WGA

An EU Survey on Whole-of-Goverment Approaches to External Conflict and Crisis

Lithuania Report

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1 | Introduction

To date, Lithuania has not introduced a formal whole-of-government approach (WGA) system to deal with external conflicts and crisis. In other words, it has yet to map out a system for how to provide a coherent response to such events in a coordinated manner. However, this does not mean that Lithuania does not have any foreign policy coordination. In fact, a range of mechanisms and procedures that allow for coordination and cooperation among various governmental institutions and actors in crisis situations has been established and is in use. In addition, over the last two years, the government has started planning how to introduce what it refers to as an 'integrated crisis coordination system'. Thus, it is evident that efforts are underway to move the country towards a more formalised WGA. That said, one must add that the plans developed so far are fairly general, and that the steps taken to date have only been incremental.

One can identify at least four reasons why Lithuania does not yet have a complete and coherent WGA system. First, the country's foreign policy is coordinated through a range of formal, semi-formal and informal mechanisms, and they have been used when needed so far. However, having yet to encounter any major disaster or failure, there has not been any external pressure on the government to establish a more coherent system. Second, Lithuania is a small country and does not have a huge government apparatus of personnel working in foreign affairs and security policy. Most of the players involved know each other, the chains of command and hierarchy structures are not long, and it is usually not difficult to mobilise the responsible people in a crisis situation. Third, since Lithuania regained its independence in

1990, the idea that the country needs to have a coherent system to coordinate and manage crisis situations has always existed. But this idea has not become reality yet due to the absence of clear political leadership at a sufficiently high level of the government and owing to the lack of will and resources to implement such a system. What's more, inter-institutional competition regarding which body should be in charge of such coordination has also compounded this lack of will. Over the last decade, the Office of the President's dominant role in foreign policy matters has also rendered a formal system unnecessary, as the office has coordinated most of the needed responses informally and assumed what appears to be a dominant position. Finally, while Lithuania's foreign policy is concentrated on the country's national security and the Russian threat, most efforts related to security and defence policy focus on domestic crises and threats. For this reason, it is assumed that any serious response to an external crisis should be undertaken either by bigger states or through consultations in the context of the EU and/or NATO and using their fairly developed instruments.

2 | What policies have been developed to further policy coherence?

As mentioned earlier, Lithuania has yet to develop a clear framework for strengthening the integration, coordination and effectiveness of foreign, security and developmental policies, or what might be called a coherent WGA framework. However, there are several policy-coordination instruments and mechanisms to ensure policy coherence on the strategic level as well as some systems in place on the tactical level. First, there is the State Defence Council, a constitutional body for debating and making decisions about the most important national security matters. Second, there are two legally binding national security documents that are updated frequently and define the main focus areas of national security efforts. Third, there is a generally strong consensus in Lithuania on the most important foreign policy questions, which obviates the need to discuss which external crises the country should focus on and on which level. In what follows, I will provide more details about these three points.

As noted above, the State Defence Council (SDC) is a special body devoted to coordinating national security issues on the national level. This entity is mentioned in Article 140 of the Constitution of the Republic of Lithuania (adopted in 1992), which states that the main issues of national defence are considered and coordinated by the State Defence Council. The council consists of the president, the prime minister, the speaker of the Seimas (parliament), the minister of national defence, and the commander of the armed forces. The SDC is convened and headed by the president. The Law on the State Defence Council (adopted in 1997) (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 1997) adds that the council deliberates on foreign and domestic policy questions related to national security and territorial integrity as well as to the main principles of security policy, supplies recommendations on international treaties and defence agreements, coordinates the activities of state institutions working on national security, provides guidelines on strategic crisis management and the defence budget, and coordinates the activities of the intelligence agencies. According to the law, the chairperson of the Seimas National Defence Committee, the director of the State Security Department, and the minister of the interior are to be invited to SCD meetings. As a rule, the minister of foreign affairs has also been invited.

Although neither the constitution nor the law designates the SCD as the main body for strategic planning and guidance, in practice the body is also used to debate and decide on any

challenges related to national security and/or foreign policy. Thus, it can be viewed as the main national body devoted to WGA on the national strategic level. However, it should also be noted that the council does not meet very often. In fact, the president usually convenes the council when he or she wants to reach or demonstrate institutional/governmental consensus on some national security question. For example, such a demonstration of consensus agreement was needed when the first debates on the Lithuanian international military missions started (in 2005/2006) as well as when the decision was made to reintroduce military conscription in response to the crisis in Ukraine (in 2014). In the context of external crises and conflict prevention, the SCD would convene and hold debates if there were a military crises close to Lithuanian borders. But, in all likelihood, other external crisies would be tackled by other instruments and/or institutions (as is further discussed below).

Regarding documents related to national security and foreign policy, Lithuania has two legal documents that systematically define its foreign and national security policies on a strategic level (e.g. the main goals, objectives, threats, risks and responsible institutions), and that provide some ideas about a system for managing and coordinating crises. The first one is the Law on the Basics of the National Security (originally adopted in 1996, but amended 28 times between then and 2018) (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 1996). The law indicates that the government must create and develop a crisis-management system to monitor, prevent, foresee and react to threats, and it stipulates that the Crisis Management Committee headed by the prime minister should be the main coordinating body in this. According to the law, a 'joint coordination centre' is to be set up for each crisis, if needed, to coordinate and manage the response. The law also talks about the integral crisis-management plans that each ministry and other governmental institutions should have (on the actual functioning of these institutions, see below).

The second strategic policy document is the National Security Strategy adopted in 2017 (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2017). This is the fourth such strategy, following previous versions adopted in 2002, 2005 and 2012. It defines national security interests, threats, risks, and both long- and short-term objectives.

In addition to these two documents, Lithuania's foreign policy community has a long, informal tradition of seeking and reaching consensus on strategic foreign and security matters and positions among the main political parties of Lithuania by publicly signing the agreement on strategic foreign, security and defence policy commitments. Such agreements – which are considered binding, though legally they are not – were made in 2004 and 2008. These two documents are the Strategic Guidelines for the Foreign, Security and Defence Policy of the Republic of Lithuania for 2014–2020 (signed in 2014) (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2014) as well as the Lithuanian Defence Policy Guidelines (signed in 2018) (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2018). Finally, from time to time, the Seimas also adopts resolutions on foreign policy directions, most recently in 2016 (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 2016).

Such agreements and resolutions seek to demonstrate strategic consensus on the main questions and directions of foreign and security policy. These policies, in turn, are supposed to provide guidelines for the day-to-day activities related to making and implementing foreign policy decisions, including ones related to responding to external crises. Such guidelines also specifically indicate which external crises should be considered important and why.

Finally, in order to understand the (currently) minimal need to have a coordinated system in Lithuania for responding to external crises, it is useful to keep in mind the main foreign policy priorities of the country. Lithuania is strongly focused on its own security and on maintaining a secure environment around its borders, i.e. in its 'neighbourhood'. Thus, all thinking about external conflicts and crises is dominated by self-interest and regional interests. At present, Russia is the main security threat and adversary – and Lithuanians generally consider this not only to apply to themselves, but also to Europe as a whole. Indeed, Russia is viewed as an expansionist state that seeks to control its own neighbourhood as well as one that destabilises the region whenever these goals are not achieved, as has happened in Georgia and then Ukraine. In fact, Russia is not only a military threat, but also militarily threatening. In other words, in addition to being prepared and ready to use force, it is also willing to do so. And this also includes via non-military means, such as through energy policy, false information campaigns and cyberattacks. Although neighbouring Belarus is not directly mentioned often in security and foreign policy discussions and documents, perceived threats do arise from the fact that it is viewed as somewhat of a Russia satellite. However, Belarus' new nuclear plant in the border city of Astravyets, which is scheduled to enter into operation in 2020, has led it to be viewed in recent years as a threat due to safety concerns.

Given these concerns about its neighbours, all strategic documents and papers emphasise the vital importance of Lithuania's memberships in the EU and NATO, which are both considered the primary guarantors of the country's security. Accordingly, the viability and unity of NATO and the EU, as well as the degree of solidarity within both organisations, are of paramount interest to the country. Regarding NATO, the main focus is on collective defence commitments and the importance of maintaining strong transatlantic ties (i.e. on keeping American forces in Europe and keeping Americans interested in the continent). In order to counter Russia's efforts to destabilise and exert influence in Eastern Europe, Lithuania strongly supports more closely integrating Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine into to the EU (and eventually offering them membership) and having a strong Eastern Partnership (EaP) in addition to inviting these countries to join NATO.

Instability in other parts of the world is acknowledged, and the negative consequences for the international community of problems in regions further away are recognised. However, unless some EU instrument is activated and there is a need for a national position, little more is done in terms of strategic deliberations on the national level. Thus, in Lithuania, there is not much in terms of systematic and comprehensive thinking on external crisis management, conflict prevention or conflict resolution if these are not taking place in nearby regions (e.g. Belarus, Georgia or Ukraine). In such cases, general remarks about solidarity and strengthening international security and stability are usually made. Furthermore, Lithuania acknowledges that its security depends on countering challenges to the south of Europe, where prolonged conflicts, unstable states and security vacuums are creating conditions for terrorism, uncontrolled migration, organised crime and humanitarian crises – all of which present a huge challenge to EU unity. But the country's focus and urgency to react is usually only reserved to a limited number of external security threats.

3 | Who are the main actors involved in cooperating in a WGA?

There are four main institutions that would usually be involved in coordinating a reaction to an external crisis in some WGA-like fashion: the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), the Ministry of National Defence (MND), the Prime Minister's Office and the President's Office. Depending on the issue at hand, other institutions might be involved, such as: the State Security Department; the so-called Second Investigation Department under MND, a military intelligence unit; the Ministry of the Interior; or the Ministry of Economy and Innovation.

In times of external crisis, coordination and cooperation would take place in more or less the following way, which is based on a mixture of formal and informal practice. In general, the government has a pretty clear system of disseminating information during a crisis situation. This is done via a messaging system and/or telephone, and there is a system for who gets informed, about which matters, how the level of urgency is determined, and who should be contacted next. In a second step, a decision is made about whether to react and, if so, about whether those in the circle of already-informed bodies should respond to the problem or the response efforts should be taken to a higher, if not the highest, level. After the initial decision on the nature of the situation, the type of subsequent communication depends on the type of crisis (internal, external, both) and the sector impacted by the crisis (security, defence, foreign, interior, energy, cyber, etc). In serious situations, the initial decision about whether to react would usually be made in the President's Office, which would then contact the MFA. However, the opposite can also happen, with the MFA taking this decision and then contacting the President's Office. If the crisis has security- or defence-related aspects, the MND would also be involved. Given the external nature of the crisis, Lithuania's permanent representative to the EU and/or NATO (depending on the type of question) would also be brought into the communication loop and then assist in coordinating subsequent consultations. Since Lithuania is a small country, the communication chain is usually short and quick. But the success of this procedure depends a lot on how good the working relations and/or personal contacts between the President's Office and the ministries are.

For a long time, even though the Prime Minister's Office coordinates the Crisis Management Committee and the newly created National Security Commission, the office and the prime minister him- or herself have been rather marginal actors in this system. Moreover, the National Security Commission is just beginning to function, so its role among the actors has yet to be defined, and the Crisis Management Committee has never become functional and has only been activated a few times, all of which have involved domestic crises.

4 | How does your country operationalise a WGA?

Despite Lithuania's lack of a single, coherent WGA framework, there are procedures and mechanisms in place regarding what is and should be done in times of crisis. One part of the existing system (information-sharing) and how it functions among actors in various institutions have already been described above. In what follows, the additional elements are discussed.

As things now stand, plans for having a more integrated and coordinated system of managing crises are being proposed and discussed. This indicates that more systemic efforts are being made to move towards something more similar to a WGA. As discussed earlier, even though

Lithuanian laws have established various crisis-management structures, to date they have either been ineffective or virtually non-functional. The Law on the Basics of National Security (Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania 1996) mentions the Crisis Management Committee, which is headed by the prime minister and consists of the responsible ministers and the chancellor of the government. The committee is supposed to help the government with crisis management and coordination. For example, it has to propose a strategy, develop a system of crisis management, and be the institution in charge should a crisis occur. However, this committee has never become fully functional, it has not had any supporting institutions to organise its meetings and activities, and it has usually only convened when a (domestic) crisis has arisen.

Another body, the Crisis Management Center in the MND, existed until 2010. Although this institution was also tasked with creating some kind of crisis-management system, it did not produce any significant results and was silently dissolved. Furthermore, it should also be noted that there are legal acts, procedures and sometimes even plans regarding crisis management on the governmental and ministerial levels. Nevertheless, the biggest challenge here is that not every minister has had trainings or participated in crisis simulations, which means that not everyone in the system would know what to do in an actual crisis.

Recently, the MFA and the MND, the two ministries that would deal with most external crises, have begun testing and checking their crisis-response systems and procedures. The mechanism in these two ministries for working and coordinating with EU institutions is also well established, as it is the same mechanism used for non-crisis situations. The leading actors are the MFA and Lithuania's Brussels-based permanent representatives to the EU and NATO, who regularly also contribute to coordination efforts. The president contributes to the formation and representation of EU policy issues that are discussed in the European Council, but his or her involvement in the coordination process depends on the political and strategic salience of the issue. The Permanent Representation of Lithuania to the EU represents the country's official positions in EU institutions, contributes to the formation of national positions, and disseminates information about EU initiatives. Thus, the representation is the main hub through which coordination and communication with EU institutions takes place, and its communication channels and procedures with the MFA are also well established. The biggest challenge is a matter of resources (mainly human, but also financial), so there must be scrupulous prioritisation regarding which issues to focus on (as discussed earlier in the section on Lithuania's foreign policy priorities).

Regarding initial steps to establish an integrated crisis-management system, the programme of the current government (which assumed office in late 2016) mentions the goal of putting in place an integrated crisis-management and hybrid threat-prevention system by the end of 2020. The idea is to establish a functioning system that would be prepared to respond to hybrid threats. This would involve creating, among other things, a coordinating body, a mechanism for crisis prevention, an information-exchange system and an early warning system. The current government began working on establishing a more defined mechanism for crisis coordination among the ministries by creating a new structure in late 2017. The Governmental National Security Commission aims to become the main institution coordinating threat-monitoring and -prevention measures, and it would also serve as the main body responding to a security-related crisis (as mentioned earlier, the State Defence Council would retain responsibility for military threats). The new commission also aims to have a working crisis-communication system between ministries and other responsible agencies. The

'working' part here is meant to acknowledge that such a system already exists on paper, but nobody knows whether and how it would work in an actual crisis situation. The commission, chaired by the prime minister, consists of the heads of several ministries (Economy and Innovation, National Defence, and the Interior), a representative of the President's Office, and the directors of the State Security Department and the Second Investigation Department under MND. The commission is supposed to generally meet on a monthly basis and to be responsible for coordinating the whole crisis-management cycle, including threat identification and evaluation, crisis prevention and crisis management. At present, it mostly discusses strategic questions and preventive measures, but it is also considered to be the main institution in charge of organising responses to emergencies.

The Office of the Government, as the Prime Minister's Office is also known, is divided into groups, one of which is the Threat Management and Crisis Prevention Group. It currently serves as a secretariat for the above-mentioned National Security Commission (NSC) and the Crisis Management Committee (CMC). However, the CMC will cease to exist if the new amendments to the Law on the Basics of National Security are adopted. On paper, the NSC partly duplicates the work of the CMC. For this reason, the proposed amendments would eliminate the CMC and shift its responsibilities to the NSC, thereby expanding the latter's functions. The new commission has been formed, but without the supporting higher-level legal acts. These provisions were being discussed in parliamentary committees at the time of writing (June 2019).

One of the related plans is to create a body responsible for supporting the work of the revised National Security Commission, called the Joint Threat Management and Crisis Prevention Group (not to be confused with the above-mentioned group with the almost exact name), which would comprise representatives of the relevant ministries and other governmental agencies. In this way, the complete institutional crisis-management system would be established: The NSC would handle coordination on the strategic level; the joint group would execute coordination efforts and facilitate information-exchange among institutions; the group in the Prime Minister's Office would coordinate the work of the NSC and joint group; and the ministries would have their own crisis-management structures.

At the moment, the whole system only exists on paper as a draft. However, initial steps and existing plans indicate that a concerted effort is being made to move towards a more systemic and coherent WGA. If these plans are implemented, one could say that Lithuania has developed (at least on paper) a WGA system for crisis management. Still, even under the proposed system, the focus would remain on internal crises and domestic security issues. But, implicitly, the system is also supposed to work for the majority of major external crises.

5 | Conclusions

After reviewing the efforts over the years to coordinate foreign and security policy in Lithuania both in crisis and normal situations, the first thing that needs to be mentioned is the fact that Lithuania is focused on its own national security, and that thinking about crisis management is oriented internally. Given these circumstances, the majority of the crisis-management mechanisms that exist or are in the planning stage mainly focus on domestic crises or threats. When asked directly if the existing or future mechanism for crisis management will be

applicable to external crises, most officials working on such matters would say 'yes', though they would likely add that this dimension of crisis management is rarely the focus. Instead, EU and/or NATO institutions, mechanisms and procedures are usually considered to be more appropriate and suitable structures for implementing a comprehensive approach to external crises.

The external crises that Lithuania's foreign policy establishment tends to react to and to try to produce a coordinated response to concern Russia and countries in the EU's eastern 'neighbourhood' (e.g. Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine). For example, the crisis in Ukraine has definitely prompted a coordinated and systematic response in which a range of institutions have been involved, projects have been coordinated, and a related budget has been systemically and consistently allocated. Other external crises are usually considered 'not for us to solve', and the principles of either solidarity or non-involvement are invoked. Accordingly, for a long time, there was no need to develop a systematic WGA framework for managing external crises and preventing conflict. Thus, despite the efforts to establish an integrated crisis-management system, most crisis communication is now done via a mixture of formal, informal and ad hoc ways.

As some efforts to establish an integrated crisis-management system are underway and some previous experience in crisis management exists, it is possible to pinpoint several factors that would contribute to the success of a WGA system. The first – and, it seems, the most crucial – is the role of leadership. Leadership matters in at least two senses: in understanding the need and reasons for a WGA, and in showing the will to create such a system. The second factor is the ability to take advantage of the smallness of the country, which would result in a less complicated governmental structure, quicker decision-making and having a rather small number of people involved. The third necessary factor is a willingness among the relevant players to implement reforms. The current partly formal-partly informal system seems to be working, so there must be strong incentives for and enthusiasm about establishing a more formal and legalistic system (even if the backers of a more flexible or creative approach might view this as a hindrance). Finally, external pressure and/or vigorous recommendations (AKA nudging) from the EU and/or NATO could provide additional stimulus to Lithuania to start implementing a working WGA system. All in all, if at least all four of the factors listed above were present, it would not be overly presumptuous to claim that Lithuania would be on a much quicker road to having a formal WGA system in place that would enable coordinated, coherent and long-term responses to external conflicts and crises.

6 | Reference list

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