already frozen Baltic NPP as an argument against the Visaginas NPP project.³⁹ Both Russia and Belarus tried to convince the Lithuanian political elite and the public that the construction of the Visaginas NPP was excessive, because the nuclear power plant under construction in Ostrovets would supply Lithuania with allegedly cheaper electricity.⁴⁰ Although Lithuanians eventually started seeing nuclear energy as something negative (which was confirmed not only by numerous studies,⁴¹ but also by results of a consultative referendum held in 2012)⁴², and the question of Visaginas NPP project was removed from Lithuania's political agenda,⁴³ the extent these results were determined by Russia's efforts or frustration felt by Lithuanians due to prolonged disputes between Lithuanian political parties over the construction of a new nuclear power plant is not clear.⁴⁴

The second example is the Baltic synchronization project. Synchronization is one of the main planned Lithuania's responses to the construction of

³⁸ Molis, A. et. al. (2018). op. cit., p. 18, 19.

³⁹ Second Department of Operational Services under the Ministry of National Defence (2014). *Assessing Threats to the National Security*, Vilnius, p. 5, 6.

⁴⁰ State Security Department of the Republic of Lithuania (2015). *Assessing Threats to the National Security*, Vilnius, p. 9, 15, 16.

⁴¹ Augutis J. et. al. (2018). *Lithuanian Energy Security. Annual Review 2016 – 2017*. Kaunas: Vitae Litera, p. 16 – 23.

⁴² Central Electoral Commission (2012). *Elections to the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania and referendum on the construction of a new nuclear power plant in the Republic of Lithuania of 2012*
https://www.vrk.lt/statiniai/puslapiai/2012_seimo_rinkimai/output_lt/referendumas/referendumas.html
2018-09-05

⁴³ The 17th Government formed by the Lithuanian Peasants and Green Union is against the Visaginas NPP project. It not mentioned in the Lithuanian Energy Independence Strategy 2018 either.

⁴⁴ Genys D. and Leonavičius V. (2018). *Sociology of Energy Security. Theory and Practice*. Vilnius: Versus Aureus, p. 164 – 178.

the Ostrovets NPP,⁴⁵ which should limit electricity flows between Belarus and Lithuania in the long term. Russia argues that synchronization will be detrimental to both the Baltic States and Russia itself, because this supposedly will not allow cheap electricity produced in the Ostrovets NPP to enter the Baltic market,⁴⁶ and Russia will have to invest heavily (between EUR 2 and 2.5 billion) in renovating electricity infrastructure.⁴⁷

The development of nuclear power in Belarus also enables Russia to provoke disagreements between Lithuania and other countries in the region. On the one hand, the geographical proximity of the Ostrovets NPP, the frequency of incidents during its construction, attempts to conceal them⁴⁸ and unfriendly political rhetoric⁴⁹ encourage Lithuania to plan a response to the construction of a nuclear power plant near its external border and to expect support from neighboring countries. On the other hand, the Baltic States are tempted by offers to buy supposedly cheap electricity from Belarus, thus forcing to choose between direct support for Lithuania and a more cautious position which is unfavorable to Lithuania.

Since the Ostrovets NPP is built on the Lithuanian border near its capital Vilnius, the military units deployed for the protection of the object at the same time ensure closer Russian-friendly, and sometimes even Russian-trained, troops at the external NATO border, which is handy for Russia. A Belarusian military base has already been set up near the Ostrovets NPP construction site, having deployed there a special internal service battalion with some of the troops serving in it trained in Russia (in Federal Security Service and the International Institute for Nuclear Security)⁵⁰, and anti-aircraft missile brigade,⁵¹ armed with the Russian TOR-M2 air defense system.⁵²

Obviously, significant involvement in the Ostrovets NPP project not only strengthens Russia's influence in Belarus, but also broadens the capabilities of

⁴⁵ It is not to say that Lithuania aims to withdraw from the IPS/UPS only for the sake of blocking Belarusian electricity import. It is a separate strategic priority.

⁴⁶ Bankauskaitė D. (2018). *Kremlin Tests Baltic Electric Solidarity*, <http://infowar.cepa.org/Briefs/Lt/Kremlin-Tests-Baltic-Solidarity> 2018-09-05.

⁴⁷ Gurzu A. (2015). "*Baltics Threaten to Unplug Russian Region*", *Politico*, 11 April 2015

⁴⁸ Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Lithuania (2017). *Belarus Nuclear Power Plant in Ostrovets. Environmental and Safety Concerns* <http://www.am.lt/VI/en/VI/files/0.644483001490604859.pdf> 2018-09-04

⁴⁹ BNS and Irytas.lt, *Two Nuclear Power Plants near Lithuania - a Geopolitical Punch*, 20 April 2016.

⁵⁰ БелАЭС: атом под защитой внутренних войск <http://mvd.gov.by/main.aspx?guid=345933> 2018-09-15

⁵¹ Алесин А. (2018), „В районе Островецкой АЭС создается мощный щит ПВО“ *Naviny*, 24 June 2018

⁵² Naviny (2018) Зенитно-ракетный полк для охраны БелАЭС получил боевое знамя <https://naviny.by/new/20180601/1527855188-zenitno-raketnyy-polk-dlya-ohrany-belaes-poluchil-boevoye-znamya> 2018-09-05.

implementation of its foreign policy in the Baltic Sea region. The Ostrovets NPP helps Russia to fight against deeper regional infrastructure integration in the energy sector, ambitious strategic energy projects in the Baltic States, and to strengthen its military presence on the NATO border. Russia's participation in the Ostrovets NPP project indicates that Lithuanian foreign policy should not only take into account nuclear safety issues or be focused on Belarus only, but should also assess Russia's involvement and the resulting threats.

3. Lithuanian Foreign Policy towards the Ostrovets NPP

Having analyzed the chronology of the Ostrovets NPP project, discussed its strategic, economic and social features and identified the key strategic interests behind Russia's support to Belarus, let us further look into Lithuanian foreign policy. The main focus here is on the implementation of foreign policy, also focusing on policy-making. What was Lithuania's earlier position and how has it changed over time? What factors led to its change? Does the changed Lithuania's position respectively change the position voiced at high-level meetings and its justification? Is the question of Ostrovets NPP becoming more or less frequent at high-level meetings? The search for answers to these questions will allow to form a systematic picture of Lithuanian foreign policy, also objectively discussing its effectiveness.

3.1. Lithuanian Official Position

The first strategic documents defining Lithuania's attitude towards the development of nuclear energy in Belarus were only adopted in mid-2012, however, the essential outlines of Lithuania's official position were shaped at the end of 2008 – beginning of 2009, without making any significant supplements thereto till mid-2016. On 29 December 2008 (in December of that same year, the Belarusian Special Commission recommended building a new nuclear power plant near Ostrovets), during his work visit to Minsk, the then Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vygaudas Ušackas asked Belarus to provide more information on its "plans to build a nuclear power plant on the border with

Lithuania”.⁵³ This position with regards to the construction site of the nuclear power plant was also repeated in Ušackas’s meetings with EU commissioners for energy and external relations in January 2009. Not only the problem of the geographical proximity of the Ostrovets NPP was highlighted, but also nuclear safety of the power plant was questioned in these meetings⁵⁴ asking to include the development of nuclear power in Belarus in the agenda of EU - Belarus relations.⁵⁵ The issue of nuclear safety was also being raised in the International Atomic Energy Agency.⁵⁶

The development of nuclear energy in Lithuania’s neighborhood was included in high-level official documents for the first time on 17 March 2011, six days after the nuclear power plant disaster in Fukushima. That day, the Seimas passed a resolution “expressing its deep concern that the areas affected by nuclear power plants planned to be built by neighboring countries <...> may spread in the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, reaching the capital Vilnius and other cities and towns, also affecting the Neris water basin”⁵⁷, at the same time asking Belarus “to comply with all the provisions of international legislation, to answer all the questions <...> raised by Lithuania <...> in substance, to initiate public debates in Lithuania and to hold bilateral consultations”⁵⁸. Such wording clearly indicates that at the time, Lithuania did not officially object to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, but demanded Belarus to comply with the provisions of international legislation and the principles of good neighborhood.

After the Seimas approved the Lithuanian Energy Independence Strategy and the National Security Strategy on 26 June 2012, the Ostrovets NPP was defined as a challenge to Lithuania’s national security. Even though this made the problem of the Ostrovets NPP relevant in the overall hierarchy of

⁵³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2008). *The Foreign Minister of the Republic of Lithuania and Belarusian officials discussed bilateral economic cooperation and Belarus’s relations with the EU* <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/lietuvos-uzsienio-reikalu-ministras-su-baltarusijospareigunais-aptare-dvisali-ekonomini-bendradarbiavima-ir-baltarusijos-santykius-su-es> 2018-09-01.

⁵⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2009). Lithuania’s energy security issues discussed at the meeting with the EU Commissioner for External Relations. <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/susitikime-su-es-isoriniu-rysiu-komisare-aptarti-lietuvos-energetinio-saugumo-klausimai> 01 09 2018.

⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2009). The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania discussed Lithuania’s energy security with the EU Commissioner for Energy <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/lietuvos-uzsienio-reikalu-ministras-su-es-energetikos-komisaru-aptare-lietuvos-energetinio-saugumo-klausimus> 01 09 2018.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2011). Activity Report 2010, Vilnius, p. 13.

⁵⁷ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Resolution on the Safety of Nuclear Power Plans to be Built in Lithuania and its Neighborhood*, 17 March 2011

⁵⁸ Ibid.

priorities of the Lithuanian foreign policy, it neither laid down a clear purpose for the Lithuanian diplomatic corps nor possible measures for its implementation. The Programme of the 16th Government approved in half a year made no direct or indirect reference to nuclear power plant projects in Belarus and Kaliningrad.⁵⁹ In some time, these nuclear power plants found their place in the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Government Programme in 2013.⁶⁰ Lithuania still considered the Ostrovets NPP unsafe and sought to escalate the relevance of the issue of nuclear safety, including it in the agenda of various multilateral platforms and defending its interest within the framework of international conventions.

It also made efforts to take advantage of the political resonance that followed the disaster at Fukushima Daiichi NPP and the increased importance of nuclear safety in international politics. On the one hand, Lithuania proposed to tighten international nuclear safety standards,⁶¹ also seeking to achieve that additional measures for ensuring nuclear safety were already used directly in the Ostrovets NPP project in Belarus.⁶² On the other hand, Belarus was urged to consult with specialists from the International Atomic Energy Agency and to allow EU experts to conduct the so-called “stress tests” at the Ostrovets NPP to test nuclear power plant’s resistance to unexpected emergencies, such as floods, earthquakes, terrorist attacks, airstrikes and etc.⁶³

It is important to emphasize in this case that till 12 May 2016, when the Seimas adopted a resolution calling for the suspension of the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, Lithuania did not directly object to the project of a nuclear power plant in Belarus. Until that date, Lithuania had officially declared its concerns regarding nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP, its geographical proximity and legality of its construction. Of course, this does not mean that Lithuania did not object indirectly. A concern about nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP and attempts to tighten international nuclear safety regulation can be considered as indirect, informal or non-public forms of resistance. The application of additional nuclear safety standards not only enhances the safety

⁵⁹ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Regarding the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania*, 13 December 2012, No. XII-51.

⁶⁰ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Regarding the Approval of the Priority Measures for the Implementation of the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania*, 13 March 2013, No. 228.

⁶¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2012). *The ninth meeting of Europe and Asia upheld Lithuania’s proposal to hold a seminar on nuclear safety* <http://www.urm.lt/default/lt/naujienos/devintajame-europos-ir-azijos-valstybiu-susitikime-pritarta-lietuovs-siulymui-surengti-seminara-bran-duolines-saugos-tema> 05 09 2019

⁶² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2013). *Activity Report 2012*, Vilnius, p. 11, 12, 13.

⁶³ European Commission (2018). *Stress tests* <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/nuclear-energy/nuclear-safety/stress-tests> 2018-09-15

of nuclear power plants, but also requires additional investments,⁶⁴ and slows down the speed of project implementation. For example, Minsk was of the opinion that the removed nuclear reactor vessel was technically sound, but decided to replace it due to public concern over nuclear safety.⁶⁵ The same can be said about the assessment of the Ostrovets NPP in various committees for the implementation of international conventions, the visits of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency and the European Union. Preparing for them takes both time and resources.⁶⁶ Indirect resistance to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP was openly declared in 2016-2017 for the first time, when a significant number of legal acts on Belarus's nuclear programme were adopted in the period before and after the elections to the Seimas. The resolution of the Seimas mentioned above was the first high-level document explicitly stating the goal to stop the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, at the same time offering some of its implementing measures. The resolution called on the Government to:

take all the necessary diplomatic, legal and technical measures to stop the construction of the unsafe Belarusian nuclear power plant; to express immediately and firmly to Lithuania the will of the Republic of Lithuania to prohibit this unsafe power plant from using Lithuania's electricity system and its reserve capacities, and to deny access to the electricity produced in this nuclear power plant to the Lithuanian electricity system, also prohibiting its sale on the Lithuanian electricity market.⁶⁷

Subsequently, the goal to stop the construction of the Ostrovets NPP and the measures that should assist in reaching this goal were included in the Programme of the 17th Government⁶⁸ and the agreement of parliamentary political parties "On Joint Action in Respect of Unsafe Ostrovets NPP".⁶⁹ In 2017, Lithuania's countermeasures against the construction of the Ostrovets NPP were enshrined in its domestic law. On 20 April of that year, a law was

⁶⁴ Please see: Nuclear Energy Agency and Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2017). *Impacts of the Fukushima Daiichi Accident on Nuclear Development Policies*. Paris: OECD/NEA Publishing. Standard & Poor (2016). *Nuclear safety upgrades post-Fukushima cost \$47 billion* <http://blogs.platts.com/2016/03/29/nuclear-safety-upgrades-post-fukushima/> 2018-09-15.

⁶⁵ Digges C. (2017). "Rosatom replaces reactor vessel that technicians dropped at its Belarusian plant" *Bel-lona*, 2 May 2017

⁶⁶ European Social, Legal and Economic Projects (2012). *Study on instruments to strengthen the EU's external energy policy and coordination between EU Member States in their relations with third countries in the field of energy*, Vilnius: ESTER, p. 27, 28.

⁶⁷ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Regarding the 30th anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear power plant accident, the threat posed to Lithuania by the nuclear power plant under construction in the Ostrovets District of Belarus, proposing the Government to take all necessary steps to reduce the threat*, 12 May 2016.

⁶⁸ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Regarding the Programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania*, 13 December 2016. No. XIII-82.

⁶⁹ *Agreement of Parliamentary Political Parties "On Joint Action in Respect of Unsafe Ostrovets NPP"* 10 February 2017.

adopted defining the concept of unsafe nuclear power plant and the prescriptive procedures for recognizing it to be unsafe, denying electricity from unsafe nuclear power plants operating in third countries access to Lithuania, also prohibiting them from providing power reserve services.⁷⁰ Another law adopted on 15 June 2017 called the Ostrovets NPP: “<...> unsafe nuclear power plant, which poses threat to Lithuania’s national security, the environment and public health”,⁷¹ and this approach has persisted to this day.

Here the Resolution of the Government of 13 September 2017 laying down Lithuania’s actions in relation to the Ostrovets NPP should be discussed in greater detail. The document reveals that Lithuania’s resistance to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP is divided into three main directions. In the first case, Lithuania is trying to reach agreements with Finland, Poland, Estonia and Latvia on uniform principles for electricity from third countries accessing the market, also negotiating with Latvia and Estonia common charges for electricity transmission from third countries. In the second case, Lithuania seeks to improve the electricity system so as to ensure the lowest possible supply of Belarusian electricity to the system, without jeopardizing stable operation of the country’s electricity system. In this context, both the construction of new power lines and the dismantling of the main cross-border power lines connecting Lithuania and Belarus are planned. In the third case, Lithuania associates the synchronization project with attempts to halt the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, with the aim to replace the synchronous zone as soon as possible and to reach a multilateral agreement with Poland, Latvia, Estonia and the European Commission,⁷² which was finally achieved in mid-2018.

In summary, it should be emphasized that Lithuania has objected to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP in principle, but has expressed its objection indirectly, emphasizing nuclear safety issues. Legislation adopted in 2016 - 2017 articulated a more explicit position – an open objection to the Ostrovets NPP project. The following measures were used in attempt to stop the construction of the Ostrovets NPP: restriction of electricity flows between Lithu-

⁷⁰ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Law on Necessary Measures to Protect Against Threats of Unsafe Nuclear Power Plants in Third Countries*, 20 April 2017, No. XIII-306.

⁷¹ Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania. *Law on the Recognition of the Nuclear Power Plant Under Construction in the Republic of Belarus, the Ostrovets District, Unsafe and Posing Threat to National Security, Environment and Public Health of the Republic of Lithuania*, 15 June 2017, No. XIII-451

⁷² Government of the Republic of Lithuania (2017). *Regarding the Approval of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Necessary Measures to Protect Against Unsafe Nuclear Power Plant Under Construction in the Republic of Belarus which Poses Threat to National Security, Environment and Public Health of the Republic of Lithuania*, 13 September 2017, No. 739

ania and Belarus, banning the provision of power reserves to the Ostrovets NPP, agreements with neighboring countries and synchronization of the Baltic power systems with the continental European network. Table 1 summarizes Lithuania's position in official documents.

Table 1. Key documents defining Lithuania's position with regard to the Ostrovets NPP⁷³

Date	Document	Document value
17 03 2011	Regarding the safety of nuclear power plants to be built in Lithuania and its neighborhood	1. Expresses a "serious concern" about the safety of the Ostrovets NPP; 2. Requests to comply with all provisions of the Espoo Convention, the IAEA Convention on Nuclear Safety and other international legislation, to answer any questions raised by Lithuania, to initiate public hearings in Lithuania and to hold bilateral consultations;
26 06 2012	National Energy Independence Strategy	1. Expresses doubts about the safety of nuclear power plants in third countries;
26 06 2012	National Security Strategy	1. Development of nuclear energy in the region without respecting international nuclear safety standards is equated to external risk, danger and threat;
12 05 2016	Resolution of the Seimas on the 30 th anniversary of the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant accident and the threat posed to Lithuania by the Nuclear Power Plant under construction in the Ostrovets District, Belarus, and proposing to the Government to take all necessary steps to reduce the threat	1. Declares the Ostrovets NPP to be a threat to Lithuania and Vilnius; 2. The Government is encouraged to take all steps to halt the construction of the Ostrovets NPP or, in case of a failure to achieve that, to prohibit Belarus from using the reserve capacity of the Lithuanian electricity system and ban the supply of electricity produced by the Ostrovets NPP to Lithuanian system;
13 12 2016	Programme of the 17 th Government	1. Advocates against the construction of the Ostrovets NPP; 2. Provides for the prohibition of import of electricity produced in Ostrovets NPP in case of a failure to stop the project; 3. Associates the resistance to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP with the synchronization of the Baltic power systems with the continental European electricity network;
17 01 2017	National Security Strategy	1. Once again equates the development of unsafe nuclear power near the border of Lithuania to a threat, danger and a risk factor; 2. Indicates that such a threat stems from the actions of Russia and Belarus;
10 02 2017	Agreement between parliamentary political parties on a joint action towards the unsafe Ostrovets NPP	Parliamentary political parties: 1. Express their support for the call to halt the construction of the Ostrovets NPP; 2. Support the position expressed in the Programme of the 17 th Government regarding the Ostrovets NPP; 3. Commit to adopt a new law governing the restrictions on the import of electricity produced in the Ostrovets NPP;

⁷³ Compiled by the author.

13 03 2017	Resolution of the Government approving the action plan for the implementation of the programme of the Government of the Republic of Lithuania	1. Aims to reach an agreement on a common position regarding the Ostrovets NPP; 2. Pursues to ensure decisions regarding the Ostrovets NPP favorable to Lithuania within the framework of international organizations and conventions; 3. Aims to make nuclear safety in the EU's neighborhood a key issue for EU energy and foreign policy and for the EU's priority relations with Belarus;
20 04 2017	Law on Emergency Measures to Protect against Unsafe Nuclear Power Plant Threats from Third Countries	1. Defines the concept of an unsafe nuclear power plant; 2. Prohibits supply of electricity to the Lithuanian market from countries that have unsafe nuclear power plants; 3. Prohibits the use of the Kruonis Pumped Storage Plant from meeting the needs of third countries operating unsafe nuclear power plants for power reserve;
15 06 2017	Law on Recognition of Nuclear Power Plant under Construction in Ostrovets District, the Republic of Belarus, as Unsafe and Posing Threat to National Security, the Environment and Public Health of the Republic of Lithuania	The Ostrovets NPP has been recognized: "<...> unsafe nuclear power plant, which poses threat to the national security, the environment and public health of the Republic of Lithuania."
13 09 2017	Regarding the Approval of the Action Plan for the Implementation of the Necessary Measures to Protect from Unsafe Nuclear Power Plant under Construction in the Republic of Belarus, which Threatens National Security, the Environment and Public Health of the Republic of Lithuania	1. Pursuit of an agreement with Latvia, Estonia, Poland and Finland on common principles for access of electricity from third countries to the market, and an agreement with the Baltic States on additional charges; 2. Aim to prohibit the use of the Kruonis Pumped Storage Plant for meeting the needs of the Ostrovets NPP; 3. Aim to reduce intersystem permeability between Lithuania and Belarus (to dismantle some of the power lines); 4. Emphasizes that after synchronization with CEN, there shall no longer be a possibility for electricity from Belarus to directly access the Lithuanian electricity system;
21 06 2018	National Energy Independence Strategy	1. Unsafe nuclear power plants are considered a threat to Lithuania's national security; 2. Aim to ensure that electricity produced in such power plants cannot be supplied to Lithuania; 3. Pursuit of adoption of decisions in line of Lithuania's national interests regarding Ostrovets NPP at the European Union and other international organizations.

3.2. Implementation of Lithuanian Foreign Policy

The previous chapter revealed that Lithuania's position regarding the Ostrovets NPP has been twofold, even if it shared the same goal. During the period from 29 December 2008, when the construction of a new nuclear power plant in Belarus was first discussed at the bilateral meeting of Lithuanian and Belarusian Ministers of Foreign Affairs, till 11 May 2016, Lithuania expressed its concerns about the nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP, and on 12 May 2016, it started objecting to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP. This allows comparing the peculiarities of the implementation of the Lithuanian foreign policy before the adoption of the resolution condemning the construction of the Ostrovets NPP on 12 May 2016 and after that. In other words, to answer the question: has the changed official position somehow affected the implementation of the Lithuanian foreign policy? The chapter is divided into three sections. The first section examines the frequency of meetings, the second one analysis the distribution of meetings by country and organization, and the third section distinguishes the goals voiced at the meetings most often and arguments to justify them.

3.2.1. The intensity of high-level meetings

Top Lithuanian politicians raised the issue of Belarusian nuclear power at 265 high-level meetings. In the period from 29 December 2008 till 11 May 2016, the issue of nuclear power in Belarus was raised 143 times, and in the period from the adoption of this resolution till 31 August 2018, the Belarusian nuclear energy was discussed 122 times. This means that the Ostrovets NPP has been on the agenda of Lithuanian officials more often since mid-2016, because during the period from 1 January 2009 till 12 May 2016, the issue of the Ostrovets NPP was discussed at the highest political level 19 times per year on average, and during the period from 13 May 2016 till 31 August 2018, it was referred to about 50 times per year on average. Lithuanian politicians raised the issue of the Ostrovets NPP most frequently in 2011 (50 times), in 2016 (56 times) and in 2017 (65 times), and talked about that the least in 2009 (5 times), 2010 (11 times), 2014 and 2015 (6 times).

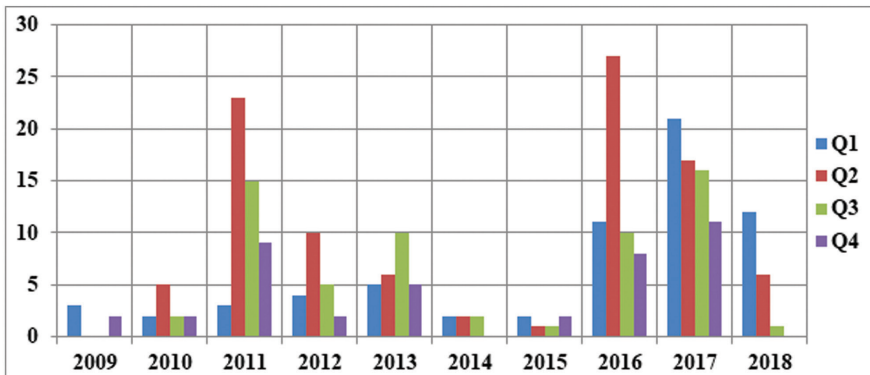


Figure 1. **Mentions of Belarusian nuclear energy at high-level meetings in 2009 – 2018⁷⁴**

The differences observed can be explained by taking into account three fundamental aspects: the chronology of the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, Lithuania's internal political processes and systemic circumstances. In 2008 – 2010, the Lithuanian authorities were already aware of Belarusian plans to build a new nuclear power plant near the country's border, but its implementation was still in the initial phase. In 2011, a significant increase in activity was evoked by the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear disaster on 11 March, because in the first quarter of 2011, passivity typical of previous years could still be observed (nuclear power in Belarus was mentioned in three meetings only), while in the second quarter, Lithuanian politicians actively raised the issue of the Ostrovets NPP at high-level meetings (mentioned it in 23 meetings). Neither the decree signed by Lukashenko on 15 September 2011 finally approving the construction of a new nuclear power plant, nor the start of the construction works of the first nuclear reactor in November 2013 rendered such effect.

Low level of activity on the issue in 2014 – 2015 was mostly related to Russia's military action in Ukraine. Conventional security threats became the most urgent issue in both domestic and foreign policy, which had more or less overshadowed other national security challenges in Lithuania. Meanwhile, the increase in the activity level in 2016 - 2017 is related to the change of Lithuania's position towards the Ostrovets NPP (see Table 1) and the elections to the Seimas held at the end of the year. This is when substantial legislation defining Lithuania's position on the Ostrovets NPP was adopted, and parties that spoke against nuclear power in general won the elections to the Seimas. Informa-

⁷⁴ Compiled by the author. For the sake of better visual representation, a meeting that took place in December 2008 was transferred to the first quarter of 2010.

tion on the first incidents at the Ostrovets NPP site, such as the collapse of structures of one of the buildings or the drop of the reactor vessel, published in 2016 should have also given an impetus for a more active inclusion of the Ostrovets NPP in the agenda of high-level meetings. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania says it is aware of six incidents during the construction of the Ostrovets NPP,⁷⁵ meanwhile the Belarusian Vice Minister for Energy said in 2016 that there were 10 incidents at the construction site that resulted in three deaths.⁷⁶

Ostrovets NPP has not been regularly discussed in high-level meetings over the past ten years, but in 2011, it became a topic of frequent discussion due to the Fukushima Daiichi NPP accident. In 2014 – 2015, the issue practically disappeared from the agenda, although it was the crucial time for raising this issue, because in November 2013, works of construction of the first unit commenced. In 2016 – 2017, the topic of the Ostrovets NPP returned to the agenda of major Lithuanian politicians, but a significant decline in activity was once again observed in the second and third quarters of 2018. Looking at the issue of the Ostrovets NPP in isolation, such chronology of meetings shows that the issue of the Belarusian nuclear power plant could have been raised more frequently at the highest political level. On the other hand, low activity in 2014 – 2015 also reveals limitations in the implementation of foreign policy inherent of small countries, where limited resources are focused on national security challenges that are most relevant at the time.⁷⁷

3.2.2. High-level meetings by destination

Having discussed the activity of Lithuanian foreign policy, the next stage reveals the main directions of activities, comparing their changes before and after the resolution of the Seimas of 12 May 2016. Throughout the entire period under analysis, the issue of the Ostrovets NPP has been mainly raised in meetings with representatives of the US (25 times), Poland (13 times), Germany (11 times), Belarus (10 times), Estonia (10 times), Latvia (8 times) and

⁷⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania (2018). *Fundamental Problems of the Ostrovets Nuclear Power Plant under Construction in Belarus* <http://urm.lt/default/en/news/fundamental-problems-of-the-astrovets-nuclear-power-plant-under-construction-in-belarus-25-06-2018>.

⁷⁶ Jokūbaitis M. (2016). "Construction of a Nuclear Power Plant in Ostrovets: 10 incidents, 3 deaths, alcohol tests and football rules" *15min*, <https://www.15min.lt/verslas/naujiena/energetika/atomines-statybos-astrove-10-incidentu-3-zuve-alkotesteriai-ir-futbolo-taisykles-664-684453> 2018-09-05

⁷⁷ Urbelis V. (2013). "Implication of Smart Defense Initiative for Small Members of NATO", *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 11, p. 26, 27.

Sweden (7 times) at a bilateral level. Even though the key directions of activities of Lithuania's top politicians at the bilateral level are clear, the Ostrovets NPP was discussed at least once with representatives of many other countries, such as Austria, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Israel, Portugal, Slovakia, Croatia, Romania, Russia, France, Monaco, Macedonia, United Kingdom, Japan, Kazakhstan, Cyprus, Hungary and Ukraine.

At the multinational level, the main focus was on the European Union, the United Nations and the International Atomic Energy Agency. Lithuanian politicians have raised the issue of Ostrovets NPP 77 times in the European Union, including 36 times during Council meetings and 41 times in meetings with important EU officials, usually Commissioners. The issue of the Ostrovets NPP was raised 11 times at the International Atomic Energy Agency and six at the UN. Similarly, the issue of the Ostrovets NPP was raised quite frequently in multilateral platforms at the Baltic Sea Region level: the Baltic Council, the Council of the Baltic Sea States, the Nordic – Baltic Eight cooperation format (NB8) and the Nordic Council. The issue of nuclear safety in Belarus was also raised several times in non-traditional multinational platforms, such as the Euro-Asia Summit, the Nuclear Security Summit and the World Economic Forum.

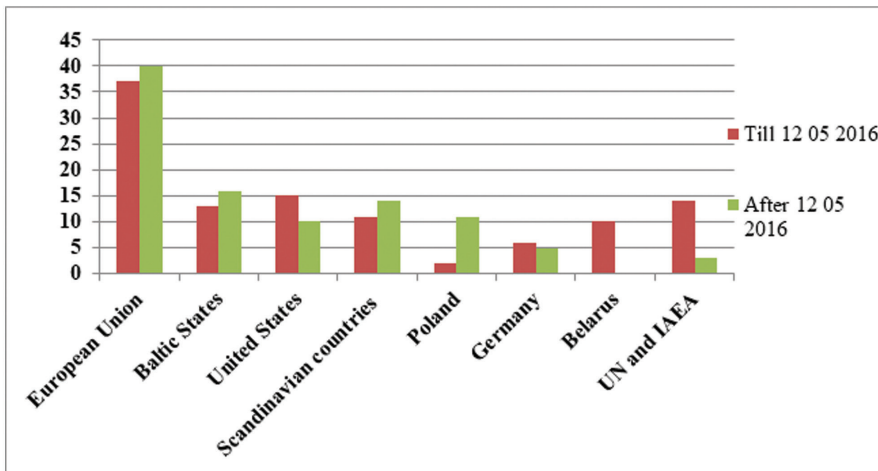


Figure 2. Most frequent high-level meetings having addressed nuclear energy in Belarus, by country and organization in 2009 – 2018⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Compiled by the author.

Such a distribution of meetings is adequate for the goals which Lithuania set in relation to the Ostrovets NPP. Various international measures can be used to raise nuclear safety issues in Belarus. These are the so-called “stress tests” in the European Union. Key instruments at the International Atomic Energy Agency include expert visits to nuclear power plants of its member countries and instruments at the United Nations are reviews of compliance with ratified international conventions, such as the ones signed in Espoo and Aarhus. When raising the issue of nuclear safety, it is also important to make the Belarusian nuclear project known internationally to the widest possible audience, thus the issue of Ostrovets NPP can be raised both in non-traditional multinational platforms and in various bilateral meetings. In order to limit the access of Belarusian electricity to the territory of Lithuania, reaching agreements with Baltic Sea Region countries in particular is necessary, which explains Lithuania’s activity in the region. In the case of power system synchronization (synchronization is a means of restricting electricity flow between Lithuania and Belarus), it is essential to reach an agreement with Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the European Commission.

When comparing the level of activity of Lithuanian foreign policy by direction prior to the redefinition of its tasks in May 2016 and after that, several aspects should be taken into consideration. At the highest political level, activity in the European Union, the Baltic States and the Nordic countries has become more intense. The number of meetings with Poland increased the most. In view of the differences in the duration of the comparative periods, meetings with the US and Germany also became more frequent. Correspondingly, the number of meetings at the UN and the IAEA level has decreased, and since 2016, the construction of the Ostrovets NPP has never been discussed at the highest political level with Belarusian representatives until the very end of the analysis period. In the case of the European Union, the Baltic States, the Nordic countries, the United States and Germany, the increased activity is mainly attributable to increased frequency of inclusion of the Ostrovets NPP in the agenda of high-level meetings since 2016 in general. On the one hand, a greater number of meetings with Poland reflects the intensified bilateral cooperation after the annexation of Crimea, and, on the other hand, it relates to Lithuania’s attempts to negotiate with Poland on the synchronization of the power system. A decline in the number of meetings with Belarus is best explained by changes in Lithuania’s official position - a direct objection

to the construction of strategic infrastructure in its territory. Finally, the decline in the number of meetings at the IAEA and UN levels is largely due to changed frequency of high-level multinational meetings rather than to changes in Lithuanian foreign policy.

3.2.3. Goals and arguments

Attempts to raise the issue of nuclear safety in Belarus in various ways have almost always been made at high-level meetings (216 repetitions), offering specific instruments to achieve this. Usually, the main aim was to use instruments at the European Union, International Atomic Energy Agency and United Nations level (126 repetitions), which can be divided into two subcategories. The first subcategory includes instruments for reviewing compliance with international treaties such as the Espoo and the Aarhus Conventions, and nuclear safety standards (EU stress tests and IAEA missions) (79 repetitions). The second is the linking of the Ostrovets NPP to the political processes in the European Union. On the one hand, the initiative on the external dimension of the common energy policy, which would set uniform environmental and safety standards for energy produced in the European Union and imported thereto, was supported (27 repetitions). On the other hand, attempts were made to include the issue of unsafe nuclear power plants in the Energy Union concept (20 repetitions). The meetings also raised the issue of restricting imports of electricity from Belarus (29 repetitions) and set out the aim of stopping the construction of the Ostrovets NPP (8 repetitions).

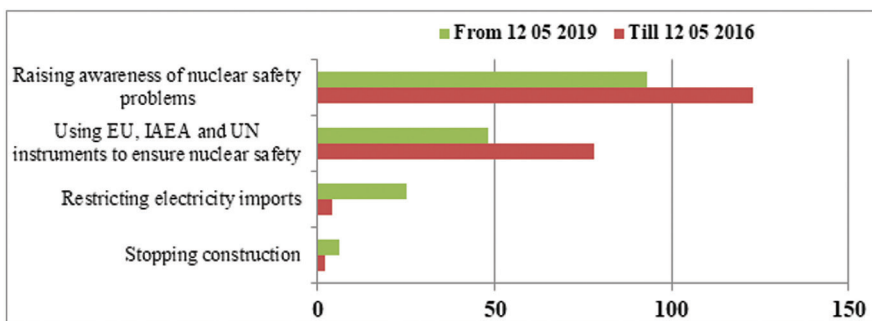


Figure 3. Lithuania's most frequently voiced goals regarding the Ostrovets NPP at high-level meetings in 2009 – 2018⁷⁹

⁷⁹ Compiled by the author.

When it comes to nuclear safety, the position voiced by Lithuanian politicians has remained nearly the same, because the issue of nuclear safety in Belarus was brought up both before the Resolution of 12 May 2016 and after it, offering various instruments to ensure nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP. The main difference arises when analyzing the instruments directed against the construction of the Ostrovets NPP. Till May 2016, Lithuania's representatives offered restricting electricity imports from the Ostrovets NPP only four times and they proposed suspending its construction twice at the highest political level. Following the adoption of the said Resolution, restricting the import of Belarusian electricity was offered at the highest political level 25 times, calling for halting the construction of a nuclear power six times.

The reasoning behind Lithuania's position voiced at high-level meetings can be divided into three main types. The first type of reasoning is mainly related to geographical context, emphasizing that an unsafe nuclear facility was being built on the external border of the European Union rather than on the border of Lithuania only (78 repetitions). It was also emphasized that the nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP poses a threat not only to Lithuania, but also to the Baltic Sea region or Eastern and Central Europe (18 repetitions). The second type of reasoning consists of arguments that justify nuclear safety-related issues in Belarus. It emphasizes that Belarus violates the Espoo and the Aarhus Convention (62 repetitions), implements the Ostrovets NPP project non-transparently (24 repetitions), referring to the consequences of the Fukushima and Chernobyl disasters (15 repetitions) and the incidents at the Ostrovets NPP construction site (10 repetitions). The third type of reasoning is the linking of the Ostrovets NPP project to Russia's strategic interests and its potential for use in the country's foreign policy (17 repetitions). At least once, Lithuania's position was justified by concerns over excessively fast development of the project, water safety, interference with changing the synchronous zone and threats at NATO's external border.

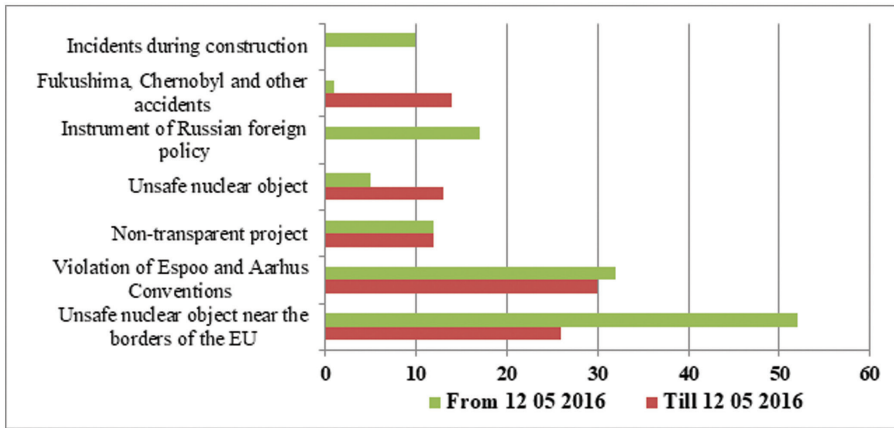


Figure 4. Reasoning behind Lithuania's position in respect to the Ostrovets NPP most frequently expressed at high-level meetings in 2009 – 2018⁸⁰

The comparison of the periods before May 2016 and after this date revealed a few differences only. Before adopting the resolution of the Seimas on the construction of a nuclear power plant in Belarus in 2016, the Ostrovets NPP was not identified as Russian foreign policy instrument, and there was no mention of any incidents at the construction site. Including Russia in the reasoning is linked to a change in Lithuania's position when no accidents were referred to, because information on the first incident at the Ostrovets NPP was published on 4 May 2016. Before the first incident, the Fukushima and Chernobyl catastrophes were emphasized, but then the reasoning changed, because incidents having happened at the power plant itself better illustrate nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP.

3.3. Circumstances Affecting the Change in Lithuania's Position

After discussing Lithuanian foreign policy-making, its implementation and changes, the circumstances that have affected Lithuania's position at the national, bilateral and multinational level are discussed further. Three main factors affecting the formation of Lithuania's position can be seen at the national level. The first is the parallel development of the Visaginas NPP project, which entered the state of political uncertainty after the consultative re-

⁸⁰ Compiled by the author.

ferendum of 2012 and remained there till the Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union standing against nuclear energy won parliamentary elections in 2016. A direct objection to the Ostrovets NPP project at the time when Lithuania still had the idea of constructing the Visaginas NPP would simply have had adverse consequences for the implementation of Lithuanian foreign policy. Even when declaring its concern about the nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP, Lithuania has already been accused of trying to combat competition for the Visaginas NPP that way. Had it declared its pursuit to halt the construction of the Ostrovets NPP earlier, Lithuania would find it hard to justify its concerns about nuclear safety. After refusing the Visaginas NPP project, this risk has become no longer relevant, and its position could change.

The second circumstance at the national level is Lithuanian elections. The Lithuanian Peasants and Greens Union having won the elections in 2016 and formed the ruling coalition, spoke against nuclear energy in general, whether it would be developed in Lithuania or abroad. Meanwhile, the Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats, which ranked second and became the leader of the opposition, actively objected to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP in particular, and this was an important part of their election campaign. Thus, the two political parties that won the most seats in the Seimas had the same attitude towards the Ostrovets NPP, which facilitated the transition from nuclear safety concerns to halting the Ostrovets NPP project. The last circumstance is the economic crisis in Lithuania, which took the attention of the most important Lithuanian politicians to the problems of domestic politics in 2008 – 2010.

At the level of Belarus-Lithuania bilateral relations, economic interdependence was the most important factor. Despite the increasing political confrontation over the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, neither Lithuanian direct investment in Belarus (from EUR 62 million in 2013 to EUR 94.5 million in 2017) nor Belarusian cargo handling at the port of Klaipeda (from 8.9 million tons in 2013 to 15 million tons in 2017) has stopped increasing.⁸¹ This may have contributed to cautious Lithuania's position till mid-2016, because the statements of Lithuania's representatives after bilateral meetings with Belarusian politicians were much more modest than in meetings with representatives of other countries (especially the USA). There could be Belarusian countermeasures, but they would also have negative consequences on Minsk, because stevedoring through Latvian or Russian ports would not be economically beneficial for Belarus.⁸²

⁸¹ Astapenia R. (2018). *op. cit.*, p. 9 – 12.

⁸² Belsat, Литва или Латвия: кого шантажирует Лукашенко? 23 September 2018.

Looking at the international context, changes in Lithuania's position can be seen in several aspects at the least. Russian military intervention in Ukraine can be one of the possible explanations for why Lithuania has not previously declared its opposition to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP in public. The analysis of high-level meetings showed that upon the start of military actions between Ukraine and Russia, the issue of the Ostrovets NPP practically disappeared from Lithuania's political agenda despite the fact that works of construction of the first unit started in November 2013. In 2014 – 2015, the main focus was on Lithuania's defense. This is when the country focused on the acquisition of new combat weaponry, discussed the reinstatement of the service in Lithuanian armed forces, also discussing the issue of financing the national defense. Returning to the issue of the Ostrovets NPP was possible after making having the major decisions in the field of national defense. Another possible explanation relates to Russia's economic capabilities. In 2013, Russia froze the construction of Nemunas NPP in Kaliningrad, and later Russian economy was undermined by military intervention in Ukraine, the fall in oil prices and, to some extent, by the sanctions imposed by the European Union and the US. Thus, in the initial phase of construction of the Ostrovets NPP, it was still possible to believe that the Ostrovets NPP project could be postponed due to a shortage of financial resources.

4. Results of the Lithuanian Foreign Policy

A comprehensive assessment of the effectiveness of Lithuanian foreign policy will only be possible in the future, when the outcomes of the Ostrovets NPP project become clear (the commissioning of the power plant has been postponed periodically) and answers to many other important questions are known, e.g. will the Ostrovets NPP engage in continuous commercial activities? If so, what will the cost of electricity generated in it be and what will be its sales price? If electricity is sold at a loss, who and how will compensate for it? What will be the overall consequences of the operation of the Ostrovets NPP on the Belarusian economy, the stability of the political regime and its bilateral relations with Russia? For example, if Belarus does not repay the loan to Russia, will Minsk be able to retain ownership of the Ostrovets NPP, or will Rosatom take over the nuclear power plant, as was the case in Transgaz Belarus? How will the commercial activities of the Ostrovets NPP affect cross-border relations in the Baltic Sea region and how will it affect Lithuania? What will be the efficiency of Lithuanian measures to prevent the supply of electricity pro-

duced in the Ostrovets NPP to the country? These questions identify the major uncertainties that need to be addressed in the near future.

Nevertheless, some of the achievements and failures of the Lithuanian foreign policy can already be named. One of the most important achievements of Lithuania is awareness-raising of nuclear safety problems of the Ostrovets NPP, the success of which can be substantiated by various international documents and statements made by important politicians. At the end of 2017, Jean-Claude Juncker, the President of the European Commission, expressed the approach that nuclear safety in the Ostrovets NPP is not only a matter important to Lithuania, but also to the European Union as a whole,⁸³ and on 19 April 2018, the European Parliament adopted a resolution encouraging the development of the European Union - Belarus relations in respect of the Ostrovets nuclear safety.⁸⁴ Concerns about nuclear safety in the Ostrovets NPP were also enshrined in the joint statements of the Ministers of the Baltic States⁸⁵ and the European Council.⁸⁶ Both the findings of the Espoo and Aarhus Convention Implementation Committees, which were unfavorable to Belarus, and incidents at the nuclear power plant construction site, which were first reported by the media and local activists rather than by competent Belarussian authorities shaped controversy over nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP. The issue of nuclear safety was also highlighted by systemic circumstances – an accident at the Fukushima Daiichi NPP brought attention to the issue of nuclear safety in international politics.

Nuclear safety problems in Belarus actively voiced by Lithuania (see Figures 3 and 4) have also rendered other tangible results. Belarus eventually agreed to invite experts from both the International Atomic Energy Agency and the European Union and allowed them to carry out an independent assessment of the nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP. Minsk's attempts to remedy the project's negative reputation were not confined to the admission of international experts only, but manifested in other areas as well. For example, in 2016, a decision was made to replace the reactor vessel dropped at the beginning of the summer by a new one not because Rosatom considered its technical condition to be no longer suitable for operation, but because the Russian

⁸³ Pael M. (2017). "Lithuania given EU backing in nuclear plant dispute with Belarus" *Financial Times*, 24 November 2017.

⁸⁴ European Parliament (2018). *European Parliament resolution of 19 April 2018 on Belarus* http://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/142472/EP_resolution_BY_April2018.pdf 2018-09-04.

⁸⁵ Prime Ministers' Council of the Baltic Council of Ministers (2017). *Joint Statement* http://urm.lt/uploads/default/documents/uzienio_politika/Baltijos_taryba/Baltic_PM_Joint_Statement_18_12_2017.pdf

⁸⁶ Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (2018). *Resolution 2241: Nuclear safety and security in Europe*

state-owned company sought to: “protect Belarusian colleagues against any unfounded allegations by third parties <...> to soothe any public concern”.⁸⁷ Therefore, such a decision is likely to not have been made, if nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP was not questioned both internationally and by Belarus itself. According to Antony Froggatt and Mycle Schneider, the decision to replace the damaged nuclear power plant vessel by a new one delayed the construction of the Ostrovets NPP for eight months at the least,⁸⁸ which can be considered a significant achievement for Lithuania. It is important to note that the delay could have been significantly longer if a nuclear reactor vessel had to be manufactured, but Rosatom decided to use the vessel, which was originally intended for the Baltic NPP.

On the other hand, the last visits of experts delegated by the IAEA and the European Union to Belarus will complicate further implementation of Lithuanian foreign policy. Until 2017, Belarus did not have strong arguments to justify nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP, because the validity of the statements made by its diplomats was questioned both due to various violations of international conventions and the frequency of incidents at the nuclear power plant construction site. These are the facts that Belarus could not contest in any way giving arguments about alleged Lithuania’s politicking and supposedly unreasonably raised nuclear safety concerns. International convention implementation committees identified violations of conventions, while incidents occurred as a result of contractor negligence. However, this does not mean that Belarus cannot diminish the significance of these arguments by other means. Conclusions of the visit of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency of 16 – 20 January 2017 allowed Belarus stating that the most important international organization in the field of nuclear energy had a positive opinion of nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP, even though there were incidents in the past and despite the fact that the project did not meet the requirements of the Espoo and the Aarhus Convention. Respectively, Belarus can make similar statements after the visit of the experts delegated by the European Union on 12 – 16 March 2018, which was followed by press releases from the European Commission and the European Nuclear Safety Regulator Group in favor of Belarus.

The visit of experts from the International Atomic Energy Agency was unfavorable to Lithuania for three reasons. First, by inviting international experts, Belarus presented itself as a good and responsible neighbor, respon-

⁸⁷ Digges C. (2017) op. cit.

⁸⁸ Frogant, A. Schneider M. (2018). Op. Cit., p. 18, 155.

ding (at least formally) to Lithuania's concerns about the safety of the nuclear power plant near its border (the invitation of IAEA SEED mission was one of Lithuania's fundamental requirements for Belarus).⁸⁹ Second, both the statements made by senior IAEA officials after the visit and the experts' findings on the nuclear safety of the Ostrovets NPP were highly positive. Greg Rzentkowski, Director of Nuclear Safety Department, said that Belarus had taken the necessary steps to protect itself from the worst possible external incident.⁹⁰ Meanwhile, the assessment findings indicated that Belarus had systematically and comprehensively assessed the external risks and had taken additional safety measures in light of the lessons learned from the Fukushima disaster.⁹¹ Thirdly, Belarus can use such conclusions of the most important international nuclear regulatory authority not only to justify nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP, but also to discredit Lithuanian foreign policy, which has emphasized nuclear safety issues very actively (see Figures 2 and 3).

Although the results of the European Union "stress tests" are less positive when it comes to Minsk, they are still more favorable to Belarus than Lithuania, because the European Commission and the European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group published reports where the Ostrovets NPP received an "overall positive" evaluation⁹², praising Belarus for being a good and responsible neighbor.⁹³ Such statements open up exactly the same opportunities for Belarusian diplomats as the IAEA experts' findings. On the one hand, they allow Belarus to justify nuclear safety in the Ostrovets NPP, which was questioned by past incidents and attempts to conceal them, and on the other hand, they provide grounds for challenging the validity of Lithuania's criticism. Still, the findings of the stress tests are not exclusively favorable to Belarus, as they contain a wide range of recommendations (in particular on threats posed by seismic activity) to improve nuclear safety in the Ostrovets NPP and requests for additional information. As the European Commission considers coopera-

⁸⁹ Member states define the mandate of IAEA's missions. Belarus invited IAEA to conduct a SEED mission utilizing only two out of six available modules. Please see: International Atomic Energy Agency (2018). *Site and External Events Design Review Service (SEED)* <https://www.iaea.org/services/review-missions/site-and-external-events-design-review-service-seed> 2018-09-12; International Atomic Energy Agency (2017). *Safety of the Belarusian NPP against Site Specific External Hazards*. Minsk: Site and External Events Design Review Service (SEED).

⁹⁰ International Atomic Energy Agency (2017). *IAEA Mission Concludes Site and External Events Design (SEED) Review in Belarus* <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/pressreleases/iaea-mission-concludes-site-and-external-events-design-seed-review-in-belarus> 2018-09-08.

⁹¹ *Safety of the Belarusian NPP against Site Specific External Hazards* (2017). op. cit., p.10.

⁹² European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (2018). *Belarus Stress Tests Peer Review Executive summary*, p. 4.

⁹³ European Commission (2018). *Comprehensive risk and safety assessments of the Belarus nuclear power plant completed* http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4347_en.htm 2018-09-20.

tion in the nuclear safety field to be a relevant issue in EU-Belarus relations,⁹⁴ it expects Belarus to develop a plan specifically identifying methods for resolving the shortcomings found during “stress tests” and explanations to the uncertainties found, and to submit it for re-assessment.⁹⁵

Of course, this situation could change if ENSREG gives a negative evaluation of the Belarus National Action Plan or if Belarus does not submit it for further assessment altogether. Recent developments suggest that this particular scenario is possible. Shortly after the assessment of the resistance of the Ostrovets NPP, on 10 July 2018, Director of Gosatomnadzor Olga Lugovskaya said that “<...> we will need three months to draft an action plan”⁹⁶ – however, the document was only prepared on 16 August 2019.⁹⁷ Lithuania is of the opinion that the Belarusian action plan on the safety of the Ostrovets NPP is inadequate as it provides for implementation of the ENSREG recommendations after the commissioning of the nuclear power plant, i.e. in 2021 – 2024, rather than doing that before the launch. This is why on 16 September 2019, Lithuania asked the European Commission to urge Belarus not to commission the Ostrovets NPP until the ENSREG recommendations have been implemented and the ENSREG has assessed the Belarusian National Action Plan.⁹⁸

It is also important to note that Belarus’s delay to implement these recommendations allow requesting that provisions concerning the Ostrovets NPP are included in the EU-Belarus partnership priorities. In May 2019, the Belarusian Minister of Foreign Affairs Vladimir Makei accused Lithuania of being the only country in the European Union to block the signing of the priorities agreement,⁹⁹ with discussions on further Lithuania’s position on the partnership agreement being rather controversial.¹⁰⁰ It seems that Lithuania is still looking for ways to reconcile the spirit of the Eastern partnership with resistance to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP.

Limiting Belarusian electricity access to European Union markets is a relatively new priority in Lithuanian foreign policy (see Figure 3), but at le-

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ European Nuclear Safety Regulators Group (2018). *EU Peer Review Report of the Belarus Stress Tests*, p. 72.

⁹⁶ *Belarus to prepare national action plan based on peer review of nuclear power plant stress tests*, 10 July 2018

⁹⁷ *Belarus open to contacts with European Commission on nuclear power plant stress tests action plan*, 17 September 2019

⁹⁸ Council of the European Union (2019). *Implementation of nuclear safety recommendations outlined in the EU peer review report of the Belarus NPP ‘stress tests’*, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12060-2019-INIT/en/pdf> 2019-10-05.

⁹⁹ Istrate, D. (2019). “Belarus points finger at Lithuania for EU failure”, *Emerging Europe*, 16 May 2019

¹⁰⁰ Rimaitė, V. (2019). “Ostrovets fuels political passions: L. Linkevičius and the Conservatives Continue Raging” *Lietuvos rytas*, 2 October 2019

ast some of the outcomes of Lithuanian foreign policy can be mentioned. The most important of these is the agreement between Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Poland and the European Commission on the Baltic States' accession to the Continental Europe synchronous area through Poland by 2025.¹⁰¹ The change of the synchronous area will significantly reduce electricity exchange opportunities with Russia and Belarus when the specific cross-system throughput will depend on the number of back-to-back converters the countries will decide to construct.

It should be noted here that limiting the access of Belarusian electricity to Lithuania till the synchronization planned in 2025 can only be successful if agreements with Lithuania's neighbors are reached. The Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs Edgaras Rinkevičius said at the end of July 2017 that Latvia does not plan introducing legislation that imposes restrictions on imports of electricity produced in Belarus.¹⁰² In August 2019, the Latvian government decided to change the legal framework that would allow electricity to be traded with Russia, which would in turn allow it to buy electricity from Belarus through the connections in the BRELL ring.¹⁰³ Rinkevičius repeated at the Warsaw Security Forum in October that he would not support Lithuania's attempts to restrict access to electricity produced by the Ostrovets NPP: "If we see that we are denied access to fairly cheap electricity for political reasons for the most part, we will look for opportunities elsewhere. I believe the Latvians will not understand another increase in tariffs. We already are arguing about the price that we are actually paying for electricity."¹⁰⁴ Estonia does not support Lithuania's position either, saying that blocking electricity produced by the Ostrovets NPP is technologically impossible.¹⁰⁵ Poland is the only one supporting Lithuania when it comes to limiting electricity access.

The intensifying cooperation between Belarus and Latvia in the field of transport shows that not only does Latvia show no support for Lithuania's position regarding the Ostrovets NPP, but it also seeks to take over Belarusian transit cargoes from the port of Klaipėda.¹⁰⁶ In 2017, Latvian Railways opened

¹⁰¹ Biznes Alert, *The Baltic states call for EU funding for synchronization*, 20 February 2018

¹⁰² Augutis J. et. al. (2018). *Lithuanian Energy Security. Annual Review 2016 – 2017*. Vilnius: Versus aureus. P.12.

¹⁰³ Navakas, N. "Latvians will import Russian electricity after the launch of the Ostrovets NPP", *Verslo Žinios*, 24 August 2019.

¹⁰⁴ LRT, "Head of the Foreign Ministry of Latvia Regarding the Refusal to Purchase Electricity from Ostrovets: Latvians will not Understand Increased Electricity Tariffs", 3 October 2019.

¹⁰⁵ Rutkauskaitė, R. "Estonia does not Rule Out the Possibility of it Using Electricity Produced in the Belarusian NPP" *Verslo Žinios*, 16 August 2019.

¹⁰⁶ The Baltic Course. *Latvian-Belarus cooperation council agree to develop cooperation in transport, logistics, transborder cooperation and IT*, 7 September 2018.

its representative office in Minsk, which aims to: “actively promote cooperation with Belarus and China in trying to attract new cargo from China to the Latvian transit corridor”.¹⁰⁷ In other words, Latvia seeks to take advantage of favorable circumstances – Belarus-Lithuanian dispute over the Ostrovets NPP – and to obtain economic benefits from it, instead of solidarity by supporting Lithuania’s position.

Summarizing the discussion on the outcomes of Lithuanian foreign policy in the field of nuclear safety and restrictions on electricity supply, three main aspects can be emphasized. First, Lithuania successfully escalated the issue of nuclear safety, which eventually made Belarus to partially comply with Lithuania’s request to invite international experts and restricted the freedom of action of project contractors (replacement of the nuclear reactor vessel), which slowed down the construction of the Ostrovets NPP. Second, the latest findings of international experts encumbered a possibility for Lithuania to substantiate nuclear safety problems in Belarus. This is especially true of the visit of IAEA experts in 2017. Although the so-called IAEA SEED mission was not full-scale after Belarus confined its mandate, Minsk was still able to secure significant positive publicity coming from the authoritative international organization. Third, synchronization of the Baltic electricity systems with the Continental Europe network will limit the access of Belarusian electricity to Lithuania in the long run. In the short term, efforts will be made to achieve this on the basis of national action and in consultation with Latvia and Estonia, but the negotiations have been unsuccessful so far - Estonia has avoided assuming additional commitments, while Latvia has acted in its own national interests trying to take over Belarusian cargo transit from Lithuania.

Conclusions

As revealed in the first sections of the article, the grounds for active Lithuanian foreign policy have been formed not only by geographical proximity of the Ostrovets NPP, incidents at its construction site, systematic attempts to disguise them, but also by Russia’s comprehensive involvement and the resulting political challenges. Involvement in the Ostrovets NPP project has enabled Russia to further strengthen its influence on Belarus (establishing a monopoly in the new energy sector), at the same time helping to implement

¹⁰⁷ Ministry of Transport of the Republic of Latvia. *Transit* <http://www.sam.gov.lv/sm/content/?lng=en&cat=84> 2019-11-05.

national interests in the Baltic Sea region, and to combat deeper regional integration in the energy sector in particular.

Official Lithuania's position on these challenges was twofold, but the goal behind the different positions was equally ambitious - to oppose the implementation of the Ostrovets NPP project. Since the end of 2008 till mid-2016, Lithuania focused exclusively on the nuclear safety and legal aspects of the Ostrovets NPP, therefore, political issues of the nuclear power plant, especially Russia's strategic interests behind its support for the construction, were not emphasized during high-level meetings. On the one hand, the issue of nuclear safety in Belarus was actively raised at the time, also seeking to take advantage of various international instruments on nuclear safety, including the review of compliance with UN conventions, and IAEA and EU expert missions. As the enhancement of nuclear safety is both time-consuming and requires significant financial resources, such Lithuanian actions can be considered as indirect forms of resistance against the implementation of the Ostrovets NPP project. In its Resolution adopted on 12 May 2016, the Seimas urged to halt the construction of the Ostrovets NPP in Belarus and to limit the supply of Belarusian electricity to the territory of Lithuania, which later became regulated by laws, providing therefor in the Programme of the 17th Government and the agreement of parliamentary political parties signed in February 2017. Although Lithuania's official position changed fundamentally, it has only changed the implementation of Lithuanian foreign policy in part, leaving concerns about nuclear safety expressed as Lithuania's position at high-level meetings and continuing to actively emphasize the importance of international instruments to ensure nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP.

However, there also were some changes. Following the reformulation of Lithuania's position, the representation of the Ostrovets NPP at the highest political level became more active, and, alongside awareness-raising of safety problems, an additional line of activity emerged in Lithuanian foreign policy – limiting access of electricity generated in unsafe nuclear power plants to European Union markets. It should be noted that the goal of stopping the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, which has often been emphasized at the national level, has practically been absent at the highest political level (the aim to stop the Ostrovets NPP was mentioned in a mere six of the 122 high-level meetings held after 12 May 2016), which shows that such the aim was more of a pre-election outcome of domestic policy, while actual steps in Lithuanian foreign policy in the areas of nuclear safety (93 mentions) and limitation of electricity supply (25 mentions, mostly in meetings with the Baltic States and

the EU) were taken from mid-2016. Simply put, even after having publicly announced its opposition to the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, Lithuanian representatives focused on the implementation of other goals at high-level meetings.

Of course, such assessment of the situation can be questioned, arguing that limiting electricity flows at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border is a means of destroying the economic feasibility of the Ostrovets NPP, which will help to suspend the project in the long run. However, the economic feasibility of the Belarusian nuclear power plant discussed in the first part of the article remains questionable regardless of whether markets for Belarusian electricity exports would be open or closed. The aim of limiting electricity flows on the Lithuanian-Belarusian border at the least, and, ideally, also between Belarus and other EU countries, is a more defensive move that responds to Russia's strategic interests in the Baltic Sea region (see part two) rather than an attempt to ruin the Ostrovets NPP project as such a measure essentially cannot do. Limiting electricity flows would help Lithuania to hedge against possible dumping of electricity generated at the Ostrovets NPP, which would have at least two negative consequences. First, it would limit the development of local electricity generation sources in Lithuania. Second, it would threaten electricity imports from Scandinavia and Poland. The likelihood of the use of the electricity dumping strategy would be particularly high if the Ostrovets NPP became the property of Russian state-owned companies in the future due to insolvency of Belarus. Another possible scenario is the write-off of a loan to Belarus. In this case, the electricity generated by the Ostrovets NPP would become extremely cheap, since covering investments constitutes the major share of costs of electricity generation in nuclear power plants.

Thus, Lithuania tried to oppose the Ostrovets NPP project in two major ways: by raising the issue of nuclear safety and limiting the access of Belarusian electricity to the markets of the European Union. The analysis of high-level meetings revealed that the arguments and directions chosen by Lithuanian representatives were appropriate to the nature of such measures. There were no attempts to try to substantiate the Ostrovets NPP nuclear safety issue using political arguments, mostly emphasizing violations of international law, incidents on the construction site and nuclear precedents in Chernobyl and Fukushima. Political arguments were used only when it was necessary to substantiate Lithuania's aspiration to limit the access of Belarusian electricity to the countries of the European Union. At the multinational level, the issue of the Ostrovets NPP was raised most frequently in the European Union, the International Ato-

mic Energy Agency and the United Nations, and at the bilateral level – in meetings with representatives from the US, Germany, Poland, Belarus, the Baltic States and Nordic countries.

However, the study also showed that the representation of Lithuanian national interests at the highest political level was inconsistent - it was affected by both national and systemic processes. In 2009 – 2010, the issue of the Ostrovets NPP was on the agenda of several high-level meetings, although the construction of the Ostrovets NPP supporting infrastructure had already started in Belarus at that time. In 2011, the issue of the Ostrovets already was on the agenda of many meetings due to the Fukushima disaster, but in 2012 and 2013, discussions relating to the issue were much more passive at the highest political level. In 2014 – 2015, the Ostrovets NPP was barely discussed at the highest political level due to Russian military intervention in Ukraine, but pre-election positions of the political parties and incidents at the Ostrovets NPP construction site prompted activity in 2016 and 2017.

Despite the observed inconsistencies, Lithuanian foreign policy can still be considered effective. It is important to bear in mind in this context that while defending its national interests, Lithuania tried to obstruct the construction of a strategic infrastructure in the territory of another country, which was fully supported by the great powers. And even with such an asymmetric power distribution, Lithuania successfully raised nuclear safety issues of the Ostrovets NPP at the international level, which likely contributed to the following outcomes: findings of the Espoo and Aarhus Convention Implementation Committees unfavorable to Belarus, visits of IAEA and EU nuclear safety experts to the Ostrovets NPP, replacement of the decommissioned nuclear reactor vessel and slowed down implementation of the project. Lithuania has also succeeded in limiting electricity flows: approval of the plan for the synchronization of electricity systems of the Baltic States through Poland by 2025 favorable to Lithuania and Warsaw's support on limiting Belarusian electricity.

Looking at future prospects, two aspects should be emphasized. First, visits of the IAEA and EU experts to Belarus requested by Lithuania itself had a more or less positive opinion about nuclear safety at the Ostrovets NPP, which already allows Belarus to question Lithuania's concerns about the safety of the Ostrovets NPP. If Lithuania could refer to incidents that took place during the construction of the Ostrovets NPP, Belarus's attempts to conceal them and violations of the Espoo and the Aarhus Convention in order to substantiate its negative opinion of the Ostrovets NPP safety, Belarus may not only point to the results of IAEA compliance assessment missions in trying to prove the safety

of the Ostrovets NPP, but it may also use the findings of stress tests that were favorable to Belarus and were formulated in accordance with the procedures established by the European Union. Of course, this situation may change in the event of more incidents in further process of construction or equipment tests at the Ostrovets NPP, or if the re-assessment of the EU “stress tests” renders negative results.

Second, in order to limit access of electricity generated at the Ostrovets NPP to the European Union markets, agreements must be reached not only with Poland, but also with Estonia, Latvia, and, ideally, with Finland. If Lithuania fails to reach these agreements, which is likely judging from Latvia’s intention to resume trade with Russia via the Velikoretskaya-Rezekne connection, Lithuania will be able to limit direct access of electricity produced at the Ostrovets NPP to the national system only, but it would still reach Lithuania via interconnections with Latvia. This problem should eventually be resolved by synchronizing the Baltic electricity systems with the Continental European network, but this will only take place in 2025, while both units of the Ostrovets NPP are scheduled for launch in 2020, unless the construction is delayed or stopped for some unforeseen interruptions. The level of effectiveness of the synchronization of the Baltic States limiting Belarusian electricity supply will depend on the number of back-to-back converters (which enable electricity exchange between asynchronous electricity systems) to be built on the border of the Baltic States with Russia and Belarus and designed trade capacity.

Kaunas, October 2018

Copyright of Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review is the property of Sciendo and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.