

ANALYSING THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL POLITICAL INFLUENCES ON THE EUROINTEGRATION AND NATION-BUILDING IN UKRAINE AND LITHUANIA FROM 1990 TO 2021

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Abstract: The Republic of Lithuania's experience examining foreign policy's impact on European community integration processes is considered exemplary for Ukraine due to shared initial characteristics, historical proximity, and the relatively recent experience of modern statehood in Ukraine and Lithuania, despite significant historical achievements. This article examines the impact of foreign policy on state-building and European integration processes. It has been demonstrated that there is a considerable discrepancy between the two states regarding their existing local self-government systems and their interaction with state authorities. This research aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the impact of foreign policy factors on the development of Eurointegration and state-building processes in Ukraine and Lithuania between 1990 and 2021. The study identified the countries that exerted the most significant influence on the state-building process in Lithuania and Ukraine after 1990 in the context of developing democratisation. The study revealed the essence of the interests, strategies, and methods of influence of the various countries involved, which either motivated or hindered the processes of state-building and Eurointegration. The study showed that Russia exerted the most destructive influence on the state-building process in Lithuania and Ukraine after 1990. This influence was exerted through significant political, financial-economic, religious, informational-psychological, diplomatic, and military levers of pressure. The prolonged influence of tense relations with Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, and Moldova was identified. The fundamental concepts of state-building in Lithuania and Ukraine during the period under study were elucidated.

Keywords: state-building processes, European integration, decentralisation reform, the Republic of Lithuania, Ukraine.

1 Introduction

The final decade of the 20th century was characterised by significant geopolitical shifts precipitated by the collapse of the totalitarian communist system. In the context of this historical event, numerous states underwent a process of re-emergence and re-assertion of their independence. Despite the prevailing optimism, the nascent democratic state-building process in the newly independent countries was met with external political challenges and obstacles from the former centre. The Kremlin effectively began to impede the democratisation process in the countries of the former USSR and the related socialist bloc. It was achieved by exporting its authoritarian model of managed democracy, which aimed to form a powerful integration entity as a counterbalance to the European community. The control of Ukraine and Lithuania was identified as a critical objective within Russia's foreign policy strategy.

In light of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the issues under examination have gained particular importance in historical-political circles. Many researchers, including those from international institutions, have devoted considerable attention to the role and impact of foreign policy in the state-building processes of Ukraine and Lithuania, which have been identified as representative countries of active democratic state-building and aspirations for integration into the globally developed environment. However, contemporary researchers are confronted with the challenge of analysing the impact of external political factors on the development of state-building in Lithuania and Ukraine within the context of Eurointegration and democratic processes. Moreover, the question of identifying the countries that have most influenced the state-building process in Ukraine and Lithuania post-1990 in conditions of democratisation remains unresolved. It includes differentiating and comparing their strategies, interests, and methods of

influence. The historical experience of foreign policy formation, which highlights the main principles and conceptual foundations of Eurointegration and state-building processes, is presented in the works of several scholars. It is considered appropriate to identify the impact of neighbouring countries as catalysts or obstacles to the examined development processes of Lithuania and Ukraine. It will involve assessing the extent and degree of their direct or background influence.

2 Literature review

Many scientific and legal studies of state-building processes, frequently conducted within an interdisciplinary framework, as well as the search for practical ways to improve them, are focused on studying and adapting the experience of foreign states from the post-Soviet space. In addition, the selection of countries studied, their specific geographical location, historical characteristics, traditions, affiliation to particular legal systems, and political associations in the context of similar studies are conditioned by the adjacent object and the specific subject of a particular study (characteristic of comparative legal research) (Trabucco, 2017; Petryshyn, 2013; Astrauskas, 2015).

The empirical basis of the study comprises literary sources, monographs, and scientific articles authored by European, Lithuanian, and domestic scholars, including Andrushchenko (2005), Appatov and Makan (1999), Bezeha (2012), Vidnianskyi and Martynov (2011). Several scholars analyse the historical prerequisites for democratic state-building in Lithuania and Ukraine, while other researchers focus on studying the potential historical conceptuality of Eurointegration processes. In light of the current processes of transformation of the socio-political environment, which are being influenced by open aggression by a neighbouring state in the heart of the European community, the scholars' findings possess specific theoretical-methodological potential. However, they require practical testing and optimisation in today's realities to be fully realised.

This study aims to provide a comparative analysis of the impact of foreign policy factors on the development of European integration and state-building processes in Ukraine and Lithuania from 1990 to 2021.

3 Materials and methods

The research process involved utilising a diverse range of scientific methodologies, philosophical approaches, and principles of scientific knowledge, enabling a comprehensive analysis of the subject matter.

Among the general scientific methods employed, the systemic method was used to characterise the specifics of the influence of foreign policy factors on the state-building and Eurointegration processes in Lithuania and Ukraine as a functional dynamic system. The functional method was employed to identify the objectives and tasks of the researched processes and their functional purpose. The sociological method was employed to generalise the empirical information about the specifics of the practical implementation of state-building and Eurointegration processes. Meanwhile, the historical method permitted the investigation of the distinctive characteristics of their evolutionary progress. The comparative-legal method differentiated the characteristics of the evolution and development of the influence of foreign policy factors on the Eurointegration and state-building processes in Ukraine and Lithuania from 1990 to 2021.

4 Results

A comprehensive comparative analysis of the impact of foreign policy factors on Eurointegration and state-building processes in

Ukraine and Lithuania from 1990 to 2021 necessitates a more nuanced understanding of the initial data context and the circumstances in which Lithuania and Ukraine found themselves at the time of independence restoration. Following the Declaration of Independence, both countries formed new governments and adopted new constitutions.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Lithuania proclaimed the restoration of the independent Lithuanian state, initially established in 1918. The 1992 Constitution of Lithuania outlines three fundamental principles: a democratic form of governance, independence from external control, and national sovereignty. The Constitution of Lithuania, in its modern iteration, devotes considerable attention to local self-government and its internal and external administration.

As the inaugural republic to proclaim independence, Lithuania was at an advantage over Ukraine in restoring constitutional legitimacy. During this period, Ukraine experienced a constitutional crisis, with the Constitution of independent Ukraine only being adopted in 1996. It is acknowledged that Ukrainian state figures have made significant contributions to the country's independence. However, the natural restoration of Ukrainian statehood can only be considered in the temporal factor of 2014, with adopting a decisively pro-European national development course. In contrast, Lithuania made this choice much earlier, enabling it and other Baltic countries to join the European Union in 2004 (Trabucco, 2017; Petryshyn, 2013; Astrauskas, 2015).

State-building and European integration in Lithuania are conventionally divided into four stages, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. State-building and European Integration of Lithuania

Period	Features
1990-1997	Implementing administrative-territorial reform, establishing a decentralised system and gradually simplifying it, and redistributing powers
1997-2005	Initiating a discussion on developing regional policy and addressing the issue of administrative oversight of decentralisation and democratisation processes
2005-2010	Ensuring the preparatory process for implementing a series of legislative decisions to support European integration and state-building processes
Since 2010	Eliminating district administrations and establishing regional development councils, economically oriented social development, active European integration policy

Several distinctive features must be considered to comprehend the underlying causes of Ukraine's "lag" in implementing state-building reforms and adopting European norms of social development.

In the late 1980s, Lithuania saw the formation of reformist movements to establish national rights, democratic principles, a free market, and implement European requirements and norms for state-building (Mahomedov, 2022; Solodkyi & Rakeru, 2016). Conversely, Ukraine, geographically and historically more closely tied to Russia, saw the efforts of national movements historically fail and suffer significant losses due to the harsh reactions of the Soviet and later Russian authorities. Given the challenging conditions for development, the phenomenon of Ukrainian nationhood and statehood was weaker than that of Lithuania.

Furthermore, it is notable that historically, Lithuania had closer cultural and religious ties with Western European countries. A significant proportion of the Lithuanian population adheres to Catholicism, mainly due to the prolonged influence of the Polish Catholic Church. Moreover, the Lithuanian language belongs to the Indo-European language family's Baltic group, which

facilitated Lithuania's distancing from the Soviet Union in this regard. These factors significantly influenced the processes of state-building and the formulation of Lithuania's foreign policy development course. State institution reform is only possible with the involvement of civil society and its active transformation (Mahomedov, 2022; Solodkyi & Rakeru, 2016).

Following the international recognition of Lithuania's independence, the country initiated a process of closer ties with the EU and NATO. It is important to note that at that time, there was virtually no opposition to the Western development course in the country. Furthermore, domestic political debate was focused on developing an integration algorithm into the European community. In 1991, Lithuania commenced an active policy of rapprochement with the EU and NATO. In this context, the country joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and became eligible for EU support programmes. In its interactions with neighbouring countries, Lithuania established the Baltic Assembly, a parliamentary cooperation body on the path to membership in the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance (Skryl, 2015; Chuhaiev, 2006).

In 1994, Lithuania officially declared its intention to join NATO, and in 1995, it signed the Europe Agreement to establish an association similar to Ukraine's Association Agreement with the EU. Nevertheless, the external aspect of integration into the European community was less significant than implementing a series of crucially necessary political and economic reforms. Lithuania, like Ukraine, was characterised by lingering post-Soviet influence in the 1990s. It manifested in the priority of the state sector in the economy, a high level of centralisation, and a critical mismatch of national legislation with European norms and requirements.

These circumstances precluded a rapid integration with the EU and NATO, necessitating significant domestic political efforts to reform and transform socio-political processes through the Association Agreement. By 1999, Lithuania had fully met the political criteria for EU membership, having made significant progress in establishing a functional market economy. The unwavering commitment and radical nature of the reform efforts resulted in Lithuania's accession to both the EU and NATO by 2004, which was highly supported by the population.

The practical application of Lithuania's experience in addressing systemic issues in Ukraine necessitates the consideration of both global and local factors currently adversely affecting the effectiveness of reforms. For Ukraine to successfully pursue its constitutionally entrenched irreversible European and Euro-Atlantic course, it is essential to adopt a range of normative-legal acts in synergy with the implementation of actual practical measures for integrating the fundamental values of a democratic society. The state power and local self-government must interact and bear responsibility equally within their respective reach.

A review of the impact of foreign policy factors on the Eurointegration and state-building processes in Lithuania and Ukraine reveals that Russia was the least interested in the democratisation and European integration of both countries following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Russia's strategy towards Ukraine was characterised by adaptability and a multifaceted approach. Russia initiated an anti-Ukrainian campaign even before Ukraine declared independence to stoke interethnic tensions in areas densely populated by national minorities. It was achieved by using the language issue as leverage. In 1994, Ukraine began its European integration process in response to significant external pressure from Russia, signing the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU.

Russia's response to Ukraine's moves towards Eurointegration involved an increased use of soft power methods, including the protection of the Russian national minority and Russian speakers. This strategy managed to slow the state-building pace towards a European development course. Putin's strategy to absorb Ukraine through a combination of soft and hard power

failed during the Revolution of Dignity in 2013–2014. In the aftermath of this failure, Russia exploited the socio-political crisis in Ukraine to launch a hybrid armed aggression.

In addition to Russia, other neighbouring countries also demonstrated their interests regarding Ukraine, with strategies frequently aligning with Russia's. Despite most conflicts being resolved by the late 1990s, negative trends occasionally resurfaced actively (Mahomedov, 2022; Solodkyi & Rakeru, 2016).

In 1990, Romanian extremists initiated anti-Ukrainian propaganda campaigns. The occurrence of severe economic crises in Ukraine and Romania, coupled with Romania's aspirations for EU and NATO membership, compelled the leadership of both countries to initiate the formation of stable, good neighbourly relations in 1995. It was achieved by signing a bilateral political agreement on 2 June 1997, confirming the borders' inviolability. Subsequently, an agreement on cross-border cooperation was adopted, although the issue of Romanianisation remains unresolved. Notably, despite the persistence of differences, 2014 represented a pivotal year in the evolution of Ukrainian-Romanian relations. Romania was among the first EU member states to ratify the Association Agreement with Ukraine. In 2014, a minor border traffic agreement was also concluded, significantly contributing to forming new positive bilateral dynamics in the relationship.

Similarly to Romania (Solodkyi & Rakeru, 2016), Moldova sought to gain access to the Black Sea by annexing the southeastern part of Bessarabia, which fuelled autonomist aspirations among Moldovans in Ukraine. Nevertheless, the lack of organisation among Moldovans prevented the development of anti-Ukrainian sentiments, and the contentious issues in Ukrainian-Moldovan relations regarding creating joint crossing points on the Ukrainian-Moldovan border were resolved.

In the context of relations with Hungary, the national factor had the most negative impact, as the rights of the Hungarian national minority remain questioned. Despite the conclusion of bilateral agreements between Ukraine and Hungary during the 1990s, with the support of Russia, separatist sentiments were fostered among the Rusyn people, who demanded autonomy and cultural and administrative separation of Transcarpathia from Ukraine. Following Hungary's accession to the EU and NATO, the rhetoric surrounding the issue abated. In contravention of Ukrainian law, Hungary distributed a significant number of Hungarian passports in the region with the support of Russia. Furthermore, the Hungarian government exercises control over the media and exerts a significant influence over the financing of local Hungarian entrepreneurs (Medynskiy & Kapchos, 2016).

The Slovak Republic also influenced the development of state-building and Euro-integration processes in Ukraine. In the 1990s, Slovak nationalists, with the support of Russia, promoted separatist sentiments in Transcarpathia, with manifestations continuing to the present day. Undoubtedly, in the context of joint development and the resolution of crises, by the 2000s, the countries had established constructive dialogue and cooperation, particularly in the spheres of energy, economics, and political-diplomatic relations. Nevertheless, the Slovaks' inclination towards Russophilia contributed to strained relations during the initial decades of independence. The bipolar stance of the Slovak Republic impeded the establishment of effective interactions, including at the diplomatic partnership level.

From the inception of democratic state-building in Ukraine, Poland has demonstrated consistent and active support for Ukraine's pro-European stance. Despite historical and conceptual divergences, Poland has positively influenced Ukraine's state-building and Euro-integration processes. Polish policymakers have comprehensively assessed the potential advantages, disadvantages, risks, and opportunities associated with Ukrainian state-building. Despite encountering numerous challenges, they have remained unwavering in supporting Ukraine as it pursues its European future. Poland has assumed the role of a lobbyist

for Ukraine's interests within the EU, most notably in 2005 and 2014, playing a significant role on the international stage.

In contrast, Belarus's situation has been markedly negative. Russia's geopolitical absorption of Belarus and its authoritarian political regime have led to an irreversible deterioration in relations with Ukraine (Skryl, 2015; Chuhaiev, 2006).

In analysing the impact of external political factors on the Euro-integration and state-building processes in Ukraine and Lithuania from 1990 to 2021, it is crucial to note that the most dangerous was the underestimation of the negative influence of Russia and Belarus. These nations' strategies of external political influence on Ukraine convincingly demonstrate that the Soviet identity of political elites and ethnicity, the Russian language, and various economic-energy dependency factors facilitated Russia's interference in Ukraine's internal and external affairs. These circumstances have contributed to the emergence of diverse geopolitical sentiments among the Ukrainian population (Mahomedov, 2022; Solodkyi & Rakeru, 2016).

Currently, Lithuania is engaged in shaping the EU's Eastern policy. The country's primary initiative regarding Ukraine is the official recognition of Ukraine as a candidate for EU membership during Lithuania's second presidency of the Council of the European Union, scheduled for 2027. Vilnius aims to assume the role of the principal European expert on reforms in Ukraine while simultaneously advocating for the country's interests within the EU.

5 Discussion

Several researchers have posited that the Republic of Lithuania's experience studying the impact of the external political situation on the processes of integration into the European community is indicative for Ukraine due to the presence of common starting characteristics, historical proximity of the states, and the relatively short experience of modern independence in Ukraine and Lithuania, despite significant historical contributions.

Contemporary scholars (Kotsur, 2019; Kotsur, 2020) posit that, in contrast to Lithuania, national movements in Ukraine have historically suffered losses due to the harsh response of the central authority and a series of policies (russification, destruction of Ukrainian schools). Consequently, the Ukrainian nation and statehood were weaker than those of Lithuania. As these scholars posit, the dynamics of optimisation transformations remained negligible for a considerable period, with most reforms being perceived as ineffective.

According to researchers (Mahomedov, 2022; Solodkyi & Rakeru, 2016), despite a range of destructive influences, socio-political transformations acted as a driving force for a radical change in the format of relations in external political activity and terms of cooperation with global institutions to ensure sustainable development towards Euro-integration in both Lithuania and Ukraine.

According to Khakhula (2015), an analysis of the historical prerequisites for democratic state-building in Ukraine, in a comparative aspect with the Baltic countries, allows a focus on studying the potential of the historical conceptualisation of Euro-integration processes. Scholars argue that pressure from aggressively-minded neighbouring states has significantly delayed the processes of effective state-building and Euro-integration in Ukraine.

Meanwhile, as scholars (Masyk, 2020) believe, Lithuania serves as a prominent example of a country that, despite its size, is an active player in the region. This state has defined its strategic goals and values, implemented necessary structural reforms, and found its place in the architecture of NATO and the EU. It supports democratic transformations in the region and is a partner capable of supporting them even in difficult times. Drawing on Lithuania's experience (Skryl, 2015; Chuhaiev, 2006), the prospective development trajectory for Ukraine

should include the optimal refinement of public management models and further maximal integration into the European environment.

6 Conclusion

The analysis of the strategies of foreign policy factors on the Euro-integration and state-building processes in Ukraine and Lithuania during the period from 1990 to 2021 reveals that, in contrast to Lithuania, Ukraine had complex foreign relations with the majority of its neighbouring states, which significantly impeded its European and democratic progress. During the 1990s, most countries, except Poland, pursued a rather assertive foreign policy towards Ukraine. This policy shared many similarities with the foreign policy strategy of the Russian Federation. It manifested itself in several ways, including territorial claims, the exploitation of national and language issues, and the incitement of separatism. Subsequently, the integration of most of these countries into Euro-Atlantic structures compelled them to relinquish their aggressive foreign policy aspirations and adopt a strategy of soft power through which they pursue their interests in Ukraine.

Concurrently, European integration became a pivotal factor for Lithuania, significantly influencing the country's development and serving as the primary catalyst for socio-political reforms and economic growth. Following the Copenhagen criteria, Lithuania underwent a legislative reform process, bringing the country closer to the level of a consolidated democracy.

The study yielded a series of conclusions regarding the potential for reform in the context of Euro-integration processes in Ukraine, drawing on Lithuania's experience. The current crisis has presented various challenges to Ukraine's adherence to the Euro-integration course. However, the country has successfully mitigated these threats due to the strong international support for democratic state-building processes.

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