Jacek Sobczak, *Potomkowie Lecha i Giedimyna. Stosunki polityczne między Litwą i Polską w pierwszych latach odrodzenia państwa litewskiego*, Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe WNPiD UAM, 2009, 182 p. ISBN 978-8360-677-76-6

The law professor Jacek Sobczak is not just the author of a few articles devoted to questions of the legal regulation of national minorities, but has also written works on *Lithuanian problems*.¹ In his most recent study, published in 2009, the Polish scholar discusses various aspects of the relations between Lithuanians and Lithuania's Poles, and between Lithuania and Poland: the question of Polish autonomy, the reactions of the Polish government to the Lithuanian declaration of independence, the first attempts to develop political contacts, and later diplomatic relations. However, the focus of the book is devoted to the declaration by Lithuania and Poland in 1992, as well as the circumstances of the signing of the treaty between the two states in 1994, and analyses in detail the contents of these documents.

The author describes the negotiations on the declaration and the process of the treaty, and the more important moments in the negotiations, consistently enough. In general, these parts of the book will certainly be useful for a historian of diplomacy, analysing Lithuanian-Polish relations from 1990 until 1994, i.e. until the signing and ratification of the treaty. It will be useful primarily because the author discusses in detail *how* the agreements were achieved, and *how* the negotiation process occurred. However, Sobczak's book is not only interesting for this. It is important that the author tries to figure out *what political considerations* influenced the dynamics of the negotiations, what objections, difficulties and obstacles the politicians and diplomats of the states had to overcome. All of these issues are discussed in the largest section of the book 'The Road Towards the Polish-Lithuanian Treaty'.² Before discussing some of the more impor-

¹ J. Sobczak, *Studia nad wyborami prezydenckimi i parlamentarnymi na Litwie i Białorusi* (Poznań, 1997); idem, 'Stosunki polityczne między Polską a Litwą', *Zbliżanie się Wschodu i Zachodu. Studia – analizy – rozpoznania*, ed. P. Kraszewski, T. Miluski, T. Wallas, (Poznań, 2000); idem, 'Polityka radziecka wobec Litwy. Od deklaracji o suwerenności państwowej z 18 maja 1989 roku do uznania niepodległości Litwy przez ZSRR 6 września 1991 roku', *Sprawy wschodnie*, vol. 1, (2003), pp. 27–48.

² The political circumstances of the signing of the Lithuania–Poland treaty are discussed in Lithuanian historiography: V. Sirutavičius, 'Suvalkų sutarties vertinimų vaidmuo, rengiant Lietuvai 1994 m. Lietuvos ir Lenkijos sutartį/Rola ocen umowy suwalskiej w przygotowywaniu umowy między Litwą a Polską w 1994 r.', *Suvalkų sutartis faktai ir interpretacijos/Umowa Suwalska fakty i intepretacje*, ed. Č. Laurinavičius (Vilnius, 2012), pp.182–213, 411–447.

tant, and in some cases doubtful, insights of Sobczak: a few more general observations. In general, Central and East European countries, by signing treaties 'for friendly relations' and 'good neighbourly cooperation', laid the foundations for a new security architecture in the region. This process, in the most general sense, was influenced by Mikhail Gorbachev's liberalisation policies, the process of the Soviet republics obtaining sovereignty, and, ultimately, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the decision of the West to expand to the east. Thus, you have to agree with the author that the Lithuanian-Polish intergovernmental agreement was one of the conditions for integration into Western structures. Another conclusion is also right: the Lithuanian-Polish international agreement was made possible on the basis of diplomacy, based on difficult compromises. Such an assessment of the treaty, presented at the end of the book, is the best response to the question how this agreement is significant today to both countries. However, from some general observations, let us move on to a discussion of more specific subjects.

Chronologically, the author begins the 'road' to the 'Friendly relations and good neighbourly cooperation' treaty between Lithuania and Poland from a discussion of the Memorandum 'On the needs of the Polish minority in the Republic of Lithuania' of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland on 26 November 1990. In the memorandum, the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, by the way, at the 'request' of the Lithuanian foreign minister Algirdas Saudargas, presented the needs of the Polish minority in Lithuania. According to Sobczak, the Lithuanians failed to evaluate the document correctly: allegedly, it can be interpreted as a 'step' towards the recognition of Lithuania *de jure* (p. 84). It would be difficult to agree explicitly with these observations. The political circumstances of the emergence of the document are not entirely clear. Judging from the text of the memorandum, one can totally reasonably claim that it came from the initiative of Saudargas.³ Perhaps, the document was used in the preparation of the Lithuanian and Polish declaration of friendly relations. However, for Vilnius, the memorandum was important first of all because in it the provision that the Polish government 'does not intend to support the creation of a Polish territorial unit' was formulated in a rather clear manner. So, the Lithuanians could use the Memorandum as a means to suppress the political ambitions of Polish autonomists in Lithuania. The document was confidential, but at the beginning of 1991 it was disclosed in the journal *Lithuania*, edited by Leon Brodowski, and published by the Polish Lovers of Lithuania Club (*Ogólnopolski Klub Miłośników Litwy*). Unfortunately, we do not know the circumstances of its disclosure. However, one can assert fairly reasonably that after the publication of the memorandum the tension between Lithuanians and Lithuania's Poles did not

³ *Lietuvos ir Lenkijos santykiai 1917–1994* (Vilnius, 1998), p. 175.

diminish, but on the contrary, could only increased even more: Lithuanian radicals interpreted the memorandum as proof of Poland's interference in Lithuania's internal affairs, while Polish radicals explained that the new Polish government, its Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was 'betraying' its compatriots in Lithuania.

Practically all authors investigating Lithuanian-Polish relations after March 1990 agree that the signing of the 'friendly relations declaration' was an important period in relations between the states. Lithuanian sources would allow one to declare that the states agreed on the necessity for signing the declaration as early as December 1990. It was also agreed that the declaration could be similar to the agreement between Poland and Ukraine, signed in October of the same year. Of course, according to the Lithuanian negotiators, 'the status of Lithuania differs [from that of Ukraine], and this circumstance should be taken into account [in preparing the declaration]'. The Poles agreed with this position⁴. Drafts of the agreement were exchanged in February 1991. Another circumstance is also important, which the author of the study, unfortunately, ignored: the Lithuanians, along with the draft of the declaration, presented to the Poles drafts of several other agreements (an agreement on national minorities, an agreement on economic cooperation, and drafts of the statutes of interest bureaus). The Lithuanian government, by offering such a 'package' of agreements, sought the most important goal, to extract recognition from Warsaw. If Poland had signed a 'cross-border agreement on ethnic minorities' with Lithuania, and agreed to the creation of 'interest bureaus', i.e., in a sense, analogues of embassies, then she would have directly recognised Lithuania *de facto*. One should also note that the minister of foreign affairs, K. Skubiszewski, for a variety of reasons, declined to sign these agreements.

In general, Poland's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with regard to its eastern neighbours, took the so-called two-track policy, i.e., it supported the goal of statehood of the neighbouring states, but also tried to retain good relations with Moscow. So Warsaw did not hurry to recognise the statehood of Lithuania, but supported the recovery of statehood process. On the initiative of Minister Skubiszewski on 12 March 1990, the Polish government issued a statement basically supporting the restoration of Lithuanian statehood. Of course, this, like the resolutions passed by other Polish state institutions, the Senate, were documents of a more moral-political nature. On the other hand, one has to admit that in Lithuania there was not always an adequate response to these statements. On 24 March 1990, it was stated in the Lithuanian Supreme Council that the documents adopted by the Polish Senate and Parliament, supporting the goal of Lithuania's independence, were nothing less than 'the recognition of the independence of Lithuania'. It is understandable that some deputies, finding themselves

⁴ V. Sirutavičius, 'Suvalkų sutarties', p.186.

in an emergency situation, wanted very much to present their desires as an actual fact ...

Still extending a little the issue of Lithuania's 'recognition', in the opinion of Sobczak, on the other hand, not all Polish politicians maintained the cautious, pragmatic course with regard to Lithuania characteristic of Minister Skubiszewski. Some Polish politicians, such as the Marshal and organisation 'Wspólnota Polska' president, Andrzej Stelmachowski, in March 1991, promised the highest Lithuanian politicians that Poland would be the first to recognise Lithuania's independence (p. 89). Of course, it remains unclear whether these statements by the politician were 'free improvisation' or testified to differences existing in the Polish government's elite on the case of Lithuania's recognition. Or maybe, by such promises, A. Stelmachowski, the leader of an organisation that sponsored compatriots living outside Poland, sought to obtain alleviations for Polish autonomists with whom he had rather close contacts?

Be that as it may, Poland was not the first to recognise Lithuania. Even more after the August coup, the *de jure* recognition and the establishment of diplomatic relations, tensions arose between the countries, and Lithuania, eventually, became the last of Poland's neighbours with which Warsaw signed an international agreement. It is usually stated in literature that the main reason for this was the deterioration in the situation of the Polish minority. For in September 1991, the councils of the Vilnius and Šalčininkai districts were dissolved, and direct rule was imposed in the districts. The author of the book discusses widely the consequences of direct management on the Polish community. In this case, one would have to admit that in Lithuania the question was practically not examined at all.

After signing the declaration, in addition to the problem of ethnic minorities, another important circumstance, the different treatment of the historical past, conditioned the dynamics of inter-state relations and the negotiation process for the treaty. (Of course, as the author notes, despite the various political tensions in bilateral relations, the parties were usually able to agree on a series of practical questions of a pragmatic nature.) Thus, in Lithuanian society, among politicians, especially of the right, the goal became to demand from Poland in a treaty a condemnation of Želigowski's aggression, and thus reinforce the idea that Vilnius belongs to Lithuania according to the Suwalki agreement. One can understand that Poland viewed the historical events relating to the recognition of Vilnius and the so-called breaking of the Suwalki treaty differently. We would think that Sobczak, relying basically on the works of his fellow historians and politicians, not only in detail, but also objectively, discusses the efforts of both countries' diplomats and politicians to find a compromise. It is known that the essence of the compromise was such: the Lithuanians gave up the assessment of Želigowski's aggression, but in the treaty 'both sides solemnly acknowledge one another's current territories with the capitals

of Vilnius and Warsaw now and in the future, regardless of the process of the formation of their borders in the past.'

Sobczak's book discusses not only various aspects of the relations between Lithuanians and Poles, and Lithuania and Poland. The author briefly reviews the circumstances of the restoration of statehood, the relations between Vilnius and the Kremlin, and so on. Therefore, to finish, here are several observations about how the author of the study, in the most general sense, understands the process of the restoration of Lithuania's statehood. In Sobczak's opinion, after the 11 March Act of Independence the state of Lithuania was *in statu nascendi*, i.e., in the stage of the formation of an embryo. Thus, it is no coincidence that in the book the highest institution of Lithuania's government at that time – the Council – is continued to be called the 'Supreme Council of the Lithuanian SSR', though, on 11 March a law was passed 'On the name of the state, and the coat of arms.' According to it 'the official name of the state of Lithuania' became the 'Republic of Lithuania'. (An interesting circumstance is that the Polish deputies, who abstained from voting for independence, voted for this law.) In Sobczak's opinion, the referendum (formally entitled 'global survey') of February 1991, its results and the constitutional law adopted on its basis, had a particular importance for the restoration of the state of Lithuania. Declaring this law meant the termination of ties with the Soviet Union (p. 70). In a formal, legal sense, Sobczak is right. On the other hand, although the referendum and the constitutional act of Vilnius 'unequivocally' severed ties with the Soviet Union, Lithuania's international situation has changed very little ...

Undoubtedly, the reader who is interested in the latest history of Lithuanian-Polish relations will find a wide range of interesting insights and observations in Sobczak's book. It will also be useful to the researcher, the professional historian, who is interested in the circumstances of the signing of the declaration between Lithuania and Poland and the international agreement.

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