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Lithuanian strategy towards the Indo-Pacific region

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On July 5, the Lithuanian government adopted the Strategy for the Indo-Pacific region prepared by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The document was developed in response to the need to ensure security and strengthen Lithuania's international position as well as to tighten economic cooperation with partners from this region. At the same time, in the Strategy, Lithuania once again emphasized its critical position towards the increasing global position of the People's Republic of China.

Intensification of political relations and improvement of security. Lithuania's greater interest in the Indo-Pacific region should be seen in the context of the policy of its current government, formed at the end of 2020. First, its primary goal at the international level is the observance and promotion of democratic values, national sovereignty, and human rights. Secondly, security issues remain a priority for the Lithuanian government. Turning towards the Indo-Pacific region coincides with Lithuania's diplomatic dispute with China, the main axis of which concerns respecting the abovementioned values. Starting from the withdrawal from the 16/17+1 format in May 2021 (an initiative which is to connect the countries of Central and Eastern Europe with China), and then the announcement of the establishment of a Taiwanese representative office in Vilnius in July 2021, Lithuania limited contacts with the People's Republic of China (PRC). Then, it attempted to establish cooperation with other Indo-Pacific countries. This was expressed, among others, by the development of diplomatic representations. Between 2020-2022, Lithuania opened its embassies in Australia, South Korea, and Singapore. At the same time, India opened an embassy in Lithuania, while South Korea expressed its intention to do so. At the beginning of this year, Australia also opened its trade representative office in Vilnius.

The policy goal "For a Secure, Resilient and Prosperous Future Lithuania's Indo-Pacific Strategy" adopted by the Lithuanian government (lit. Už Saugesną, Atsparesną ir Ekonominiį Augimą Užtikrinančią Ateitį – Lietuvos Indijos Ir Ramiojo Vandenynų Regiono Strateginės Gairės) is another step towards strengthening cooperation with this region. At the same time, the document directly indicates the principles that Lithuania's foreign policy is based on. These include the need to respect international standards, territorial integrity, sovereignty, and to refrain from using coercion in relations with partners. Thus, although the Strategy concerns the broadly understood Indo-Pacific region (40 countries and Taiwan), the document emphasizes that cooperation will be established only with those that comply with the abovementioned principles. Moreover, the Strategy explicitly expresses Lithuania's critical approach to autocratic methods of internal control and China's aggressive foreign policy. While Lithuania recognizes the "one China policy" treating Taiwan as an inseparable part of China, it gradually develops cooperation with Taiwan and considers China as a threat to the security of Southeast Asia. In the Strategy, Lithuania clearly criticizes China's stance on the Russian-Ukrainian war and opts for limiting the spread of Chinese information pressure on Taiwan.

Development of economic cooperation. An important pillar of Lithuania's Strategy towards the Indo-Pacific region is the development of economic cooperation. The document highlights the impact of this region not only on contemporary geopolitical processes but also on the global economy. The Indo-Pacific region is one of the fastest growing regions in the world, home to nearly two-thirds of the world's population as well as being responsible for more than 60% of global GDP and half of world trade in goods. However, it was clearly emphasized that the development of economic ties between Lithuania and this region should result from democratic principles and the rule of law. Lithuania is interested in deepening economic relations, which will be associated not only with short- and medium-term economic benefits but also with the long-term geopolitical goal of

reducing autocratic influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Thus, Lithuania's critical position towards China's activity was again underlined.

At the same time, the Strategy identifies priority markets for Lithuania in the Indo-Pacific region that are particularly important as directions for increasing exports. These are Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, Australia, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, and India. In 2022, these nine economies constituted 1.9% of total Lithuanian exports, while Lithuania's export to China was 0.2% (however, it is worth noting that these nine economies simultaneously contribute 1.3% to total Lithuanian imports, and China – 3.8%). In addition, the Strategy includes measures to build a new trade network with other economies in the region. Furthermore, sectors based on advanced technologies (including the laser industry, biotechnology, and telecommunications technologies) are a priority.

Conclusions:

- In the face of dynamic changes in the global geopolitical arena and the growing importance of the Indo-Pacific region, Lithuania has adopted a Strategy aimed at establishing stronger political, economic, and social ties with this region. The strategy is based on three pillars:
 1. security and political dialogue, including developing defence capabilities, building resilience in the field of cybersecurity, and hybrid threats.
 2. economic cooperation with countries in the region, which aims to build and strengthen economic partnerships in areas such as trade, investment, science, and technology.
 3. soft power through interpersonal contacts in the field of science, culture, education, and tourism.
- At the same time, the Strategy adopted a week before the NATO summit in Vilnius in July 2023 stresses Lithuania's desire to build and deepen relations only with those countries and regions that pursue policies consistent with the values of democracy, sovereignty and human rights. Thus, Lithuania once again emphasized its critical stance towards the PRC authorities.
- In recent years, NATO countries have also begun to pay more attention to strengthening political partnerships with Indo-Pacific countries to counter China and Russia. National strategies for the Indo-Pacific region have already been adopted by Germany, France, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and the Czech Republic. The European Union is also pursuing its own strategy for cooperation with the region. However, Lithuania stands out in its Strategy for its decidedly critical approach to China.
- The document may be an instrument for long-term bilateral US-Lithuanian cooperation as it fits in with the objectives of the strategic dialogue between the United States and Lithuania in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent years, the main direction of such dialogue has been to coordinate actions in response to China's global position, Russia's war against Ukraine, and to counter China's political and economic pressure on Lithuania. Thus, by the adopted Strategy, Lithuania confirms its willingness to establish closer relations with countries that play an important role in the American security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region.