

# The role of focusing events on agenda-setting: changes in the Lithuanian security policy agenda after the annexation of Crimea

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## Abstract

*The annexation of Crimea in 2014 struck the world suddenly and unexpectedly, so unexpectedly that the world could only watch the occupation unfold. Neither politicians nor society had an opportunity to prepare deterrence efforts. Through the overview of the literature, analysis of various documents, including the work programmes of the Seimas 2013-2015 sessions, presidential reports (annual addresses) from 2013 to 2015 presented at the Parliament, and a case study of the return of the conscript army, the paper aims to determine whether the annexation of Crimea satisfied the requirement of the focusing event concept and whether it could prompt changes in Lithuania's national security agenda. Realising that focusing events have the power to attract the attention of the policymakers and engender alterations in agenda-setting processes, the paper employs the agenda-setting theory and focusing events approach in order to assess if the annexation of Crimea may have caused changes in the Lithuanian public policy agenda, namely its security policy dimension. The research revealed that the annexation of Crimea meets the criteria of a focusing event since it was sudden and unpredictable for political players and society as well as it has consolidated the focus into one place simultaneously. As a focusing event, it opened a window of opportunity to mobilise the nation and political efforts for changes to the security policy agenda.*

**Keywords:** focusing events, agenda-setting, annexation of Crimea, framing, conscript army

## Introduction

Agenda Setting is the most influential theory focusing on how issues gain or lose the attention of interested parties; how a social issue becomes a policy problem

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(Furman and Šerikova, 2007). Jones and Baumgartner (2005) argue that the factors determining the emergence of social issues on the political agenda have become the focus of the players. One of those factors is sudden shocks (Kingdon 2014) which can grab the attention, mobilise political efforts, and consolidate decision power. The article explores the annexation of Crimea, which has been chosen as an object of analysis because it has shaken the world and forced European leaders to think about the challenges facing Europe's common foreign and security policy. Owing to the occupation experienced and collective memory of the past, "[t]he formation of the Lithuanian state since 1990 was based on the emphasis of the greatest possible separation from Russia" (Janeliūnas, 2019), the annexation of Crimea aggravated Lithuanian society's negative experiences, which put pressure on politicians to take measures concerning national security.

As M. Šešelgytė (2015) rightly puts it, "the crisis in Ukraine has dramatically changed the security environment in Europe", thus encouraging discussions in the country about Lithuania's national security and changing the political discourse concerning the country's security. Scholars maintain that some events distinguish themselves from others by their ability to attract the attention of political players and shake society. These events are forged as focusing events by Kingdon (2014). Realising that a focusing event has the power to attract the attention of the policymakers and engender alterations in agenda-setting processes, it is essential to assess whether a particular event that has met the criteria of focusing events may have caused changes in the Lithuanian public policy agenda. Therefore, the agenda-setting theory (Cobb and Elder, 1971; Jones and Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 2014) and focusing events approach (Birkland, 2004; Kingdon, 2014) have been chosen to examine the phenomenon of the annexation of Crimea trying to determine if it meets the requirements of a focusing event. Furthermore, the paper seeks to find out what impact the annexation of Crimea had on the Lithuanian security policy agenda. Finally, the article aims to test the hypothesis that the annexation of Crimea was a focusing event that mobilised the nation and political efforts for security policy agenda change.

The paper starts with an overview of literature clarifying the role of focusing events on public policy agenda-setting. Further, the article looks over the Russia - Lithuania relations and their impact on the national security policy of Lithuania. The return of the conscript army is examined as a case study to assess the effect of the phenomenon on the security agenda in Lithuania. The period 2013-2015 was chosen to indicate whether the annexation of Crimea had any impact on the national security and defence policy agenda of Lithuania and whether it sparked any changes in it by assessing the Parliament agendas one year before and after the annexation of Crimea and analysing the annual presidential addresses presented at the Parliament. The article has no intentions to determine the impact of the focusing event on Lithuania's policy agenda on the long run. However, it aims to assess whether the annexation of Crimea as a focusing event prompted any changes in Lithuania's national security

agenda. Agenda-setting matters how issues get on the political agenda and what solutions were proposed to solve the problems. Therefore, one year after Crimea's annexation will allow a better assessment of whether the alternatives on the agenda have become viable.

## 1. Theoretical background

Agenda setting process has been analysed by different scholars who focused on the conflict between compelling issues (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962; Schattschneider, 1961) or the impact of social forces on political agendas (Cobb and Elder, 1971). Both studies address political agendas by emphasising the importance of the conflict between competing issues for access to the political agenda (Klüser and Radojevic, 2019), while Kingdon's theory focused on the interplay of three streams – problems, alternatives and politics, which are connected by policy windows (Kingdon, 2014). Political actors are primarily involved in the policy stream by proposing solutions to the issues and carrying them to the agenda-setting process. Furthermore, Jones and Baumgartner (2005) developed a theory that sees public policy as an interplay of “long periods of stability and short periods of dramatic change”. According to the authors, certain conditions and mechanisms are necessary to challenge “political monopolies”. The essential key to the political process is identifying the issues and proposing alternatives to address them through agenda-setting (Dye, 2013). In analysing the political agendas, Cobb and Elder (1971) focused on the impact of social forces on political agendas. The authors talked about “crisis politics”, occurrences (coined as focusing events by Kingdon, 2014) which can bring together collective attention and trigger changes in political agenda”. Moreover, Kingdon (2014) notes that the exceptional power of focusing events on consolidating harms in one place and time makes them gain agenda-setting power (Birkland and DeYoung, 2012). As Birkland (1998) points out, visible harms concentrated in a particular area are caused by focusing events that highlight problems that can be addressed by the government or other institutions.

Literature on agenda-setting (Birkland, 2004; Kingdon, 2014) specifies that focusing events share the same characteristics. These are sudden, rare and large in scale events that politicians and the public learn about while having the power to open a policy window. Indeed, some events attract the attention of policymakers. However, the attention span to those events is scarce and does not lead to any changes. Considerable attention by Kingdon (2014) is paid to crises or disasters: “[p]roblems are brought to the attention of people in and around government by systematic indicators, and by focusing events like crises and disasters [...]”. These are a “little push” to get the attention of people and authorities to the problems which in some way exist in people's minds but gained insufficient attention from the political players (Kingdon, 2014). In this regard, the policy window might be triggered by “apparently unrelated external focusing events, such as crises, accidents,

[...]” (Béland and Howlett, 2016). While Birkland and Schwaeble (2019) argue that not every event works as a focusing event, according to the theorists, “[t]he process by which a focusing event can yield policy change is complex and involves attention to the problems revealed by the event, as well as evidence of learning from the event on the part of policymakers”. Furthermore, Birkland (1998) notes that focusing events affect the issues which are already ingrained in peoples’ minds “[f]or the agenda to change, there needs to be an agenda before an event”. The scholar maintains that focusing events are important as they can stimulate to opening policy window by dramatically highlighting policy failures and providing opportunities for policy learning (Birkland, 2004). Thus, all of the sudden, shocking events may attract the attention of the policymakers to the monopolies which have not been challenged and questioned for years. Birkland (2004) contends that a focusing event shifts the presumption away from the status quo toward the proposition the policy change is necessary. Nevertheless, disasters and accidents have the potential to consolidate the power to attract the attention of decision-makers to move the agenda-setting process and open a policy window. Kingdon (2014) considers that the policy window is an opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions or to push attention to their special problems. These opportunities created by sudden shocks are called focusing events with their ability to aggregate the harms in one place and time (Birkland, 1998) and force decision-makers to move forward with alternative agendas. Finally, the issue framing by giving it the shape that suits the audiences the most to support the cause is also as important as a venue (Schattschneider, 1961). Framing is an activity in which the problem is (re)defined to fit specific frames (context). How the frame is outlined determines how an issue is perceived, what questions will be included in the policy process, and whether an item will receive the necessary attention. Significantly, naming something as a problem feels essential and worth doing something about it (Kingdon, 2014). Eriksson (2020) maintains that threat framing is reflected in the first framing function: problem definition. Also, the scholar argues that threat framing is a type of problem definition, implying identification and labelling of a phenomenon as threatening to some core values, requiring preventive or remedying action. Ultimately, framing is used to achieve the desired solutions by highlighting the context of the social issue and defining the desired meaning of a social issue. Furthermore, sudden, and unexpected events such as focusing events prepare the ground for policy actors to take advantage of the setting and offer political solutions that would meet their political ends.

Metaphors are often used to achieve this goal. Burger *et al.* (2016) argue that metaphors can serve framing by promoting pet solutions, putting to fore some problems by forgetting others or creating context and discourse for the issue deliberation. Furthermore, media is used in politics because it suits the political elite for political ends. Besides, how the media present this information is often in line with the objectives of political actors (Walgrave and Van Aelst, 2016). Elmelund-Præstekær and Wien (2008) rightly point out that the media allows politicians to

promote issues they already care about by creating a window of opportunity. Furthermore, the news may not be the actual grounds of their attention but rather the accelerator of their public image of attention to the issues of concern. Van der Pas (2014) notes that politicians' reaction to media news is conditioned by how news is framed. Politicians respond only if the frame the media use corresponds to their understanding of the issue: When media reporting provides a context in which their frame prevails, their policy solutions appear more plausible, so it makes sense to strike the iron when it's hot and discuss the issue in parliament at that moment.

## 2. Methodology

Putting a wide range of social issues on the political agenda, debating and deciding which social issues shall fall into or remain outside the agenda are the main subjects of the public policy agenda-setting theory. However, agenda-setting is determined by various factors, including sudden, unexpected events coined as focusing events by Kingdon (2014), which can attract the attention of political actors and the public and consolidate forces to make the necessary solutions to the agenda (Birkland, 2004; Kingdon, 2014); therefore, the theoretical approach employed in this research is based on the agenda-setting theory and focusing events approach. The analysis of diverse data in many forms and shapes allows the author to see a complete picture of the agenda-setting analysed process. While it may be evident that the annexation of Crimea was a critical agenda-setting event, it is essential to understand if this event met the criteria of a focusing event, as well as the impact it had on the political agenda of Lithuania. As a qualitative research method, data analysis requires data to be examined to acquire a cognitive perception of the situation, in order to achieve understanding and give the meaning to the topic under inquiry (Bowen, 2009). Therefore, different data is analysed to offer meaning to the agenda-setting processes in Lithuania after the annexation of Crimea. Due to the complexity of the agenda-setting process, the document analysis encompasses different types of data, including media articles, parliament agendas, legislative initiatives, and annual addresses of the President, followed by a case study. Attention is taken to media articles since they are perceived as an additional source of information where different players provide their insights, assessments or explain their own decisions concerning security policy in Lithuania. The return of the conscript army was chosen as a case study to illustrate how the annexation of Crimea gave an impetus for security policy change in Lithuania. A case study lets us investigate the annexation of Crimea in detail within the changed security environment in Europe and Lithuania after the conflict in Eastern Ukraine. As Yin (1994) suggests, a case study is especially applicable in situations when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be evident. In this regard, document analysis has provided an opportunity to develop a better justification for the annexation of Crimea as a focusing event.

The ruling by the Constitutional Court established that the governance model of the State of Lithuania is categorised as the parliamentary republic governance form. However, it also has some characteristics of a so-called mixed form of governance (Constitutional Court of Lithuania, 1998). The Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania stipulates that the right of a legislative initiative at the parliament (Seimas) belongs to Seimas, the President and the Government (Seimas, 1992). However, the President and Government's agendas are forwarded to the Parliament as legislative initiatives for the Parliament's consideration; therefore, the article focuses on the Seimas agenda. Moreover, the Statute of the Republic of Lithuania defines that the work programme of the Seimas session is the primary document where the agenda items are put forward for the consideration of the Parliament. Sessions of the Seimas shall open with the discussion and approval of the work programme. Therefore, within this paper, the work programmes of the Seimas sessions are chosen as a basis for the analysis of the agenda-setting.

The work programmes of the Seimas sessions are divided into sections covering different areas of public policy, so the parts related to national security and defence are thoroughly scrutinised. The analysis focuses on assessing the aims and goals of the work programmes of the Seimas 2013-2015 sessions concentrating on the study of items, namely, legislative initiatives proposed to the agenda by different actors. The Statute of the Seimas (1994) stipulates that the first step of the legal stage is the registration of a draft law and its inclusion into the work programme of the Seimas sessions; however, another step is the presentation of the draft law at the Seimas sitting during which the Parliament votes in favour or against the legislation to be considered in the Seimas sittings. The article focuses only on the first stage of the legislative process by assessing the aims formulated by decision-makers in the field of national security, coupled with the items brought to the agenda to fulfil the goals. Hence, the Parliament agenda is reviewed to understand how the annexation of Crimea has changed the Seimas agenda, including initiatives of institutions having legislative initiative powers. What items those institutions brought to the Seimas agenda are to be considered by the members of the Parliament. The annual presidential addresses from 2013 to 2015 presented at the Parliament, including parliamentary agendas, are analysed to understand what impact Crimea's annexation had on the thinking of Lithuania's leadership, which caused the policy changes in the country.

Annual addresses of the Lithuanian President given at the Parliament are worth analysing since it sets the guidelines for Government in terms of foreign affairs and national security. The Constitution of Lithuania does not elaborate on the content or structure of the President's annual address to be presented to the Parliament. However, in her interview, the former President (2009-2019) explained that her addresses aimed at, not only overviewing the overall situation of Lithuania, but

setting the guidelines for future work.<sup>1</sup> According to the Constitution of Lithuania (Seimas, 1992) “the main issues of national defence and State security are considered and coordinated by the Lithuanian State Defence Council, which consists of the President, the Prime Minister, the Speaker of the Seimas, the Minister of National Defence, and the Commander of the Armed Forces. The President of the Republic heads the Lithuanian State Defence Council”.

## **2.1. Russia – Lithuania relations and their implication on Lithuania’s public policy**

Overall, Russian-Lithuanian relations have been fairly challenging since the restoration of Lithuania’s independence, due to various mistrust and tensions caused by the collective memory (Ethan and Berg, 2009). The country, which was occupied by the Soviet Union under the tutelage of the Molotov - Ribbentrop Pact in 1940 and annexed to the USSR, was looking for security strategies. Therefore, the State’s primary goal since its independence was to build up allies within the West in order to keep its distance from Russia, thus maintaining the country’s security (Jakniūnaite, 2016). As Janeliūnas (2019) contends, the issue of Lithuania’s relationship with Russia is of most significance not only in terms of foreign policy but of identity construction as well. Russia’s attitude towards the former Soviet countries and longing for the past, forced Lithuania to express its identity by focusing on the history of independent pre-war Lithuania as well as on the annoyance generated by Russia’s heartening denial of the occupation. Ethan and Berg (2009) argue that “national narratives of self are not merely reflections of historical events; they also construct the past for the purposes of the present, if only by a selective emphasis”. Since their independence, the Baltic States were focused on self-identification; however, the perception of “returning to Europe” has always been accompanied by the idea of “distancing from Russia” (Kempe, 2005). In his exploration of Russia’s relations with Lithuania, Vitkus (2006) emphasises that the relationship between the two countries is fairly poor and is not improving despite several opportunities of cooperation. In general, Russia’s attitude towards Lithuania is based on superiority rather than collaboration and recognition of Lithuania’s national interests.

Moreover, Russia’s hostility towards the Baltic states as part of the “near abroad” doctrine was one of the principles of its foreign policy since 1992, which aimed at neglecting Lithuania’s national identity. As Šleivyte (2010) points out, the doctrine manifested itself in Russia’s attempt to emphasise its right to act in the Baltic

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<sup>1</sup>Grybauskaitė, D. (2020), LRT studija Vilniaus knygų mugėje 2020. Prezidentė Dalia Grybauskaitė: svarbiausias principas – nemeluok, LRT, 27 February (retrieved from <https://www.lrt.lt/mediateka/irasas/2000094818/lrt-studija-vilniaus-knygu-mugeje-2020-prezidente-dalia-grybauskaite-svarbiausias-principas-nemeluok>).

States and the attribution of these countries to Russia's vital sphere of interests. Furthermore, each step Lithuania took towards defining its independence and pursuing its security concerns was perceived by Russia as a threat to its geopolitical interests. By condemning the inclusion of the Baltic States in NATO, Russia's Duma and diplomats emphasised the damage done to further cooperation between Russia and the Alliance (Mankoff, 2012). The hostility of Russia after Lithuania's accession to NATO was primarily felt in the economic sphere at first. However, later "provocative raids" by Russian military planes over Lithuania and other Baltic States (BBC, 2005) were only the beginning of Russia's confrontational actions towards the Baltic States. After restoring independence, Lithuania's insecurity and instability were the main incentives to seek security guarantees from NATO and the EU allies. As former Defense Minister Linas Linkevičius puts it, "[w]e are talking about instability, unpredictability [...], and it has always surrounded Lithuania. We need some guarantees".<sup>2</sup> Despite a constant sense of unpredictability from Russia, the importance of security increased in Lithuania and the other Baltic States after the annexation of Crimea. For this reason, Russia's unpredictability turned into intimidation, which stirred up the minds of both the common people and their leadership, becoming "the most important threat and a cause for worry and driving force behind various security measures" (Jakniūnaitė, 2016).

### **3. Research and discussion**

#### **3.1. Annexation of Crimea as a focusing event**

The annexation of Crimea was indeed a sudden, unexpected event that have caught the attention of the entire world, including Lithuanian leaders and society. Kingdon (2014) defined a focusing event as a sudden shock that can grab the attention of both society and policymakers at the same time, stimulate policy window for policy change, and aggregate their harms in one place and time. However, by approaching focusing events empirically, Birkland (1997) defined a potential focusing event as an event that is "sudden, relatively rare, can be reasonably defined as harmful or revealing the possibility of potentially greater future harms, inflicts harms or suggests potential harms that are or could be concentrated on a definable geographical area or community of interest, and that is known to policymakers and the public virtually simultaneously". Moreover, Schneider (1995) singles out two essential features of focusing events: the number of people affected and peoples' perception of the importance of the event. The research takes into consideration all

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<sup>2</sup> Myers, S.L (2004), *As NATO Finally Arrives on Its Border, Russia Grumbles*, the New York Times, 3 April (retrieved from <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/04/03/world/as-nato-finally-arrives-on-its-border-russia-grumbles.html>).



of these key characteristics which are used interchangeably to define the annexation of Crimea as a focusing event.

Russia's role in intervening in Ukraine's internal affairs by forcing the President to step away from the association agreement resulted in a bloody uprising. The rapid withdrawal of the Ukrainian President to Russia produced an opportunity for Moscow to gain its political ends by annexing Crimea and launching the offensives via proxies in Eastern Ukraine. The annexation of Crimea occurred suddenly, engulfing Ukrainian and world leaders unexpectedly and unpredictably. Moreover, neither politicians nor society had an opportunity to prepare for the adversary forces to be deterred or stopped from entering Crimea. Despite the peninsula's annexation and conflict in Eastern Ukraine, the military intervention did not expand geographically deeper into Ukraine. Military conflicts in Europe are rare if not exceptional; the latest was the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict in 2008, although not sudden, but in essence similar to the annexation of Crimea. Furthermore, the annexation of Crimea was not only concentrated in one place geographically but also the most significant damage of the conflict was felt in Eastern Ukraine. Therefore, it can be said that the annexation of Crimea corresponds to the characteristics of focusing events defined by Birkland (1997) and Kingdon (2014). As such, the annexation of Crimea created an opportunity for world leaders to consider deterrence measures, while it has also wakened Lithuanian leadership to discuss alternatives to their security agenda. Lithuanian parliament condemned Russia's actions in Ukraine, namely, the annexation of Crimea (Seimas, 2014d). The impact of the annexation on security discourse among the EU leaders was immense and was reflected in many media articles affecting society's attitudes on national security. Germany announced that it was ready to increase safety on NATO's border with Russia,<sup>3</sup> while France threatened to review military cooperation with Russia and supported the suspension of Russia in G-8.<sup>4</sup> The United Kingdom followed suit by curtailing all military cooperation and defence export to Russia.<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, Birkland (1997) and Schwaeble (2019) consider that focusing events open a window of opportunity as events offer a symbol-rich example of stated policy failure. Discussions on the NATO Defence Plan for the Baltic States, which have lasted since 2009<sup>6</sup> had gained

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<sup>3</sup> Rettmann, A. (2014), Germany ready to reinforce Nato-Russia borders, EUobserver, 31 March (retrieved from <https://euobserver.com/world/123685>).

<sup>4</sup> Irish, J. (2014), France to review military cooperation with Russia in future sanctions, Reuters, 15 March (retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-crisis-hollande-idUKBREA2E0R020140315>).

<sup>5</sup> Norton-Taylor, R. (2014), UK to review arms sales to Russia, the Guardian, 10 March (retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/defence-and-security-blog/2014/mar/10/arms-russia-ukraine>).

<sup>6</sup> BNS (2009), D. Grybauskaitė: NATO gynybos planas Baltijos šalims gali atsirasti tik po dveju metų, Diena.lt, 28 July (retrieved from <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/salies-pulsas/dgrybauskaite-nato-gynybos-planas-baltijos-salims-gali-atsirasti-tik>).

momentum after the annexation of Crimea, when the president of the United States assured NATO support for the Baltic States,<sup>7</sup> followed by a visit of the NATO Secretary-General to Lithuania to discuss the NATO Defence Plan for the Baltic States.<sup>8</sup> The news articles<sup>9,10</sup> and TV programs exploring various scenarios of occupation of the Baltic States by questioning NATO's capability and readiness to defend Lithuania, coupled with rich imagery from the peninsula occupied by adversary forces, have inspired discussions on alternatives to security agenda as well.<sup>11</sup>

The changes in society's perceptions of national security after the annexation of Crimea were dramatic ones. A public opinion poll revealed that due to the events in Ukraine, the military threat to Lithuania increased considerably. It showed that almost 70 per cent of respondents expressed fears of political instability, military conflict (55 per cent), and loss of political or economic sovereignty (54 per cent),<sup>12</sup> while almost 60 per cent of respondents claimed Lithuania did not face any threats in 2012 (Sprinter tyrimai, 2014). As such, the events in Ukraine have undoubtedly affected the population's perceptions, considering that the number of those willing to defend the country have increased significantly along with the number of supporters of increased funding for defence (Sprinter tyrimai, 2014). At the same time, the survey carried out by the Baltic Institute of Advanced Technology has also highlighted a shift in people's general attitudes vis-à-vis State security. In their opinion, they are first and foremost responsible for the protection of the State (Gečienė, 2014). Hence, the news broadcasts and articles with different insights and approaches towards NATO and its capacity to defend the Baltic States built up the momentum for change in dominant issues on the agenda. As Birkland (1998) notes, "focusing events can lead interest groups, government leaders, policy entrepreneurs,

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<sup>7</sup> Elta (2014), B.Obama Baltijos šalims: su NATO - jūs saugios, Respublika.lt, 3 September (retrieved from [https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/pasaulis/pasaulio\\_politika/bobama\\_baltijos\\_salims\\_su\\_nato\\_jus\\_saugios](https://www.respublika.lt/lt/naujienos/pasaulis/pasaulio_politika/bobama_baltijos_salims_su_nato_jus_saugios)).

<sup>8</sup> LRP (2014), NATO – Lietuvos saugumo garantas, President of the Republic of Lithuania, 21 November (retrieved from <https://www.lrp.lt/lt/cwwl/news/the-president-encouraged-women-of-the-world/21570>).

<sup>9</sup> Samoškaitė, E. (2014), Kaip Kremlius dalina Europą: ar Baltijos šalys lieka už raudonos linijos, Delfi.lt, 26 March (retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/kaip-kremlius-dalina-europa-ar-baltijos-salys-lieka-uz-raudonos-linijos.d?id=64360234>).

<sup>10</sup> Samoškaitė, E. (2015), 8 valstybės užėmimo fazės: kaip tai atrodytų Lietuvoje. LRT.lt, Delfi.lt, 8 September (retrieved from <https://www.lrt.lt/naujienos/lietuvoje/2/44565/8-valstybes-uzemimo-fazes-kaip-tai-atrodytu-lietuvoje>).

<sup>11</sup> Jurgelis, J. (2014), Ką darysim su žaliaisiais žmogeliukais?. Delfi.lt, 30 September (retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/ringas/lit/j-jurgelis-ka-darysim-su-zaliaisiais-zmogeliukais.d?id=65970484>).

<sup>12</sup> Alfa.lt (2014), Apklausa: pusė lietuvių – su neramiomis mintimis apie karinius konfliktus, 22 September (retrieved from <http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/809053/apklausa-puse-lietuviu-su-neramiomis-mintimis-apie-karinius-konfliktus#ixzz3GhSQNiLN>).

the news media, or members of the public to identify new problems, or to pay greater attention to existing but dormant problems, potentially leading to a search for solutions in the wake of apparent policy failure". As such, the annexation of Crimea brought Lithuania to a different reality by putting security issues high up on its agenda. In the Parliament, the winds of change were observed by different initiatives to increase the number of military professionals (Seimas, 2014b) and by various discussions on the rise in national defence funding (Seimas, 2014c). Meanwhile, the President initiated an agreement on strategic guidelines for Lithuanian security policy for the 2014-2020 period.<sup>13</sup> Ultimately, the Foreign Security and Defence Policy Agreement was signed by all parties represented in Seimas at the Presidential Palace (Seimas, 2014a).

### 3.2. The Parliament and the agenda-setting

The analysis of the work programmes of the Seimas 2013-2015 sessions gave an insight into the flow of the Seimas agenda in general. As such, it has provided information on how the agenda has been changing since the annexation of Crimea until 2015 and what actors have played the most crucial role in bringing new items to the Seimas agenda. Also, the analysis of work programmes revealed to what extent the events in Ukraine had inspired legislative initiatives. The assessment of the work programmes' aims of the Seimas 2013-2014 sessions concerning national security and defence policies revealed that the Parliament was focused on strengthening the European Union's external borders and cybersecurity regulation and the development of a cybersecurity framework in 2013. The consolidation of defence power of the State and the development of armed forces were also among the main aims of the 2014 work programmes of the Seimas sessions. The Seimas sessions work programme's objectives have dramatically changed in 2015 since the additional sections called *Strengthening foreign, and defence policy* (the Seimas autumn session's work programme) and *European Union foreign and Security Policy* (the Seimas spring session's work programme) were added with additional aims and goals formulated in these sections to traditional *National Security* section. Agenda-setting scholars argue that focusing events can attract attention and mobilise political actors for a common purpose. The consensus of political parties, including the opposition to alternate objectives of Seimas work programmes by including additional issues corresponding to a perceived threat, indicates that the annexation of Crimea was an event that was able to mobilise political efforts. The aims of Seimas 2015 sessions' work programmes for the concerning foreign and defence policy revealed that the Parliament was aimed at amending the Principal Armed Forces

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<sup>13</sup> Vasiliauskaitė-Notten (2014), Pasirašė susitarimą dėl Lietuvos saugumo politikos gairių, Verslo žinios, 29 March (retrieved from <https://www.vz.lt/archive/article/2014/3/29/pasirase-susitarima-del-lietuvos-saugumo-politikos-gairiu>).

Structure as well as at setting the number of permanent compulsory military service professionals and deciding on the model of the Lithuanian Military recruitment including the restoration of conscription. Moreover, the Parliament aimed to amend the existing legal regulation and to provide for the number of permanent compulsory military service soldiers in 2015. Furthermore, the work programmes included initiatives to establish the safety areas for protected objects, to oblige air carriers engaged in air passenger transport to provide, free of charge, automatic booking and departure control data for passengers arriving in or departing from the territory of the Republic of Lithuania, as well as to establish a joint Lithuanian, Polish and Ukrainian military unit – brigade, to define its tasks, principles of operation, structure and other issues related to the activities of the squad. Finally, work programmes of sessions aimed at ensuring more effective control of foreigners' migration that pose a threat to national security, public order, and society, reducing the risk of such persons being temporarily or permanently residing in Lithuania. The assessment of the Seimas sessions' work programmes for 2015 concerning national security revealed that the Parliament was aimed at offering additional powers to Lithuanian intelligence institutions, and at creating conditions for the establishment and development of the defence and security industry in Lithuania. Finally, the Parliament intended to amend the legislative procedures in the Statute of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania with the procedures applied after the declaration of mobilisation, State of emergency or martial law.

The assessment of the items brought to the agenda during 2013-2014 shows that the Parliament was generally focused on strengthening internal security. Eleven issues directly linked to the State's national security were brought to the work programmes of the 2013 and nine in 2014 Seimas sessions, while more than 22 issues were brought to the work programmes within 2015 Seimas sessions. To sum up, the analysis of work programmes of the 2013-2015 Seimas sessions revealed that the new items on the agenda emerged after the annexation of Crimea during the first Seimas session in 2015, which were aimed at strengthening the national security of the State. While the changes in the 2014 Seimas autumn session's work programme did not stand out from the rest, the developments in the 2015 Seimas spring session's work programme were considerably altered.

### **3.3. The President and the agenda-setting**

According to the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania, the fundamental issues of foreign policy are decided by the President. The President conducts foreign policy together with the Government. In presenting the annual address in 2013, the President stressed the importance of cybersecurity, by defining the attacks against Lithuanian cyberspace as a severe warning. The President, however, did not talk about any measures to be taken in order to protect the cyberspace of Lithuania, nor

were any remarks on any legislative or administrative action to be made.<sup>14</sup> With the submission of her report in 2014, the President stressed the significance of freedom by announcing allies' satisfactory military and security assurances. However, the President expressed concerns about public information warfare against the country and warned people of NATO to strengthen the protection of their nations from fabrications, disinformation, and provocations.<sup>15</sup> Summarising the 2013-2014 annual presidential addresses, one of which was presented immediately after the seizure of Crimea, it can be argued that no new items were issued to the agenda. Even though President talked about information warfare, the need to identify falsehoods or propaganda, and stressed the meaning of cybersecurity, no specific agenda items were proposed to the country's political agenda.

The annual presidential address of 2015 was noticeably different from the previous ones. The President started her address by highlighting each Lithuanian citizen's core value and responsibility, namely to defend the homeland. Furthermore, the President praised the politicians who were united by "Constitutional duty" to ensure the quality defence of the State. The President raised concern over the dissatisfactory quantities of professionals enrolled in the armed forces and prized the decision to restore the conscription, highlighting the importance of having a more extensive military corpus (Grybauskaitė, 2015). The new issues on the agenda were raised only in the 2015 annual address presented by the President to the Parliament. There was concern over national security, so the return of conscription was a new item brought to the national agenda by the President as a Chair of the State Defence Council, which was cited as a significant achievement in her 2015 annual address, the implementation of which still required Parliament's follow-up. Furthermore, the concern over a shortage of professionals to be enrolled in the Army was also an issue that gets materialised later, as seen in the Parliament agenda analysis. The President of Lithuania managed to choose the right venue and the audience to bring the issues of concern to the agenda. By presenting the issue to the Parliament, the President framed it as a dilemma for the State's survival.

Consequently, by uniting the parties' leadership at the Parliament for a 'common cause', with the national security of the State framing being of utmost importance, the President gained allies to support an issue the President stands for – the restoration of conscription. Even those who did not support this idea entirely could not oppose it since it was framed as a part of an inviolable package of the agreement on defence signed by parliamentary political parties. Although the decision on the return of conscription was made before the annual address to the

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<sup>14</sup> Delfi.lt (2013), Lietuvos prezidentės Dalios Grybauskaitės metinis pranešimas, 11 June (retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/prezidentės-dalios-grybauskaitės-metinis-pranešimas-visas-tekstas.d?id=61599817>).

<sup>15</sup> Bernardinai (2014), Prezidentės D. Grybauskaitės metinis pranešimas, Berdnardinai.lt, 27 March (retrieved from <https://www.berdnardinai.lt/2014-03-27-prezidentės-dalios-grybauskaitės-metinis-pranešimas/>).

Parliament, by prizing the decision of returning the conscription, President sent a clear message to those who had any doubts. Therefore, the President formulated this issue so that if the army of conscripts were not returned, national security would be at stake. Thus, the agreement's signatories could not put the State at risk by obstructing the implementation of the decision, which was predominantly part of the President's agenda. This way, a venue to present the cause was rightly chosen since under the Constitution of Lithuania, the President reads the statement in the Parliament – at the premises of the signatories of the agreement.

### 3.4. A case study: return of the conscription

The changing security environment in Europe has shifted the people's perceptions of national security. Public opinions polls after the seizure of Crimea revealed changing attitudes of society towards national defence in general and indicated the growing commitment of citizens to defend their homeland (Sprinter tyrimai, 2014). Therefore, returning the conscripts to the Army started with the agenda-setting in the media. Emerging media articles soon after the annexation of Crimea were packed with thoughts of the military leadership, along with the importance of reinstating conscription since the conscript army's abolition in 2008. In his interview on 9<sup>th</sup> of June 2014, reserve Major General Jonas Kronkaitis noted that he was always a supporter of a conscription army. Furthermore, he framed an issue as if the return of conscription had an economic value: “[t]here are benefits even in the economic sense of reducing unemployment and growing young people into better citizens”.<sup>16</sup> While commander of the Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Jonas Vytautas Žukas, did not rule out this possibility by noting that if Lithuania did not collect the number, which the leadership considered to be the minimum, other options would have needed to be considered. “I do not exclude the possibility of proposing a partial or full return of the conscript army to the political leadership,” Lieutenant General Žukas said.<sup>17</sup>

Although the idea of the return of the conscription army, which was abolished in 2008, was accepted with suspicion, the President echoed the concept of the return of conscription by noting that “this is a possibility which one day may be put on the table”.<sup>18</sup> The intention was furthered by the head of the Seimas Committee on

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<sup>16</sup> Želniene, L. (2014), *Atsargos generolas majoras Jonas Kronkaitis: „Rusija ruošiasi kariniam konfliktui su Vakarais”*, 15min.lt, 9 June (retrieved from <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/interviu/atsargos-generolas-majoras-jonas-kronkaitis-rusija-ruosiasi-kariniam-konfliktui-su-vakarais-599-432302?copied>).

<sup>17</sup> ELTA. (2014), *Šauktiniai gali sugrįžti, Vakarų ekspresas*, 30 September (retrieved from <https://www.ve.lt/naujienos/lietuva/lietuvos-naujienos/sauktiniai-gali-sugrizti-1242127/>).

<sup>18</sup> ELTA. (2014), *D. Grybauskaitė: Lietuva – propagandos karo stovyje, Delfi.lt* 14 October (retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/d-grybauskaite-lietuva-propagandos-karo-stovyje.d?id=66109912>).

National Security and Defence, A. Pauslauskas. Acknowledging that Russia's invasion of Ukrainian territory, the annexation of Crimea with the help of "green men" forced Lithuanian politicians to face reality, Pauslauskas outlined that "Lithuania must return to compulsory military service, at least temporarily".<sup>19</sup> Ultimately, the Lithuanian President voiced the need to reintroduce the conscript army, who justified the measure's necessity to Russia's "growing aggression" in Ukraine.<sup>20</sup> The decision to return the army of conscripts was made during the Lithuanian State Defence Council meeting on 24 February 2015.<sup>21</sup> As a matter of urgency, the Parliament voted in favour of the reintroduction of the conscript army on 19<sup>th</sup> of March, 2015. The defence minister presented the opinion of the State Defence Council at the Parliament, pointing out that the geopolitical situation in Ukraine was the main reason to supplement incomplete Lithuanian military units by inviting young people to compulsory military service.<sup>22</sup>

The primary reason for the return of conscription was the lack of professionals in the Army, which coincided with another geopolitical reason – the intensity of military threats in the region. Russia's aggression against the Baltic States was considered real, and it needed to be prepared, as early mobilisation could have been hampered by hostile actions.<sup>23</sup> The Lithuanian Armed Forces consisted of about twelve thousand professional soldiers in 2015. This meant that the State disposed of only half of the required troops. In most battalions, barely a third were filled, whereas not all politicians agreed to move on with the conscript army for a bleak reality – the need to fill in the Lithuanian Armed Forces reserve. The Chairman of the Lithuanian Social Democratic Party, Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius, stressed that the decision was temporary and had to be taken in light of the geopolitical situation in the region. While Eligijus Masiulis, Chairman of the Liberal Movement Party, said he could not speak unequivocally on the issue but was keen

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<sup>19</sup> Bakutis, R. (2014), Privalomas karinis rengimas pakviptų sovietmečiu? Alfa.lt, 8 September (retrieved from <https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/695303/privalomas-karinis-rengimas-pakviptu-sovietmečiu>).

<sup>20</sup> Khomami, N. (2015), Return of conscription in Lithuania sparks debate over gender roles, The Guardian (retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/jun/04/lithuanian-army-conscripts-moving-photography-project>)

<sup>21</sup> Černiauskas, Š. (2015), VGT sprendimas: atėjo laikas grąžinti privalomąją karo tarnybą, Delfi.lt, 24 February (retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vgt-sprendimas-atejo-laikas-grazinti-privalomaja-karo-tarnyba.d?id=67259680>).

<sup>22</sup> BNS (2015), Seimas grąžino šauktinius į Lietuvos kariuomenę, Kauno diena, 19 March (retrieved from <https://kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/politika/sauktiniu-grazinimas-seimorankose-681178>).

<sup>23</sup> Pancerovas, D. (2015), Lietuva grąžina šauktinių kariuomenę – šįmet bus pašaukti 3 tūkst. vyrų, 15min.lt, 24 February (retrieved from <https://www.15min.lt/naujiena/aktualu/lietuva/lietuva-grazina-sauktiniu-kariuomene-simet-bus-pasaukti-3-tukst-vyru-56-487013?copied>).

to question the merits of such a decision.<sup>24</sup> Although politicians disagreed on the Army of conscripts, all parties in the Parliament understood the need for changes in Lithuanian Armed Forces. Less than a month later, Seimas almost unanimously returned the conscription army and nine months of compulsory military service during the Seimas 2015 spring session (Seimas, 2015a).

The annexation of Crimea opened a window of opportunity for the leadership of the Army to come back to a pressing issue that did not get the attention of politicians for years. The low number of professionals in the Lithuanian Armed Forces received the attention of politicians only when an issue was framed as a threat to national security. A professional army with only one-third of the required number of professionals was, according to many experts, a threat to national security. According to the Commander of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, Lieutenant General Vytautas Jonas Žukas, when Lithuania withdrew its conscripts in 2008, the mobilisation reserve of the Army was depleted. As a result, not only did the reserve of the country's soldiers decrease significantly in seven years, but the filling of military units was approaching the critical threshold. In his judgement, the shortage of troops in the units posed a threat to Lithuania's national security.<sup>25</sup> The issue needed to be resolved, and there were various ways to tackle it. The fact that the deficiency in military units was solved with the return of conscripts without seeking other solutions showed that the State's leadership perceived the lack of professionals in the Lithuanian Army Forces as a threat to national security. According to the Minister of Defence J. Olekas, the reserve could also be made up by inviting enough contracts to sign: “[w]hen a contract ends the contractor becomes a reserve soldier, or we can prepare [soldiers] by re-training them. However, the Lithuanian State Defence Council has chosen the return of conscripts” (Seimas, 2015c). An introduction of conscripts was, by some scholars, also understood as a possibility to prepare civilians for hostilities since the attack on Ukraine by Russian forces was understood as hybrid warfare instead of conventional war. Professor of the Lithuanian Military Academy Jūratė Novagrockienė noted that public preparedness for military actions is undoubtedly necessary, especially in the case of having a non-predictable neighbour. “Usually, in today's military conflicts, which are often hybrid, civilians are always victims because they do not know how to behave, defend themselves and what to do in a clash”.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Černiauskas, Š. (2015), VGT sprendimas: atėjo laikas grąžinti privalomąją karo tarnybą, Delfi.lt, 24 February (retrieved from <https://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/vgt-sprendimas-atejo-laikas-grazinti-privalomaja-karo-tarnyba.d?id=67259680>).

<sup>25</sup> Bardauskas, J. (2016), Ar bus įteisinta mišri kariuomenė? Diena.lt, 4 June (retrieved from <https://www.diena.lt/naujienos/lietuva/salies-pulsas/ar-bus-iteisinta-misri-kariuomene-753521>).

<sup>26</sup> Bakutis, R. (2014). Privalomas karinis rengimas pakviptų sovietmečiu? Alfa.lt, 8 September (retrieved from <https://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/695303/privalomas-karinis-rengimas-pakviptu-sovietmeciu>).



## Conclusions

The annexation of Crimea serves as a focusing event since it was sudden and unpredictable, it occurred as a disaster in one place and at the same time was able to attract attention of various nations across the Globe. Moreover, this major geopolitical event has managed to change the political discourse and triggered changes in security policies across Europe; Germany had strengthened NATO's borders with Russia, France has initiated suspending Russia from G8, and the United Kingdom curtailed defence exports with Russia. Furthermore, discussion with NATO on Defence Plan for the Baltic States had accelerated. Likewise, the seizure of Crimea was unpredictable for all Lithuanian players – political actors and various audiences, including society and decision-makers. The annexation of Crimea mobilised the nation toward national security issues, thus allowing politicians to act more rigorously in agenda-setting and decision making. Furthermore, the annexation of Crimea as a focusing event opened a window of opportunity for changes in national security policy. The powers that were not heard grasped the opportunity to voice the issues concerning insufficiencies in the Lithuanian Armed Forces. Ultimately, the President used the momentum to propose an increase in the defence budget to fulfil the international commitment and started working on the return of conscription. Finally, the annexation of Crimea has also changed Lithuanian society's perceptions of national security.

The analysis of work programmes of the Seimas 2013 -2015 sessions revealed dramatic changes in agenda-setting in the 2015 work programme. The consensus of all political parties, including the opposition, was achieved to change work programmes' objectives and include additional sections titled Strengthening foreign and defence policy and European foreign and security policy into the 2015 work programme of the Seimas sessions. Furthermore, the analysis of work programs of the Seimas sessions revealed that Parliament was aimed at amending the Principal Armed Forces Structure and setting the number of permanent compulsory military service professionals and deciding on the model of the Lithuanian Military recruitment, including the restoration of conscription. Furthermore, the Parliament outlined an enhanced concern at strengthening Lithuanian intelligence institutions. Finally, the assessment of the items brought to the agenda during 2013-2015 shows that the Parliament was generally focused on strengthening internal security in the 2013-2014 Seimas sessions, while the new items on the agenda that emerged after the annexation of Crimea during the first Seimas session in 2015, were clearly aimed at strengthening the national security of the State.

Moreover, the President of the State aimed at uniting the political parties and setting the grounds for the new policy agenda. Furthering her ideas on strengthening the capacities of the Lithuanian Armed Forces, she united the political parties for the general agreement on the Strategic Guidelines of the Foreign, Security and Defence Policy of the Republic of Lithuania for 2014-2020. Analysis of the 2013-2015 annual

presidential reports revealed that no new agenda issues were proposed at the Parliament even though the President addressed warfare, propaganda, and cybersecurity issues during her address to the Parliament. However, her speech to the Parliament in 2015 was aimed at framing aggression from the East as a threat that requires the mobilisation of society and political parties and stressing each citizen's responsibility – to defend the nation. President paid attention to the dissatisfactory quantities of professionals enrolled in the armed forces, prized the decision to restore the conscription initiated by her as a chair of the Lithuanian State Defence Council and encouraged the Parliament to contribute more to international obligations.

Conclusively, the returning of the conscripts to the Army gained traction in the media when the President voiced this idea as a possible unavoidable necessity. Senior military officials have spoken in the media about the need to return the army of conscripts if the army corps is not sufficiently fulfilled. Furthermore, senior politicians also joined the tune by highlighting the inevitability of conscription. In this regard, the ultimate decision regarding the return of the Conscription Army was taken by the State Defence Council, which the President heads. Although not everyone agreed with the reform, the politicians did not object when passing the conscription law to strengthen national defence. Finally, public opinions polls showed an increased commitment of society toward national defence and support of the President's initiatives for changes in the security agenda.

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