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## Lithuania in the NATO Mission in Afghanistan: Between Idealism and Pragmatism

The article is first of all aimed at demonstrating how in the case of Lithuania's participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan the discourse that has spread by idealistic rhetoric figures, as a tool for creating a certain image of Lithuania (as an actor in international relations), is employed by the Lithuanian government to pursue pragmatic goals of the Lithuanian foreign policy, oriented toward a totally different geographic and mental space (in Lithuania, commonly referred to as 'transatlantic space') than the region, the Central Asia, in which the physical action takes place and in which Lithuania has no vested interests whatsoever. At the same time, making use of the concepts 'construction of social reality' and 'social construction of knowledge' formulated by Stefan Guzzini, the relationship between the image broadcast through discourse and the reality are analyzed. The article also seeks to tackle the question of whether, taking into account the worsening worldwide economic situation, specifically in Lithuania, as well as the security situation in Afghanistan, the chosen tactics of pursuing foreign policy goals will pay off in the long term perspective and what could be scenarios for further development. To answer the latter question, the new government-endorsed "Strategy of the participation of the Republic of Lithuania in the activities of the international community in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013" is analyzed in the last part of the article.

### Introduction

In the four years since the establishment in the summer of 2005 of the Lithuanian military-led "Camp Whiskey" nearby the administrative centre of the Afghan province of Ghor, Chaghcharan, the Lithuanian government has been actively seeking to create a double image of Lithuania both at home and abroad. On one hand as an active and trustworthy ally and partner, and on the other hand as a capable and successful donor state. The audience of this image is also double: on the international level – the so-called "allies and partners" (first of all the American administration, but also top NATO officials and governments of the Alliance member-states), and on the national level – Lithuanian citizenry (the society). A third group directly linked to Lithuania's

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commitments in Afghanistan – Afghans, or, to be more precise, inhabitants of the Province of Ghor. The latter are to be identified as the target group.

Top Lithuanian officials routinely present Lithuania's participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan as one of priorities of the Lithuanian foreign policy<sup>1</sup>. From an idealistic point of view, Lithuania's participation in this international operation can be seen as a three-member structure, where the subject (the Lithuanian government) through its decisions makes a direct impact – comprehensively contributes to the reconstruction of the province – on the target group (inhabitants of Ghor) and then communicates the results (achievements) of that impact to the audience (the Lithuanian society and “allies and partners”). It is exactly this picture that is being constantly presented in the public by the Lithuanian politicians and the involved state institutions.

However, under closer scrutiny of the real actions of Lithuania in the NATO mission in Afghanistan so far a somewhat different constellation of the members of this structure reveal itself, where the audience (in particular “allies and partners”) are practically turned into the target group, while the original target group (Afghans in the person of inhabitants of Ghor) become a mere means for the subject in achieving its pragmatic goals that have no direct relation with the original target group. In other words, at the hands of the Lithuanian government Afghans (first of all, the inhabitants of Ghor) have become a tool in creating the image of Lithuania as an active international relations subject, and the entire mission – a public relations campaign both within its borders and outside them.

This article is first of all aimed at demonstrating how in the case of Lithuania's participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan the discourse permeated by idealistic rhetoric figures, as a tool for creating a certain image of Lithuania (as an actor in international relations), is employed by the Lithuanian government to pursue pragmatic goals of the Lithuanian foreign policy oriented toward a totally different geographic and mental space (in Lithuania, commonly referred to as ‘transatlantic space’) than the region, Central Asia, in which the physical action takes place and in which Lithuania has no vested interests whatsoever. At the same time, making use of the concepts of ‘construction of social reality’ and ‘social construction of knowledge’ formulated by Stefan Guzzini<sup>2</sup>, the relation between the image broadcast by the discourse and the reality is analyzed. The article also seeks to tackle the question of whether, taking into account the worsening of the economic situation worldwide and specifically in Lithuania as well as security situation in Afghanistan, the chosen

<sup>1</sup> Both the then minister of national defense Juozas Olekas, and the former chief of Armed forces general major Valdas Tutkus told the Baltic News Service (BNS) that Lithuania considers its participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan a priority task, though underscored that the mission undertaken by the Provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Ghor has brought Lithuania to the limit of its capabilities. See: Alfa.lt “Lietuvos įsitraukimas į veiklą Afganistane – tai vienas pagrindinių mūsų valstybės tarptautinių įsipareigojimų”, 04 04 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Guzzini S., “A Reconstruction of Constructivism in International Relations”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 2000, vol. 6, no. 2, p. 147-182.

tactics of pursuing foreign policy goals will pay off in the long term perspective and what could be scenarios of its further development. To answer the latter question the newly government-endorsed “Strategy of the participation of the Republic of Lithuania in the activities of the international community in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013” is analyzed in the last part of the article.

## 1. The Nature of the Mission – Fulfilment of Obligations to NATO

The Lithuanian military have been taking part in the occupation of Afghanistan since the end of 2002, when a squadron of Special Operations Forces (SOF) of the Lithuanian Army joined the US-led “Operation Enduring Freedom” and until 2004 was succeeded by another three squadrons. In the summer of 2007 a SOF squadron joined the military operations of ISAF in the provinces of Kandahar and Zabul, and have since been replaced by several others. But due to secrecy of the SOF structure, personnel and *modus operandi*, the activities of SOF squadrons have not become a hot topic of discussions or a tool for creating of the image of the state. Though, there is an exception – an article by an American war journalist Michael Yon<sup>3</sup> about the activities of the Lithuanian SOF in the province of Zabul, which was used by the Ministry of National Defence (MND) to enhance both its own prestige and the positive image of Lithuania’s participation in the occupation of Afghanistan. The Ministry awarded Michael Yon a “Feather of the year” of 2008 in recognition of his “genuinely describe(ing) soldiers of the Lithuanian special military operation forces in the international operation in Afghanistan.”<sup>4</sup> Contrary to the SOF, the Lithuanian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team, because of its origins and nature – it is the first self-governing Lithuanian mission of this kind – is in the eyeball of media since the very moment the Lithuanian government in 2005 made the decision to establish it.

Historically by now (as of July 2009) the 26 existing PRTs can be divided into those which were established by the USA in the course of the “Operation Enduring Freedom” and those which were established after 2003 by individual states (NATO members and partners) under the umbrella of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The main difference is related to the fact that most of the American PTRs since their very establishment had to operate in the active combat zone – in the southern, south-eastern and eastern provinces (the so-called ‘Pasthun Belt’), while the ISAF PRTs were established in rela-

<sup>3</sup> Yon M. “On the Front Lines in Afghanistan, Part Two”, <http://pajamasmedia.com/blog/on-the-front-lines-in-afghanistan-part-two/2/>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>4</sup> Ministry of National Defense, “JAV karo žurnalistui įteiktas “Metų plunksnos” apdovanojimas”, 2009-01-22, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/181513/>, 14 07 2010.

tively calm provinces. PRTs (among them the Lithuanian one) established in non-Pashtun provinces (in the western and northern parts of the country) until recently had much more favourable conditions to pursue the set objectives (the main ones being strengthening of influence of the Afghanistan's government in provinces and creating conditions conducive for reconstruction of the provinces and the state). But, as analysts notice<sup>5</sup>, the activities of ISAF PRTs operating even in relatively secure provinces are developed very unevenly because apart from the security factor, the effectiveness of their activities is circumscribed by the available infrastructure, topographic and demographic peculiarities of provinces, and the capabilities of PRT banner-bearer state – the financial and human resources which that state can pull together for the reconstruction of the province.

The godfathers of the Lithuanian mission (i.e. of the establishment and leading of the PRT), the then ruling Social Democrats (the Minister of National Defence G. Kirkilas and his successor J. Olekas) described the main goal of the mission in the following words: “to stabilize the situation both in Afghanistan and in particular in the Province of Ghor”.<sup>6</sup> Since the security situation in Afghanistan in general, and especially in Ghor in the beginning of 2005 was almost satisfactory, no tense or dangerous service for Lithuanian representatives was forecast. Media then reported that according to Olekas: “the Province of Ghor, where Lithuanians will head the reconstruction works, in his opinion, has its advantages. J. Olekas argued that it is in the centre of Afghanistan, therefore there are no border problems, “where as a rule drugs’ and weapons’ paths go”. The MP saw also as an advantage the fact that this province for a while was watched over by an American mission and “after this stage will be surrounded by provinces where PRTs will be established”. This certain environment security, according to him, would guaranty greater safety.”<sup>7</sup>

Through such similar wording an image of a relatively safe and stable province, where no dangers for the health or life of the Lithuanian citizens ought to arise, was being created in the public, while totally keeping silent on the events pertaining to the dynamics of security situation in a recent past. This way, for instance, Lithuanian politicians concealed (and the media mentioned in just a few words) the fact that in the summer of 2004 a local warlord, Abdusalam Khan, with a purpose it is maintained, to concentrate in his hands as many weapons and drug production and dealing as possible, with his armed militia in an armed encounter made the government-appointed governor Ibrahim Malikzada flee and briefly took the provincial administrative centre Chaghcharan into his hands. The situation was normalized only after two weeks when the

<sup>5</sup> Eronen O., “PRT Models in Afghanistan Approaches to Civil-Military Integration”, *CMC Finland Civilian Crisis Management Studies*, 2008, vol. 1, no 5.

<sup>6</sup> ELTA, “Lietuvos misija Afganistane gali trukti keliolika metų”, 2005 03 25, [http://www.politika.lt/index.php?cid=831&new\\_id=1974](http://www.politika.lt/index.php?cid=831&new_id=1974), 2009-11-05.

<sup>7</sup> ELTA, “Lietuviai turi pasiruošti, kad misija Afganistane truks keliolika metų, tvirtina J. Olekas”, 2005 03 25, <http://www.sekunde.lt/content.php?p=read&tid=10261>, 14 07 2010.

President of Afghanistan temporarily dispatched a detachment of the Afghan National Army (ANA) to the province, where otherwise until now there is no permanent presence of the ANA. Around the same time, armed encounters between militias loyal to the then governor of the neighbouring province of Herat, Ismail Khan, and groups hostile to him took place in Ghor. Lithuanian media failed to make notice of that either.

After announcing publicly Lithuania's decision to involve itself in the expansion of the ISAF activities zone in the form of a PRT, Lithuanian politicians ascertained to the nation that this mission would not cost much to Lithuania. Media conveyed the assurances of the then Minister of National Defence G. Kirkilas that, "at the moment there are predictions that the mission in Afghanistan may cost Lithuania 400-500 thousand Lt per month. It is planned that for a year 8-9 million Lt will be allocated from the budget of the Ministry of National Defence. The main part from it will be conferred for the salaries of the soldiers departing for the province in Afghanistan."<sup>8</sup>

In the context of economic growth, such amount, especially when the bulk of the money was to come back to Lithuanian citizens in the form of salaries for the soldiers serving in the mission, did not have to alarm even the very tight-fisted citizens of the country. In reality, however, the military expenditures already in the first year (when the US was still entirely financing the maintenance of the PRT in Chaghcharan) reached several tens of millions and during the entire 2005-2008 period made around 220 million Lt<sup>9</sup>.

The godfathers of the mission were not disturbed by the apparently inauspicious natural conditions in the province of Ghor, or the degree of social and economic backwardness there: practically the entire territory of the province is covered by mountains ranging from two to three and a half kilometres in height, with steep slopes and deep passes. Therefore, the province is one of the hardest in the whole of the country. Winters last from October to April, and this allows for only one yield per year in the diminutive agricultural areas in valleys. During the winter season, once the snow covers crossings and roads, life gets slower in the whole territory of the province. For instance, there was a heavy winter in 2005 – several hundred people died from cold only in Ghor, and up to 1000<sup>10</sup> over all of the country. Several hundred others died in the spring because of floods caused by rapidly melting snow.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Aleknaite K., "Į Afganistaną siunčiamų karių skaičių gali prašyti didinti", Delfi.lt, 2005 m. vasario 21 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=6086612>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>9</sup> Such amount is indicated in one of the drafts of the "Strategy of the participation of the Republic of Lithuania in the activities of the international community in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013" prepared by the MFA. The first draft of the Strategy, dated April 23, indicates a 190 million Lt amount.

<sup>10</sup> "Up to 200 kids said dead of cold in Afghan province", 24 Feb 2005, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/DDAD-69WUA3?OpenDocument&query=Ghor>, 14 07 2010. "Hundreds feared dead in Afghanistan's harshest winter for years", 04 Mar 2005, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/VBOL-6ABCHS?OpenDocument&query=Ghor>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>11</sup> "Floods kill over 200 in Afghanistan", 20 Mar 2005, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/VBOL-6APG87?OpenDocument&query=Ghor>, 14 07 2010.

The province of Ghor is criss-crossed by mountain rivers that flood in the spring but sink or totally desiccate in the second part of the summer. Though some of them (especially in the north) feed the agricultural fields that are outside the province, it is difficult to effectively use water from the rivers for the needs of the inhabitants of the province. Therefore the problem of drinking-water and water suitable for agricultural use, especially in the summer and early autumn, is very acute. Several-year long droughts at the beginning of the decade have pushed Ghor to a brink of mass famine. A similar situation developed in the summer of 2006.<sup>12</sup>

Approximately 98 percent of the inhabitants of Ghor are peasants (only about 13-15 thousand of roughly 670 thousand live in the only town in the whole province – in its administrative centre Chaghcharan) who live in some 2,000 villages spread in the area of more than 36 thousand square kilometres. Though cereal plants are most common in agriculture, poppies that used to bring several times higher income than other agricultures were for a time also widely cultivated. However, the locals almost stopped cultivating the opium poppies because of bad yields caused by repeated droughts and because of low wholesale prices and in 2008 it was officially announced that Ghor is an opium poppy-free province of Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

If, before the establishment of the PRT, there was some even if meagre information provided publicly about the natural conditions in Ghor, there virtually was no information or statistics on after effects (victims or damage) of natural disasters, or the condition of the local economy – overall poverty and starvation.<sup>14</sup> Using to its advantage the ignorance of the Lithuanian society – there was no previous knowledge about the real situation in Ghor – the Lithuanian government engaged in successful “construction of social reality” and “social construction of knowledge” when through press releases and public speeches by politicians it supplied the society with “processed” (“softened”) information about Ghor aimed at forming among the citizens of the country a favourable or at least not adverse opinion about the kicking-off mission. All the possible risk factors (as a rule identified exclusively with natural conditions) were countered with the argument that Ghor is one of the safest provinces in Afghanistan.

But what is most important, is the presumably favourable circumstances and conditions that joining the NATO mission in Afghanistan brought and how it was being presented, not only as the fulfilment of the obligations to NATO,

<sup>12</sup> “Christian Aid calls for immediate action and assistance for drought affected population in Afghanistan”, 13 Aug 2006, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/KHII-6SR89C?OpenDocument&query=Ghor>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>13</sup> Mansfield D., “Poppy Free Provinces: A Measure or a Target?”, Water Management, Livestock and the Opium Economy Project, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Case Study Series, May 2009, [http://www.aren.org.af/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=26&task=doc\\_download&gid=668](http://www.aren.org.af/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=26&task=doc_download&gid=668), 14 07 2010.

<sup>14</sup> Several press releases could be considered as exceptions. For instance. ELTA, “Afganistane nuo šalčio miršta šimtai vaikų”, 2005 m. vasario 24 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=6114070>, 14 07 2010. BNS, “Afganistane galėjo mirti daugiau kaip 1 tūkst. vaikų”, 2005 m. vasario 18 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=6073385>, 14 07 2010.

but also as the only possibility to accumulate foreign policy “capital” while practically taking no serious risk. The then Minister of National Defence G. Kirkilas assured that “The Lithuanian leadership of a Provincial reconstruction team in Afghanistan will endow the state with a solid political significance in the NATO context. Lithuania, through actively engaging in the international operations, will be more visible and will attain stronger position.”<sup>15</sup> – Recalling that the political elite of Lithuania in 2004 were actively proceeding with the construction of the image of Lithuania as the leader of the region (though geographically never precisely defined), it becomes even more comprehensible that the mission in Afghanistan had to add to the strengthening of this image.

Besides, it was very likely hoped-for by the architects of the mission that an active engagement in NATO activities in Afghanistan would be of great value for Lithuania – a new (and inexperienced) member of NATO – Armed Forces, which would not only gain the priceless experience of cooperation, as well as action in an armed conflict zone, but would experience the overall transformation, the hugest part of which was and still is the renewal of armaments and machinery. Lastly, the army (especially high ranking officers) would have to perform a sort of diplomatic function – to be envoys of Lithuania in a grand international project. And indeed, there were no mistakes made in this sphere – from the publicly available information one can get an impression that the preparedness of and fulfilment of tasks by Lithuanian soldiers (among them the talent to avoid victims) has received a positive evaluation from top NATO officials as well as military chiefs and commanders from individual member-states. In the Lithuanian media there are plenty of citations of both the commends for the Lithuanian soldiers made by foreign generals or other brothers in arm and the local politicians who insistently emphasize this. One can come to the conclusion that the government of Lithuania has succeeded in reaching one of its goals – to create in the eyes of military “allies and partners” an image of Lithuania as an active member of NATO which is fulfilling (or even exceeding) its obligations to the Alliance. Occasionally, the example of Lithuania in the NATO system would be used to embarrass member-states of NATO that have more recourses and forces but contribute less to the activities of ISAF.

However, absorbed by this aspect of the image-creating, the governing Social Democrats until the very end of their ruling in 2008 failed to seriously focus on the civil dimension of the mission. The position of the then Minister of National Defence Kirkilas, conveyed by media some time prior to the actual establishment of the PRT, that “assistance from the Alliance members will also be sought in the future in executing various construction works in Afghanistan, such as building of hospitals and paving the roads. The minister hopes that

<sup>15</sup> BNS, “Lietuva mini narystės NATO pirmąsias metines”, 2005 m. kovo 29 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=6348015>, 14 07 2010.



these projects will be implemented specifically out of NATO allies' funding."<sup>16</sup> This betrays the fact that Lithuania did not even consider seriously engaging in the provincial reconstruction works (in other words, international donations). Kirkilas' idea of soliciting funds for civilian projects from "allies" shows the then government's felt (and possibly consciously made) division between the military and civilian dimensions of the Lithuanian mission in Ghor – Lithuania since the very inception of the PRT was ready to pull adequate financial and human resources only for the former – and this was later proven by the amounts spent.

Since the MND was the most eager institution for Lithuania to join the mission, from its establishment in the summer of 2005 the PRT was and remains in principle a military project, because the civilian component (not including hired service personnel, such as kitchen and laundry workers) has never exceeded 5 percent of the PRT personnel. For the first two years since the establishment of the PRT (especially when Kirkilas became the Prime Minister in the summer of 2006) the MND had practically taken over the diplomatic functions related to Lithuania's activities in Afghanistan and pushed aside the awkward MFA until its mandate and functions as the coordinating institution were enhanced with the establishment in 2007 of the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department.

## 2. The Evolution of the Mission: Between Rhetorical Altruism and Tacit Pragmatism

"Lithuania responded with enthusiasm to the invitation of NATO to lead a new PRT in the Afghan Province of Ghor. I can assure you that you have friends who want to help you."<sup>17</sup> – with such words the then President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus reassured the Vice President of Afghanistan during their meeting in the autumn of 2005. Soon afterwards, when on a visit to the Lithuanian-led PRT in Ghor, the President declared that "Lithuania, having quite a lot experience in state-building, understands the need of Afghanistan to build its state. We consider our mission as very important."<sup>18</sup> But the "state-building" Adamkus was referring to is mainly composed of activities of non-military nature (where probably the most important tasks are building the institutions and structures of government, justice and security and strengthening of their capacities and capabilities). Therefore, the Lithuanian-led PRT like the others elsewhere in the country, besides the military dimension that had to ensure se-

<sup>16</sup> Aleknaitė K., "Į Afganistaną siunčiamų karių skaičių gali prašyti didinti", Delfi.lt, 2005 m. vasario 21 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=6086612>, , 14 07 2010.

<sup>17</sup> Press service of the President, "V. Adamkus: Lietuva reiškia paramą Afganistano vyriausybės siekiams", 2005-09-15, <http://archyvas.lrp.lt/lt/news.full/5940>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Sekunde.lt, "Prezidentas pagyrė ir apdovanojo Lietuvos karius", 2005-10-12, <http://www.sekunde.lt/content.php?p=read&tid=23060>, 14 07 2010.



cure environment for “state-building”, also had from its inception to embark on civilian (development cooperation) activities that through human and financial resources were to make a direct contribution to the “state-building”.

Formally, the civilian dimension of the mission in Ghor was not much behind the military dimension – the Lithuanian Parliament sanctioned the participation of civilians in the mission as early as June of 2005 by creating a Special Mission whose first employees started to work in Ghor in the end of July that same year. The civilian component of the PRT, especially the Special Mission, had to be multifunctional right from its inauguration: on the one hand it had to represent Lithuania in Afghanistan (to serve as a surrogate embassy both in respect to partner-states and the official Kabul as well as in the realm of ISAF), while on the other hand it had to carry out development cooperation projects – to contribute comprehensively to the reconstruction of the province. Lithuania (in the person of the MFA) appointed a Special Lithuanian assistance and project coordinator in Afghanistan on September 8, 2005. The coordinator was charged with supervising “the civilian activities of the Lithuanian-led Ghor PRT in Afghanistan, organizing support for civilian, development and humanitarian projects”<sup>19</sup>. At the same time, it was reported that the mission of the Ambassador G. Damušis who was appointed the coordinator was to “attract attention and encourage activities in the Province of Ghor of other governmental, international and non-governmental organizations and agencies”. Thus, formally considering, legally and structurally Lithuania from late 2005 was ready for a full-fledged development (e.g. implementation of development cooperation projects) of the civilian dimension of the mission in Ghor. However, real input of the country that proclaimed itself a donor-state hardly met the image being created (and ultimately the expectations of organizations engaged in international donations as well those of the local residents).

Firstly so, because the Lithuanian Special Mission since its establishment up to this day (mid-2009) has been staffed by only three or four civil servants from the MND, MFA and the Police Department. As of mid-2009, not any other ministry or state institution had sent any specialists in other fields (like agriculture, health care, education, communications, economy). With such a composition of the Special Mission, the division of functions was hard to realize and the representation function was mixed with the practical (development cooperation).

Even worse, due to a constant lack of funding for civilian projects the Special mission has been engaged in the practice that could be named “diplomatic begging”, when foreign governments, enterprises or international organizations are constantly being beseeched to spare funds for long-term infrastructural and other large scale projects in Ghor. Itself in 2006, Lithuania budgeted 1.14 million Lt for the civilian projects in Afghanistan that had to “improve the

<sup>19</sup>Delfi.lt, “G. Damušytė koordinuos Lietuvos projektus Afganistane”, 2005-09-09, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/article.php?id=7449807>, 14 07 2010.

infrastructure of Ghor, delivery of electricity and health services.”<sup>20</sup>, from this amount “0.3 million Lt -for technical support and training of the Afghan National Police (ANP).”<sup>21</sup> Considering the fact that the police officers in the province (as elsewhere in the country) lack elementary knowledge and working skills, 100 thousand Euros for the essential equipment and machinery although was vitally necessary was way too small a support for policemen who are in charge of some 36 thousand square km mountainous territory.

In the first year of the PRT operation, only very limited funding was attracted from outside because even the USAID had no (more) representation in Ghor and UNAMA still had not opened an office in the province (it was opened only in the summer of 2007). From among the half a dozen of non-governmental organizations operating at the time in the province several (e.g. the French MADERA (*Mission d’Aide au Developpement des Economies Rurales*) and the American *World Vision*) had even halted their activities due to a deterioration of the security situation (because of increase in racketeering, threats and even violence against employees of aid organizations).

With just a year having passed since the establishment of the PRT, there already were discernible signs that local officials were starting to feel that the PRT was not meeting the expectations of the provincial administration. This was openly reflected by one Lithuanian civil servant who had close relations to the activities of the PRT and who in his memos to the then leadership in the National Defence System lamented that “lately during meetings more and more often we hear reproaches because of meagre financial and material support provided by the PRT for the restoration of the provincial economy. It is claimed that in other provinces such support is considerably larger. In the future, this could have negative impact on providing safety for soldiers.”, and added further that “the CIMIC sections of all the Lithuanian PRTs (rotations – *my insertion*) were doing their job very well but during the past year they have not received a dollar for their activities. All the charity was received from Denmark and Iceland or bought on personal money of the Lithuanian soldiers. Further the harder it will be for the PRT’s MLOTs (Mobile Liaison Observation Teams) to visit villages in the province, because local residents do not feel any concrete, even if small, support for schools, hospitals, disabled people and so on. One has to “buy” the safety of MLOTs.”<sup>22</sup> Finally, by way of concluding he proposed that “the civilian component of the PRT has to be strengthened. The PRT is not a responsibility of the national defence system but an international obligation of Lithuania. (...) in the composition of the planned Lithuanian VIP delegation there should be representatives (desirably, of not lower than the ministry secretary rank) from the Healthcare, Education, Agriculture, Economy,

<sup>20</sup> Delfi.lt, “Afganistano atkūrimui Lietuva žada skirti apie 4 mln. Lt”, 2006-11-03, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/article.php?id=11121364>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>21</sup> Lrytas.lt, “Trečdalis Lietuvos paramos Afganistano Goro provincijai teks vietos policijai”, 2006-08-08, <http://www.lrytas.lt/-11550360991154176812-tre%C4%8Ddalis-lietuvos-paramos-afganistano-goro-provincijai-tekis-vietos-policijai.htm>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>22</sup> Memo of a National Defense System employee to the NDS leadership, autumn of 2006.

Interior and other ministries. The ministries, after having analyzed the situation in the Province of Ghor and assessing their own capabilities, should commission representatives for longer period of times, like in the way it is done by the Ministry of Interior, for the implementation of particular projects."<sup>23</sup>

The neglect of the Lithuanian government in the sphere of civilian (later named "development cooperation") projects was criticized back in the end of 2006 by the head of the 3<sup>rd</sup> PRT rotation which just had finished its tour of duty, colonel lieutenant Vilmas Šatas. According to him, it was obvious already then that "the resources are needed not only for us but to develop the province too. Our detachments are stationed there, but there is no result whatsoever. Excuse me, the visible result is very paltry."<sup>24</sup>

In public, on the contrary, a picture of social and economic growth in the province was being painted by politicians and top civil servants: "I was there twice. I witnessed how the living conditions are changing. Support has been given to the school, the local hospital. First light-bulbs will be switched on in villages. I think it is a solid support",<sup>25</sup> - this is what one of the godfathers of the mission and the then Minister of National Defence J. Olekas claimed at the end of 2006. The Ministry he was heading at the time was preoccupied with the regular release into circulation of messages with "humanitarian" content. For instance, in 2006-2007, the MND, and to a certain extent the MFA, would broadcast widely press releases on transmission of some materials (furniture, office commodities, clothes, small equipment and machinery) or organizing of repair services for the local children's home, hospital or other public institutions.<sup>26</sup> By means of this kind of public relations messages both a picture of the province under reconstruction and an image of the main organizer of that reconstruction – Lithuania as a diligent and generous donor – were painstakingly being created in the eyes of the society by both ministries.

Indeed, until 2007, when the "Commission of development cooperation and democracy promotion programs and projects"<sup>27</sup> was created by a decree of the Minister of Foreign Affairs soon to be followed by establishment of the

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Masilionis R., "Valdžia nesugeba išspręsti paramos Afganistanui klausimo", *Panorama*, 2006 m. lapkričio 25 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=11331722>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ministry of National Defense, "Čagčarano mergaičių mokyklai – pagalvės ir šildytuvas", 2006-12-04, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/117826/>, 14 07 2010; "Koranas ir kilimai mečetėms – dar vienas greitojo poveikio projektas Goro provincijoje", 2006-11-13, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/116321/>, 14 07 2010; "Lietuvos kariai padeda Afganistano Goro provincijos našlaičiams pasirengti žiemai", 2007-10-23, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/141879/>, 14 07 2010; "Afganistane Lietuvos karių iniciatyva rekonstruotas vaikų globos namų kambarys" 2006-11-28, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/117184/>, 14 07 2010; "Lietuvos kariai padeda kompiuterizuoti Goro provincijos valdžios institucijas", 2007-08-01, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/136742/>, , 14 07 2010.

<sup>27</sup> Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department of the MFA, "Bendroji informacija", <http://www.orangeprojects.lt/site/?page=10>, 14 07 2010.. On the website, among other things it is stated that "The goals of the Lithuanian Development Cooperation Policy are to contribute to the development of democracy, security, and stability in the neighbouring regions; to promote political, cultural, economic, and social relationship with the countries in the region; and to increase the role of Lithuania in shaping and implementing the policy of the international organisations in the region, and, therefore, to strengthen Lithuania's national security."

Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department, entrusted with implementation of civilian projects in Ghor, the civilian component of the PRT was in the place of a stepdaughter to the military contingent and could not (was not able to) pursue any significant long-term development cooperation activities. The year 2007 could be considered as the breakthrough year – Lithuania increased threefold the resources allocated for development cooperation projects: in 2007, 25 of such projects worth 3.6 million Lt were underway in Afghanistan and in 2008 – the year of boom – 4 million Lt were spent for a record high number (36) development cooperation projects in Afghanistan. The grand total spent for civilian projects in 2006-2008 – around 8.7 million Lt. In the four years since the establishment of the PRT (2009 including) Lithuania assigned 11.7 million Lt (about 3.5 million Euros) for the development cooperation projects in Afghanistan. In comparison, Estonia and Latvia which do not have their own PRTs committed respectively 400 thousand and not less than 170 thousand Euros for the development cooperation projects in Afghanistan in 2007-2009. Also Poland, which has no PRT either, allotted 8.5 million Zlotys (about 2 million Euros) in just 2008.

The official financial statistics of the MFA on development cooperation projects do not distinguish between those projects the funds for which are appropriated in Afghanistan and by Afghans (ideally in Ghor) and those the funds for which stay in Lithuania and go to the accounts of Lithuanian enterprises, organizations and individuals. In other words, the official statistics do not reveal what share of allocated funds remains in Lithuania (or what goes to third parties, for example, for logistical services) and does not reach the Afghans. Looking through the list of approved projects for the past four years (including 2009) one can make out several project categories, funds for which either do not leave Lithuania or are received by Lithuanian citizens. Among such categories are “Strengthening of cultural relations and protection of cultural heritage” and “Public awareness” projects. The projects of these two categories, especially of the second, are invoked for the creation both inside and abroad of an image of Lithuania as a capable and successful donor-state.

In 2007, there was only one project that fell into the category of “Strengthening of cultural relations, protection of cultural heritage” – an archaeological expedition that cost Lithuania 62.35 thousand Lt while the two projects in the category of “Public awareness” cost 53.40 thousand Lt. In 2008, already 385 thousand Lt were given for five projects in the category of “Strengthening of cultural relations, protection of cultural heritage” out of which 210 thousand Lt – for a repeated archaeological expedition while 50 thousand Lt were spent on publishing of Lithuanian fairy-tales translated into Dari language. “Public awareness” projects (4) that year fetched 146 thousand Lt, whereof 2 projects (with the total value of 31 thousand Lt) – for promotion and advertising of the aforementioned archaeological expedition. In this manner, in two years (2007-2008) out of 7.6 million Lt allocated to development cooperation, projects of the two categories received almost 650 thousand Lt (8,5 % of all projects’ value) with the bulk of money going to Lithuanian enterprises, organizations

and individuals. Among the 13 approved projects (total value – 2 million Lt) for 2009 two are of “Strengthening of cultural relations, protection of cultural heritage” (a third archaeological expedition and continuation of the publishing of Lithuanian fairy-tales in Dari language) and another two of “Public awareness” category (besides the continuous<sup>28</sup> “Look – Afghanistan is near. Help – you can”, a one-off National TV (LRT) project “Afghanistan: the presidential elections – a test for Lithuania as well”).

“Visibility” of Lithuania is almost a keyword defining not only the projects of development cooperation in Ghor that fall into the category of “Public awareness”. Most of the other projects, such as those related to infrastructure building, or provision of equipment (for the hospital, police, local authorities) or even training are seen by Lithuanian officials (first of all in the person of civil servants at the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department of the MFA) through the prism of a public relations campaign – Lithuania should be visible as much as possible in all the projects financed by Lithuania. Those projects which do not show material (physically visible) results are shunned. So, for example, the MFA is reported to have refused to finance the vaccination of life stock of residents of Ghor, because, as a former head of the Special Mission ironically remarked, “you would not paint the Lithuanian flag on a sheep”. Thus the construction of “social reality” and “social construction of knowledge” were started being applied not only vis-à-vis the allies and partners who had become the surrogate target group and the Lithuanian society but on residents of Ghor as well (who had also to start believing not only in sincerity of Lithuanian intentions to support reconstruction of the province but in its actual industriousness too).

In any case, the allocated two and a half million Euros over three years (2006-2008) could not have had any significant even temporal support for the inhabitants of the province because any keen observer of the situation in Ghor knows that Ghor is the poorest province in Afghanistan, inhabitants of which suffer chronically from lack of necessary alimentary products and fuel for cooking and heating. For example, in October of 2007 a joint USAID, WFP and a few NGOs investigation revealed that up to 45% of Ghor residents (from the estimated 635,302) were in acute need of food assistance – they needed more than 14 thousand metric tons of various foodstuffs.<sup>29</sup> It was announced in May of 2008 that more than 110 thousand residents of Ghor were in acute need of food assistance again and to avoid the humanitarian crisis 1,733 metric tons of food were needed to be distributed.<sup>30</sup> Even though a bulk of necessary food was finally distributed through the efforts of international and non-governmental

<sup>28</sup> Pečeliūnaitė L., “Parama Afganistanui – vieno žmogaus rankose”, *Alfa.lt*, 2009-02-18.

<sup>29</sup> “Afghanistan: One month to avert mass displacement in Ghor”, 23 Oct 2007, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/LRON-789BYA?OpenDocument&query=Ghor>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>30</sup> “Afghanistan: Food aid appeal for some 100,000 in Ghor Provinc”, 19 May 2008, <http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/YSAR-7ESL79?OpenDocument&query=Ghor>, 14 07 2010.

organizations, contribution of Lithuania to the appeasement of the situation, sadly, was minimal (in February of 2008, the PRT allocated only 6 tons of food for the Chaghcharan residents) and limited mostly to logistics.<sup>31</sup>

But most important is the fact that when a great part of the inhabitants of Ghor were on the verge of famine the MND and the MFA, instead the elucidation of the real situation, on their websites and through media were posting messages to the society about one or another small humanitarian support action – distribution of pullovers, wraps and the like<sup>32</sup>, without even mentioning the measure of the problem. After comparing press releases of international aid organizations and Lithuanian state institutions, one might get an impression that the talk is about two different geographical regions. Since there are no doubts that both the PRT and the government of Lithuania had comprehensive information about the chronic humanitarian crisis in the province, avoidance to inform the Lithuanian society could be regarded as a part of the public relations and image creation campaign where the adverse or compromising information was intentionally blocked in order to conceal the helplessness of Lithuania in the face of this crisis.

However, finally in 2008 the seriousness of the situation into which Lithuania had gotten into was realized and the godfather of the mission G. Kirkilas started to speak with more caution about the course and the success of it. According to media, in a meeting in July of 2008 “with the USA vice-president Dick Cheney, the premier Gediminas Kirkilas told him that Lithuania is ready to fulfil the obligations, but additional financial and military support was necessary for the Lithuanian reconstruction mission in the province of Ghor in Afghanistan.”<sup>33</sup> This rhetoric of Kirkilas might have in part been impelled by seasonal difficulties: harsh winter of 2008, followed disastrous spring floods and summer drought but also by realization that the security situation in the province is out of control – something that was pointedly shown by a worthless loss of a Lithuanian soldier during the siege in May of 2008 at the PRT camp.

### 3. A New Beginning?

At the end of 2008, with the change of the government and with steadily worsening economic situation in the country, Lithuania (first of all, in the person of the ruling coalition) began to re-evaluate its obligations in Afghanistan. The advisor to the Minister of National Defence Dainius Žalimas evaluated the decision of the then Lithuanian government (run by Social Democrats) to

<sup>31</sup> Ministry of National Defense, “Goro provincijos sostinėje Čagčarane PAG-6 kariai vietiniams gyventojams dalijo maistą”, 2008-02-11, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/148134/>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>32</sup> Ministry of National Defense, “Afganistane kariai padeda vietos gyventojams kovoti su žiemos sunkuma”, 2008-01-18, <http://senas.kam.lt/index.php/lt/146044/>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>33</sup> Delfi.lt., “G. Kirkilas: misijai Afganistane reikia papildomos paramos”, 2008 m. liepos 3 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/archive/article.php?id=17608225>, 14 07 2010.



take on the responsibility for the establishment and leading of a PRT bluntly but correctly: "It was a political decision, made, maybe, with the aim of being the first to score. One could discuss for long why Lithuania sticks out in its peculiar way compared with other Baltic States. Maybe, because of its statehood traditions, maybe, because of the perception of its own role, which does not correspond to the possibilities and the size of the state. (...) It is difficult to say, if Lithuania can play its role any further."<sup>34</sup>

In 2009, with the increased attention of the politicians for the participation of Lithuania in the NATO mission in Afghanistan, the distinction between the two dimensions of the mission – the military (that corresponds to the fulfilment of the obligations to NATO) and the civilian (that corresponds to the carrying out of the donor-state role) resurfaced once again. According to the Minister of National Defence Rasa Juknevičienė, "in the military sphere, we are doing everything right. The biggest problem – to help the local government of the developing province of Ghor to pave roads, build schools, improve health care, take care of infrastructure: plumbing and electricity. This proceeds with difficulties. We have attained very little from this point of view."<sup>35</sup> Around the same time, President Adamkus openly expressed his (and Lithuania's) wish: "We would like the donor-states to share (their resources – *my insertion*) with us in NATO missions, because their financial capabilities are much better than Lithuania's. (...) This is a moral question and a question of solidarity".<sup>36</sup>

One can discern from the sayings of the Minister and other top state officials that the Lithuanian Government is satisfied with the military dimension of the mission in Afghanistan and the concern is raised only because of the possible reduction in funding in the future. On the contrary, there are a lot of discussions about the civilian dimension of the mission. Members of the government and MPs from the ruling parties notably critically met the intended reduction of the funding for development cooperation projects from the previous 4 million Lt in 2008 to the suggested 2 million Lt in 2009. After the opposition from of the chairman of the Parliamentary National Security and Defence Committee conservative A. Anušauskas and other influential politicians, funding for civilian projects for 2009 was set at a halfway amount of 3 million Lt (in fact, only 2 million were distributed according to the data as of November 2009) even though some of the MPs from the governing parties (for instance, a member of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs Committee Saulius Stoma) thought that "the civilian projects require the same amount of money as it is needed for sustaining the military part of our mission" (not less than 40 million Lt per year).<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Laučius V., "Penkmetis Aljanse: patirtis ir iššūkiai", *Lietuvos žinios*, 2009 m. kovo 28d., <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/spausdinti/aktualu/lietuva/56/34328/>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Delfi.lt, Lietuva norėtų persikirstyti Afganistanu "krepšeli", 2009-04-03, <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/article.php?id=21318207&l=fplead>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>37</sup> Samoškaitė E., "Lietuva karštligiškai ieško pinigų Afganistanui", Delfi.lt, 2009 m. birželio 10 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/article.php?id=22578001>, 14 07 2010.



Simultaneously, the ruling parties indirectly criticized the neglect of the previous government and its subordinate institutions (especially the MFA) in safeguarding the efficiency of the civilian dimension of the mission in Afghanistan. The Minister of National Defence declared that “Lithuania cannot provide as much money as it would be necessary. Even in the years of economic growth very little financial resources were being allocated compared with what was being given to those provinces that are administered by richer states. I am afraid that in time it could become an instability factor. (...) This is a headache for our MFA – it manages the money designated for Afghanistan. We need to search for ways out, first of all – to look for donor-states.”<sup>38</sup>

Incapability to enlist donors is nearly the most galling fact in the work related to Lithuania’s commitments in Afghanistan, of the MFA as the institution coordinating the civilian dimension of the mission in Ghor. This was discussed in a joint session of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and National Security and Defence Committees in June of 2009 during which, according to media, “parliamentarians (...) raised the question about the fruits of the activities of the diplomats. According to the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee A. Ažubalis, some of the parliamentarians had doubts if the Lithuanian diplomats did everything to make other states join the reconstruction of the province of Ghor.”<sup>39</sup> And if to the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Petras Vaitiekūnas Afghanistan was not a priority direction of the Lithuanian foreign policy (he had effectively delegated the responsibility to civil servants of the Special Mission and at the Development Cooperation and Democracy Promotion Department) then his successor in the minister’s chair Vygaudas Ušackas is active himself in this field. As media has reported, “underlying the importance of international support for remote and less developed regions like the province of Ghor in which Lithuania leads one of the provincial reconstruction teams, V. Ušackas suggested establishing of a special development fund for the country which would guarantee more even and efficient distribution of the international donor resources in Afghanistan.”<sup>40</sup>

In order to improve the unfavourable situation, the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and National Security and Defence Committees in the spring of 2009 “having listened to the information of interested governmental institutions and taking into consideration the decreasing financing which may have a direct impact on the safety of Lithuanian citizens working in Afghanistan, proposes for the Government of the Republic of Lithuania to prepare and submit by June 1 to the Committees a complex military and civilian strategy of the activities of the

<sup>38</sup> Laučius V., “Penkmetis Aljanse: patirtis ir iššūkiai”, *Lietuvos žinios*, 2009 m. kovo 28 d., <http://www.15min.lt/naujiena/spausdinti/aktualu/lietuva/56/34328/>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Samoškaitė E., “Lietuva karštligiškai ieško pinigų Afganistanui”, *Delfi.lt*, 2009 m. birželio 10 d., <http://www.delfi.lt/news/daily/lithuania/article.php?id=22578001>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>40</sup> BNS, “Ušackas: misija Afganistane būtų efektyvesnė, jei būtų aiški veikimo strategija”, 2009-04-05, [http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10267257/?Ušackas..misija.Afganistane.butu.efektyvesne..jei.butu.aiski.veikimo.strategija=2009-04-05\\_19-14](http://www.alfa.lt/straipsnis/10267257/?Ušackas..misija.Afganistane.butu.efektyvesne..jei.butu.aiski.veikimo.strategija=2009-04-05_19-14), 14 07 2010.

Republic of Lithuania in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.”<sup>41</sup> For the sake of fairness, one has to point out that the need for such a strategy was felt already by the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Parliament of the previous term, when in one of its meetings “it was emphasized that it is necessary to strengthen the civilian component of the mission, to pay more attention to solving humanitarian, and social welfare problems by more actively involving other states in the planning and execution of civilian projects in the Province of Ghor, Afghanistan. The Committee will propose for the Government to discuss the question of a further strategy of the international mission in Afghanistan.”<sup>42</sup> However, back then there were no further steps taken beyond the expressed wish ultimately leaving the initiative to the Parliament of the new term and the government of new composition (as it turned out, without the Social Democrats).

On August 19, 2009, after four and a half months in preparation and active discussions and adjustments by various institutions, the government of Lithuania finally endorsed the “Strategy of the participation of the Republic of Lithuania in the activities of the international community in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013”, the purpose of which is to “set[s] out objectives, tasks, principles, and measures for Lithuania’s effective and successful engagement in Afghanistan stemming from Lithuania’s international commitments. The Strategy outlines Lithuania’s contribution in Afghanistan in the context of Joint Engagement Strategies of NATO, the EU, the US, and other allies and reflects Lithuania’s realistic potential to contribute to the efforts of the international community and the Government of Afghanistan aimed at the restoration of peace, security, and stability, and facilitation of sustainable development.” (English translation provided by the MFA)<sup>43</sup>.

The Strategy, before gaining its current form which was endorsed by the government, had at least a couple of earlier crucially different drafts. The early draft-project dated April 23, 2009 “Civilian-military strategy of the activities of the Republic of Lithuania in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013” prepared by the Transatlantic Cooperation and Security Policy Department of the MFA was very emotional. It was permeated by the feeling that if the Lithuanian mission in Ghor is not yet doomed to fail, without a solid financial boost to the civilian dimension (to finance large-scale development cooperation projects), it will inevitably face difficulties and threats which will lead Lithuania to “consider the possibility of looking for other ways to

<sup>41</sup>Press release of the Parliamentary National Security and Defense Committee, “Turi būti tęsiamas civilinių projektų finansavimas Afganistano Goro provincijoje”, April 8, 2009, [http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5\\_show?p\\_r=6242&p\\_d=85898&p\\_k=1](http://www3.lrs.lt/pls/inter/w5_show?p_r=6242&p_d=85898&p_k=1), 14 07 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Press release of the Parliamentary National Security and Defense Committee “Komitetas iš klausė Krašto apsaugos ministro informaciją dėl situacijos tarptautinėse operacijose”, July 9, 2008, <http://www3.lrs.lt/docs2/RHIGNGDF.DOC>, 14 07 2010.

<sup>43</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, “Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos dalyvavimo tarptautinės bendruomenės veikloje Afganistano Islamo Respublikoje 2009–2013 metų strategijos patvirtinimo”, 2009-08-19, <http://www.lrvk.lt/lt/teises-aktai/priimti-teises-aktai?a=Nutarimas&an=&df=2009-08-19&dt=2009-08-19&ot=0&q=Afganistano>, 14 07 2010.

participate in the ISAF operation partly or fully transferring its leadership of the PRT in the province of Ghor to another ally".<sup>44</sup> In the nine formulated risk factors, the funding of the mission is directly associated with the success of the mission while only superficial attention is given to the military (security) dimension without taking seriously into consideration the progressive decline of the security situation both in all of the country and in particular Ghor.

Another important aspect of the initial project is the dominating belief that the Lithuanian mission in Ghor is inseparable from the creation of Lithuania's image. In describing the strategic goals of Lithuanian activities in Afghanistan one of the two stated goals in the project was "to consolidate the status of Lithuania as an active, reliable, responsible member of the international community. Seeking to achieve this goal Lithuania has to actively participate in the development cooperation and donation activities." The aspiration "to establish Lithuania as a reliable and strong NATO member"<sup>45</sup> is indicated as one of the objectives. And "seeking to assure the support of the Lithuanian society and politicians for the Lithuanian actions in Afghanistan, a communicative strategy is needed, which would include information dissemination and public relations activities both in Lithuania and in Afghanistan as well as broadcasting the news abroad about the work of Lithuania", in which the most important accent should be stressing "the stories of success". The project was finished with a warning that "if the goals of the Lithuanian mission in Afghanistan were not reached, the province of Ghor could become uncontrollable and this would make a negative impact on the success of the entire ISAF operation. In such a case trust in Lithuanian capability to participate in international operations would be shaken and a huge harm would be done to the international image of Lithuania as a reliable partner."

The initial draft reflected the spirit of the Lithuanian activities in Afghanistan in 2006-2008 – through the construction of "social reality" and "social construction of knowledge" to create to all – the "partners" and allies, the Lithuanian society and the target group – the inhabitants of Ghor – an impression of Lithuanian activeness (especially in the donations and development cooperation field) which in its turn had to serve for an improvement of the Lithuanian image and prestige. One can indirectly understand from the project that the target audience of the Lithuanian mission is the US Government – "the participation of Lithuania in the international operation in Afghanistan is an essential aspect of Lithuanian participation in NATO activities and the relationships with the USA."<sup>46</sup>

In a later draft named the "Strategy of the activities of the Republic of Lithuania in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013" which became the basis for the Strategy's edition endorsed by the government, the

<sup>44</sup> "Lietuvos Respublikos veiklos Afganistano Islamo Respublikoje civilinė-karinė strategija 2009 – 2013 metams", Project, MFA, 2009-04-23.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

emotionality was changed within the style and content of dry bureaucratic language. Taking into consideration the comments of the members of the Parliamentary Foreign Affairs and National Security and Defence Committees, the draft was twice amended and refined by the MFA.

In the endorsed “Strategy of the participation of the Republic of Lithuania in the activities of the international community in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013”<sup>47</sup> the creating of Lithuania’s image was practically eliminated. Still, there is a separate section in the Strategy devoted to “Communications and Public Relations” through which “an emphasis on the positive aspects and results” should be put for the Lithuanian society, the allies and partners, the international organizations, donors, the society of Afghanistan and especially its government. Among the desired “results of Strategy implementation” is a following one: “Favourable opinion of Lithuania’s public and the majority of politicians on Lithuania’s activities in Afghanistan”.

It is stated in the Strategy that “The first objective of Lithuania as an active and committed member of the international community is to ensure the national security and security of its allies, enhance NATO’s credibility, and contribute towards ensuring regional and global security and stability.”, while “to contribute to the international efforts to reconstruct the state of Afghanistan, ensure stable and consistent development of its economy and infrastructure, improve living conditions for its inhabitants, and promote the rule of law, good governance, and respect for human rights.” is relegated the status of secondary objective. If the prioritization of the Lithuanian objectives in the Strategy was intentional (and it is plausible to believe so), one can come to the conclusion that the hypothesis is the Lithuanian government had displaced the target groups is verified – Afghans indeed stayed behind only as a secondary group while their place was taken up by NATO allies and partners.

When evaluating the entire text of the Strategy one can make a conclusion that an attempt to verbalize *raison d’être* of the Lithuanian mission was, though very belated, nevertheless necessary. However, the achieved result is to be considered with caution – there is too little assessment of the wider context and tendencies, and there is too much concentration on describing the *status quo* and specific racketeering of the government in order to ascertain greater funding otherwise warning that the mission would collapse. Finally, the pessimistic tone of the Strategy makes an impression that its authors did not believe anymore in the success of the Lithuanian mission whether it be the creation of Lithuania’s image and prestige, or the improvement of living standards for the residents of Ghor.

<sup>47</sup> Lietuvos Respublikos Vyriausybė, “Dėl Lietuvos Respublikos dalyvavimo tarptautinės bendruomenės veikloje Afganistano Islamo Respublikoje 2009–2013 metų strategijos patvirtinimo”, 2009-08-19, <http://www.lrvk.lt/lt/teises-aktai/priimti-teises-aktai?a=Nutarimas&an=&df=2009-08-19&dt=2009-08-19&ot=0&q=Afganistano, 14 07 2010>.

## Conclusion

The participation of Lithuania in the NATO mission up to now is twofold and controversial: being basically of a pragmatic character (giving the preference to the “allies and partners” as the (surrogate) target group and ignoring the expectations of the original primary target group (residents of the province)) it is only covered with the veil of altruism (utilizing the construction of “social reality” and “social construction of knowledge” and purposely disorientating Lithuanian citizens (the audience)). In the long run such an approach could be disastrous: the mere imitation of Lithuanian activeness will not satisfy the international partners (like aid organizations) who operate on the altruistic grounds and will also turn the residents of Ghor whose expectations are not met either, against Lithuania. This will inevitably determine the decline of the image of a reliable, able and responsible state among partners and in Afghanistan itself (pragmatic goals of the participation in the mission will be lost) and the rising discontent will determine a growing danger for the safety of the Lithuanian citizens and the citizens of the partner-states working in the PRT (thus preventing from the possible reaching of idealistic goals). Finally Lithuania will have to withdraw from the mission shamefully (and possibly with losses).

In the government-endorsed “Strategy of the participation of the Republic of Lithuania in the activities of the international community in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the years 2009-2013” it is intended to forestall this eventuality, especially through warnings, admitting one’s own limitations but also through indirect accusations levelled against the “allies and partners” for presumed letting down – not contributing enough resources to the reconstruction of Ghor. In other words, the government by endorsing the current edition of the Strategy sought to insure itself against the possible failure of the mission (possibly encoded already in the decisions made by the government of Social Democrats) and publicly envisaged a possibility to make even the most radical decisions, among them withdrawal from the PRT (but not the participation in the NATO mission in general). After responsibly and critically evaluating the evolving situation, the government of Lithuania should start treating the Lithuanian participation in the NATO mission in Afghanistan not as an “image creation” but rather as a “face-saving” and should undertake adequate measures. The anticipated (in six months from the endorsement of the Strategy) “Plan of measures for the implementation of the Strategy” will show which way Lithuania is intended to truly move – to continue, out of inertia, with the dangerous inactiveness covered by idealistic rhetorical figures or to take immediate steps in pre-empting painful outcomes both on the physical (for the Lithuanian soldiers and civil servants of the Special Mission) and spiritual (for the decent name of Lithuania among the “allies and partners”) levels.

No matter how the Lithuanian mission in Afghanistan proceeds (at this moment, there are very little circumstances and conditions for it to proceed

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successfully), it is already evident that Lithuania has become the victim of its own ambitions (desire to create an image of an active subject in international relations), immaturity (failure to assess the „*on the ground* “ situation that requires cultural literacy and its own capabilities and resources) and circumstances (terrible climate and social conditions in the province of Ghor, decline in security conditions in entire Afghanistan).