Research Article

Section: History

To read the paper online, please scan this QR code

Ukraine and Lithuania: A comparative study of early military-political integration trajectories in the Post-Soviet Era

Vitaliy Mykhaylyk [1*], Oleksandr Kadeniuk [2], Olena Sapytska [3], Olena Mykhaylyk [4]
[1] Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, Ukraine
[2] Higher Educational Institution "Podillia State University"
[3] Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, Ukraine
[4] Ukrainian National University, Ukraine
*Correspondence: vitalmih34@gmail.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1443-4646

Abstract
This article presents a comparative analysis of the initial vectors of military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, offering a novel scholarly examination of the topic. The authors draw upon historical context, analyze international and domestic political processes, and consider institutional and geopolitical factors. The article explores the causes, strategies, and challenges faced by both countries in their attempts to integrate into NATO, the European Union, and other international military-political structures. Specific features of each country are analyzed, revealing their unique characteristics for comparative study and contribution to the field. The significance of the research lies in identifying and comparing the key drivers of military-political integration in Ukraine and Lithuania in order to discern similarities and differences, as well as to understand the developmental peculiarities of each nation within the post-Soviet space. The findings and conclusions of the article contribute to a better understanding of the vectors of military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania and may also be useful for studying and comparing integration processes in other post-Soviet states, therefore contributing to the development of scientific understanding of integration processes within the context of shifting geopolitical realities.

Keywords: comparative analysis, Lithuania, military-political integration, national security, Post-Soviet period, Ukraine

This article presents a comparative analysis of the initial vectors of military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, offering a novel scholarly examination of the topic. The authors draw upon historical context, analyze international and domestic political processes, and consider institutional and geopolitical factors. The article explores the causes, strategies, and challenges faced by both countries in their attempts to integrate into NATO, the European Union, and other international military-political structures.

1. Introduction

In the post-Soviet period, many countries, having liberated themselves from centralized control of the USSR, faced the difficult choice of determining their future path of military-political integration. Ukraine and Lithuania represent intriguing and instructive examples of different approaches to this process. By examining the importance of the initial vectors of military-political integration of these countries, this study aims to fill a gap in the existing scholarly literature on this subject.

The hypothesis of this research is the assumption that a range of factors, such as geographical location, historical roots, political decisions, and socio-economic development, played a crucial role in determining the initial vectors of military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania after the collapse of the Soviet regime.

The objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the initial vectors of military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania following the collapse of the Soviet regime, in order to identify the main differences and similarities in their approaches and the outcomes of the adopted strategies.

To achieve this objective, the following tasks are set:

1. Examine the key factors that determined the initial vectors of military-political integration in Ukraine and Lithuania;

2. Analyze the major political decisions in defense and national security taken immediately after the collapse of the Soviet regime;

3. Determine the similarities and differences in the strategies of military-political integration pursued by Ukraine and Lithuania;

4. Assess the consequences and outcomes of the chosen strategies of military-political integration for these countries.

The pursuit of military-political integration into the global system by post-Soviet countries became one of the key challenges of the early 21st century.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Main Stages of Military-Political Integration of Ukraine

2.1.1 Declaration of Independence (1991)

Gaining independence from the Soviet Union marked a crucial turning point in Ukraine's history. By declaring its sovereignty on August 24, 1991, Ukraine initiated a difficult but essential journey toward becoming a self-reliant nation, responsible for its own military and political decisions (Marples 2019). Following the declaration, Ukraine was confronted with the daunting task of disentangling itself from the Soviet political, economic, and military systems. The transition necessitated the establishment of new state institutions, including the government, parliament, and judiciary, as well as the reorganization of the national security apparatus.

As Ukraine sought recognition on the international stage, it set out to create a distinct national

identity and foreign policy (Hong, 2020). This involved striking a delicate balance between forging relationships with the West, maintaining ties with Russia, and asserting its position as an independent actor within the complex geopolitical landscape.

In a significant move, Ukraine made the decision to voluntarily dismantle its nuclear arsenal – the third-largest in the world – and accede to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Spence, 2019). This action signaled the nation's commitment to international security and paved the way for improved relations with the international community.

With its newfound independence, Ukraine embarked on a series of economic reforms aimed at liberalizing its market and reducing dependence on Russia. These reforms were essential for the country to pursue closer ties with Western institutions, such as the European Union and potentially NATO (Maksak, 2021).

Throughout the post-Soviet era, Ukraine has made considerable strides in building its political and military autonomy. However, ongoing challenges, such as regional conflicts and political strife, continue to test the nation's sovereignty and present obstacles to deeper integration with Western institutions (Hong, 2020).

2.1.2 Establishing the Armed Forces of Ukraine (1991-1992)

In the aftermath of independence, Ukraine faced the challenge of building its own military from the elements of the Soviet Armed Forces that had been stationed on its territory (Zabyelina & Markovska, 2019). The formation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine was a vital step towards military sovereignty.

Initiation and organization. The Ukrainian government swiftly took measures to create its armed forces. By decree, the units and formations of the Soviet military within the territory of Ukraine were transferred under the control of the newly independent state. Establishing a functional chain of command and management structure was essential for the formation of the Armed Forces of Ukraine (Kuzio, 1995).

Personnel and equipment. Ukraine inherited a significant amount of military personnel, hardware, and weaponry from the Soviet Union. The country faced the challenge of incorporating these resources into a cohesive and effective fighting force, while simultaneously addressing issues pertaining to the loyalty and integration of the military personnel (Zlenko, 1994).

Reforms and professionalization. Over the first few years of independence, the Ukrainian military underwent numerous reforms, aimed at streamlining its organization, improving its capabilities, and adapting it to the new realities of Ukrainian sovereignty (Marples, 2019). These early reforms laid the foundation for the further development and professionalization of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in the years to come.

International collaboration. As a newly independent state, Ukraine faced several geopolitical challenges and sought to build partnerships and alliances with other countries, particularly in the realms of military training, equipment procurement, and defense policy. Strengthening ties with international organizations like NATO and the European Union became an essential aspect of Ukraine's military-political integration strategy (Maksak, 2021).

By successfully establishing the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the country solidified its military sovereignty, ensuring its ability to protect its citizens and secure its territorial integrity. This marked a vital step in the overall process of Ukraine's military-political integration following the collapse of the Soviet Union.

2.1.3 Non-aligned, Non-nuclear Commitment (1994)

The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (1994) marked a significant milestone for Ukraine's military-political integration. Under this agreement, Ukraine committed to being a non-aligned, non-nuclear state, while the US, UK, and Russia assured to respect Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Denuclearization. As a major component of the Budapest Memorandum, Ukraine agreed to relinquish its inherited nuclear arsenal, which was the third-largest in the world at that time (Koch, 2012). This decision reflected Ukraine's commitment to non-proliferation and its aspiration for a peaceful integration into the international community.

Non-aligned status. By committing to a non-aligned status, Ukraine sought to maintain a neutral position in international relations, essentially avoiding any formal alliance with major military blocs. This status aimed to reduce the risk of becoming entangled in potential conflicts and build relationships with a broader range of global partners (Kieninger, 2022).

Security assurances. In exchange for Ukraine's commitments, the US, UK, and Russia provided security assurances. These assurances included commitments to respect Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity, and political independence; refrain from using force or economic coercion against Ukraine; and support Ukraine in cases of aggression by a nuclear-armed state (Koch, 2012). The Budapest Memorandum thus aimed to create a more secure and stable environment for Ukraine as it navigated the challenges of military-political integration in the post-Soviet era (The Budapest Memorandum 1994).

2.1.4 Partnership with NATO (1994-present)

Although not directly seeking NATO membership, Ukraine established close ties with the organization through the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, which began in 1994 (De Santis, 1994). This partnership has evolved over time, with Ukraine's involvement increasing in various NATO-led missions and exercises.

In the early stages of cooperation, Ukraine's participation in the PfP program aimed to foster trust, cooperation, and collaboration in security matters between Ukraine and NATO member countries. This partnership also allowed Ukraine to gain valuable experience in joint military exercises and interventions, which enhanced the professionalism and capabilities of its armed forces (Hunter, 2022). Following the 2008 Bucharest Summit, NATO declared its support for Ukraine's aspirations to join the alliance in the long term. This statement marked a shift in the relationship between Ukraine and NATO (Spence, 2019), leading to deeper cooperation on defense reforms, military modernization, and increased engagement in joint exercises and missions.

Since the 2014 Russian annexation of Crimea and the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine (Gardner, 2016), the partnership between Ukraine and NATO has intensified further. NATO has provided substantial support to Ukraine in various forms, such as military training, defense reforms, and financial assistance, aimed at strengthening Ukraine's resilience and preparedness against potential threats.

While Ukraine's path to NATO membership remains uncertain, the deepening partnership with the organization has significantly enhanced its military capabilities and overall security relations with the alliance members. This cooperation has also played an essential role in shaping Ukraine's military-political integration since the collapse of the USSR.

2.1.5 European Integration (1998-present)

Ukraine's European aspirations have been a long-standing objective, starting with the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) with the European Union in 1998. Later, Ukraine signed the Association Agreement with the EU in 2014, which included significant political and trade integration measures (Duleba, 2022).

Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (1998). The PCA marked Ukraine's first major step toward fostering deeper political and economic ties with the European Union. This agreement sought to strengthen dialogue, promote trade, and enhance cooperation in various sectors such as energy, transport, and environmental protection (Shpak et al., 2020).

EU-Ukraine Association Agreement (2014). This comprehensive agreement marked a pivotal moment in Ukraine's European integration efforts. The Association Agreement aimed to deepen both political and economic relations between the EU and Ukraine, providing a framework for reform and modernization (Lendel, 2021).

Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area (DCFTA). As part of the Association Agreement, the DCFTA aimed to create new trade and investment opportunities between Ukraine and the EU (Lendel, 2021). This agreement allowed for the gradual removal of trade barriers, increasing market access for both parties and promoting economic development.

Ongoing challenges and prospects. Despite the progress made with the Association Agreement and DCFTA, Ukraine continues to face challenges in implementing reforms and addressing corruption in its political system (Shpak et al., 2020). However, the country's unwavering commitment to European integration is evident in its pursuit of EU membership and reform initiatives.

Ukraine's dedication to European integration, beginning with the PCA in 1998 and progressing with the significant Association Agreement in 2014, demonstrates its ongoing commitment to aligning itself with European values and standards, fostering political and economic collaboration, and contributing to the stability and prosperity of the region.

2.1.6 War Started in Eastern Ukraine and Increasing NATO Cooperation (2014-present)

The conflict in Eastern Ukraine, which began in 2014, has underscored the need for stronger military-political ties with NATO and the EU. The complexity and intensity of the ongoing conflict have significantly impacted Ukraine's security environment and prompted a desire for increased support and engagement with its western partners (Tosbotn & Cusumano, 2020).

Joint exercises and missions. As a result of the ongoing conflict, Ukraine has participated more proactively in joint exercises and missions with NATO (Zabyelina & Markovska, 2019). These interactions aim to increase interoperability, boost Ukrainian Armed Forces' capabilities, and promote mutual understanding between the partner countries.

Enhanced NATO cooperation. In 2020, Ukraine gained the status of NATO's Enhanced Opportunities Partner. While not being a full member, this status allows Ukraine to further deepen its cooperation with the alliance on several fronts, including military training, intelligence sharing, and joint operations (Tosbotn & Cusumano, 2020). This partnership significantly strengthens Ukraine's alignment with NATO's strategic objectives and fosters closer collaboration in addressing common security challenges.

Support for reforms. The increased cooperation with NATO and the EU has also prompted Ukraine to implement numerous defense and security sector reforms (Maksak, 2021). These efforts aim to bring the country's military and governance structures in line with NATO and EU standards, thus bolstering Ukraine's overall stability and resilience.

NATO's support and collaboration remain vital for Ukraine's ongoing security and development. The deepening ties with NATO and the EU set the foundation for a more robust and integrated response to external threats and challenges facing the nation.

2.1.7 Seeking NATO Membership (2021-present)

Despite Ukraine's non-aligned status, its leadership has expressed strong interest in joining NATO as a full member. This objective is based on the nation's ongoing efforts to implement reforms that comply with NATO standards, including military modernization programs, democratic processes, and rule of law. It remains an ongoing political integration effort for Ukraine.

Military modernization. To achieve NATO membership, Ukraine is actively working on modernizing its armed forces, improving military infrastructure, and promoting interoperability with NATO troops (Hunter, 2022). These efforts include revamping military training, developing new defense technologies, and enhancing cybersecurity capabilities.

Democratic processes and rule of law. Complying with NATO standards involves strengthening democratic processes and promoting the rule of law within the country. Ukraine has taken steps to address corruption, reform the judiciary, and ensure transparency in government decision-making (Oxford Analytica, 2021). These reforms also involve safeguarding human rights, encouraging pluralistic media, and promoting civilian control over the military.

NATO's Open Door Policy. NATO maintains an Open Door Policy for countries that aspire to join the alliance (Hunter, 2022). However, the decision for Ukraine to join NATO depends on a consensus among all existing NATO member countries, which will consider the candidate's readiness to fulfill NATO requirements and the overall strategic interest of the alliance.

Challenges. Ukraine's path to NATO membership faces several challenges, including ongoing Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine, the unresolved Crimea situation, and potential opposition from some NATO members who express concerns over exacerbating tensions with Russia (Oxford Analytica, 2021).

Ukraine's pursuit of NATO membership highlights its commitment to align with Euro-Atlantic standards, bolster its national security, and deepen cooperation with NATO member countries. While Ukraine continues to make progress in various reforms and demonstrate its dedication to NATO, the decision for it to become a full member ultimately relies on the consensus of all NATO member states.

2.2 Main Stages of Military-Political Integration of Lithuania

2.2.1 Independence of Lithuania (1990-1991)

In March 1990, Lithuania became the first of the Soviet republics to declare the restoration of its independence (Vebra, 1994). This bold decision was not met without resistance, as Moscow retaliated quickly by imposing an economic blockade on the Baltic country. The Soviet Union's economic embargo sought to cripple Lithuania's ability to function independently, targeting key supplies such as oil, gas, raw materials, and even medicines (Ashbourne, 1999). This isolation was meant to force Lithuania to reconsider its decision and reintegrate itself into the Soviet Union.

Lithuania remained steadfast in its pursuit of independence despite the economic hardships imposed through the blockade. The government, led by Vytautas Landsbergis, actively sought international recognition and diplomatic support. As Lithuania continued its quest for freedom, the world watched: the struggle of a small nation against the powerful Soviet Union.

While the blockade would ultimately last for six months, it was not enough to deter Lithuania from asserting its sovereignty. The USSR gradually began to crumble, and multiple Soviet republics

declared their independence. In the midst of the political upheaval, a failed coup attempt took place in Moscow in August 1991 (Skirius, 2022). The consequent weakening of Soviet power provided Lithuania with an opportunity to advance its bid for statehood.

Immediately following the failed coup, the Baltic States – Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia – gained increasing international support, including recognition by several NATO and European Union members (Olesen, 2022). As the Soviet Union's grip loosened further, the practical implications of Lithuania's declaration of independence started to take shape. By September 1991, Lithuania's sovereignty was recognized by the majority of the international community, including the remaining post-Soviet republics. The declaration of Lithuania's independence marked a critical turning point for the country, initiating a series of military-political reforms and integrative steps that would redefine its position in Europe and the global political landscape. Despite the early hardships, Lithuania persevered, eventually paving the way for a new era in the nation's history.

2.2.2 Creation of Own Armed Forces (1991-1993)

Following the restoration of its independence, Lithuania recognized the importance of establishing a national army to ensure its security and bolster its newfound sovereignty (Kalvaitis & Petrauskaitė, 2020). The chaotic and uncertain environment of the post-Soviet era made it critical for Lithuania to develop robust and efficient defense structures.

Initially, Lithuania reestablished a paramilitary structure known as the Lithuanian Territorial Defense Force, which had existed before the Soviet occupation. However, it soon became evident that a more formal and professional armed force was necessary to adequately protect the nation. In September 1991, the Lithuanian government created the Lithuanian Armed Forces, with a primary focus on developing a land-based army component.

Throughout 1991-1993, Lithuania laid the groundwork for its military infrastructure, including establishing the necessary legal frameworks, educational institutions, and training facilities (Kalvaitis & Petrauskaitė, 2020). A civilian Ministry of Defense was instituted to oversee the growth and management of the armed forces, strengthening civilian control over military affairs – a key component for democracies.

During this period, Lithuania also sought to consolidate its military infrastructure by eliminating the remnants of the Soviet armed forces within its borders. This process entailed the removal of Russian military bases, repurposing Soviet military installations, and retraining former Soviet servicemen for inclusion in the Lithuanian Armed Forces, where appropriate (Vitas, 2019).

By 1993, Lithuania had a fledgling but functional military that could serve as the foundation for further growth and integration with Western defense institutions in the years to come.

2.2.3 Diplomatic Strengthening of Sovereignty (since 1991)

A key component of Lithuania's military-political integration was the pursuit of diplomatic recognition and membership in prominent international organizations (Miniotaite, 2000). This strategy served to legitimize the nation's newfound independence and helped develop relationships with key global partners.

United Nations (1991). Lithuania became a member of the United Nations (UN) in September 1991, shortly after its declaration of independence (Gylys 2004). Joining the UN cemented Lithuania's position within the international community and offered the nation access to crucial resources and diplomatic channels.

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (1992). In 1992, Lithuania joined the OSCE, which played a significant role in the nation's security policy (Gylys, 2004). By participating in

the OSCE, Lithuania committed to fostering regional stability and upholding a comprehensive concept of security that extends beyond military matters to include economic, environmental, and human rights issues.

Council of Europe (1993). Lithuania became a member of the Council of Europe in 1993, which highlighted its commitment to upholding democratic principles, the rule of law, and human rights – all crucial pillars of a modern European state (Gylys, 2004). Membership in the Council of Europe further facilitated Lithuania's integration into European structures and demonstrated its readiness to become part of a united and democratic Europe.

These diplomatic endeavors signified Lithuania's intent to pursue strong relationships with the international community and reassert its sovereignty on the global stage. The nation's active participation in these organizations contributed significantly to the successful military-political integration process and laid the foundation for a stable and secure future.

2.2.4 Preparing for Integration into NATO and the EU (1994-2004)

Lithuania's aspirations for deeper integration into the Western political, economic, and security architecture necessitated a series of significant reforms and nation-building efforts. The essential goals were to gain membership in NATO and the European Union (EU), which would solidify Lithuania's position within the community of democratic nations and ensure long-term stability (Schweickert et al., 2011).

Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program (1994). Lithuania joined NATO's PfP program in 1994, marking a crucial step in its path toward NATO membership. The PfP program aimed to enhance security cooperation, military interoperability, and trust between NATO and non-NATO member countries. Through the PfP program, Lithuania initiated defense reforms, fostered collaboration with its partners, and gained valuable experience in participating in joint military exercises and peacekeeping operations (Peterson, 2021).

Association with the EU (1995). In parallel with its pursuits to join NATO, Lithuania aspired to European Union membership. The Association Agreement with the EU, signed in 1995, helped the country establish closer ties, implement necessary legislative and economic reforms, and prepare for full integration into the EU (Schweickert et al., 2011). Being part of the EU would offer economic growth opportunities, greater access to European markets, and the ability to participate in shaping the Union's policies.

Modernizing the Armed Forces and Aligning with NATO Standards. One of the critical requirements for NATO membership was the modernization and restructuring of Lithuania's armed forces. The country worked diligently to align its military doctrines, training, equipment, and procedures with those of NATO (Schweickert et al., 2011). This process entailed significant investments in defense, comprehensive reforms in the military structure, and the gradual adoption of NATO standards and practices. These efforts culminated in Lithuania becoming a NATO member in 2004, alongside its fellow Baltic States, Estonia and Latvia.

Lithuania's journey of military-political integration has been a multifaceted and complex process. Since the restoration of its independence, the country has actively sought to establish firm ties with Western organizations, most notably NATO and the EU (Heinecke, 2019). Through its memberships in these organizations, Lithuania has cemented its position within the community of democratic nations, ensuring long-term stability and security for its citizens.

2.2.5 Accession to NATO and the EU (2004)

The culmination of Lithuania's military-political integration efforts came in 2004, when the country joined two key international organizations, NATO and the European Union. These significant milestones marked the completion of Lithuania's transformation from a former Soviet republic to a fully-fledged member of the Western political, economic, and security institutions.

NATO Membership (March 29, 2004). Achieving full NATO membership was a strategically vital accomplishment for Lithuania (Peterson, 2021). By joining the world's most powerful military alliance, Lithuania secured its long-term security and demonstrated the success of its military reforms. NATO membership signified Lithuania's commitment to collective defense and close collaboration with other NATO nations, effectively deterring potential aggressors.

European Union Membership (May 1, 2004). On May 1, 2004, Lithuania cemented its place within the European community by becoming a member of the European Union. EU membership brought numerous benefits to Lithuania, such as access to the European single market, the possibility of structural funds and investment, and a stronger voice in shaping the EU's policies (Peterson, 2021). Additionally, it solidified the nation's commitment to democratic values, human rights, and the rule of law.

The accession to NATO and the EU in 2004 marked the completion of Lithuania's military-political integration after the collapse of the Soviet Union (Heinecke, 2019). The country underwent a remarkable transformation during this period, demonstrating its dedication to the principles of democracy, security, and cooperation with the international community. As a result, Lithuania has secured its place as a respected member of the global stage and enjoys the benefits of close partnerships with its fellow NATO and EU members.

3. Methods

3.1 Designation of the Experimental Base and Selection of the Study

This comparative analysis primarily utilizes secondary data sources, comprising official documents, policies, and statements of Ukraine and Lithuania during the period following the fall of the Soviet regime. The study also examines news articles, scholarly articles, and reports from reputable organizations, such as NATO, the EU, and government agencies, which provide insight into the military-political integration processes in both countries.

3.2 Data Collection and Analytical Methods

The research employs a qualitative comparative analysis (QCA) methodology to evaluate Ukraine's and Lithuania's military-political integration processes. QCA offers the ability to identify causal connections and influences between various factors, such as policy decisions and diplomatic initiatives, across the two cases. This approach enables us to understand the similarities and differences in the countries' respective experiences and strategies.

Content analysis is applied to the collected data to identify trends and patterns in the language, emphasis, and themes present in the documents and literature consulted. This includes examining the chronological and geopolitical context of the chosen documents in both cases, as well as paying close attention to the differences in the internal political environments of Ukraine and Lithuania.

3.3 Selection and Justification of Methods

The choice of QCA and content analysis for this study is based on the complex and multifaceted nature of military-political integration processes. These methodologies provide a comprehensive understanding of

the decision-making dynamics, geopolitical factors, and strategic choices that influenced the trajectories of Ukraine and Lithuania. Combining these methods offers a rigorous way to assess the variations in each state's approach to building relationships with NATO and the EU, as well as the outcomes of their respective efforts.

3.4 Description of Study Scheme

The study proceeds as follows:

A.   Identification of specific events, time frames, and policies crucial to the military-political integration goals of both countries.

B.   A thorough examination of the selected data, using content analysis to pinpoint themes and trends related to each nation's approach to military-political integration.

C.   The comparative analysis employs QCA to evaluate and draw out causal links, similarities, and differences between Ukraine's and Lithuania's integration processes.

D.   Interpretation of findings to determine both common and divergent factors in their strategies and achievements, enabling a fuller understanding of the conditions necessary for successful military-political integration post-Soviet era.

The approaches used in this study enable us to delve deeply into the complex interactions and factors shaping the integration experiences of both countries, leading to a richer comparison of their respective paths toward NATO and EU membership. Moreover, by acknowledging the importance of considering geopolitical, historical, and internal political contexts, the study is better equipped to identify critical elements contributing to their successes and challenges. Ultimately, the findings of this investigation will inform further research on military-political integration, with specific lessons and insights gleaned from the experiences of Ukraine and Lithuania in the post-Soviet era.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 The Main Factors that Determined the Initial Vectors of Military-Political Integration of Ukraine and Lithuania

Understanding the key factors that have driven the military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania in their respective contexts is essential to making a meaningful comparative analysis. This chapter will explore the prevailing forces that influenced each nation's trajectory during the earliest stages of their post-Soviet development.

I. Historical and Geopolitical Context:

1. Proximity to Russia: Both countries share a history of complex relations with Russia, emerging as relatively new states from the Soviet Union's collapse. The proximity to Russia has influenced their security concerns and significantly impacted their respective military-political integration processes (Budrytė, 2021).

2. Legacies of past regimes and occupations: Both Ukraine and Lithuania have a history of occupations by different regimes, shaping their military and political contexts (Maksak, 2021; Peterson, 2021). The transition from Soviet rule to independence also meant the need for new political realities and military infrastructure that supports their strategic orientations.

II. Strategic Priorities:

1. Security Concerns: The volatile security landscape in the region, including potential Russian aggression (Koposov, 2022), has been a driving force for both countries to seek stronger ties with NATO and the EU, aiming to enhance their defense capabilities.

2. Euro-Atlantic Integration: Both Ukraine and Lithuania viewed Euro-Atlantic integration as a strategic priority, striving to forge closer ties with NATO and the EU (Spence, 2019; Gylys, 2004), two powerful organizations representing political stability and the shared values of freedom, democracy, and the rule of law.

III. Domestic Factors:

1. Political Leadership and Consensus: The visions of prominent political leaders and forging a national consensus have played crucial roles in determining the initial vectors of both countries' military-political integration (Maksak, 2021; Schweickert et al., 2011). The extent to which leaders have supported Euro-Atlantic integration has largely shaped the course of Ukraine's and Lithuania's progress.

2. Reforms and Institutional Readiness: The pace and depth of military, political, and governance reforms favored by the EU and NATO had a direct impact on the military-political integration vectors of Ukraine and Lithuania (Maksak, 2021; Peterson, 2021). The ability to implement these reforms has been essential in aligning with Western norms and standards.

Multiple factors determined the initial vectors of military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania, including their respective historical and geopolitical contexts, strategic priorities, and domestic influences. Both nations faced significant challenges in transitioning from the Soviet period, but their shared aspiration for Euro-Atlantic integration has largely shaped their paths since the early 1990s.

Immediately following the collapse of the Soviet regime, both Ukraine and Lithuania found themselves engaged in reshaping their political landscapes while simultaneously making essential decisions in the areas of defense and national security. This analysis will focus on the key political decisions made by each country during this vital transitional period (Table 1).

Table 1. The Critical Political Decisions during the Transitional Period in Ukraine in Lithuania

	Ukraine	**Lithuania**
Declaration of Independence	1991 On August 24, 1991, Ukraine declared its independence from the Soviet Union, highlighting a critical moment in the nation's history. This decision led to the formation of Ukraine's own armed forces by unifying existing military units stationed within its territory.	1990 On March 11, 1990, Lithuania declared its independence from the USSR, marking the beginning of state-building efforts and the foundation for establishing its own military forces.

Formation of the Ukrainian Armed Forces	(1991-92) Ukraine established its independent armed forces, which involved the consolidation and reorganization of the Soviet military and internal security forces present in the country.	(1990-92) Following its declaration of independence, Lithuania focused on establishing an independent armed force. The country began by reinstating the historical Lithuanian Riflemen's Union and introducing conscription, followed by further consolidation and modernization projects.
Strategic Arms Reductions	1994 The Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances included Ukraine's commitment to eliminate all former Soviet nuclear weapons from its territory. In exchange, the United States, Russia, and the United Kingdom provided security assurances for Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity.	--
Application for NATO	2008 Ukraine first submitted its application for NATO membership in 2008, during the NATO Summit held in Bucharest from April 2 to 4. At the summit, both Ukraine and Georgia expressed their intentions to join NATO through the Membership Action Plan (MAP) program. At that time, the decision to grant MAP was postponed; however, NATO member countries confirmed that Ukraine and Georgia would be able to join the alliance in the future, once the necessary transformations and reforms had been implemented.	1994 In November 1994, Lithuania submitted its first application for NATO membership and embarked on a comprehensive integration process. This initiative was driven by the desire to consolidate its independence, strengthen national security, and integrate into the Euro-Atlantic community.
NATO Accession	--	2004 A decade after submitting its application, Lithuania achieved full membership in NATO, demonstrating the nation's commitment to meeting the alliance's requirements and successfully undergoing the required reforms during the integration process in order to contribute to regional and global security.

Application for European Union Membership	2022 On February 28, 2022, during the active phase of Russian military aggression in Ukraine, President Volodymyr Zelensky submitted an application for Ukraine's membership in the European Union. The statement was delivered to the President of the European Council, Charles Michel. The membership request was an integral part of Ukraine's appeal to European leaders for diplomatic, military, and political support amid the crisis.	1995 Lithuania submitted its application for membership in the European Union on December 8, 1995, marking a significant milestone in the nation's path toward European integration and demonstrating its commitment to aligning with the broader values and goals of the European community.
Attaining EU Membership	--	2004 As a result of successful negotiations and meeting the accession criteria, Lithuania became a member of the European Union on May 1, 2004. This accomplishment was part of the European Union's enlargement, which included a number of other candidate countries at the time. The accession marked Lithuania's successful integration into the political, economic, and social structures of the European community.

These pivotal decisions in both Ukraine and Lithuania set the stage for their respective military-political integration journeys, with each nation pursuing different paths based on their objectives and external influences. Both countries faced the challenge of transforming former Soviet military structures and developing their own national defense capabilities while navigating regional and global security issues. However, Lithuania pursued NATO and EU membership more actively, while Ukraine embarked on an initially ambiguous and uncertain path toward alignment and partnership (Table 2)

Table 2. Comparative Analysis: Ukraine and Lithuania

	Ukraine	Lithuania
	I. Commonalities	
Soviet Legacy	Both countries emerged from the Soviet Union's collapse, thus sharing a common historical background and facing similar challenges in their efforts to build independent political and military structures.	
Western Orientation	Ukraine and Lithuania share a strong inclination toward Western relationships, particularly through NATO and the EU, with aspirations for greater involvement in and support from these organizations.	
Security Concerns	Both countries perceive threats emanating from Russia's actions in their respective regions, heightening their focus on strengthening their military capabilities and defense partnerships.	
	II. Differences	

NATO and EU Membership	No membership.	NATO and EU Membership.
	This distinction renders profound variations in the country's security frameworks and political and economic integration level with Europe.	
Regional and International Conflicts	The ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine significantly affected the country's political, economic, and military dynamics. After Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the situation in the country is dangerous.	Lithuania had a comparatively stable security environment.
Defense Spending	Ukraine struggles to achieve this figure due to its economic and political challenges.	Lithuania has met NATO's recommended defense spending target (2% of GDP)
Weak Sides	Ongoing conflicts, war, economic challenges, unfulfilled NATO membership, unfulfilled EU membership, incomplete reforms.	Limited military power compared to larger NATO members, ongoing vulnerability to regional security threats.
Strong Sides	Large military force, successful cooperation with NATO, Europe-oriented strategic goals	Full NATO and EU membership, commitment to defense spending, successful military modernization efforts.

The military-political integration strategies of Ukraine and Lithuania exhibit both parallels and divergences. In terms of similarities, both nations endeavor to become increasingly integrated with Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union. They have also undertaken defense reforms to strengthen their armed forces and align with NATO standards. Furthermore, Ukraine and Lithuania consider political integration a vital component of their long-term security and stability, leading to closer relationships with partner countries.

However, there are crucial differences in their respective strategies. Lithuania has already secured membership in both NATO and the EU, providing a stable and supportive framework for continued military-political reforms. In contrast, Ukraine has yet to join either organization and faces more substantial external challenges to its integration efforts, notably Russian aggression. The pace and breadth of military-political integration have also varied between the two countries, with Ukraine experiencing slower progress and greater obstacles due to ongoing conflict, intricate internal political dynamics, and significant external pressure. While Lithuania has successfully implemented mandatory conscription, Ukraine has not yet established it as part of its military reforms.

Evaluating the consequences and outcomes of these military-political integration strategies reveals that Lithuania's approach has engendered numerous benefits. Successful integration into NATO and the EU has bolstered Lithuania's national security, political stability, and yielded economic advantages. Enhanced cooperation and coordination with NATO member states have also improved Lithuania's military capabilities and readiness. As a result, Lithuania stands as a model for other countries seeking Euro-Atlantic integration.

Ukraine's situation, on the other hand, presents a more complex picture. The persistent conflict and Russian aggression significantly challenge the country's military-political integration efforts.

Nevertheless, Ukraine has made strides in defense sector reforms and collaboration with NATO, leading to better military capabilities and a closer partnership with NATO member countries. Unfortunately, the slow pace of Ukraine's integration into European structures, due to external and internal factors, may impede its ability to fully realize its integration objectives in the short term.

Lithuania's military-political integration strategy has produced positive outcomes, while Ukraine's more gradual progress has been hampered by both internal and external challenges. Despite these differences, both nations continue to prioritize military-political integration as a means of ensuring their security and stability.

4.2 Forging Resilient Futures: Multi-layered Political and Military Reforms for Accelerated European Integration and Enhanced National Security

Ukraine is embarking on a set of crucial political and military reforms with the goals of expediting its European integration process, strengthening national security, and augmenting its defense prowess. Key reform initiatives include:

1. Defense Sector Modernization: A priority for Ukraine, the modernization encompasses upgrading its armed forces (Abramova, 2023), constructing new military facilities and training centers, and ensuring military preparedness while aligning with NATO standards.

2. Internal Security Reform: Ukraine is concentrating on the reorganization and modernization of law enforcement entities, special force units, counterterrorism programs, and improving the efficiency of its border services.

3. Political Reform: A critical component of Ukraine's strategy involves fortifying democratic institutions, promoting transparent elections, implementing anti-corruption measures, and upholding the rule of law.

4. Defense Expenditure: Addressing defense budget allocation is vital as Ukraine aims to enhance funding while incorporating transparency in equipment procurement procedures and eliminating corruption in contract agreements.

5. National Security Strategy Development: The creation, review, and renewal of fundamental national security documents are paramount, as well as the design and execution of armed forces development concepts.

6. External Political Integration: Remaining a critical aspect of Ukraine's long-term ambitions, the country is determined to deepen its integration with the EU while fostering cooperation with NATO. By encompassing these multifaceted reforms, Ukraine aims to attain long-term stability, robust national security, and reinforced protection. The implementation of these endeavors necessitates significant effort, time, and resources, but they remain indispensable for realizing Ukraine's strategic objectives and safeguarding its sovereignty.

In light of the prevailing geopolitical landscape and considering the exacerbation of threats, Lithuania continues to implement political and military reforms aimed at bolstering national security and meeting its NATO obligations. The following initiatives are prioritized for Lithuania:

1. Increased military expenditures: In fulfillment of NATO commitments, Lithuania strives to raise its military budget to 2% of GDP and beyond (Waszkiewicz & Taksás, 2023), ensuring adequate funding for national defense.

2. Armed forces modernization: Lithuania emphasizes armed forces modernization, including procurement of new equipment, strengthening cyber security, and enhancing combat readiness and mobility of military units.

3. Intensified regional cooperation: Lithuania actively collaborates with neighboring NATO countries in the Baltic region and Poland, augmenting joint military and defense capabilities to deter potential aggressors.

4. Training and participation in international missions: Lithuanian armed forces actively partake in international exercises, training, and operations, building combat readiness and integration into NATO and EU structures.

5. Strengthening civil society: Lithuanian political institutions persistently cater to the population, promoting transparency of power, citizen participation in decision-making, and the development of democratic values.

It is essential to note that though these reforms may alter and adapt to specific circumstances, they nonetheless manifest in Lithuania's development strategies and programs as a fully-fledged NATO and EU member.

5. Conclusion

The military-political integration of Ukraine and Lithuania showcases the strategic alignment of both nations with Western institutions such as NATO and the European Union. These countries' pursuit of political and military reforms showcases their determination to overcome evolving geopolitical challenges and secure a more stable future. By adopting defense and security reforms that meet NATO standards, Ukraine and Lithuania signal their commitment to enhanced regional stability and stronger alliances within a complex international landscape. Although the trajectories of Ukraine and Lithuania differ in significant ways, their shared pursuit of closer integration with Western institutions reveals a common determination to foster a secure and prosperous future. As the two countries navigate their unique challenges and opportunities, their shared commitment to military-political integration creates a platform for cooperation and mutual support. By pooling resources and knowledge, fostering stronger diplomatic and defense ties, and cementing their commitment to the shared values of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, Ukraine and Lithuania can effectively reinforce their positions in the global arena. Thus, the examination of Ukraine and Lithuania's military-political integration highlights the necessity of ongoing adaptation, flexibility, and constructive cooperation to accommodate the rapidly changing hazardous environment. These two countries' experiences serve as valuable case studies for other nations seeking to navigate similar challenges and pursue lasting stability, prosperity, and global integration.

Author Bionote

Vitaliy Mykhaylyk: Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Head of the Department of History and Archeology, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, Ioanna Pavla II Str., 17, Kyiv 01042, Ukraine (temporarily transferred University).

Oleksandr Kadeniuk: Doctor of Historical Sciences, Professor, Department of Law, Vocational and Socio-Humanitarian Education, Higher Educational Institution "Podillia State University", Shevchenko Str., 12, Kamianets-Podilskyi 32316, Ukraine.

Olena Sapytska: Ph.D. in History, Assistant Professor, Department of History and Archeology, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, Ioanna Pavla II Str., 17, Kyiv 01042, Ukraine (temporarily transferred University).

Olena Mykhaylyk: Ph.D. in History, Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science and International Relations, Volodymyr Dahl East Ukrainian National University, Ioanna Pavla II Str., 17, Kyiv 01042, Ukraine (temporarily transferred University).

Authorship and Level of Contribution

Vitaliy Mykhaylyk: conceptualization and design of the study; analysis of historical and military-political contexts in the post-Soviet era.

Oleksandr Kadeniuk: investigation of Ukraine's integration process; comparative analysis of Lithuania's integration trajectory.

Olena Sapytska: examination of the role of domestic politics and international factors in shaping integration trajectories.

Olena Mykhaylyk: analysis of lessons learned and recommendations for future integration efforts. Each of the four authors has made significant contributions to various aspects of the study. They have collaboratively provided comprehensive and valuable insights into the military-political integration trajectories of Ukraine and Lithuania in the post-Soviet era's study.

References

Abramova, M. (2023). Recommendations of the required level forecasting of defense Ukraine potential system improving. *Scientific Collection «InterConf»*, (141), 353-355.

Ashbourne, A. (1999). *Lithuania: the rebirth of a nation, 1991-1994*. Lexington books.

Budrytė, D. (2021). Memory politics and the study of crises in International Relations: Insights from Ukraine and Lithuania. *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 1-21.

De Santis, H. (1994). Romancing NATO: Partnership for peace and East European stability. *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 17(4), 61-81.

Duleba, A. (2022). Differentiated European integration of Ukraine in comparative perspective. *East European Politics and Societies*, 36(2), 359-377.

Gardner, H. (2016). The Russian annexation of Crimea: regional and global ramifications. *European Politics and Society*, 17(4), 490-505.

Gylys, P. (2004). Lithuanian Foreign Policy Challenges and Backround 1992-1996. *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, (13-14), 95-100.

Heinecke, S. (2019). Challenges in the East–Root Causes and Prospects. *L'Europe en formation*, (2), 9-32.

Hong, S. (2020). From Autonomy to Independence: Evolution of Ukrainian Political Thoughts. *Korean Journal of Ukrainian Studies*, 1(1), 1.

Hunter, R. (2022). The Ukraine crisis: Why and what now? *Survival*, 64(1), 7-28.

Kalvaitis, R. & Petrauskaitė, A. (2020). *The Case Study of Lithuanian Voluntary National Defence Service in Intelligence in 1991-1993*. Challenges to national defence in contemporary geopolitical situation CNDCGS'2020: proceedings of the 2nd international scientific conference, 14-16 October 2020, Vilnius, Lithuania, pp 291-299. General Jonas Žemaitis Military Academy of Lithuania.

Kieninger, S. (2022). The Bush and Clinton Administrations and Ukraine's Nuclear Dismantlement, 1991–1994. *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 33(3), 566-588.

Koch, S. J. (2012). *The Presidential Nuclear Initiatives of 1991-1992*: (Monograph). National Defense Univ Fort Mcnair Dc Center for the Study of Weapons of Mass Destruction. Defense Technical Information Center. Available in: https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA577537

Koposov, N. (2022). Populism and memory: Legislation of the past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. *East European Politics and Societies*, 36(1), 272-297.

Kuzio, T. (1995). Civil-military relations in Ukraine, 1989-1991. *Armed Forces & Society*, 22(1), 25-48.

Lendel, M. (2021). Ukrainian-Slovak relations milestones in the context of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement. *Annales Scientia Politica*, 10(2), 44-53.

Maksak, H. (2021). The security perception and security policy of Ukraine, 1991–2018. *Defense & Security Analysis*, 37(1), 53-65.

Marples, D. R. (2019). Ukraine's drive to independence in 1991. *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 61(3), 321-345.

Miniotaite, G. (2000). The Security Policy of Lithuania and the" Integration Dilemma". *COPRI*, 5.

Olesen, M. R. (2022). The beginnings of Danish foreign policy activism: Supporting Baltic independence 1990-1991. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 47(4), 370-390.

Oxford Analytica (2021). *Ukraine will seek a louder voice in adverse conditions*. Emerald Expert Briefings.

Peterson, J. W. (2021). NATO: Partnership for Peace (PfP) and a staggered admission process. *Defending Eastern Europe*, 52-64. Manchester University Press.

Schweickert, R., Melnykovska, I., Belke, A., & Bordon, I. (2011). Prospective NATO or EU membership and institutional change in transition countries. *Economics of Transition*, 19(4), 667-692.

Shpak, N., Kuzmin, O., Melnyk, O., Ruda, M., & Sroka, W. (2020). Implementation of a circular economy in Ukraine: The context of European integration. *Resources, 9*(8), 96.

Skirius, J. (2022). Significant Works of a Small Group of Lithuanian Americans in Chicago: Activities of SOS Americans for Lithuania's Freedom in 1990-1991. *Lituanus*, 68(1).

Spence, R. B. (2019). Democratization, militarism and paramilitarism in post-Soviet Ukraine. *The Military and Society in the Former Eastern Bloc*, 137-155. Routledge.

The Budapest Memorandum (1994). *Memorandum on Security Assurances in connection with Ukraine's accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons*. Budapest. Available in: http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/12/13943175580.pdf

Tosbotn, R. A. & Cusumano, E. (2020). NATO in a Changing World. *The Changing Global Order: Challenges and Prospects,* 321-336.

Vebra, R. (1994). Political rebirth in Lithuania, 1990–1991: Events and problems. *Journal of Baltic Studies*, 25(2), 183-188.

Vitas, R. A. (2019). Civil-military relations in Lithuania. *Civil-Military Relations in the Soviet and Yugoslav Successor States*, 73-91. Routledge.

Waszkiewicz, G. & Taksás, B. (2023). Military Spending Among European NATO Members. *Journal of Security and Sustainability issues*, 13(1), 53-56. DOI: 10.47459/jssi.2023.13.5

Zabyelina, Y. & Markovska, A. (2019). Ukraine: organised crime, politics and frozen conflicts. *Handbook of Organised Crime and Politics,* 105-118. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Zlenko, A. (1994). Fact Sheet: Ukraine. *US Department of State Dispatch*, 5(18), 267.