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Security Policy of the European Union and Lithuania in View of Russia's War of Aggression

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I. Introduction

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has threatened international legal order at its core and placed the security of European countries at risk. Its ideology and policy reflected in full-scale hostilities revealed a crystal-clear reality: international peace and security is a promise rather than a guarantee and threats posed by the aggressor state are lasting and real. Russia's war in Ukraine has challenged our values and democratic way of life and has accordingly impacted the security strategies of many European states, such as Lithuania, and organisations, including the European Union (EU). Speaking of the latter, from a 70 years' perspective "it is symbolic that both – the quest for peace, necessary in the face of Russia's aggression against Ukraine, and the principle of the rule of law – still are the most significant part of the Euro-

pean project”.¹ For Lithuania, which was subject to 50 years of Soviet occupation, the threat posed by Russia is not unexpected or unknown: many years if not decades Lithuania as well as other Baltic states used to warn European countries of the risks posed by Russia. History now reminds us of our common legacy and brings an historic challenge to take. There is no longer a clear boundary left between Lithuania’s or even Europe’s security and Ukraine’s security: their fight for freedom, democracy, rule of law and human rights has become our fight. Reports and assessments on possible scenarios of future geopolitical events often link the likelihood of Russia’s attack on other state(s) to the course of the war in Ukraine.

This research explores security threats that Lithuania has been facing recently in relation to Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and measures taken by the state as well as the security policy of the EU to address such threats.

II. International security landscape

Initially, a general picture of the international security landscape should be given. As regards *global* security environment, one of major studies of peacefulness Global Peace Index 2025² concludes that the world has become less peaceful over the past 17 years. Deteriorating peacefulness is evident: for example, on the report’s day there were 59 active state-based conflicts, 98 countries that were at least partially involved in some form of external conflict over the past five years; 78 countries engaged in a conflict beyond their borders. A New Agenda for Peace 2023³ refers to a world at a crossroad, where there is less trust and solidarity and more competition. It is noted that while the contours of the new global order remain to be defined, multipolarity might serve as one of its defining traits. “In this moment of transition, power dynamics have become increasingly fragmented as new poles of influence emerge, new economic blocs form and axes of contestation are redefined”.⁴ A significant role of regional organizations is admitted. Nevertheless, there might be

¹ Calleja D., Rusche T. M., ES teisė – 70 metų. Savo piliečių labui veikianti Sąjunga [70 Years of EU Law. Union acting for the benefit of its citizens], Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2024, p. 16.

² The study uses 23 indicators for the assessment of global peacefulness. Institute for Economics & Peace. Global Peace Index 2025: Identifying and Measuring the Factors that Drive Peace, Sydney, June 2025, <<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/Global-Peace-Index-2025-web.pdf>>.

³ United Nations, A New Agenda for Peace, 2023, <<https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/our-common-agenda-policy-brief-new-agenda-for-peace-en.pdf>>.

⁴ United Nations (footnote 3), p. 3.

complex tensions within – fragmentation, hesitation, lack of unity or willingness to contribute to common aspirations and be equally involved.

NATO, the main collective security and defence alliance, has indicated that the Euro-Atlantic region is not at peace. The NATO Strategic concept 2022⁵ declares that “the Russian Federation is the most significant and direct threat to Allies’ security and to peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. It seeks to establish spheres of influence and direct control through coercion, subversion, aggression and annexation. It uses conventional, cyber and hybrid means against us and our partners. Its coercive military posture, rhetoric and proven willingness to use force to pursue its political goals undermine the rules-based international order”.⁶ The list of threats is continued by terrorism, conflict and fragility in the Middle East, China’s coercive policies, contested cyberspace and other hybrid threats, emerging disruptive technologies, erosion of arms control, including nuclear threats, among others. Similar perception of the security situation, at times defined as most dangerous security environment from the Second World War, has been retained in recent years. For example, in January 2025, Secretary General Mark Rutte stated: “Russia’s war against Ukraine rages on. An assertive grouping of adversaries seeks to divide and challenge us. There is war in the Middle East. Terrorism poses a persistent threat. And new technologies bring opportunities but also many serious security challenges”.⁷

III. Threats to Lithuania’s security

Lithuania’s security and even freedom have for years been dependent on its fight against, resilience and response to Soviet, now Russian aggression. Historically, always at a crossroad between the West and the East, Lithuania is geographically situated in the neighbourhood of Belarus and Kaliningrad (Russia). Being located in between the adversary states Russia and Belarus, Lithuania has chosen the path of European and transatlantic integration. That is why the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania establishes provisions which are implied as a principle of a geopolitical orientation: this means, the State’s membership in the EU and NATO, that is, European and transatlantic integration and encompasses non-alignment to post-Soviet Eastern unions.

⁵ NATO Strategic Concept 2022, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_210907.htm>.

⁶ Ibid., p. 4.

⁷ NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, Opening remarks at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government, 25 June 2025, see <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_236497.htm?selectedLocale=en>.

Unsurprisingly, the National Threat Assessment 2025⁸, prepared by the Lithuanian security institutions, indicates Russia and its aggressive policy as a major threat, taking into account that it has resources to renew its military capacities to continue war in Ukraine, a diplomatic solution in the nearest future can hardly be expected as well as assuming that the Russian regime perceives their relations with the West as being between war and peace. Lithuania faces hybrid threats: “there were dozens of sabotage operations targeting infrastructure, energy, transport, information systems, and objects of historical memory in Lithuania and other European countries supporting Ukraine”.⁹ Threats to Lithuania’s security also come from Belarus – Russia’s ally and partner in military and economic cooperation.

Today, Lithuania is facing a wide range of security threats that call for appropriate action. They are different in their nature, duration and seriousness and, with no intention of providing an exhaustive list, the following are to be mentioned:

- illegal migration from Belarus;
- hybrid threats in the Baltic Sea;
- the Suwalki Corridor (Gap);
- “Zapad” military exercise;
- growing militarization of hostile state;
- smuggling balloons from Belarus;
- drones entering Lithuanian airspace
- GPS signal jamming from the Kaliningrad region;
- aggressive propaganda;
- attempts to rewrite history;
- persecution of the Russian and Belarussian opposition;
- other (deliberate arson, etc.).

1. Illegal migration from Belarus

Lithuania in recent years has been facing so called “instrumentalised migration” from Belarus. At the beginning of the summer of 2021, an illegal migration crisis broke out on Lithuania’s border with Belarus. Just before first groups of migrants appeared near Lithuania’s borders A. Lukashenko had declared: “We were stopping migrants and drugs – now you will catch them and eat them

⁸ Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania, National Threat Assessment 2025, <https://kam.lt/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2025-GR-ENG-02-21-El-be-uzraso_.pdf>.

⁹ Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania (footnote 8), p. 7.

yourselves”.¹⁰ Migrants began to flow into Lithuania and other countries sharing a border with Belarus – Latvia and Poland. This wave of migration was inspired by the Belarusian government. This is evidenced by such signs as the significant increase in flights operated by the Belarusian state airline “Belavia” to certain Asian countries affected by crises or with very low living standards – Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and others. In addition, advertisements were purchased on television in these countries, claiming that Lithuania was the EU country easiest to enter, with the only requirement being to travel to Belarus. After their arrival to Belarus, they were free of charge transported to the Lithuanian border and instructed where to cross. In many cases the Belarusian border guards themselves assisted migrants in crossing into Lithuania, either by showing them the way or even by damaging infrastructure of state border. In a very short time, more than 4’000 migrants entered Lithuania. From July 2021, the flows of migrants rose to more than 100 per day, and sometimes more than 800 migrants attempted to enter Lithuania illegally daily.

Due to the influx of migrants at the Lithuanian border, a state of emergency was declared, the Lithuanian armed forces were called to ensure security and control supporting the State Border Guard Service and physical barrier (a barbed wire (concertina) fence) along the Lithuanian border has been installed. Lithuania has been trying to balance the need to ensure human rights standards and protect the State’s security, however, Lithuanian border guards were allowed to push back migrants attempting to enter Lithuania from Belarus disregarding established procedure, i.e. not through designated border crossing points. Since then, the number of migrants who have been denied entry to Lithuania has exceeded 24’000.

These cases will undoubtedly contribute to the new developments in the field of asylum and migration and have already been reflected in the new EU asylum and migration policy. In July 2025, the proceedings by Lithuania have been instituted against Belarus at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the case Alleged Smuggling of Migrants¹¹ and in cases against not only Lithuania, but also Latvia and Poland related with the alleged “push back” of migrants are pending before the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR).¹²

¹⁰ Lithuanian PM calls Lukashenko ‘migrants and drugs’ threats absurd, BNS, 27 May 2021, <<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1418870/lithuanian-pm-calls-lukashenko-migrants-and-drugs-threats-absurd?srsId=AfmBOooEuXQKJSJ01fHWd635MZullG8ueSGUwoZggAjFurBzhOE6rje5>>.

¹¹ International Court of Justice, Alleged Smuggling of Migrants (Lithuania v. Belarus), <<https://www.icj-cij.org/case/200>>.

¹² In February 2025, there were over 30 cases regarding “pushbacks” at the Belarusian borders from summer 2021 to summer 2023 pending before the ECtHR against Latvia, Lithuania and

Three cases pending before the ECHR Grand Chamber concern the legal and practical consequences of the respective measures for the applicants – Afghan, Iraqi and Cuban nationals – who complain that they were pushed back to Belarus, which is not a safe third country, without being given an opportunity to request asylum in the relevant EU Member States. They complain that they were subjected to collective expulsion, without an examination of their individual circumstances and without having a genuine and effective access to means of legal entry. In general, respondent States mostly seek to emphasize the need to protect national security, applicants’ failure to follow established procedure and among other arguments rely on the case-law of the ECHR in similar cases related with illegal migration. For example, *N.D. and N.T. v. Spain*, where violations have not been established by the ECHR in the situation related with the attempts of the groups of migrants who used even force trying to enter the territory often at nighttime ignoring established procedure and therefore were returned¹³.

As regards the ICJ, this is the first time Lithuania institutes inter-state proceedings before this court. In the proceedings against Belarus before the ICJ, Lithuania claims that Belarus breached many of its obligations under the Protocol against the Smuggling of Migrants by Land, Sea and Air (supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Crime) by: “facilitating, supporting, and enabling the smuggling of migrants, and also failing to take necessary border measures to prevent and detect the smuggling of migrants and to ensure the security and control of documents; failing to exchange information to prevent, detect, and investigate the smuggling of migrants, strengthen cooperation with Lithuania’s border control agencies, and cooperate in the field of public information to prevent potential migrants from falling victim to organized criminalized groups; and failing to preserve and protect the rights of migrants and afford them appropriate assistance”. Lithuania contends that “the smuggling of migrants through Belarus into Lithuania has caused serious harm to Lithuania’s sovereignty, security, and public order, as well as to the rights and interests of the smuggled migrants themselves, who have been exposed to grave abuses in trying to reach Lithuanian territory”.¹⁴

Poland. ECtHR Press Release: Grand Chamber hearing concerning alleged “pushbacks” at the Lithuanian-Belarusian border, 12 February 2025.

¹³ Ancite-Jepifánova A. From the EU-Belarus Border to Strasbourg. 3 March 2025. Available: <<https://verfassungsblog.de/eu-belarus-border-migrant-instrumentalisation/>>. Also see ECHR Factsheets. Collective expulsions of aliens. October 2024, <https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/FS_Collective_expulsions_ENG>.

¹⁴ ICJ press release, 19 May 2025, <<https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/200/200-20250519-pre-01-00-en.pdf>>.

2. Hybrid threats in the Baltic Sea

In recent years Baltic Sea has become more vulnerable to threats to critical undersea infrastructure. Lithuania and other Baltic Sea countries have been reporting repeating cases of damaged or cut undersea cables attributing such incidents to Russia's "shadow fleet". Targeting to disrupt the provision of critical state services of communication and energy transmission, such attacks may qualify as sabotage and amount to hybrid attacks which are just below the threshold of kinetic warfare and blur the lines between peace and conflict. Baltic Sea is an area of critical strategic importance: it serves for maritime trading routes and communication and holds potential for the development of new energy sources thus is likely to remain attractive to similar incidents which may range from interruption of commercial vessels navigation to damaging critical state infrastructure. In the face of such threats, Baltic States have turned to both, the EU and NATO, which hold both, power and instruments needed to respond to such threats. In general, such measures as surveillance, information sharing, patrolling at sea, strengthening response capacities and increasing resilience have been activated. NATO has established a "Baltic Sentry" aimed at increasing patrol aircraft, warships and drones to deter destabilising acts and the EU developed regulation on critical entities and responded with application of sanctions on "shadow fleet" ships.

3. The Suwalki Corridor (Gap)

This is a section of the Lithuanian Polish border about 65 km wide, located between Russia's Kaliningrad region in the west and Belarus in the east. The Suwalki Corridor is the only land link connecting the Baltic States with NATO and EU territory. It is said to be the most vulnerable NATO location in Europe from a military point of view: if an enemy were to succeed in taking control of the Suwalki Corridor, the Baltic States would be cut off from the rest of the NATO countries, making their defence extremely complicated and resulting in a very serious security crisis. Incidentally, during the "Zapad" exercises held in 2017, joint Russian and Belarusian forces specifically trained to seize control of the Suwalki Corridor. This area is of specific importance not only in terms of military but also human perspective. In case of (a threat of a) real attack, this would also become the main or even a single route for residents of Lithuania to flee having taken such crucial decision as many Ukrainians were called to. Therefore, this zone is one of the most discussed areas in NATO planning. Lithuania and Poland, together with their allies, regularly conduct exercises, strengthen defence plans, and deploy additional forces. The NATO brigades stationed in the Baltic States are intended, among other things, to provide de-

terrence and to demonstrate that aggression against these countries would mean conflict with NATO.

“Zapad” military exercise and growing militarization of hostile states. Russian-Belarusian military exercise is closely watched by NATO and in particular Belarus neighboring European states each time it takes place. The exercise is not only aimed at training hostility but also raises a real risk of deployment of military troops along the border which preceded Russia’s invasion in Ukraine in 2022 and Georgia in 2008. Belarusian military is closely intertwined with Russia’s military. Just to remind, open aggression against Ukraine in February 2022 was launched from the territory of Belarus which has been used for continuing the aggression against Ukraine since then.

Most recently, “Zapad” took place in September 2025 in Belarus. This was a counterpart to the “Zapad-2021” exercise, after which the large-scale invasion of Ukraine began. The need to take this exercise seriously is also illustrated by the example of Georgia, which was invaded by Russia six days after the “Kavkaz-2008” exercise in 2008, resulting in the loss of Abkhazia and South Ossetia – comprising about 20 percent of the country’s territory altogether.

According to available information¹⁵, the “Zapad-2025” drills seem to have encompassed training of the potential use of nuclear weapons and medium-range missiles which have already been deployed on Belarusian territory. There is no credible information on the scale of military involved, however, analysts assess that actual participation could have ranged between 100’000–150’000 troops, much exceeding official numbers.

Analysts warn that even a smaller-scale exercise poses a threat: such maneuvers should be seen not only as a symbolic event but also as part of an increasingly active strategy designed to train and prepare for potential land escalation on NATO’s eastern flank beyond Ukraine. This represents a lasting, complex, multidimensional challenge for Europe and the Euro-Atlantic community. Western leaders must not only assess the consequences of such large-scale military exercise but also be ready to counter-related hybrid pressure campaigns aimed at undermining their democratic unity. In response to the Belarusian Russian exercise, NATO countries are simultaneously conducting their drills – “Iron Defender” in Poland and “Fierce Wolf” in Lithuania.

¹⁵ E.g., Belarus says it will draw up nuclear weapons plan and Oreshnik missile system at joint exercises with Russia in September, see news of 13 August 2025, <<https://www.pravda.com.ua/eng/news/2025/08/13/7525986/>>.

4. Growing militarization of hostile states

Reports declare that “Russia is expanding its brigades and military formations and capacities and settling them along NATO Eastern border and increases drone production”.¹⁶ Russia’s aggression against Ukraine has called European states to review military capacities and conscription and revealed shortcomings of their military readiness. Lithuania also experiences such deficiencies. The war in Ukraine has become the race in logistics and states have increased military production dramatically. Russia’s growing military production and expansion of military capabilities along NATO’s border (including the territory of Belarus) remains a serious threat. Reports propose that in terms of military capacities Russia would be capable to launch an attack against a NATO country in a few years.¹⁷

5. Smuggling balloons from Belarus

Starting from the end of the year 2025 meteorological balloons have been drifting over the border with Belarus entering the territory of Lithuania’s sovereignty in high numbers. In 2026, the first shipment of contraband cigarettes was intercepted in January carrying 3’000 packs of cigarettes with a GPS tracking device attached. In 2025, 635 shipments have been recorded and 122 persons were detained suspected for contraband smuggling.¹⁸ Illicit balloon traffic has caused risk to safety of civil aviation demanding closure of national airports for dozen times which resulted of delayed or cancelled flights affecting thousands of passengers. The Lithuanian government declared a state of emergency which allowed certain measures to be taken to respond to such threats; as there was no explicit right to shoot such balloons or resort to similar means, criminal persecution for smuggling has been conducted as well as political pressure against Belarus. Control has been intensified, and the situation has become manageable. Balloons are “weaponized” by Belarus. One of the reports states that “Belarusian authorities have the capability to stop the

¹⁶ Lithuanian intelligence says Russia won’t threaten NATO while Ukraine war continues, see Lithuanian National Radio and Television (LRT), 6 March 2026, <<https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2859104/lithuanian-intelligence-says-russia-won-t-threaten-nato-while-ukraine-war-continues?srsId=AfmBOqr8t7DIMbvGQNAj9y6ZBBhdUdOw0jvqli1pWTOkn7tnqP-B99->>.

¹⁷ Germany stations army brigade in Lithuania amid Russian threat, euronews, 2 February 2026, <<https://www.euronews.com/2026/02/02/why-germany-is-stationing-a-bundeswehr-brigade-in-lithuania>>.

¹⁸ Lithuanian border guards seize first balloon-smuggled cigarette shipment of the year, LRT, 6 January 2026, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2798272/lithuanian-border-guards-seize-first-balloon-smuggled-cigarette-shipment-of-the-year?srsId=AfmBOorhPZ7GCMrZtsZmiWd-MjlcXB_cTfk3kgNxXdC4vxSbfHdDOVF>.

smuggling of cigarettes into Lithuania using weather balloons but are deliberately allowing such activity to continue, exploiting criminal networks to pressure Lithuania into political dialogue”.¹⁹

6. Drones entering Lithuanian airspace

In September 2024, a Russian-launched Shahed-type unmanned aerial vehicle that was carrying explosives entered Latvian territory and crashed; fortunately, its explosives did not detonate and were deactivated. In July 2025, two Russian-made Gerbera-type drones entered Lithuanian airspace from Belarus. According to Lithuanian officials, the first posed no threat, carried no explosives, and crashed near the Belarusian border. The second, also a Gerbera-type drone, carried 2 kg of explosive material and penetrated deeper into Lithuanian territory. Fortunately, the explosives carried by the drone did not detonate.

These drones that entered Latvian and Lithuanian airspace from Belarus exposed certain gaps in the airspace security of both countries. Among other things, they showed that, first, there is a lack of effective means to detect small and low-flying drones; second, the decision-making algorithm did not allow for rapid responses in determining what measures should be taken; and third, the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission does not provide sufficient protection against drones, highlighting the need for other specialized measures. At EU level, taking into account recently faced “growing and multi-faceted challenges relating to drones and meteorological balloons, including hostile overflights, airspace violations, disruptions to airports, as well as risks to our critical infrastructure, external borders and public spaces”, EU Action Plan on Drone and Counter Drone Security was presented by the European Commission in February.²⁰ It aims at both, internal safety and defence and encompasses practical tools ranging from boosting detection capacities to strengthening the EU’s defence readiness.

7. GPS signal jamming from the Kaliningrad region

Lithuania also experiences blocking GPS signal along its Western border. Lithuanian Armed Forces in 2025 reported that GPS signal jamming has in-

¹⁹ Lithuanian intelligence says Russia won’t threaten NATO while Ukraine war continues, LRT, 6 March 2026, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2859104/lithuanian-intelligence-says-russia-won-t-threaten-nato-while-ukraine-war-continues?srsId=AfmBOorDedEQ9N36LQIAE2kCF5qJ13_txapiUOIVpuYONcR5cquVZdnx>.

²⁰ European Commission, Action Plan on Drone and Counter Drone Security, 12 February 2026, <<https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/drone-security>>.

creased sevenfold in comparison to the previous year.²¹ GPS signal jamming causes a wide range consequences negatively affecting aircraft and drone control, NATO activities and Klaipėda Seaport daily routine.

8. Aggressive propaganda

Propaganda has been actively used by Russia and Belarus many years. Just to remind that “special military operation” in Ukraine in February 2022 was started by Russia as then announced by its president in necessity to respond to neonazism and protect Russian speakers in Ukraine. Russia tries to undermine the unity to support Ukraine, exaggerates alleged Lithuania’s unfriendly policy towards Russian speakers and uses each occasion to distort facts and manipulate information. Among many the following narratives may be mentioned: Lithuania is a failing state suffering from migration and unable to manage its economy; Lithuania sympathizes with Nazism; In Lithuania, Russian-speaking individuals are being persecuted etc.

A study on Lithuanian society’s resilience to informational threats, the results of which were published at the beginning of 2024²², revealed the following trends. 68% of respondents never use Russian and Belarusian channels that spread disinformation, while 8% say they watch these channels daily or at least once a week; 63% mainly notice fake news on social media and believe that the response to it is inadequate. The results show that citizens notice disinformation quite frequently and assess their skills in recognizing disinformation quite positively.²³

9. Attempts to rewrite history

Russian propaganda is related with persistent and decade long attempts to reinterpret the history denying the right of independence of so-called post-soviet countries or even the right of their nations to exist. Vladimir Putin has defined the collapse of the Soviet Union as “the greatest geopolitical catastro-

²¹ Drone chaos on Lithuania's coast: GPS jamming near Kaliningrad increased sevenfold, LRT, 10 June 2025, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/2586184/drone-chaos-on-lithuania-s-coast-gps-jamming-near-kaliningrad-increased-sevenfold?srltid=AfmBOopg_aXy3d9MUA_mIXBPL4eOsONndUqzq-JAfPXTEp4sf3CqEMSDg>.

²² Most people in Lithuania believe that social media managers do not respond appropriately to disinformation. Government of the Republic of Lithuania, 8 January 2024. Available: <<https://lrv.lt/lt/naujienos/dauguma-lietuvos-gyventoju-mano-kad-socialiniu-tinklu-valdytojai-netinkamai-reaguoja-i-dezinformacija/>>.

²³ 44% of respondents said they are very good or good at recognizing deliberately spread false information, while 29% rate their ability to identify disinformation as average.

phe of the 20th century”²⁴ and on many occasions contested the restoration of Lithuania’s independence in 1990 since then. From textbooks at school to news on mass media, in all fields and forms Russia depicts its own history different from reality and international law. Researchers suggest that Russia’s “hostile relationship with Europe and nowadays the West, its historically established tendency of authoritarian government, relative weakness of the rule of law inside the country, and the utmost desire to preserve the territorial integrity of Russia as the world’s largest territorial state have decisively shaped post-Soviet Russia’s approaches to international law”.²⁵ An open aggression against Ukraine and international crimes continually committed by Russia in Ukraine have demonstrated Russia’s complete departure from the rules based international legal order. But what is more, is the regime’s ideology, driven by imperialism, hostility, disrespect for human dignity, humiliation of other nations and continuous distortion of facts trying to rewrite history and even reshape the state borders on the world’s map.

10. Persecution of the Russian and Belarussian opposition

Opposition figures from Russia and Belarus report being threatened by KGB security services abroad. Just recently, in March 2026, an investigation has been opened at the International Criminal Court having concluded that there is a reasonable basis to believe that international crimes were committed at least in part on the territory of the Republic of Lithuania. In September 2024 Republic of Lithuania requested the Office of the Court to investigate alleged crimes against humanity (deportation, etc.) committed from 1 May 2020 onwards. Launching the investigation opens door to prove and seek accountability: “the large-scale commission of the crimes, the number of victims, and the organised nature of the acts are all factors illustrating the widespread and systematic nature of the attack carried out by the authorities against actual or perceived political opponents”.²⁶

²⁴ Putin deplored collapse of USSR. BBC, 25 April 2005, <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/4480745.stm>>.

²⁵ Mälksoo L., *Russian Approaches to International Law*, Oxford, 2015, p. 3.

²⁶ Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court. The Situation in the Republic of Lithuania / Republic of Belarus. Summary of Preliminary Examination Findings, <<https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/2026-03/Summary-of-findings-Situation-Lithuania-Belarus.pdf>>, para 9.

IV. EU Response

The EU's perception of threats to security is related with their comprehensiveness and interrelation and a close connection with a global dimension from which Europe is not isolated. The global security environment has become more complex and multifaceted. Threats and challenges that the EU faces range from conventional to hybrid threats including cyber-attacks, terrorism, propaganda and are affected by a global environment of instability, insecurity, increased competition and decreased trust. Military conflicts are ongoing not only globally, but also in EU's neighbourhood. Russia's war against Ukraine has urged to prioritize security in the EU global strategy. As it is stated in the EU's Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, EU clearly understands that "Russia is grossly violating international law and the principles of the UN Charter and undermining European and global security and stability"²⁷. The latter is a lasting threat and there are many more challenges: climate change prone to foster instability in fragile societies, competition as regards the access to natural gas and oil deposits, artificial intelligence and disruptive technologies.

In recent years the discussion on the need of Europe's better readiness to defend and ability to respond to military threats more independently has been heard more often. In March 2025, the European Commission presented the Community's defence guidelines – the so-called White Paper for European Defence – Readiness 2030. The White Paper proposes measures to close critical capability gaps and build a strong defence industrial base, such as development of greater military capabilities; stepping up support to Ukraine; strengthening European defence industry and partnerships with like-minded countries around the world as well as ensuring a better protection of external borders (with Russia and Belarus).

In addition, sanctions imposed by the EU are to be emphasized. Individual, diplomatic, economic, sectoral and other type of bans and restrictions on Russian individuals and entities have so far been adopted in 19 sanction packages aiming to reduce Russia's ability to wage this brutal war and seeking to end the aggression.

V. Lithuania's security policy

Lithuania's security is perceived within its cooperation with the EU and NATO and supporting the interaction of these two organisations. This Euro-Atlantic

²⁷ A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/strategic_compass_en3_web.pdf>, p. 17.

integration, 20 years of which (membership in the EU and NATO) Lithuania celebrated in 2024, was a clear choice of a geopolitical orientation, a declaration of values and seen as a guarantee of security and defence. Lithuania's security aspirations today are also related with the membership in both organisations.

Lithuania is an active participant in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP): it develops civilian and military capabilities, contributes to EU missions and operations, develops resilience to hybrid threats. "Over several decades, the EU has contributed to international peace and security, undertaking nearly 40 CSDP missions and operations in regions of conflict and crisis, 18 of which are ongoing today".²⁸ The Versailles declaration which was adopted by the EU leaders 10-11 March 2022 foresees increase in defence spending, continuation of mission and operations capability, promotion of synergies between civil, defence, space research and innovation, tackling disinformation, preventing attacks on critical infrastructure and also refers to stepping up military mobility within the EU.

Essential part of Lithuania's security policy is defence policy²⁹ which aims at deterrence against the armed attack of Lithuania and in case of armed aggression – protection of its independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Lithuania not only seeks for security guarantees but also contributes to a better regional security and stability environment. This goal is pursued through the joint efforts of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, NATO allies, state institutions and society and combining all means, both military and non-military.

Military means and capacities need to be adequate and enabling to react to hybrid threats, but what is clear is the need of increase in defence funding and ensure adequate military deployment. In order to retain long-term Germany's military presence in the region the German brigade was activated on 1 April 2025 in Lithuania. Once its formation is complete as expected by the end of 2027, the brigade should consist of 4'800 troops and around 200 civilian staff.³⁰

Human security is an important part of the security concept and increasing resilience to threats (propaganda, recruitment, etc.) is emphasized. State is

²⁸ Lithuania's participation in the EU Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), <<https://www.urm.lt/en/lithuanias-security-policy/lithuanias-participation-in-the-eu-common-security-and-defence-policy-csdp/996>>.

²⁹ Ministry of National Defence of Lithuania, Defence Policy, Strategic Provisions, <<https://kam.lt/en/strategic-provisions/>>.

³⁰ Germany stations army brigade in Lithuania amid Russian threat, 2 February 2026, <<https://www.euronews.com/2026/02/02/why-germany-is-stationing-a-bundeswehr-brigade-in-lithuania>>.

also developing the mobilization system which would ensure quick and flexible response to the changing situation. Facing hybrid and cyber threats, Lithuania continues to strengthen its capabilities to prevent, identify them, respond and increase an overall resilience to them with a focus on the protection of critical infrastructure. All these tasks require a comprehensive approach: improving legal regulation, developing institutional capacities and reviewing political strategies.

Last but not least to mention is the remaining need to build resilience to Russia's attempts to interfere into domestic democratic processes and a large and coordinated network of Russian propaganda instruments, consisting of state-controlled media, social networks and pro-Russian websites.

VI. Concluding Remarks

Not only there are no clear lines between peace and war but also no boundaries between Ukraine's and Europe's, including Lithuania's, security. Peace for Ukraine means peace for Europe, their fight for democracy, freedom, rule of law and human rights has become our fight. And our responsibility. A historic challenge to take. And an uneasy one: to maintain understanding of continuous support for Ukraine in the long run may become not that simple as separate European countries also face other threats, including terrorism or migration issues, and may prioritize them differently.

Still, in general, the scale and brutality of Russia's war against Ukraine have strengthened unity among European States, increased solidarity and fostered joint action. Security may no longer be understood within domestic borders in the world of transition, global environment of decreased stability, predictability and trust. "In an increasingly interconnected world, Europe's security starts abroad".³¹

Still, the EU is at the crossroads faced with a need to answer what exactly it wants and is capable to be in terms of its enlargement and development of its hard and soft power globally. In any case, there is a common need of EU being more flexible and capable of ensuring its own security environment, ready to respond to predicted and unexpected threats more effectively and better react to crises. A stronger EU in security and defence would positively contribute to Euro-Atlantic security and regional stability as well as the rules-based international legal order.

³¹ European External Action Service, EU Peace, Security and Defence, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-peace-security-and-defence_en>.

In times of hardship European States should be guided by the EU values, recall their common legacy and the importance of democracy and freedom in opposition to authoritarian threats. Lithuania knows this price well.