

U.S. FOREIGN POLICY TOWARDS THE BALTIC STATES: THE IMPLICATIONS OF UKRAINE CRISIS

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INTRODUCTION

The Ukraine crisis that started in November of 2013 and the annexation of Crimea challenged several basic assumptions on which U.S. foreign policy toward Europe was based: that Europe is secure, thus, requiring less attention of B. Obama's administration in comparison to other world regions (Middle East, Asia); that Russia is a partner rather than a threat. Therefore, B. Obama's administration was forced to reconsider its foreign policy priorities and strategy towards European countries. The Baltic states being a sub-region of Europe and treating the U.S. as their main security provider experienced the change in U.S. position as well. On the one hand, political communication between U.S. and Lithuania's, Latvia's, Estonia's officials became more intensive, changes were noticed in military, economic and other domains. On the other hand, however, B. Obama's administration's foreign policy towards the Baltic states applied during and after the Ukraine crisis does not seem to be original in its nature and principals.

The paper aims to discuss implications of Ukrainian crisis to United States foreign policy towards the Baltic States. Thus, the research object of the paper is the official rhetoric and implemented foreign policy of B. Obama's administration during the Ukraine crisis, focusing on factor of the Baltic States in particular. The data has been collected and analyzed on top U.S. policymakers' engagements in the Baltic states starting with January 20, 2009 (when B. Obama assumed Office) through March, 2016.

The paper argues that the U.S. relations with the Baltics came back to the format „Work for you“ that was applied in the foreign policy of G. W. Bush administration. The paper consists of several parts. To begin with, official rhetoric of the B. Obama's administration is analysed. Analysis of official rhetoric is made using several criteria: perception of the Baltic states, U.S. interests in this sub-region, declared foreign policy instruments, domains for closer cooperation. The second part is focusing on the analysis of practical level of U.S. relations with Baltic states during and after Ukrainian crisis focusing on three dimensions: political/diplomatic, military and economic. In the third part of the paper Ukrainian crisis implications on United States relations with Baltic states is assessed comparing trends in official rhetoric and practical foreign policy of Baltic states prior and after the Ukrainian crisis.

BALTIC STATES IN THE OFFICIAL RHETORIC OF B. OBAMA'S ADMINISTRATION: IMPLICATIONS OF UKRAINE CRISIS

Methodology. The research of the official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration was based on qualitative document/speech analysis, comparative and interpretive analysis of the problem research methods. To conduct the research National Security Strategies, State Of The Union Addresses released starting with January 20, 2009 through March 2016, as well as speeches and remarks of U.S. President and U.S. Secretary of State were analysed. Data was gathered from official websites of President of the United States (www.whitehouse.gov) and Secretary of State (www.state.gov) using the following keywords: Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Baltic.

Table No. 1. Analysis of Official Rhetoric of B. Obama's Administration: Methodology.

Information Sources Analysed	Criteria For Analysis	Focus on Ukraine crisis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – National Security Strategies (2) – State Of The Union Addresses – Speeches and remarks of U.S. President and U.S. Secretary of State 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Perception of the Baltic states – U.S. interests in this sub-region – Declared foreign policy instruments – Domains for closer cooperation – Declared problems – Russian factor in U.S. relations with the Baltic States 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – What is the central idea of the rhetoric? – Do U.S. officials repeat the central idea to different audiences?/Is the expressed position consistent? – Is the rhetoric new or drawn on traditions? – How do U.S. officials define the situation? How much control over events do they believe they can exert? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ (What problems are recognized? ▪ What options are developed? ▪ Is the interpretation of the situation changing?)

Source: Made by Author.

Thus, analysis of official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration towards the Baltic States during the Ukraine crisis aimed to answer the question, whether official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration was confined to general expression of security guarantees and not new in its content or whether official rhetoric was new in its content, indicated clear boundaries Russia should not overstep and indicated certain „sticks“ as punitive measures.

Perception of the Baltic states. During the Ukraine crisis all the Baltic States were the object of the U.S. officials rhetoric: U.S. President and U.S. Secretary of State addressed both – the Baltic States as a unit, and as separate actors. Analysis of B. Obama's administration's rhetoric indicated that during the Ukraine crisis the Baltic states were the object of higher level official rhetoric than prior to crisis: during the Ukraine crisis U.S. president referred to the Baltic states in 25 speeches, U.S. Secretary of State – in 8 speeches; while prior to crisis attention from the U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State distributed equally (respectively 11 and 16). Thus, an assumption might be made due to Ukraine crisis the Baltic states were referred to on higher level than before. For instance, even during the EU Presidency Lithuania did not receive that much attention from the U.S. president.

The Baltic states were addressed as a unit most frequently during the Ukraine crisis: in all the occasions except for bilateral meetings with Lithuania's, Latvia's or Estonia's officials. This trend is not new and might be called as traditional narrative of the U.S. rhetoric towards the Baltic states since it has been used since the end of Cold War. Many elements serve as deciding factor to the chosen position – such as common history of the Baltic States, similar foreign policy developments after regaining their independence (priority to Western rather than Eastern policy), security options for the Baltic states. The latter has become even more important since the beginning of Ukraine crisis. Addressing the Baltic states as a unit makes them look stronger in European security architecture. Therefore, it is not surprising that B. Obama's administration recently started portraying Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia as part of Nordic countries and attributing them to even larger region („And we are working to do even more. As I announced earlier, the initiative I've proposed to bolster the American military presence in Europe would include additional Air Force units and aircraft for training exercises here in the Nordic-Baltic region“).¹

During the Ukraine crisis the B. Obama's administration introduced consistent perception of the Baltic states and called them „allies“, „(global) partners“, „friends“, „proud democracies“, „strategic partners“². Worth noticing is the fact that U.S. officials in the majority of cases referred to the Baltic states in the context of NATO: very rational choice in the context of Ukraine crisis to underline the difference between the Baltic states and other East European countries in terms of NATO membership and security guarantees provided by alliance. Similar narrative dominated B. Obama's administration's official rhetoric before the Ukraine crisis as well – the Baltic states as

allies, partners, friends attributing them such qualities as virbant, positive, dependable, valued, close. This fact demonstrantes that B. Obama's administration's central idea about the Baltic states has not changed, was drawn from traditional perceptions of previous administrations towards Baltics and was repeated in various times to different audiences.

In the majority of speeches U.S. officials underlined significant contribution of the Baltic states to NATO, as well as active participation of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia in international crises management outside NATO. During the Ukraine crisis U.S. president and U.S. Sceretary of State constantly repeated such features of the Baltic states as strenght, their importance, responsibility, leadership, reliability.³ On the one hand, in this manner B. Obama's administration provides reassurances to the Baltic States (underlining their importance). At the same time, the other reason behing this type of rhetoric is the aim to demonstrante that neither the U.S., nor NATO would abandon the Baltic states. The above mentioned trend which was visible in U.S. official rhetoric during the Ukraine crisis is new and untraditional and, thus, indicating B. Obama's administration's reaction to the security developments in the region. Prior to Ukraine crisis the Baltic states were often addressed in the context of NATO, however, B. Obama's administration has never devoted that much attention to underline that despite their small size the Baltic states contribute more than enough to the allience and are role models (at least Estonia) for other NATO members.

The expressed ideas also indicate that B. Obama's administration presents the Baltic states as similar actors: in the official rhetoric of U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia are described using the same narratives assigning them such qualities as „fighting for freedom“, „commitment to meet requiremens of NATO“, „democracies“.⁴ All of the Baltic states are praised for taking active role in NATO, international crisis management, addressing serious security issues despite their small size (worth noticing, that B. Obama's administration mentions small size of the Baltic states, but does not mention their limited power capabilities. On a contrary, B. Obama's administration underlines very active role of the Baltic states in international relations). However, despite of the same narrative towards the Baltic states, Estonia stands out in official rhetoric of the U.S. Neither Lithuania, nor Latvia are criticized, however, only Estonia is mentioned as a role model in NATO – Latvia and Lithuania are reffered to very important and valuable allies. Estonia is described as „great success story“, „model ally“, „high-tech leader“, a country that „punches above its weight“.⁵ In the context of Ukraine crisis Estonian example serves B. Obama's administration probably not so much for deterrence of Russia from Eastern Europe as demonstrative instrument for other NATO allies to follow obligations to increase their defence spending. During the second term B. Obama's administration was vocal enough to express their concerns that European countries do not spend enough for their defence and rely too much on the U.S. as a result of limited engagement strategy that B. Obama's administration chose. Estonia is one of a few European countries that meets 2 percent of GDP for defence requirement. Therefore, B. Obama's special attention to Estonia (as well as an official visit of B. Obama in September of 2014) is very rational step in the context of Ukraine crisis. Comparing B. Obama's administration's position towards Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia prior and during the Ukraine crisis, both similarities and differences are noticed, therefore, it is rather difficult to assess Ukraine crisis implications in this context. On a one hand, B. Obama's administration attributes similar achievements to particular Baltic states since the beginning of the presidency: Estonia has been associated with achievements in cyber-security, e-governance, technological innovation, Latvia – with love of freedom, entrepreneurial spirit, democracy, Lithuania – with democracy and its promotion outside its borders, active participation in international crises management (within NATO and beyond). On the other hand, however, prior the Ukraine crisis none of the Baltic states were distinguished as a role model for the other (as it was with the case of Estonia).

Overall Ukraine crisis implications on the perceptions of the Baltics states in the official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration are mixed. B. Obama's administration is using traditional narrative of the Baltic states (allies, friends, partners) and repeating it on different occasions prior and during the

Ukraine crisis. However, at the same time certain news ideas associated with the Baltic states have been noticed as well: value and contribution for NATO and crises management despite their size for instance. Thus, B. Obama's administration has been following traditions, but introduced some new aspects in the context of Baltic states during the Ukraine crisis. Surprisingly, however, in the official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration there were no acknowledgement that Baltic states are threatened.

U.S. interests in this sub-region. Declared foreign policy instruments. Domains for closer cooperation. Declared problems. During the Ukraine crisis B. Obama's administration addressed foreign policy instruments and domains for closer cooperation with the Baltic states. No problems in U.S.-Baltics relations were mentioned. Absence of the latter in U.S. official rhetoric is not a new trend. B. Obama's administration, as well as previous administrations used to avoid admitting any problematic issues in U.S.-Baltic relations. On the one hand, it suggests that there are no problems worth mentioning during the Ukraine crisis. On the other hand, B. Obama's administration has not shown any signs of concern towards the Baltics from 2009 to 2013 either, when high level contacts between U.S. and Lithuania for instance were limited due to changes in Lithuania's foreign policy. This is traditional and rational U.S. posture towards the Baltic states that B. Obama's administration followed.

In terms of declared foreign policy instruments during the Ukraine crisis the dominant narrative created by B. Obama's administration not surprisingly was related with NATO. Both U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State constantly repeated that U.S. reaffirms commitment to Baltic states' defence under the North Atlantic Treaty. Commitment of Article 5 on the official level was described as „unwavering“, „unbreakable“, „taken seriously“, „ironclad“, „rock-solid“. Narrative of U.S. commitment to defend the Baltic states dominated the B. Obama's administration's official rhetoric during the Ukraine crisis. B. Obama's administration described specific military measures taken by U.S.: additional NATO aircraft in the skies of Baltics, more training and military exercises, rotating additional personnel, urged the alliance to update contingency planning. Attention to details indicates B. Obama's administration's wish to send a message to Russia that U.S. is taking commitments to defend Baltic seriously and, according to the U.S. president, „is prepared to do more.“ B. Obama's administration does not specify further possible steps, however. Narrative used by the administration of B. Obama is not new. G. W. Bush also claimed that „in the face of aggression, the brave people of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia will never again stand alone“, once he was in Lithuania with official visit in 2002. However, this narrative in the official rhetoric is used more often than before Ukraine crisis and is openly related with the reaction to Russia's aggression („That does not mean that Russia can run roughshod over its neighbors“) – no other U.S. administration took similar steps before. During the Ukraine crisis B. Obama's administration also returned to the „Work for you“ format: focused on its commitments to the Baltics and gave less attention to present expectations (other than 2 percent of GDP for defence). On the other hand, the vision of U.S.-Baltics relations in the military field is limited to the context of Ukraine crisis; no future projections or expectations for the Baltic states are given. The fact worth noticing is that B. Obama's administration is focusing on Baltic reassurance measures within NATO framework, not bilateral reassurance measures.

During the Ukraine crisis B. Obama's administration did not provide much attention to new possibilities of extended/deeper cooperation, but focused on Ukraine crisis situation instead. Despite that B. Obama and J. Kerry addressed other issues than military where U.S. and Baltic states had mutual interests. Among those are TTIP, energy security, international crises management, cyber security. All the Baltic states are mentioned in the context of TTIP, energy security and international crisis management; in case of cyber security – Estonia is distinguished. All of the above mentioned domains for cooperation were present in B. Obama administration's rhetoric before Ukraine crisis – thus, distinguished domains are not new in this regard. However, during Ukraine crisis U.S. officials do not discuss such domains for cooperation as building democracy,

addressing such challenges as poverty, women rights, strengthening civil society in Eastern Europe that were significant in U.S.-Baltic relations, when Baltic states were chairing EU and other international organizations.

Analysis of official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration suggests that during the Ukraine crisis U.S.-Baltic relations were not upgraded to a new level. U.S. officials focused on the same foreign policy instruments and domains as before; U.S. initiatives on military domain received more attention than usual, however, the U.S.-Baltic relations vision expressed in the official rhetoric was limited to the timeframe of Ukraine crisis, far reaching initiatives were not expressed. On the other hand, B. Obama's administration devoted more attention than before to reassurance of Baltic states and its commitments to collective defence.

Overall, in terms of foreign policy instruments and domains for closer cooperation B. Obama's administration formed and expressed consistent narrative whose central idea was that the U.S. is taking its commitments for the Baltic states defence seriously. This narrative was based on traditional position of the U.S. towards the Baltic States; however, B. Obama's administration related the narrative with Russia's actions openly (unlike previous U.S. administrations) and returned to the position „Work for you“.

Russian factor in U.S. relations with the Baltic States. During the Ukraine crisis Russian factor was addressed in the context of Baltic states' security by B. Obama's administration as well. Implications of B. Obama's administration's rhetoric towards Russia in the context of Baltic region might be mixed. Position on Russia developed by U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State was consistent, more open than before, but not as strong as the Baltic states probably would have wanted it to be.

U.S. officials referred to Russia as to an aggressor („concern over Russia's clear violation of Ukrainian sovereignty“)⁶, expressed concern over Russia's actions in the region and drew some line that Russia should not overstep („that does not mean that Russia can run roughshod over its neighbors“)⁷. U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State also constantly repeated that the U.S. commitment to NATO Article 5 and to mutual defense has not changed and is „ironclad“, pointed out security measures that have been taken in the region (NATO consultations, contingency plans, strengthening of NATO's Air Policing mission and others). U.S. officials openly admitted that the strengthening of NATO presence in Baltics, readiness action plan that NATO was preparing is a message to Russia and a response to Russian arms buildup and provocations in the region. B. Obama's administration also pointed out that the U.S. is prepared to do more, however, did not elaborate on that. Thus, U.S. president and State Secretary believed to have full control of the situation.

On the other hand, analysis of the official rhetoric of B. Obama's administration during the Ukraine crisis indicates that B. Obama's administration in the official rhetoric provided reassurance measures for the Baltic states, but not deterrence to Russia since punitive measures were not indicated in case Russia overstepped set boundaries. Moreover, B. Obama's administration pointed out that the U.S. does seek conflict with Russia and „has interest in strong and responsible Russia, not weak one.“⁸

Nevertheless, in terms of Russian factor in U.S.-Baltics relations implications of Ukraine crisis on U.S. official rhetoric might be noticed. Despite the fact that B. Obama's administration always underlined its commitment to NATO Article 5, perceived itself as guarantor of Baltic states security, but at the same time left open possibilities to develop constructive relations with Russia, during Ukraine crisis it started addressing Russia differently as an actor and focused its rhetoric on reassurance measures more than ever before. B. Obama's administration's narrative about Russia in the context of the Baltic States was consistent, based on traditional ideas, but with new adjustments since administration's interpretation of security situation in the Eastern European region has changed. Thus, official rhetoric was significantly strengthened during the Ukraine crisis, reassurance measures pointed out, certain lines that Russia should not cross were established – these were new components added to official rhetoric of the U.S. due to Ukraine crisis.

B. OBAMA'S ADMINISTRATION'S ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE BALTIC STATES ON PRACTICAL LEVEL OF FOREIGN POLICY: IMPLICATIONS OF UKRAINE CRISIS

Methodology. Constructed event data-set was the main source of information for this part of the paper that discusses practical foreign policy of U.S. top policymakers towards the Baltic states. Data was gathered from official websites of President of the United States (www.whitehouse.gov), Secretary of State (www.state.gov), New York Times, Washington Post, Wallstreet Journal, The Baltic Times. All information units⁹ referring to any type of engagements with the Baltic states of the President of United States and Secretary of State were included. The following keywords have been used: Baltic or Lithuania/Latvia/Estonia or Eastern Europe. Information units referring to various types of engagements with the Baltic states of selected top officials of United States were turned into the event data-set that had the following categories: date of the event (when), event (what happened: who did what to whom and where?), domain of the engagement (diplomatic, economic, military). From 2009 through 2016 in total 315 suitable articles have been found.

Table No. 2. Analysis of Practical Foreign Policy of U.S. Top Policymakers towards the Baltic States: Methodology

Event Data-set based on:	Domains	Criteria for Analysis
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Website of President of the U.S. – Website of Secretary of State of the U.S. – The Baltic Times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Diplomatic – Military – Economic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Applied instruments – Intensity of engagements – New type of engagements vs Previously applied types of engagements – „Work for You“ vs „Work with You“ – Focus on crisis vs Foundations for broader agenda – Official vs Practical foreign policy

Source: Made by Author.

Thus, the analysis of practical foreign policy of B. Obama's administration towards the Baltic states aimed to answer the question whether the Ukraine crisis transformed U.S.-Baltic relations and elevated them to the higher level in terms of quality of strategic partnership.

Despite fear of top policy makers of the Baltic states and the popular opinion of society that B. Obama was not the best president for the interests of the Baltic states, the research suggests otherwise. After B. Obama's administration announced „Pivot to Asia“ in 2012 European leaders voiced concerns that the U.S. would pull back from Europe. When administration declared „Reset policy“ towards Russia, leaders of Eastern European countries sent B. Obama an open letter voicing concerns about „about the future of the transatlantic relationship as well as the future quality of relations between the United States and the countries of the region.“¹⁰ However, B. Obama's administration's foreign policy towards the Baltics eventually led to the intensification of bilateral relations in diplomatic, military and economic domains: especially during the second term of B. Obama. One can claim that this was determined by Ukraine crisis.

Several important segments of **diplomatic domain** of U.S.-Baltic relations were analysed to reveal implications of Ukraine crisis on these relations: political communication (visits, meetings, phone calls), agenda of visits and meetings, decisions that were made. Research suggests that throughout the presidency of B. Obama's administration's diplomatic engagements with the Baltic states were based on the same principles, however, they also were dynamic since noticeable changes were present in it during the Ukraine crisis. To begin with, during the Ukraine crisis political communication (visits and other forms of communication) between top policy-makers of the U.S.

and the Baltic states has become extensive. The region was visited by the president of the U.S. (September of 2014, Estonia), vice-president of the U.S. (March of 2014, Lithuania), Speaker of the House of Representatives (June of 2015, Lithuania), delegations of Congress (numerous times). Officials of the Baltic states maintained active contacts with U.S. top policy-makers as well. For instance, Dalia Grybauskaitė, the president of Lithuania had working visit to the U.S. (August of 2013), had meeting with B. Obama in the U.S. (March of 2016). The number of presidential visits has not increased during the Ukraine crisis (one visit of B. Obama before Ukraine crisis, and one visit during the crisis). During his presidency B. Obama with official visit visited the Baltic states twice. Interesting fact is that both times Estonia was chosen as destination. This suggests that B. Obama's visit served not only as a sign to express reassurance for the Baltic states, but to underline the importance of appropriate military spending: Estonia is one of a few NATO members that meets obligations to spend 2 percent of GDP for defense. However, communication with other top policy-makers of the U.S. intensified and was diversified: Data indicates that before the Ukraine crisis U.S. political communication with the Baltics was focused on U.S. State Secretary level (meetings were bilateral and multilateral, in NATO, OSCE). While during the Ukraine crisis broader spectrum of U.S. top policy makers were noticeable. Such position of B. Obama's administration, on a one hand, signals about intentions to revive political communication with the Baltics on numerous levels of political institutions (Presidential, Governmental, Parliamentary levels) that is one of a key features of strong strategic partnership. On the other hand, however, one can not claim that intensity and diversification of diplomatic engagements elevated U.S.-Baltic relations to the higher level since this act more likely had to serve as a part of Russia's containment strategy and to draw some boundaries in the region Russia should not overstep.

Diplomatic decisions taken during visits and meetings of top policymakers of the U.S. and the Baltic states that directly concerned the Baltic states support the expressed argument also. Extensive political communication during the Ukraine crisis was not turned into tangible results: decisions that would have strengthened U.S.-Baltic diplomatic domain of strategic partnership (ensured higher institutionalization of the relations) have not been taken and focused mainly on Russian factor and military issues. Thus, extensive political communication and the refocusing of political agenda of B. Obama's administration towards the Baltic states have not transformed U.S.-Baltic relations: no new decisions projecting how U.S.-Baltic relations might develop beyond the Ukraine crisis in diplomatic domain were made.

During the Ukraine crisis diplomatic agenda was modified as well. Reassurance of security has always been an important part of U.S.-Baltic agenda. Nevertheless, before the Ukraine crisis conventional security was not the only issue on the agenda: cyberspace issues, promotion of human rights, civil society have been an important part of the agenda. When Ukraine crisis escalated, however, political agenda was focused on conventional security and situation in Ukraine and seem to have served as reassurance signal. Thus, expanded diplomatic agenda that started being established during the first term of B. Obama was abandoned.

In general, during the Ukraine crisis the agenda in the U.S.-Baltic relations became the one that the Baltic states would have liked it to be: intensive and focused on security issues. However, that kind of agenda has not elevated US-Baltic states relations to the higher level, not expanded the strategic partnership since it became narrow once again (as it was during the presidency of G. W. Bush). In this regard, top policymakers of the Baltic states should focus not only on short term interests (as strengthening hard security, for instance), but on long time perspective as well. It seems that the Baltic states themselves do not have foreign policy agenda that goes beyond Ukraine crisis. If they did not make one, they would not use the potential of Ukraine crisis fully in terms of status seeking. There is a great danger that the Baltic states would be left visible, but not perceived as useful and do gooders.

Overall, in diplomatic domain during the Ukraine crisis B. Obama's administration applied traditional, not new foreign policy instruments (visits, meetings, agenda-setting) towards the Baltic

states, but in significantly more intensive way than before. Considering vulnerability of the Baltic states due to aggressive policy of Russia one can claim that it was appropriate reaction of B. Obama's administration to security situation in the region. However, intensification of diplomatic contacts during the Ukraine crisis has not laid foundations for broader foreign policy agenda for U.S.-Baltic future relations.

In **military domain** of the U.S.-Baltic's strategic partnership the research has shown significant changes during the Ukraine crisis. Military domain has always been the strongest dimension of the U.S.-Baltic strategic partnership, however, due to Ukraine crisis military cooperation between the U.S. and the Baltic states has become extensive, new instruments have been introduced in military domain. Analysis of B. Obama's administration's military engagements with the Baltic states focused on several aspects: military exercises, financing of military domain, decisions about military issues (providing weaponry, deploying troops in the Baltics, for instance).

In military domain the U.S. and the Baltic states have overlapping interests and shared goals. One can claim that the U.S. interests in the security of the Baltic states are based on the obligations to NATO Treaty Article V stating that an attack on one is an attack on all. In response to Russia's aggression and Ukraine crisis B. Obama's administration has extended reassurance measures for the Baltic states. To begin with, the U.S. deployed additional U.S. fighter jets in the Baltic states, and U.S. naval vessels to the Black and Baltic Seas.¹¹ During the Ukraine crisis the number of jets in Baltic Air Policing Mission was quadrupled (from 4 increased to 16 jets). United States sent six F-15 fighter jets to join Nato air patrols over the Baltic states.¹² B. Obama's administration also briefly deployed several F-22s that are considered to have unprecedented air combat capabilities to Poland and Estonia in 2015. During the Ukraine crisis the North Atlantic Council approved the Baltic Air Policing mission to be long-term (the Baltic Air Policing mission had to end in 2014).

The number of military exercises in the Baltic states and the U.S. part in it during the Ukraine crisis significantly increased as well. In 2013 B. Obama's administration cancelled 45 percent of military training events with European partners and allies.¹³ Military exercises still took place in the Baltics, but they were modest in comparison to military drills of Russia for instance, in November 2013 6,000 strong Steadfast Jazz was held, while in Russia's Zapad 2013 more than 75 000 troops participated.¹⁴ During the Ukraine crisis, however, the decision regarding military exercises was reconsidered: military exercises Atlantic resolve, Saber Strike (nearly 10,000 service members from 13 states participated in 2016), Flaming Thunder (2015), Iron Sword (2014), Black Arrow (2014) were organized.

Due to Ukraine crisis new initiatives were introduced by B. Obama's Administration and NATO in military domain. In 2014 the U.S. president B. Obama proposed the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) that had to augment U.S. military presence in Europe providing rotating troops in Poland and the Baltic states, as well as military equipment in Eastern Europe. ERI was provided with 810 million U.S. dollars.¹⁵ Within the NATO framework Readiness Action Plan (RAP) was established in 2014 Wales summit. RAP had to provide assurance measures for NATO members in Central and Eastern Europe.

As a result in 2015 the US delivered over 100 pieces of heavy military equipment to the Baltic states to provide them with the ability to "deter" the perceived threat from Russia (though in 2013, the U.S. had removed all of its main battle tanks from Europe). Since 2015 the U.S. military vehicles toured Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria as part of a "temporary rotating battalion" to reassure NATO's most eastern allies against Russian aggression.¹⁶ In 2016 it was announced that NATO will be deploying an additional rotating military forces of four battalions of 4,000 troops in Poland and the three Baltic States, according to a report citing US Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work.¹⁷ The U.S. is likely to provide two battalions, while Germany and Britain would likely provide a battalion each. The Baltics repeatedly asked NATO and the U.S. to permanently deploy up to 5,000 troops as a deterrent. However, top policymakers of NATO members underlined that such an act would breach NATO-Russia Founding Act (1997),

which prohibits substantial numbers of combat troops from being permanently stationed on Russia's borders. A new Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) capable of deploying within "a few days" was established within NATO. NATO also opened 6 small new headquarters in Central and Eastern European member countries (NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIU)).¹⁸ From ERI 33 million USD were appropriated for Lithuanian capability building in 2015.¹⁹ B. Obama's administration requested \$3.4 billion for the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) for FY2017 that quadruples last year's ERI funding level.²⁰

On the one hand, B. Obama's administration strengthened military dimension of U.S.-Baltic relations more than other any president since the Cold war. More active U.S.-Baltic relations in military domain was not a product of the B. Obama's administration's efforts to upgrade strategic partnership with the Baltic states to higher level, but part of the reaction to aggressive policy of Russia during the Ukraine crisis. Moreover, B. Obama's administration's military engagements in the Baltic states reflected „Work for you“ format meaning that foundations for broader agenda of military cooperation was not set. Thus, one can claim that military domain was the most intensive in the U.S.-Baltic relations and affected a lot by Ukraine crisis: B. Obama's military engagements in the Baltic states reflected both traditional and new instruments applied, „Work for you“ format and implementation of declared policy. On the other hand, however, the fact remains that requests of the Baltic states were not fully met and that the Baltic states could not be defended in case of attack. RAND report²¹ suggests that the force of about seven brigades (standard brigade consists of approximately 3,200 to 5,500 troops), including three heavy armored could suffice to prevent the rapid overrun of the Baltic states.

Economic domain has been the least intensive in the U.S.-Baltic strategic partnership. Event dataset suggests that during the Ukraine crisis economic engagements between the U.S. and Baltic states constituted 3 percent of all engagements. It seems that the Ukraine crisis did not have big impact on the intensity of economic relations between the U.S. and the Baltic states: before the Ukraine crisis U.S. economic engagements with the Baltics also constituted 8 percent of all engagements.

Nevertheless, one can claim that implications of Ukraine crisis on economic domain of U.S.-Baltic relations differ depending on the Baltic country. For instance, according to the data provided by U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis, in 2014, the U.S. direct investment position in Estonia decreased by 0.7% from 2013.²² While in case of Lithuania it decreased by 2.6%. The data signals, however, a huge increase in trade turnover between Lithuania and the U.S. that in 2014 increased by 67% from 2013, while in case of Estonia the increase was not as significant.²³ The main factor determining the absence of significant changes in U.S. economic relations with Estonia is the share of market that Russia has in the country.²⁴ For Latvia and Lithuania Russia is more important trade partner than for Estonia, which tries to focus its trade on Scandinavian countries. During the Ukraine crisis due to the economic sanctions imposed by Russia Latvians and Lithuanians were forced to look for new markets that resulted in slight increase of economic relations between Latvia, Lithuania and the U.S. as well.

In economic domain another worth noticing achievement was the arrival of the Independence vessel, a floating factory to convert liquefied natural gas into burnable variety, in Lithuania in 2014. American officials described it as „the strongest signal to break the grip of Russia on energy.“²⁵ On the one hand, it indicated that energy security issues have become part of the U.S. economic agenda towards the Baltic states. On the other hand, however, the event was conditioned by Russian factor, but not by Ukraine crisis itself since negotiations on the matter had been started before the Ukraine crisis.

Worth noticing, that economic domain was the only one in the U.S.-Baltic states relations that reflected „Work with you“ format in the U.S.-Baltic strategic partnership during Ukraine crisis. However, Ukraine crisis itself was not the determining factor for the issue. Instead, it was Lithuania's presidency of the EU during the second half of 2013. One can claim that, for instance, that bilateral U.S.-Lithuanian relations were dominated by economic problematic issues important

foremost for the U.S.: certain EU matters were transferred to the bilateral Lithuania - US relations . Among those to be mentioned: the EU amendments on tobacco directive and EU negotiations with the US on TTIP. Thus, not only “Work with you” format was applied in economic relations, but agenda was expanded and new in comparison to prior to the Ukraine crisis. However, it was not the Ukraine crisis as deciding factor, but other external factors.

Overall, during the Ukraine crisis economic domain of the U.S.-Baltic relations remained as the weakest in the strategic partnership, although slight increase in certain economic indicators was noticed. However, the most significant issues on economic domain (like broader economic agenda, importance of energy security) were determined by other external factors than Ukraine crisis. Nevertheless, economic domain has a potential in the U.S.-Baltic relations.

UKRAINIAN CRISIS IMPLICATIONS ON THE UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH BALTIC STATES

The research suggests that the Ukraine crisis has brought new dynamics into U.S.-Baltics relations: they became intensive as never before. One can not say, however, that during the first term of B. Obama U.S.-Baltic relations were at odds: they were correct under the circumstances, but not as intensive as during the presidency of G. W. Bush.

Ukraine crisis had an impact on both declared and practical foreign policy of the U.S. towards the Baltic states. In terms of declared foreign policy towards the Baltic states, conducted research suggests that:

- official rhetoric of B. Obama’s administration towards the Baltic states was consistent in terms of perception of the Baltic states, Russia and declared reassurance measures to the Baltic states;
- B. Obama’s administration demonstrated to be in control of the situation;
- B. Obama’s administration’s central idea expressed in the official rhetoric was to send a clear message to Russia and provide reassurance of the Baltic states strengthening U.S. military presence in the region. This idea was based on traditional narrative of the U.S. and not new.

The analysis indicates several Ukraine crisis’ implications to official rhetoric of B. Obama’s administration. First, during the Ukraine crisis U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State devoted significantly bigger attention to the Baltic States in general (Baltic States were mentioned more frequently). Second, during the Ukraine crisis U.S. initiatives on official level evolved around the expression of commitments to collective security, whereas before the Ukraine crisis a variety of domains for cooperations were discussed. Third, B. Obama’s administration changed the declared perception of Russia naming it an aggressor and gave bigger attention on boundaries that Russia should not overstep.

The question remains, however, whether the above mentioned changes in the U.S. official rhetoric are sufficient under current security conditions and whether they were turned into practical foreign policy. On the one hand, official rhetoric of U.S. president and U.S. Secretary of State seems to be not sufficient answer to Russia’s actions in the region since it does not provide options and suggest punitive measures, if Russia overstepped the boundaries that B. Obama’s administration had set and is limited to the focus on reassurance measures for the Baltics. On the other hand, B. Obama’s administration’s official rhetoric towards Russia during the Ukraine crisis is much stronger than before (that is the strongest rhetoric towards Russia since the Cold war, in fact) and should be assessed differently than Russia’s rhetoric for instance: Russia’s officials were always very outspoken. In comparison to Russia’s official rhetoric and constructed narratives, B. Obama’s administrations rhetoric might seem weak. However, one should keep in mind that the U.S. and Russia play international games under different rules/in different leagues: the U.S. is keeping up with contemporary principles of international relations (rule of law, multilateralism, diplomacy),

while it seems that Russia is still stuck in the Cold war. Mild U.S. rhetoric (containing such phrases towards Russia as „responsible Russia“, „constructive relations“) in contemporary international relations has more weight than the one of Russia (who's rhetoric might seem to be a result of desperation). U.S. is an actor capable to send other actors to hell in such a way that they start looking forward for the trip.

Another aspect that is very important under current circumstances is the fact that not only official rhetoric determines the final outcome, but foreign policy steps on practical level as well. U.S. is famous for the usage of mild official rhetoric about Russia's engagement, while implementing Russia's containment at the same time (as it was the case during the presidency of B. Clinton and G. W. Bush). Thus, actions might speak louder than words. Analysis of B. Obama's administration's practical foreign policy towards the Baltic states during the Ukraine crisis suggests that the U.S. engagements in the Baltics were part of Russia's containment strategy and not only reflected B. Obama's administration's declared foreign policy, but at times went beyond it (especially, in military domain). B. Obama's administration intensified diplomatic domain of strategic partnership with the Baltic states (number of meetings among high rank officials increased), focused agenda on security issues; with practical actions in military domain demonstrated that neither the U.S., nor NATO would abandon the Baltic states: usage of traditional military measures was intensified (number of military exercises increased, Baltic Air Police mission was strengthened, additional funding was provided for military needs of the region), as well as new military measures were introduced (for instance, rotating troops of the U.S. and other NATO members, sending military equipment for the Baltic states, establishment of VJTF and others). The unprecedented strengthening of the U.S. military presence in the Baltic states served not only as part of Russia's containment strategy, but as instrument of Russia's deterrence as well. However, one can claim that intensive U.S.-Baltic relations were not turned into tangible results in all the domains of strategic partnership: economic domain, for instance, was still weak enough. The Baltic states have not received everything they requested: the Baltic states asked for permanent deployment of NATO troops, but received rotation of troops instead.

In order to make relations with the U.S. more productive in the future the Baltic states should put more efforts to stay on the agenda of the U.S. Reports provided by the U.S. institutions name several domains for cooperation that are important for the U.S. (Iran, Israel-Palestine, ISIS, Arctic ect.).²⁶ So far, the Baltic states do not express active role in those, except for two: issue of Russia and TTIP. Very probable that these issues will be on active agenda of the U.S. only for a limited amount of time. Therefore, the Baltic states should start thinking of new niche roles and create agenda that goes beyond the problematic of Ukraine crisis.

CONCLUSIONS

During the Ukraine crisis administration of B. Obama devoted significantly more attention to the Baltic states, addressed issues that were important to the Baltics, declared and applied specific measures to ensure security of the Baltics, underlined its commitments, aimed to send a clear message to Russia and at the same time did not abandon main principles of its foreign policy (like limited engagement in international crises that are not strategically important to the U.S., leading from behind, importance of partners).

However, despite the intensified official rhetoric and practical engagements with the Baltic states in general U.S.-Baltic relations during the Ukraine crisis were not upgraded to the whole new level (in terms of quality and strategic partnership) – bilateral relations focused mainly on Ukraine crisis, its challenges, were based on principle „work for you“ and did not attempt to create vision of broader cooperation in more domains in the future.

NOTES

- ¹ Remarks Following a Meeting With President Toomas Hendrik Ilves of Estonia, President Dalia Grybauskaitė of Lithuania, and President Andris Bērziņš of Latvia in Tallinn, Estonia. September 3, 2014. Internet access: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=107472&st=Baltic&st1=Lithuania>
- ² The President's News Conference With President Toomas Hendrik Ilves of Estonia in Tallinn, Estonia. September 3, 2014. Internet access: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=107471&st=Baltic&st1=Lithuania>
- ³ Hillary Rodham Clinton Remarks With Lithuanian Foreign Minister Audronius Azubalis After Their Meeting. November 15, 2010. Internet Access: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/11/150917.htm>
- ⁴ Statement on the Occasion of Latvia's National Day. November 14, 2013. Internet Access: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/>
- ⁵ Press Statement of John Kerry, Secretary of State on Estonia's National Day. February 21, 2013. Internet Access: <http://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2013/>
- ⁶ Readout of President Obama's Call with President Putin. March 1, 2014. Internet Access: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/01/readout-president-obama-s-call-president-putin>.
- ⁷ B. Obama's Remarks to European Youth in Brussels, Belgium. March 26, 2014. Internet Access: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/26/remarks-president-address-european-youth>
- ⁸ B. Obama's Remarks to European Youth in Brussels, Belgium. March 26, 2014. Internet Access: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2014/03/26/remarks-president-address-european-youth>
- ⁹ In this paper information unit is defined as any type of information provided by official websites of President of Lithuania and Speaker of Seimas on the required topic (that is Ukraine). Information units consisted of: speeches, messages of congratulations, condolences, press releases, interviews, data about visits.
- ¹⁰ An Open Letter To The Obama Administration From Central And Eastern Europe. July 16, 2009. Internet Access: http://www.rferl.org/content/An_Open_Letter_To_The_Obama_Administration_From_Central_And_Eastern_Europe/1778449.html
- ¹¹ Paul Belkin, Derek E. Mix, Steven Woehrel. NATO: Response to the Crisis in Ukraine and Security Concerns in Central and Eastern Europe. *Congressional Research Service*. July 31, 2014. P. 2. Internet Access: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R43478.pdf>
- ¹² Adrian Croft, NATO to triple Baltic air patrol from next month. *Reuters*. April 8, 2014. Internet Access: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-crisis-nato-idUSBREA371WH20140408>
- ¹³ Luke Coffey and Daniel Kochis, The Baltic States: The United States Must Be Prepared to Fulfill Its NATO Treaty Obligations. *The Heritage Foundation*, September 29, 2015. Internet Access: http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2015/09/the-baltic-states-the-united-states-must-be-prepared-to-fulfill-its-nato-treaty-obligations#_ftn64
- ¹⁴ *Russia's Zapad 2013 Military Exercise. Lessons for the Baltic states*. Ed. Liudas Zdanavicius, Matthew Czekaj. The Jamestown Foundation, 2015. P. iv.
- ¹⁵ Derek E. Mix, The United States and Europe: Current Issues. *Congressional Research Service*, February 3, 2015. P. 2-3. Internet Access: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22163.pdf>
- ¹⁶ Helen Wright, US Military Hardware Arrives in Estonia. *The Baltic Times*, October 26, 2015. Internet Access: http://www.baltictimes.com/us_military_hardware_arrives_in_estonia/
- ¹⁷ Julian E. Barnes, Anton Troianovski, NATO Allies Preparing to Put Four Battalions at Eastern Border With Russia. *The Wall Street Journal*, April 29, 2016. Internet Access: <http://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-allies-preparing-to-put-four-battalions-at-eastern-border-with-russia-1461943315>
- ¹⁸ NATO Force Integration Unit (NFIU). *Ministry of National Defence Republic of Lithuania*. January 1, 2016. Internet Access: http://www.kam.lt/en/international_cooperation_1089/nato_1282/nato_force_integration_unit.html
- ¹⁹ Bilateral Cooperation. *Ministry of National Defence Republic of Lithuania*. January 1, 2016. Internet Access: http://www.kam.lt/en/international_cooperation_1089/bilateral_cooperation.html

²⁰ FACT SHEET: The FY2017 European Reassurance Initiative Budget Request. *The White House*, February 02, 2016. Internet Access: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/02/02/fact-sheet-fy2017-european-reassurance-initiative-budget-request>

²¹ David A. Shlapak and Michael W. Johnson, Reinforcing Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank. *RAND*, 2016. Internet Access: http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1253.html

²² U.S. International Trade in Goods and Services. Estonia. *U.S. Department of Commerce*. 2015. Internet Access: <http://www.bea.gov/international/factsheet/factsheet.cfm?Area=331>

²³ Lietuva-patraukli šalis JAV investicijoms. LR Prezidentės pranešimas spaudai. Internet Access: <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/lietuva-patraukli-salis-jav-investicijoms/pranesimai-spaudai/19305>;

²⁴ CIA, 2014.

²⁵ *New York Times*, 2014 10 28.

²⁶ Derek E. Mix, The United States and Europe: Current Issues. *Congressional Research Service*, February 3, 2015. P. 2-3. Internet Access: <https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/RS22163.pdf>