3. Geopolitical Imaginaries

> In this era, in this generation, we are entirely convinced that facts are not simple; quite the contrary. And what's more, in things that touch on human condition, the individual, humanity in some way, opinions about facts are completely and inextricably enmeshed in value judgements, attitudes, stances. . . . Even worse, various opinions about a given fact are equally justified even if they are mutually contradictory.
> *Alexander Wat, My Century*[1]

Field research disrupts one's assumptions. When I traveled to Lithuania to research Internet development for the first time, I wanted to interview telecom industry stakeholders and learn more about their perspectives on the emergence of the Internet in a post-socialist country. Eight years after the new nation-state declared its independence from the former Soviet Union, it privatized and outsourced its main telecom infrastructure to TeliaSonera, a predominantly Swedish-Finnish owned telecom company. I initially thought that I could probably tell a story of Lithuania's independence as overshadowed by its telecom sector's economic dependency on international corporations, perhaps by using the perspective of media imperialism.[2] Conversely, I imagined that I could create a narrative about the heroic acts of telecommunications workers in a small, post-socialist nation-state that managed to develop an accessible and robust telecom industry just a decade after the Soviet Union's disintegration. However, the story on the ground turned out to be more complicated than I originally anticipated. The telecom field spoke in many voices and complicated my initial desire to establish a clear-cut geopolitical narrative about Internet development in Lithuania.

In this book, situated geopolitical imaginaries often occur through fieldwork-based stories, beliefs, perceptions about geographically distinct telecom industry actors, their

1 Alexander Wat, *My Century* (New York: New York Review Books Classics, 2003), p. 9.

2 Oliver Boyd-Barrett, *Media Imperialism* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2014).

roles, and thereupon implied dependencies and tensions in developing the Internet in Lithuania, which I illustrate using selected excerpts from fieldwork reports and interviews.

The following text explores narratives provided by local telecom industry stakeholders during my fieldwork in Lithuania from 2017 to 2018. These stories were told by public and private telecom-related employees: government officials, academics, and telecom industry workers, whom I either interviewed or observed during participatory observation practices and designate as "stakeholders" or "producers." In the field I often heard practitioners make judgments about foreign and local telecom industry actors located in geographically specific territories, as well as contribute various evaluations regarding these actors' involvement in the Lithuanian telecom industry. These imaginaries, in the form of adjectives that connote specific roles prescribed to oneself and geographically distinct others ("Modernizing," "Competing," etc.), present opinions of local industry stakeholders regarding themselves as well as other, geographically distanced, actors related to Internet maintenance in Lithuania. In short, these imaginaries outline how foreign and local contributors to Lithuania's Internet development were viewed in the field. This inquiry resulted in the argument that a particular kind of strange geopolitical imaginaries shape and constitute the Internet as infrastructure in Lithuania. In my use of the term "strange," I rely on sociologist Zygmunt Bauman, who argues that the notion "strange" is suffused with the indeterminate, anti-binary logic of modernity.[3] In this book, "strange" connotes an indeterminate and tensed logic of geopolitical imaginaries that disentangle the possibility of one national imaginary of telecom geopolitics and one story by presenting ambiguous geopolitical imaginaries on the ground.

I explore these geopolitical imaginaries in depth in the upcoming text. By focusing on these imaginaries, I thus make a broader claim that Internet as infrastructure comprises not only the labor practices of infrastructuring investigated in the previous chapter, but is framed by discourses of different geopolitical imaginaries that I theorize as constitutive to and framing the Internet's development. Multiple people not only work to produce and maintain the Internet through particular labor practices and their situated contingencies, but also actively geopoliticize Internet development through imaginaries. While in the following section I focus on complex geopolitical imaginaries due to the fact that the material collected during interviews, participatory observation and e-mail exchanges often circulated around geopolitical issues, this angle was not pre-planned and has evolved over time. While the interview citations are illustrative, their imaginary nature also means that I encountered more similar views in the field and specifically chose illustrative examples as cases.

Importantly, I am not interested in causal analysis of this information, namely in the question of whether these imaginaries had any impact on official state geopolitical narratives, telecommunication policies, or the transformation of the telecom sector in Lithuania. Instead, I perceive geopolitical imaginaries as imaginaries that were produced through field perspectives and that have framed, i.e., surrounded, the Internet as infrastructure development during my fieldwork among key past and present telecom stakeholders. These imaginaries constitute the part of the field of Lithuania's Internet

3 Bauman, "Modernity and Ambivalence," p. 151.

infrastructure and telecommunication industry that is shaped by foreign and local telecom network participants. In other words, I do not analyze the effect or linkage these gathered geopolitical utterances had on Lithuania's official geopolitical position. Rather, by studying infrastructure I geopoliticize the notion of infrastructure and complicate the possibility of one geopolitical narrative in a nation-state.

Before moving to the field, I want to briefly explore how the Lithuanian state is geopoliticized according to prevailing geopolitical narratives in Lithuania. I do so by first outlining Lithuania's dominant realist geopolitical narrative, which I explore by looking into the work of political scientists and geographers, before delving into specific cases from the field.

Geographers in Lithuania already initiated geopolitical discourses in the first part of the twentieth century.[4] Geographer Stasys Vaitiekūnas writes about the first geographers of independent Lithuania, such as Kazys Pakštas and Stanislovas Tarvydas. These scholars were interested in the relation between geography and politics; they contemplated these issues as they experienced Lithuania's 1918 independence, which they hoped to maintain amidst chaotic relationships with neighboring countries.[5] After the interwar period independence (1918–1939), Lithuania lost its independence three more times over the course of four years: first, to the Soviet Union (1940), then to Nazi Germany (1941–1944), and finally to the Soviet Union (1944), until independence was regained in 1990. Currently, official Lithuanian geopolitical discourse is predominantly focused on statist territorial international relations. According to political scientists Nortautas Statkus and Kęstutis Paulauskas, Lithuania is a parliamentary democracy that is market-oriented economy and focuses on a pro-European and transatlantic international relations and securitization policies regarding the threat of Russian aggression.[6] They state, "Most Lithuanian foreign policy makers and international relations and geopolitics specialists agree that the fundamental guarantor of our state security is full integration into the economic, political and military structures of the western world."[7] Political analyst and journalist Viktor Denisenko similarly argues that the geopolitical paradigm of post-socialist Baltic states, including Lithuania, comprises a pro-western stance, a valuation of the Soviet period as a time of occupation, the perception of interwar independence (1918–1940) as foundational to current statehood, and the self-positioning of the state as a "bridge" between the East (the post-Soviet realm and Commonwealth of Independent States [CIS]) and the West (Central and Western Europe and the US), rooted in the historical experiences of WWII and the Cold War.[8] International relations and geopolitical experts contend that Lithuania's security is premised on Lithuanian socio-cultural and economic integration into the West (understood as Western Europe and the US) and its dissociation from the East (understood as the CIS

4 Vaitekūnas, *Lietuvos geopolitika*, p. 5; Kazys Pakštas, *Baltijos respublikų politinė geografija: politinės geografijos problemos, nagrinėjamos atsižvelgiant į Baltijos tautų likimą* (Kaunas: "Spindulio" b-vės sp., 1929); Stanislovas Tarvydas, *Geopolitika*. (Kaunas: Spaudos fondas, 1939).

5 Vaitekūnas, *Lietuvos geopolitika*, p. 5.

6 Statkus and Paulauskas, *Tarp geopolitikos ir postmoderno*, pp. 38–39.

7 Statkus and Paulauskas, *Tarp geopolitikos ir postmoderno*, p. 40.

8 Denisenko, "Rusijos periodinės spaudos požiūris," pp. 35–36.

realm).[9] According to political scientists Česlovas Laurinavičius et al., Baltic countries and thus Lithuania are not only geopolitically oriented toward the West, but actually comprise a unique geopolitical constellation similar to that of Cuba due to the pressure they feel from their neighboring countries, especially the Russian Federation.[10] Moreover, the authors claim that the Baltic countries constitute a challenge to Russia, which "still does not refuse the attitude that the Baltic states belong to its geopolitical influence zone, and has not finally reconciled with Baltic states' integration into Euroatlantic structures."[11] Laurinavičius et al. posit that the situation is even more complex from a broader societal perspective: the Baltic states comprise a geopolitical anomaly; they are zones of ambivalence that consist of unstable, culturally diverse, hybrid societies located on the border of two civilizations. In the case of Lithuania, these borders are comprised of the Latin West and the Orthodox East.[12] Viktor Denisenko quotes Nortautas Statkus' et al.'s similar claim that while the official outlook of the Lithuanian state and statist elite is pro-western, i.e., pro-European and pro-US, its societal position is ambivalent: it is sometimes pro-western and sometimes pro-eastern.[13]

According to political scientist Jonas Daniliauskas, Lithuania is particularly important to Northern European countries because it is a territory that geographically expands the security of Northern region.[14] At the same time, political scientist Tomas Janeliūnas et al.'s book *Šiaurės šalių geostrateginė svarba Lietuvai* (Geostrategic Importance of Northern Countries to Lithuania) describes Northern countries as geopolitical threats due to the vast Scandinavian influence in Lithuania's crucial sectors of telecommunications, finance, and, partially, media.[15] It argues that through the development of democracy, civil society, and market economy in Lithuania, northern countries aim to help form a stable security zone in the Baltic states and thereby extend security regions further to the east.[16] Authors claim that northern countries, such as Sweden, Denmark, and Norway, support post-socialist Lithuania's independence in various ways: through assistance for its democratic structures, support for Lithuania's attempt to join the EU, military support when Lithuania joined NATO, and Foreign Direct Investment (FDI).[17] Economist Alf Vanags posits that FDI and trade indicates economic integration,[18] i.e., it illustrates an actual implementation of the single market, yet in the Baltic countries such integration fostered economic and cultural divides; in this context, richer Scandinavian countries influence multiple Baltic state sector developments, while post-

9 Statkus and Paulauskas, *Tarp geopolitikos ir postmoderno*, p. 42; Vaitekūnas, *Lietuvos geopolitika*, pp. 21–23.

10 Laurinavičius, Motieka, and Statkus, *Baltijos valstybių geopolitikos bruožai. XX amžius*, p. 23.

11 Laurinavičius, Motieka, and Statkus, *Baltijos valstybių geopolitikos bruožai. XX amžius*, p. 25.

12 Laurinavičius, Motieka, and Statkus, *Baltijos valstybių geopolitikos bruožai. XX amžius*, p. 26.

13 Denisenko, "Rusijos periodinės spaudos požiūris," pp. 36, 39.

14 Daniliauskas, et al. *Šiaurės šalių geostrateginė svarba Lietuvai*, p. 19.

15 Daniliauskas, et al. *Šiaurės šalių geostrateginė svarba Lietuvai*, p. 22.

16 Daniliauskas, et al. *Šiaurės šalių geostrateginė svarba Lietuvai*, p. 20–21.

17 Daniliauskas, et al. *Šiaurės šalių geostrateginė svarba Lietuvai*, p. 18–19.

18 Alf Vanags, "Economic Integration and Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region: A Critical Perspective from the Baltic States," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 42, no. 1 (2011), p. 92.

communist Baltic countries remain relatively poor.[19] Vanags uses data regarding Baltic trade and FDI in 2009 to illustrate that Sweden, in particular, has engaged with Baltic economies more as investors than traders through its engagement with Lithuania's telecom, tailoring, and banking sectors.[20] However, FDI, taxation, strong trade unions, social welfare systems, and other structural and historical differences separate wealthier Scandinavian countries from the less privileged Baltic states, and have occasionally resulted in tensions between the two.[21] If it is assumed that the telecom industry is a structurally crucial sector in Lithuania, and Sweden has had a substantial presence in Lithuania's telecom sector development since the 1990s, then the telecommunications sector can be perceived as a geopolitically important industry that is threatened by foreign ownership. On the other hand, closer ties with EU member state Sweden could also concomitantly express Lithuania's tighter integration into the European economy and its "desecuritization," namely its disappearance from the list of countries considered a defense threat.[22]

This is the scholarly story that presents Lithuania's telecommunications geopolitics as pro-western due to its access to the EU and NATO, interactions with Scandinavian countries and alliance with the US. How does this story hold up to the geopolitical narratives I encountered on the ground? How did local telecom industry stakeholders describe and valuate the geopolitical roles of foreign and local actors? What did they think of foreign actors' involvement in the local telecom industry, and furthermore, why did they get involved in the first place? How do they describe their own telecom industry field? What everyday geopolitical imaginaries, i.e., narratives that are based on geographic distribution of power among the locals and the foreigners, result from telecom field utterances? In this explorative investigation, I thus map the local Internet's geopolitical imaginaries through geopolitical utterances collected during my fieldwork. Exploring geopolitical imaginaries in Lithuania's telecom industry thus means analyzing how Internet development and maintenance is felt, remembered, described, and experienced by local telecom industry participants whose stories follow spatial lines of power distribution. When I discuss geopolitical imaginaries, I thus depart from official, mainstream realist statist geopolitical narratives and their possible effects on the formation of hard power politics, and seriously consider discourses gathered in fieldwork.

I take field perspectives seriously, but do not deny the relevance of geography or official state-led geopolitical actions in the formation of official realist geopolitics. One does not need to look far—think of the statist spatial power politics fueled by the emergence of hard nation-state politics apparent in recent events in Afghanistan, Belarus, Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria—to become aware that the practice of geographically-constituted strategies to gain more state power continues to play an important role in contemporary nation-state politics. However, my focus is different. I complicate the clear-cut realist geopolitical view that each state only has one geopolitical narrative through an

19 Vanags, "Economic Integration and Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region," p. 100.

20 Vanags, "Economic Integration and Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region," p. 94.

21 Vanags, "Economic Integration and Cohesion in the Baltic Sea Region," pp. 94–95, 98–99.

22 Statkus and Paulauskas, *Tarp geopolitikos ir postmoderno*, p. 25.

exploration of telecom industry geopolitical imaginaries that emerged on the ground.[23] I also argue for conceptual attention to geopolitical imaginaries in research of the Internet as infrastructure. Finally, while I argue that realist geopolitical theories are precarious due to their potential suppression of alternative political agency and particular type of anti-intellectualism grounded in a desire to eradicate cultural complexity and internal societal contradictions, I present Lithuania's telecommunications industry as a case in point of geopolitical strangeness. While statist power politics transpire through physical actions such as military interventions and particular resource distribution, I will use the following section to illustrate that diverse and incommensurable geopolitical imaginaries continue to co-exist on the ground. I begin by presenting perspectives about "the foreign Others," then describe a section of the telecom industry's self-perception, and end with an imaginary of telecom industry as cooperating.

3.1 The Others

3.1.1 Modernizing

3.1.1.1 Progress Takes Place Abroad

Vidas, a former Minister in the Ministry for Networks and Informatics (1991–1998) said that when he asked a Lithuanian government official why the Ministry was dissolved, the only explanation he received was that the US did not have such a ministry. When I asked why such country comparisons were made, the ex-Minister claimed that it is normal to look for examples of progress internationally.[24] His argument thus implied that progress takes place outside of Lithuania, a context in which Lithuania can only look outward and then adapt to developments that begin abroad. Thus, it was not surprising that when one hears comparisons of Lithuania's efforts with "the world" in the field, this usually means "the western world," specifically Northern Europe and the US, because in Lithuania these regions often seem to be perceived as more advanced. According to this logic, Lithuania's government structure, as illustrated by Vidas, could be improved by learning from the best. Similar comparisons with "the West" and subsequent praise of the US, Germany, Norway, and other countries in relation to telecom development emerged several times during my fieldwork.

In the following section, I focus on fieldwork examples of how local telecom producers described "the Others," or foreign actors who participated in local telecom developments, as modernizers. I use the concept "modernizer" as an inclusive term for such utterances from the field, which compare the local telecom industry with that of other places by establishing a hierarchical binary narrative comprised of motifs of local underdevelopment and foreign advancement. Cultural critic Svetlana Boym argues that "marginal Europeans today are more sober about Europa, their last love. . . . East Central Europeans seem to have lost some of their dreams; instead of projecting their

23 John Vianney O'Loughlin, "Introduction," in *Dictionary of Geopolitics,* ed. John Vianney O'Loughlin (Santa Barbara, California: Greenwood Pub Group, 1994), p. viii.

24 Interview with Vidas, 8 November 2017.

romantic fantasies onto the West, they turn to introspection neither loving the West unconditionally nor blaming it for local ills."[25] Despite this claim, I still encountered local imaginaries in my fieldwork that expressed awe of "the West" and that were based on binary structures such as lacking versus developed, and chaotic versus civilized. These sentiments were produced in different field contexts, especially the participatory observation of telecom labor practices and interviews with various telecom industry stakeholders who were either prompted to answer questions related to the interests of foreign actors in Lithuania's telecom industry or initiated such topics themselves. In short, binary descriptions of others as modernizing forces resulted both from reactions to staged questions and spontaneous utterances. I explore two general themes that emerged from the field material as one of many geopolitical imaginaries that were produced during my fieldwork. First, I look into the representation of geopolitical imaginaries that progress takes place not in Lithuania but abroad, and then I inquire into more specific examples, such as the claims that Sweden's and Estonia's telecom industries are more advanced than that of Lithuania.

In the field, I asked Matas from Telia Lietuva to clarify his statement regarding how Lithuania's telecom infrastructure differs from the infrastructure in "the West." Matas contended that such a comparison was grounded in his experience and conversations with other industry stakeholders. According to Matas, physical infrastructure differences comprise geographical location, historical legacy, regulatory framework, and culture:

> Starting here even from a simple thing, such as geography, i.e., the place, right. Are there mountains or no mountains? It's usually there that those infrastructures very strongly differ. One issue, is there some historical infrastructure, or isn't there? Another issue, how did it develop historically and on what basis was it built? Let's say, based on some reasoning to save. . . . Copper lines for telephone, then. When that infrastructure was built, there was not much thought given to some future generation technologies, nobody also knew about them, that there will be some DSL, and afterward some generations of DSL. Telephone was required to function. And then again, what is the attitude toward the quality. And there is that sparing. That Russian standard was [based on] much thinner lines, which actually fit the telephone very well, but we have problems with the later generation technologies. Let's say the same DSL in the Western Europe works much better than here. . . . But at the same time, there are differences in all the regulation and, I would say, even perhaps in human mentality. Well would you easily allow to drill the wall in your apartment, or is it something for which, well, you can be only forced to? Well here there was this example with copper technologies, which work on very short lines. Here [in Lithuania] they don't make much sense, because it is relatively easy to come to the very building with fiber: either to the apartment or the house. In Western Europe it is a little bit different: the users usually do not understand the wish, 'I will dig through your field and install yet another cable.' Then, alternative ways need to be searched for and that's why those copper technologies are successful . . . Another example could be perhaps local

25 Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic books, 2008), p. 246.

> apartment buildings here. Well again, perhaps we have more of the post-Soviet chaos, nobody controls what the communication channels are there, even in the staircases. Each operator—big or small—basically does those works in [an] arbitrary way. All the channels here are stuffed, so the first to come is the lucky one. This is usually regulated by local communities or by the supervising companies, which really do not care. . . . Well, in reality there are five operators, and each with their own cable, and there is not enough space for all of them. Sometimes it happens that the laying is done not in the channels but somewhere outside. So it is similar to some satellite dish: not everywhere in the world it is allowed to hang them in the balcony.[26]

Matas stated that the diversity of possible physical telecom infrastructure aspects is what make it specific: its location, equipment legacy, mentality of infrastructure developers, users, and regulatory differences. This differentiated description explores how each physical infrastructure development actually is dependent on place. However, by providing specific examples and using irony ("Not everywhere in the world it is allowed to hang them [satellite dishes] on the balcony.") the statement also claims that foreign, in particular western telecom infrastructure and its users, are more advanced than local ones. For instance, the "Russian standard" brought poor quality copper cables to Lithuania and caused "problems with the later generation technologies."[27] Moreover, it is possible to lay fiber-optic cables in Lithuania because local population allegedly does not care about privacy issues and allows telecom operators to dig into the area surrounding their dwellings. In this schema, the mentality of Lithuanians is one that accepts chaos and uncertainty. Additionally, apartment building staircases are stuffed with cables from various data transmission providers, while users similarly stuff their balconies—and are allowed to—with satellite dishes. In contrast, this would not happen in "the West," where people value their privacy and copper cables are of a better quality. In brief, although this perspective presents a highly differentiated view toward physical telecommunications infrastructure development by showing how local specificity (geography, technological legacy, and people's mentality) defines its development path, it also establishes a binary narrative of chaotic locals and civilized foreigners. In particular, the Lithuanian telecom industry is narrated as less developed than "the West" due to its technology (thinner copper cables), mentality (chaotic), and regulatory culture (not valuing private space enough).

Joris from Telia Lietuva also elaborated on the differences between Lithuania and the rather abstract "West." He told me:

> Here is a problem, that our building regulations—what is perhaps civilized in the West—that are necessary for each apartment building, well I guess, there [in the West] is written that it has to have water supply, electricity, all the issues concerned with sewage, and the Internet. Well at ours, unfortunately, it is [that the issues around the Internet are] not that clearly formulated in the law.[28]

26 Interview with Matas, 12 March 2018.

27 Interview with Matas, 12 March 2018.

28 Interview with Joris, 1 March 2018.

Although he later admitted that he did not know enough about telecom industries and policies in the West, he simultaneously declared western superiority. He stated, "I would like to know, how it is in the civilized country, in the West, I would really like to."[29] In a similar line of thought, when Vilius, a telecom practitioner from another telecom company, spoke about network problems, he posited that the irrational destruction of telecom networks that allegedly takes place in Lithuania would not happen in the West, for instance in Germany, where supposedly no one steals:

> The network [might] have many problems: their cables might be interrupted, someone might sabotage, use your cable. A need for marking, locking the cabinets, appears. There are some things which happen probably only in Lithuania. Or maybe somewhere else in the post-Soviet [realm]. Somewhere like in Germany, cables and active equipment stand outside . . . unlocked, and no one needs to do anything, no one will steal anything. . . . For example, would you ever throw a burning torch into a well with cables? You would not. I don't know, I probably also wouldn't throw. . . . Or, for instance, if there is a need for a fix [drugs], then you need to find copper, cut the cable, bring it to the metal scrap shop [skupkę], get five *litas* [Lithuanian currency before Euro] from there, and you go and buy your dose, if you are a drug addict. . . . It happens, even rats erode cables.[30]

There might be plenty of causes that influence physical network connectivity. Yet when Joris and Vilius provided examples of network failure, these consisted of West-East binaries (e.g., "How it is in the civilized country, in the West," "Somewhere like in Germany . . . no one will steal anything.") which were contrasted with ironic exploration of chaotic, lawless, disorganized Lithuania (e.g., "Well at ours, unfortunately, it is not that clearly formulated in the law," "Would you ever throw a burning torch into a well with cables?").

The examples above contribute to the narrative of "Others" as better in many ways: technologically (better copper cables), socially (less chaotic, less stealing, safer, valuing private space), regulatory (clearer rules for network construction), and, in general, as more advanced than the local telecom industry. These descriptions of "the Others" represent a binary narrative about the local telecom industry ("Lithuanian telecom industry/Other telecom industry") by first establishing a spatial hierarchy ("better West/worse Lithuania") and then explaining it through cultural terms (e.g., mentality) and technological terms (e.g., copper cables). Finally, these descriptions not only diminish Lithuania's telecom industry advancements, but they also present a highly reductive view of the West. In short, they project an image of the "Other" that is simultaneously vague and more advanced. Yet this "Other," with the exception of Germany (although this comparison is also destabilized by the word "like," as in, "like in Germany"), is a universal actor from "the West," which represents an idea that progress takes place abroad, in the imagined West, but not in Lithuania. As sociologist Stuart Hall observes, the historical concept of the West plays a role in societal ranking systems, yet what actually is perceived as more or less developed and thus western in such classifications has to

29 Interview with Joris, 1 March 2018.

30 Interview with Vilius, 16 March 2017.

be made specific through condescending comparisons. Hall posits, "For example, 'the West'= developed= *good*= desirable; or the 'non-West'= under-developed= *bad*= undesirable."[31] Sociologist Attila Melegh describes debates in Europe that value Western Europe as more advanced than Eastern Europe, which Melegh terms the "East-West slope."[32] According to such a vision, European states and regions are viewed through the image of spatial power distribution, which is maintained through daily imaginaries that the East, such as post-socialist Eastern part of Europe, is less advanced and the West is more advanced. Similarly, political scientist Gražina Miniotaitė claims that post-socialist Baltic states' political identities are grounded in accordance with such an East-West opposition. She states:

> They have been creating narratives of belonging to the West, with the East as their threatening 'other'. The narratives legitimise the Baltic States foreign policy of integration with the West and differentiation from the East. The concepts of the East and the West are highly value-loaded; the West is being associated with prosperity, security and democracy, whereas the East is linked with poverty, unpredictability and insecurity. It is a normative ideological division. Geopolitically, the West is associated with the EU and the NATO state, the East with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), mainly with Russia and Belarus.[33]

In this context, what specific examples of "the West" emerged in the field?

3.1.1.2 Sweden is Better, Estonia is Almost Better, and Poland is Worse

In addition to valuation of "the West" and the concomitant devaluation of the Lithuanian telecom industry, there were more specific statements in the field that compared the local telecom industry with geographically distant "Others." In these comparisons, particular nation-states were praised for fostering Lithuania's local telecom industry development. Specifically, in the following section I unpack two examples that were provided in the field, those of Sweden and Estonia. Some of the producers described Sweden's influence on Lithuania's telecom industry in positive terms: a relaxed, slow, ethical telecommunications industry modernizer with clearly defined labor roles. This was depicted as a stark contrast to Lithuania's telecom industry, which has been trying to catch up by getting rid itself of a corrupt mentality, yet still experiences overwork and stress. Estonia's telecom industry was also described as more socially, politically and technologically advanced than that of Lithuania, as well as better in marketing its telecom achievements. Through these everyday geopolitical projections, the general imaginary of more advanced "West" is made particular: it is concerned with the Northern part of Europe, in particular Sweden and Estonia.

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31 Stuart Hall, "The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power," in *Formations of Modernity*, Stuart Hall and Bram Gieben, eds. (Cambridge: Polity Press in association with Blackwell and the Open University, 1992), p. 277.

32 Attila Melegh, *On the East-West Slope: Globalization, Nationalism, Racism and Discourses on Eastern Europe* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), p. 39.

33 Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities: A Decade of Transformation in the Baltic States," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 16, no. 2 (2003), p. 214.

Mindaugas, director of a public wholesale Internet provider, once told to me that in the 1990s, the physical network of the biggest public telecom operator, Lietuvos Telekomas, was in poor condition, but was intensively modernized after privatization. The Swedish and Finnish owned TeliaSonera company privatized Lietuvos Telekomas in 1998, which involved modernizing its physical infrastructure. He stated that, the "network was in deplorable condition and, on the other hand, after TeliaSonera purchased Telekomas, they were committed to invest an insane—at that time—sum, some four billion euro, litas, or however much [it was], in order to modernize everything."[34] The new owners did not only bring money, but they also imported a particular set of values. According to a current Telia Lietuva manager, Andrius, the Swedish Telia owners adhere to ethical and responsible business politics and do not accept bribes. I was told that because the Baltic region is "a cleaner segment,"[35] Telia and its predecessor TeliaSonera—which owns Telia Lietuva, the biggest telecom provider in Lithuania—compete legally in Lithuania through the Competition Council and legal court system. Andrius denied any bribery practices, but added that, "I can only say that Lithuania is a country of cousins, and I was made to become aware of that,"[36] when he spoke of competitors. He thus claimed that TeliaSonera invested substantial funding in the local telecom industry and adhered to ethical business practices. Accordingly, the Baltic region has been described as ethically advanced ("cleaner," but not as perfectly clean as the Swedish Telia owners, who adhere to ethical business politics), but also as inheriting the legacy of a shadow economy (a "country of cousins"). Actually, while Transparency International evaluated Telia Lietuva's transparency as "excellent,"[37] there have been published media accounts regarding Telia Company's alleged corruption in Uzbekistan.[38]

Scandinavian countries were not only described by some as financially supportive and more ethical than Lithuania, but were also praised for their more advanced labor practices. Matas from Telia Lietuva told me that the Swedish branch of the Telia Company is managed differently than the one in Lithuania. In Telia Lietuva, employee roles are less specialized than in Sweden, although in Sweden everything takes more time. Moreover, I was told that telecom industry worker culture is different. Matas stated that "if somebody gets into an argument in Sweden, then a person takes the rest of his working day to relax. In Lithuania—someone takes their anger out on a co-worker. And in general, [in Lithuania] one person does several functions, while in Sweden they are more distributed."[39] Gabrielius, who is tasked with harmonizing Telia Lietuva's labor practices with those of the international Telia Company, argued that local labor practices need to reach the company's international standards:

34 Interview with Mindaugas, 7 February 2018.

35 Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018.

36 Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018.

37 Transparency International: Lietuvos skyrius, "Privataus sektoriaus skaidrumas," 2019, http://skaidrumas.lt/imones.

38 BNS, "'Telia' dėl korupcijos skandalo sumokės milžinišką baudą," *Delfi.lt*, published 22 October 2017, accessed 9 September 2019, https://www.delfi.lt/verslas/verslas/telia-del-korupcijos-skandalo-sumokes-milziniska-bauda.d?id=75837441.

39 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 27 February 2018.

> The goal of my work is . . . that what we develop as an organization would match general guidelines and strategies of Telia Lietuva and Swedish Telia Company, i.e., that the development would be synchronized and planned. That there would be less chaos and as little as possible of 'on hook,' i.e., as few [as possible] separate, individual decisions. That there wouldn't be any, I don't know, Gariūnai market, if compared with some marketplace. If compared with some shopping center, there is Gariūnai and some neat, I don't know, Panorama, Ozas center, i.e., there is a desire to have systemic, ordered planning and development of decisions as well as organizational decisions: [of] internal organization and with the leading Swedish company, in that sense, [of] the mother company.[40]

The aforementioned examples provided by Matas and Gabrielius describe Sweden-based Telia Company's labor practices in positive terms. There, order is respected, employee roles and responsibilities are clearly defined, workers take time to resolve personal problems and care for both individual and communal well being. In contrast, the Lithuanian telecom industry environment is described as less organized, overworked, but also as attempting to catch up to this Swedish model. Interestingly, a person responsible for harmonization of local and international labor practices illustrated his aim by using an image of "Gariūnai" ("That there wouldn't be any, I don't know, Gariūnai market"). Gariūnai is a huge post-Soviet market in Vilnius that locally stands for the ultimate metaphor of a shadow economy, while Panorama and Ozas are recently built luxury shopping malls. This comparison between Gariūnai and Panorama/Ozas can be interpreted as conveying an implicit idea that Lithuania still retains its turbulent and corrupt past, which could be rejected by installing a shiny capitalist market structure that exists elsewhere at the Telia Company.

The examples above present Sweden both as housing the Telia Company headquarters and as a country in itself. Sweden stands for a positive image of an ethically, socially, and financially advanced public and private actor that was able to help modernize Lithuania's telecom industry. Multiple examples in the field praised Swedish entrepreneurial practices, while the Lithuanian telecom industry was described as catching up to this model.

Despite this, Tadas, a leading manager at Telia Lietuva, contended that Lithuania's telecom network is good, at least better developed than that of Poland. He stated, "Probably we outdistance [Poland by] some three to four years."[41] He also evaluated Estonia's telecom progress as a result of politically conscious activity that is lacking in Lithuania and posited,[42] "Such slogans like the ones in Estonia, 'Let's become a smart country,' did not exist here [in Lithuania]." [43] According to Tadas, Lithuania lacks a sustainable political initiative necessary to develop "information society," with the positive exception of the Communications Regulatory Authority.[44] Karolis, another Telia Lietuva employee,

40 Interview with Gabrielius, 5 March 2018.

41 Interview with Tadas, 13 March 2018.

42 Estonia as a country is known internationally for being a hub for innovative digital technologies development and implementation, such as Skype and vast E-government services.

43 Interview with Tadas, 13 March 2018.

44 Interview with Tadas, 13 March 2018.

also cited Estonian Telecom as a positive example for social justice while criticizing Lithuania's greedy bosses. He asserted that "they also had bad times, but after an engineer who climbed the career ladder from the lower to the highest position came to lead the company, everyone became satisfied, because the conditions improved."[45] Estonia's telecom industry was not only described as advanced—politically active and socially fair—but also as leading in technological developments. In a Telia Lietuva testing lab during my fieldwork, employee Laurynas praised the fact that Estonia's telecom industry participants have already tried symmetric 40Gb/s PON network "which would never, or not now, pay off."[46] In contrast, Mindaugas, an interviewee from a public wholesale Internet provider, claimed that Estonia's success is only a marketing trick, simply a means of showing off. He posited:

> Estonia—show. I went there and work with them a lot . . . Show, well, because they, I would say, well, how you speak about an infrastructure, I am deeply convinced, because I know sufficiently, that neither in Latvia nor in Estonia they do not match that, what we have. . . . In general range of infrastructure.[47]

Notwithstanding the reality of Estonia's telecom industry developments, Estonia's telecom industry emerged in the field as a comparative signifier. Various local telecom industry participants described the Estonian telecom sphere as socially, politically, technologically, and commercially advanced. In contrast, its advancements were also portrayed as a marketing tool. In other words, the Estonian telecom sector has been simultaneously praised and criticized as not living up to its publicized image. In short, binary imaginaries were also established between the Lithuanian and Estonian telecom spheres, in which the latter's telecom industry was described as one step behind Scandinavian countries or "the West" due to its doubtful advancement, but also as more advanced than Lithuania's due to its political, social, and technological advancements, and its successful political marketing. Similarly, Miniotaitė explores emerging contests between the three Baltic states[48]; in this context, on various occasions of post-socialist Baltic era local political elites attempted to present their countries as different entities that both rival and have nothing to do with one another.[49] Miniotaitė writes:

> Retrospectively, one can say that at the time when they sought the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1991–94, the Baltic States acted as a geopolitical unit. Since then, however, despite growing cooperation, a kind of rivalry has evolved among them. It is mainly related to economic and political competition in the process of nation-state building and integration with the NATO and the EU. Examples include the so-called 'fish war' between Latvia and Estonia; the 'pork war' between Lithuania and Latvia in 1999 . . . [50]

45 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 14 June 2017.
46 Fieldwork report, Miglė Bareikytė, 23 June 2017.
47 Interview with Mindaugas, 7 February 2018.
48 I.e., Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
49 Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," p. 212.
50 Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," p. 211.

As illustrated by previous examples, local industry stakeholders describe "the Others" as "the West," but then exemplified these entities through the concrete and positive examples of Sweden and Estonia and their respective relations to their local telecom industries. This hierarchy was maintained through the presentation of binary narratives through illustrative examples in fieldwork encounters: "the West," in this case Sweden and Estonia's telecom industries, was described as more advanced than Lithuania, with the peculiar exception of Poland, which was judged in an explicitly negative manner. Accordingly, Estonia's telecom market was praised as politically, technologically, and socially progressive, but also described as a convincing "show-off."[51] In these examples, Sweden's influence on Lithuania's telecom sector was also described in positive terms: a force for investment and modernization, that is ethical and relaxed. These examples certainly do not represent all of the attitudes of Lithuania's telecom sector participants toward Sweden, Estonia, or Poland's telecom markets. Importantly, these examples illustrate how some of Lithuania's telecom producers developed an image of "the West" as advanced and particularized this image by producing a binary supported by examples from local telecom industry interactions with Swedish and Estonian actors.

Interestingly, this modernizing narrative is supported by examples drawn from countries in Northern Europe. While the example of Poland was a brief exception, there were no comparisons, especially of modernizing nature, made between Lithuania's telecom industry and countries with a similar post-socialist history, such as Hungary, Slovenia, Ukraine, or Russia—countries that, like Lithuania, belong to Central and Eastern Europe. Even neighboring Latvia did not prominently emerge in local discussions about foreign telecom actors. I think that in some way, this expresses Lithuania's ongoing paradoxical disinterest in neighboring countries while focusing its gaze toward an imagined "West." As Miniotaitė contends, there is no common "Baltic state" identity. Latvia, Estonia, and Lithuania prefer to perceive themselves as either European, or, in the case of Lithuania, Eastern Central European,[52] or, recently, also Northern European.[53] The 2017 United Nations decision to recategorize Lithuania as "Northern European," rather than its previous "Eastern European" designation, was welcomed positively.[54] To this date a rivalry exists in the social imaginary between Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, in which Estonia is often perceived as the most advanced country of the three, the one that was also the first to be invited to the 1997 EU accession negotiations (Lithuania and Latvia were invited in 1999).[55] Beyond the Baltic context, Lithuania's prowestern orientation is also often expressed through an image of returning to Europe that serves to distance Lithuania from the East, which is understood as comprising, for

51 Interview with Linas, 17 March 2017.

52 Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," p. 219.

53 "Mes nebe 'rytų europiečiai': Lietuva priskirta Šiaurės Europai," *Kaunodiena.lt*, published 1 August 2017, accessed 7 August 2018, https://m.kauno.diena.lt/naujienos/Lietuva/salies-pulsas/mes-nebe-rytu-europieciai-Lietuva-priskirta-siaures-europai-790883.

54 Miglė Bareikytė and Viktorija Rusinaitė, "Future-Past Infrastructures of Poland and Lithuania," *Obieg*, no. 9 (2018), accessed 20 March 2020, https://obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/en/numery/news-from-elsewhere/future-past-infrastructures-of-poland-and-lithuania.

55 Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," p. 217.

example, Russia.[56] As early as 2013, Dalia Grybauskaitė, then-President of the Republic of Lithuania, stated that "Lithuania and Northern countries share common values, a united approach to many things and similar traditions. Thanks to the unique cooperation between the Baltic and Nordic countries, the region has become one of the strongest in the European Union."[57] Thus, this narrative of modernizing "Others," in particular Sweden and Estonia, has embedded itself in Lithuania's telecom industry toward Lithuania's broader self-positioning in relation to "the West" in general and the North in particular, exemplified through its EU and NATO membership; conversely, key telecom stakeholders do not devote much time to speaking about neighboring countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

In the preface to her book *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States*, historian Maria Todorova explores the concepts of "modernism" and "modernity." Todorova contends that modernism is often understood as a cultural condition that results from large-scale socioeconomic, political transformations—such as the emergence of nation-states or industrialization—and the resulting break with previous traditions. Todorova maintains that modernity theories usually focus on "capitalist expansion, development and globalization through which the non-Western becomes Western."[58] She acknowledges sociologist Bruno Latour's argument that modernist logic scales down his self-proclaimed ontology of hybrid interconnectedness between human-made culture and non-human nature by classifying the world into neat and ordered types.[59] Within such a simplistic modernist logic, post-Soviet Eastern Europe is a flawed place where the modernization process should be practiced. It is propelled by the desire, as Todorova claims, "to close the temporal and spatial lag vis-a-vis the west, and everywhere the often-debilitating consciousness of this gap was the primary motor of activity."[60] The flip side of this progressive modernization is the idea of slower and reduced development, reserved for places such as post-Soviet Eastern part of Europe. Latourian critique of modernistic logic—that hybrid daily complexity is reduced to plain dichotomies—is persuasive in the context of a post-Soviet Eastern Europe that aims to transform the deficient into the modern in a way that perpetuates an idea of a gap that stands not only for differences as such, but also for differences in hierarchy. Hence, modernization logic divides a region's complex realities into a narrow binary logic and is perpetuated by key telecom stakeholders on the ground. The examples I used in this part of the chapter not only show how the local telecom industry perpetuates geographical division ("us versus them"), but also presents them through modernizing, namely binary and hierarchical geopolitical imaginaries of the East and the West. According to such a binary image, telecom progress takes place abroad. It does so, akin to what writer Petrică Mogoş describes as the mythical, imagined space of the "zagranitsa," a metaphysical space of the

56 Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," p. 211.

57 "Lietuvą ir Šiaurės šalis vienija vertybės ir tradicijos," Lietuvos Respublikos Prezidentas, updated 20 June 2013, accessed 20 March 2020, https://www.lrp.lt/lt/Lietuva-ir-siaures-salis-vienija-vertybes-ir-tradicijos/16445.

58 Maria N. Todorova, "Introduction: Modernism," in *Modernism: The Creation of Nation-States* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010), p. 11.

59 Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, p. 11.

60 Maria N. Todorova, "Introduction: Modernism," p. 19.

West in which everything is more advanced: "This Eastern vision of the West, functioned as a vast accumulation of mediated images, as a subjective representation of reality . . . it did not represent a mere gaze toward the sacrality of other societies, it was an appropriated and embodied idea delineating how social life itself *should* be lived."[61] Such everyday geopolitical narratives maintain a binary logic in which the world is divided into the East and the West, big and small countries, and unequal power distribution among the two in geographic, social, technological, and organizational terms. This identification of "the Others" as more advanced aligns closely with a realist geopolitical vision, which divides the world into hierarchically more or less valued regions and nation-states. In this geopolitical imaginary of "the Others" as a modernizing force, the local telecom industry plays the role of a younger sibling that attempts to prove itself and eventually catch up. The foreign "Others" hold the most power to make decisions about global and local telecom industry developments through investments. In particular, "the West" emerges through prevalent examples about the Estonia and Sweden, which decide upon local telecom development on financial, physical network, political, and cultural levels. Thus, one everyday geopolitical imaginary about "the Others" is that of "the Others" as a modernizing force.

3.1.2 Helping

3.1.2.1 Help from Scandinavia

At the beginning of the 1990s, another Scandinavian country, Norway, helped Lithuania first establish its Moscow-independent communication channel through an X.25 protocol-based satellite connection with a landing point in Norway. In 1998, 60 percent of then-public telecom company Lietuvos Telekomas (Lithuanian Telecom) was sold to the Swedish Telia and Finnish Sonera consortium during the second privatization stage.[62] Sweden is the main foreign investor in Lithuania's telecommunications industry and one of the main foreign investors in the country.[63] There is a strong Scandinavian presence in Lithuania's telecommunications sector—examples thus include the aforementioned purchase of Lietuvos Telekomas by Swedish-Finnish TeliaSonera, or Norway's 1991 aid regarding Lithuanian access to western telecommunication networks—but also in other sectors, such as banking; it has been visible since Lithuania's post-socialist independence and evolved since this point. During fieldwork, both locals and participants from Scandinavia described Scandinavian entanglement in various Lithuanian sectors as an act of modernization, but also as an act of help.

During several live and e-mail exchanges, a former Norwegian University employee explained why he initiated and helped Lithuania access international telecom networks

61 Petrică Mogoş, "Performing the West: Imagination, Desire & Revolution," *Kajet*, no. 3 (2019), p. 79.

62 Gediminas Ramanauskas, "Experience of Dramatic Systemic and Structural Changeover until the EU Accession: Lithuania," in *Rebuilding the Market Economy in Central-East Europe and the Baltic Countries*, ed. István Kiglics (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2007), pp. 378–384.

63 Gediminas Ramanauskas, "Experience of Dramatic Systemic and Structural Changeover," p. 387; Romualdas Ginevičius and Manuela Tvaronavičienė, "Inward and Outward FDI in Lithuania and Estonia: Review of Patterns in Neighboring Countries," *Journal of Business Economics and Management* 6, no. 3 (2005), p. 180.

in the early stage of the country's independence. His remarks are self-descriptive and illustrate a particular perspective of "the Others" who were involved in Lithuania's telecom development process. I wanted to present his reflections in depth, because they articulate a perspective on the reasons for the actions of key Norwegian actors. Additionally, his perspective enables further interpretation of these self-descriptions through the lens of public diplomacy, but above all it comprises yet another everyday representation of "Others" as helpers in Lithuania's telecom sector.

During the Soviet Union's disintegration, interviewee Romas worked as the chief of operations at the Norwegian University Press publishing house in Norway. While watching television one evening, he saw people from Lithuania giving a talk at the Norwegian Parliament and was motivated to help:

> They said, 'We need everything, we need computers, we need competence, we need communication,' and then it [occurred to] me . . . that we have lot of computers that we are changing. . . . Then I asked my director, maybe we can ask Lithuania, if they like to have computers that [are] built mainly for office automation, work, for text processing, for publishing, counting. [They were] super-minicomputers.[64]

After the interviewee approached his boss with the idea to donate super-mini Norsk-data computers to Lithuania, the process began. They presented the proposal to the University of Oslo. Dr. Rolf Nordhagen supported the interviewee[65]:

> Dr. Nordhagen was my mentor and direct contact at Oslo University, [F]aculty of Informatics at the time when I was doing communication projects in the Baltics. Dr. Nordhagen was coordinating the Nordic funding for our projects together with Mr. Mats Brunell from Swedish Institute of Computer Science.[66]

Romas also presented the idea to the Lithuanian consulate in Norway. He first spoke with the first honorable consul of Lithuania, lawyer Leon Bodd, and to the Vice President of Lithuanian Academy of Science, renowned mechanical engineering professor Algirdas Žukauskas. Both the consulate and Žukauskas agreed.[67] According to Romas, after the first head of independent Lithuania, Vytautas Landsbergis, received the Norwegian People's Peace Prize, an alternative Peace Prize from the University of Oslo,[68] in 1991,[69] donations from Scandinavian countries increased. Accordingly, what started as an idea

64 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

65 Nordhagen helped establish Norwegian academic network UNINETT, the Nordic university network NORDUnet, networking among Scandinavian and East European countries, and was also a member of the NATO Advisory Panel on Computer Networking ("Internet Hall of Fame Pioneer: Rolf Nordhagen," *Internet Hall of Fame*, accessed 17 June 2019, https://www.internethalloffame.org//inductees/rolf-nordhagen.)

66 Romas, e-mail message to author, 6 September 2018.

67 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

68 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

69 AP, "Norway's Other Peace Prize Given to Lithuania's Leader," *New York Times*, published 12 March 1991, accessed 20 November 2018, https://www.nytimes.com/1991/03/12/world/norway-s-other-peace-prize-given-to-lithuania-s-leader.html.

soon evolved into a large project with the participation of various Norwegian public organizations. Later, other Scandinavian countries agreed to help by donating funds and hardware toward telecommunications and IT development in Lithuania. Romas stated, "In my position, I was able to get a lot of state institutions, like departments, ministries, able to donate . . . It became a very big project, [which] lasted for five years."[70] With initial support from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry and Norwegian ministry of Church and Education, this project grew to include donations from Denmark, Sweden, and the Nordic Council Ministry for the Baltic states. Romas remembers that "the Nordic Council of Ministries gave a lot of funds in money to make it possible to buy routers . . . Internet communication equipment."[71]

The first donation, which comprised five Norway-produced Norskdata mini-computers with approximately 300 computer terminals, was given and delivered to the Lithuanian Academy of Science in February 1991. Half a year later, a satellite antenna was brought from Norway to Lithuania via Finland, Estonia, and Latvia.[72] Involved actors decided to use a satellite connection because it was not possible to dig and install underground cables due to the still unclear political fate of the Soviet Union. Romas said, "It would never be given permission to set up a cable, a physical cable from Lithuania to the rest of the world as it was still part of the Soviet Union."[73] This first connection to the world (through data, telefax, and 20 voice channels) was installed in Vilnius on 10 October 1991. Satellite equipment connecting Lithuania with Norway was located on the roof of the Lithuanian Parliament.[74] According to Romas, "The Norsk Data X.400 Notis Mail system was interconnected via satellite to the global mail exchange X400 system in Trondheim [Norway]."[75] This day was important mainly for Lithuanian politicians. Romas stated, "That means that Zingeris and Langsbergis,[76] and all Lithuania was able to dial a special code from every phone . . . and then they got this dial tone via the Norwegian system. And they could call freely where they wanted in the world. [That] was a fantastic day."[77] What is currently perceived as Lithuania's first Internet connection arose with the help of Scandinavian countries and was based on their financial and technical support,[78] the delivery of technology to Lithuania under difficult circumstances through Soviet-controlled borders and ongoing cooperation with local academia and politicians. According to the prominent Lithuanian cybernetician Gediminas, this help from Norway was "invaluable."[79]

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70 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

71 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

72 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

73 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

74 Gediminas Gasiulis, "Lietuvos interneto istorija: nuo pirmojo signalo iki optinio voratinklio," *15min.lt*, updated 6 September 2012, accessed 17 November 12019, https://www.15min.lt/mokslasit/straipsnis/internetas/lietuvos-interneto-istorija-nuo-pirmojo-signalo-iki-optinio-voratinklio-645-245969?copied.

75 Romas, e-mail message to author, 13 May 2019.

76 Prominent Lithuanian politicians: Emanuelis Zingeris and Vytautas Landsbergis.

77 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

78 Gediminas Gasiulis, "Lietuvos interneto istorija."

79 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

Although assistance from Norway and other Scandinavian countries was crucial for the internationalization of Lithuania's telecommunication system and Internet development, former Kaunas University of Technology academic Jonas told me that this help came with conditions. For example, Lithuanians relied on help from Norway when they wanted to establish Internet connectivity based on TCP/IP protocol. Even if the first Internet connection in Lithuania was established in 1991, technically, according to Jonas, it was a X.25-protocol based packet-switch network. He stated that "Norwegian machines were not fitted for the Internet. In those times, there [was] another, so-called protocol X.25. . . . through the University of Oslo, it was possible to go to the Internet."[80] Jonas claimed that some academic institutions in Lithuania were prepared to implement the Internet Protocol TCP/IP already in 1992 and 1993, but could do so only in 1994 because Norway was busy with the Olympic games:

> [They] said "No, we don't have time, everything, all the energy [is used for] the Olympics. Wait." So practically . . . we had to wait until they remade the connection for us . . . only after the Olympics. In 1994, they started that satellite channel with that real Internet Protocol, then, already, we had full, normal Internet. We could normally open text-based websites with that Gopher.[81]

In an email, Romas clarified that from the first day

> it was TCP/IP over X.25. Cisco AGS router that MII [the Institute for Mathematics and Informatics] received was connected to the satellite-based X.25 line in the Parliament. The connections to VU [Vilnius University] [and] KTU [Kaunas University of Technology] was set up with HDLC synchronous communication on copper by Zenonas Bedalis from KTU and other staff from MII and VU.[82]

Admittedly, Scandinavian countries substantially assisted Lithuania's telecom networks internationalization process. For example, Romas and colleagues helped establish a sustainable hardware donation process for Lithuania (March 1991), Lithuania's first broader technological connection to the world (October 1991), as well as the subsequent internal telecommunications connectivity between various Lithuanian scientific institutions (Lithuanian Academy of Science, Institute of Mathematics and Informatics, and Kaunas University of Technology). Romas worked alongside many telecom experts from Lithuania and Norway in order to connect different academic institutions to a Lithuanian-language network and establish international Internet connectivity. Certainly, not only Romas, but also various workers and institutions from Scandinavian countries, assisted Lithuania's telecom network development through financial support, hardware, and labor, but he played an important role. As previously mentioned by cybernetician Gediminas in an interview, this help was described as "invaluable," because Lithuania had ruptured its relations with the Soviet Union and needed new partners as well as material resources to develop its industries, which Scandinavian countries provided. Importantly, this assistance transpired through the collaboration of national and transna-

80 Interview with Jonas, 28 March 2017.

81 Interview with Jonas, 28 March 2017.

82 Romas, e-mail message to author, 13 May 2019.

tional institutions, such as the Nordic Council, as well as many engineers, politicians and translators who transported telecom hardware from Scandinavia through Soviet-controlled borders and worked together to connect "Western" and "Eastern" telecom networks. Thus, Lithuania's first Internet connectivity was based on Scandinavian help.

In this story, it is difficult to weigh in on the balance between strategic calculation, power transfer, and altruism. Despite this, it is important to consider that such help, and the (self) description of others as helpful is not only based on the assumption of unconditional altruism, but also evolved in a post-Cold War context. Professor Gediminas claimed that Scandinavian countries (Norway, Sweden, and Finland) did not support the Baltic countries in a random manner, but rather coordinated their cooperation. He stated that was "because Scandinavians have distributed: Norwegians guided Lithuania, Sweden—Latvia, while Finland—Estonia. Because Estonia even today is a factual colony of Finland. I am joking."[83] He could not tell the exact reason for such geographic distribution of cooperation, but mentioned that "now I know that this happened, I found out later, after we befriended all those Swedes and Finns . . . No one told us, that it is distributed in this way, but I can tell you only so much."[84] In an interview, Romas also agreed that Scandinavian countries cooperated on technology-related issues through the Nordic University Network and did jointly, although without any predefined strategy, help the Baltic countries. He stated, "We did, we had joint meetings, but we Norwegians in the beginning, focused our eyes over Lithuania. Swedes, they focused their eyes on Latvia, and Suomija, Finland, they focused on Estonia. . . . It was no rule, it just happened like this."[85] In contrast, political scientist Kazimierz Musial contends that Nordic countries played the role of "the West" in the post-socialist Baltics through the transmission of capital and values. Moreover, Musial cites political scientist Mare Kukk's research, which details a situation similar to the one I found in the telecom field. Musial posits, "Mare Kukk mentions Finland and Sweden's assumed 'responsibility' for Estonia, while Denmark and Norway focused more on Latvia and Lithuania, though there was not any fixed pattern of bilateral cooperation."[86] I was told in the field that when the Nordic countries distributed their support, the Baltic states willingly accepted the forms it took in terms of both resources and values: telecom equipment enabled communication that was seen as democratic because it was both international and not routed through Moscow. Musial refers to the Baltic states as a case in point: during processes of socio-political and economic transformation, these countries searched for new options and used the Scandinavian model as a symbol of "the West."[87] Conversely, Scandinavian interaction with the Baltics could be framed against the backdrop of Scandinavian value-based international relations that emerged

83 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

84 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

85 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

86 Kazimierz Musial, "Benevolent Assistance and Cognitive Colonisation: Nordic Involvement with the Baltic States since the 1990s," In *Histories of Public Diplomacy and Nation Branding in the Nordic and Baltic Countries: Representing the Periphery*, Louis Clerc, Nikolas Glover, and Paul Jordan, eds. (Leiden: Brill Nijhoff, 2015), p. 265.

87 Kazimierz Musial, "Benevolent Assistance and Cognitive Colonisation," pp. 266–267.

after the Cold War, which were based on new international cooperation and solidarity with the Baltic countries.[88]

Romas agreed that Norway's interests were political. His perspective was that help from Norway was based on both values and geographical location: it is close to Lithuania, and it values freedom. Norway "was one of the first countries [that] accepted Lithuania as a country. Iceland was number one, I think Norway, maybe, number two. Lithuania is not so far away from Norway, it was in time. We remember what freedom means."[89] Nordhagen, who supported Romas's initiative to donate computers to Lithuania, also discussed the Internet development in other countries such as Hungary and Iceland at international congresses. He stated that it conveyed an idea that networks equal cooperation in the following formula: "Networks are communication, communication is cooperation, networks are cooperation."[90] Nordhagen believed that access to the Internet carried a potential to improve cooperation between international scientific projects as well as foster education, democratic development, and peace. He praised the 1991 networking project in Lithuania as one of such examples of "networks for peace and understanding".[91] I do not aim to develop unfounded correlations in order to dramatize the narrative of Scandinavia's post-Soviet Baltic support, but it is important to remember that Nordhagen was also a member of NATO's Advisory Panel on Computer Networking.[92] Since 1958, NATO has developed a program called Science for Peace and Security, that "promotes security-related practical cooperation based on scientific research, innovation and knowledge exchange within NATO's wide network of partner countries."[93] NATO's Advisory Panel on Computer Networking, which counted Nordhagen as a member, advised NATO's Science for Peace and Security program. In short, one of the persons who supported Norway's telecommunications internationalization assistance to Lithuania also worked for NATO, meaning that this aid was not fully exclusive of international security concerns. In this context, it is important to consider that in post-Cold War 1994, Swedish Minister of Foreign Affairs Baroness Margaretha af Ugglas published an article in *NATO Review* in which she lays out how help and cooperation is linked to Sweden's security concerns. In this article, af Ugglas describes changes in Sweden's security policy from neutrality to active cooperation with Europe due to new security concerns:

88 Mart Kuldkepp, "Swedish Political Attitudes Towards Baltic Independence in the Short Twentieth Century," *Ajalooline Ajakiri. The Estonian Historical Journal*, no. 3/4 (2016), pp. 397–430; Annika Bergman, "Adjacent Internationalism: The Concept of Solidarity and Post-Cold War Nordic–Baltic Relations," *Cooperation and Conflict* 41, no. 1 (2006), pp. 73–97; Christine Ingebritsen, "Norm Entrepreneurs: Scandinavia's Role in World Politics," *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 1 (2002), pp. 11–23.

89 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

90 Document (power point presentation) produced by Prof. R. Nordhagen was kindly shared with me by Romas; Romas, e-mail message to author, 12 February 2018.

91 Romas, e-mail message to author, 12 February 2018.

92 "Internet Hall of Fame Pioneer: Rolf Nordhagen," *Internet Hall of Fame*, accessed 17 June 2019, https://www.internethalloffame.org//inductees/rolf-nordhagen.

93 "Science for Peace and Security," *NATO*, updated 17 March 2020, accessed 4 February 2020, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_85373.htm.

> To build and secure democracy, to facilitate the rule of law, to promote human and minority rights, to create market economies to the east and south-east of Sweden, are now some of the major objectives of our foreign policy. Our involvement in efforts to assure stability and peace corresponds to a security concept that is broader than the Cold War concept of military security alone. As the pace of history accelerates and our involvement with the rest of Europe deepens, the policy we pursue could no longer be labelled neutrality. With the implosion of the USSR and the disappearance of the Warsaw Pact, there are no longer two alliances to be neutral between.[94]

In this context, the information I was told in the field comprises geopolitical imaginaries of help in which assistance is possibly entangled in geopolitical European internationalization and eventual Lithuania's desecuritization. This includes antecedent assistance from Scandinavian countries regarding how they helped develop Lithuania's first Internet connection, their part in the subsequent networking of Lithuania's academic institutions and the fact that Lithuania's biggest telecom company, Lietuvos Telekomas, was initially privatized to TeliaSonera, a partially Swedish-Finnish-owned corporation in 1998.

3.1.2.2 Help from the US

In addition to the telecom network assistance from Scandinavian countries, aid from the US comprised another "imaginary-of-others" I encountered in the field. American-Lithuanian businessman Juozas Kazickas's activities are an important case in point. According to long-term telecom industry expert Donata and former Litkomas/Omnitel employee, Kazickas founded a company called Litkomas in 1992 and began to provide satellite communications from Nemenčinė, a station close to Vilnius.[95] Litkomas was the first company that connected Lithuania to the US directly via telephone.[96] Donata mentioned that the phone connection to the US was developed to surpass the requirement to call through Moscow, the only existing possibility to call abroad at that time, which could have also been surveilled.[97] Litkomas, which changed its name to Omnitel in 1994, emerged in this context of Lithuania's relative international isolation. According to former Omnitel employee Lukas, the company eventually became one of the biggest data transmission providers with an independent core network in Lithuania.[98] Omnitel expanded with the help of a partner company, the US-based Motorola, and started to provide the first GSM mobile communication services in Lithuania on 16 March 1995. Before moving to the Internet industry, Omnitel implemented a Sprintnet X.25 protocol-based service, which since 1994 was usually used by Lithuanian tourist agencies and banks. While in 1995, two companies—Omnitel and Taidė—introduced wholesale Internet services, an interviewee Donata contended that Omnitel also offered Internet for individual consumers. The first Internet for individual consumers ran through a dial-

94 Baroness Margaretha af Ugglas, "Sweden's Security Policy in Post-Cold War Europe," *NATO Review* 42, no. 2 (1994), p. 11.

95 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

96 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

97 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

98 Interview with Lukas, 21 March 2018.

up connection via Lietuvos Telekomas cables. Former Omnitel employee Donata argued that in 1998, when Internet and mobile phone usage in Lithuania grew profoundly, Omnitel retreated from offering fixed-line Internet because privatized Lietuvos Telekomas owned most of cable infrastructure required for fixed Internet connections.[99] While Omnitel began as a family business, it first sold part of its shares to Motorola, then sold all of its shares to the privatized Lietuvos Telekomas (in 2006 renamed to Teo) in 1998 and 2004. In 2017, Omnitel and Teo were consolidated into Telia Lietuva.[100]

Omnitel's founder, Kazickas, was a successful Lithuanian-American entrepreneur. Donata told me that he was "a very bright human being, who, well, did not save time, money, and himself, and who was in truth trying to bring to Lithuania the newest opportunities and newest technologies."[101] She remembered that working at Omnitel was interesting, because the company was curious for innovations and cared for its workers. Donata stated that "Omnitel was a company that really provided all the time to get to know and touch the newest technologies. You had the opportunity to develop them, these services . . . especially in Kazickas's times, until the company was sold to Telia . . . it was fun to work."[102] She further claimed that the company's atmosphere was supportive and that workers were highly motivated.

Although this story about Omnitel seems positive, Donata remembers her consequent work at Teo as an uninspiring, limiting, and draining activity in which workers' capacity to innovate was neither used, nor fostered:

> There are general principles, what I have to do, plans, and I have to execute those plans. If there is a policy of advertisement, then I have to comply . . . I will probably not create services by myself . . . in practice, you became a component of that big mechanism, where you could not really show your own initiative. . . . I perhaps don't think that everything was going on well, because that big company imposes, drains. We were joking that these plans are from the beginning so, that you know, that you will not [manage to] do them.[103]

According to Donata, the privatized Lietuvos Telekomas followed only commercial interests, while Kazickas had both commercial and altruistic concerns regarding the development of the telecom industry:

> Everyone's interest is, first of all, business. The only one who truly had the desire to not only do business, but, let's say, introduce particular services in Lithuania, I would think, was purely the Kazickas family. Maybe an altruistic interest, to help Lithuania

99 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

100 Commission of the European Communities, *Case No. Iv/Jv.9 Telia/Sonera/Motorola/Omnitel: Regulation (Eec) No 4064/89 Merger Procedure*, (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 1998), https://ec.europa.eu/competition/mergers/cases/decisions/jv9_en.pdf; "Teliasonera to Step Up Ownership in Omnitel," *Telia Company*, published 26 August 2003, accessed 18 January 2020, https://www.teliacompany.com/en/news/press-releases/2003/8/teliasonera-to-step-up-ownership-in-omnitel-80477; "'Teo' ir 'Omnitel' tampa 'Telia,'" *Telia.lt*.

101 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

102 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

103 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

> primarily . . . he had these businesses also in America and so on, but wanted to connect with Lithuania due to that, so to say, nostalgia for Lithuania and desire to help. . . . Of course, everywhere was a particular commercial interest. Nobody was providing charity. I think, that everywhere here is pure commerce, just so that precisely Kazickas managed to create such company, gather people, who supported his idea, and would do more than possible.[104]

Thus, an American émigré's support for Lithuania's telecom industry in this illustration was perceived as pragmatic but also underlined by an altruistic desire to help Lithuania. In his memoirs, Juozas Kazickas explains his involvement in independent Lithuania's telecommunications business. He states, "I became obsessed with the notion that something had to be done to overcome this reliance on Moscow for our phone lines. An idea was forming in my mind to find a way to lay a wireless channel of communications between Lithuania and the West."[105] After he asked the CIA and FBI for help and was declined, Kazickas was introduced to Aligmantas Prekeris, an American-Lithuanian telecom specialist who had worked with the Soviet Union to establish a telephone connection between Washington and Moscow.[106] Kazickas contended that "it became clear that telecommunications service was not merely a political necessity but a serious business with high demand in Lithuania."[107]

On the one hand, one could criticize such an affirmative description of Kazickas's business ventures, especially from former employee Donata, as positive past representations. On the other hand, Omnitel was one of the first private telecommunications companies and came to post-Soviet Lithuania's telecom industry very early, during a time when the private industry was still emerging. Thus it is possible to contextualize the description of Kazickas's company as actively fostering the local telecom industry's technical and high employee working conditions development alongside expected profit as pragmatic help.

A long-term worker at the Lithuanian Parliament's IT Department, Algirdas, stated that the support from the US congress, and its congressman Frost,[108] for Lithuania's Parliament networking began in 1992, and was evaluated as more substantial than Scandinavian aid. "First, especially Frost, you can't compare the money, 100 times more than Danes, Swedes, perhaps Norwegians. The Norwegians were helping again with LITNET."[109] Algirdas claimed that this help came from the US because they aimed to foster Lithuanian democracy. He stated, "Well you ask, why the Americans? Why did they help? An important thing next to all others, next to the increase of productivity, exchange of information, and all the rest, there also is a very important condition—that democracy exists in a country."[110]

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104 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

105 Kazickas, *Odyssey of Hope*, p. 347.

106 Kazickas, *Odyssey of Hope*, pp. 347–348.

107 Kazickas, *Odyssey of Hope*, p. 351.

108 I was not provided with Frost's first name, could not reach the interviewee for a second interview, and could not find the first name in other sources.

109 Interview with Algirdas, 9 November 2017.

110 Interview with Algirdas, 9 November 2017.

These perceptions of "Others" concerning the actors from the US and Scandinavian countries as helping Lithuania's telecom industry were particularized through examples in which "the Others" helped develop the local telecommunication industry and its international connectivity. Support from Scandinavian countries was illustrated by examples of how they helped the Lithuanian Parliament and multiple academic institutions develop international and local data transmission and Internet connectivity. Support from the US was exemplified by US congressional aid to the Lithuanian Parliament in order to develop governmental IT networks as well as the role of Omnitel, a local pro-profit data transmission provider owned by American-Lithuanian Kazickas, in establishing new Lithuanian telecom companies and services. I argue that value-based interests of the respective involved parties can and should be questioned. In the 1990s, the Soviet Union suddenly disintegrated and multiple new, independent post-Soviet countries emerged. Previous assumed enemies suddenly became respected assistants and friends. International help thus played a role in changing the post-Cold War telecommunications environment in Eastern Europe. It can be argued that this help was not only built on altruistic labor alongside hardware and financial transfers, but also involved a particular form of public diplomacy in post-Cold War Eastern Europe in which Nordic aid to the Baltic states was a mix of values, interests, technologies, and telecom ownership regimes. Based on the statements from the field on distributed Scandinavian support to the Baltics and thus Lithuania, it is plausible to conclude that assistance from Nordic countries was closely aligned with the new post-Cold War security situation in Europe, and was compliant with NATO security strategies of fostering cooperation between the West and the East. Nevertheless, notwithstanding this possible contextualization of help as geopolitically charged due to a changing international order, descriptions of others as helping comprise yet another everyday geopolitical imaginary of "Others" in the field. I further explore how such involvement was not only perceived in the field as help, which I unpack further in the upcoming sub-chapter, "Patronizing."

3.1.3 Patronizing

3.1.3.1 Underestimating

The following text illustrates that local telecom industry participants not only praised foreign actors for being more modern or helping build up Lithuania's telecom sector, but also described how "the Others" mistrusted and underestimated the development of post-socialist Lithuania's society and telecom industry. In the following section, I thus explore how local telecom industry stakeholders negatively judged "the Others" based on condescending statements and acts by framing these judgments within patronizing geopolitical imaginaries. Admittedly, the excerpts not only criticize but also strive for an understanding and empathize with the foreign actors by normalizing this mistrust. In this context, it is relevant to quote a note of encouragement from one my interviewees, who hoped that my dissertation might serve an educational purpose, bring Lithuania closer to the West and "show to the Other world, the western world, which does not fully understand us,"[111] as if century-long telecommunications industry developments

111 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

were based on misunderstandings and false judgments from "the western world" that could be solved solely with education and interest.

According to Miniotaitė, the contemporary outlook of Lithuanian foreign policy can be expressed with the metaphor of "coming back to Europe," which implies an act of distancing from the East (Russia and Poland), as well as from other Baltic countries (Latvia and Estonia). Lithuania's cultural alliance could be used for the same cause of return to Europe,[112] when the country is, for instance, proud to be part of the Central Europe or belong to Northern Europe.[113] Although the previously explored everyday geopolitical imaginary of "Modernizing" expresses trust in progress abroad, the following imaginary looks at the perceived faults of "the Others." Thus, positive perceptions of "the Others" as altruistic, modernizing, and progressive helpers are complicated by local acts of everyday critique that negatively judge these same "Others" as distrustful and under-appreciative of Lithuania's telecom industry development.

According to some telecom industry practitioners with experience in representative politics, there was not a great international interest in Lithuania at the beginning of the 1990s. This was because as a new country its eventual geopolitical orientation was unclear, especially if it could not disentangle itself fully from the disintegrating, but still looming, Soviet Union. In words of one politician active in the 1990s, "it was not clear whether Lithuania is independent or not."[114] Although Lithuania's Communist Party officially left the Soviet Union's Communist Party in 1989,[115] in 1990 the Sąjūdis Reform Movement of Lithuania gained the majority of votes in the first competitive Supreme Soviet elections. This new governmental body, otherwise known as the Supreme Council, declared Lithuania's independence on 11 March 1990, and served until the election of a new Parliament in 1992.[116] After the establishment of the new 1992 Parliament, the majority of the votes went to the parties within the left political spectrum.[117] Moreover, according to the data from Lithuania's Ministry of National Defense, the Soviet army was still located in Lithuania until 1993; before it started to withdraw, around 34600 Soviet soldiers were still located in Lithuania.[118] Additionally in 1993, Algirdas Brazauskas—head of the Communist Party of Lithuania, which cooperated with the reformist Sąjūdis movement—declared the Lithuanian Communist Party independent from CPSU in 1989, co-signed Lithuania's independence document in 1990, and was elected the first President of post-Soviet Lithuania. Thus, while Lithuania's foreign rela-

112 However, there is wide debate about the kind of Europe to which Lithuania is returning (Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," pp. 211–214).

113 "Mes nebe 'rytų europiečiai': Lietuva priskirta Šiaurės Europai," *Kaunodiena*.lt.

114 Interview with Vidas, 8 November 2017.

115 Saulius A. Sužiedėlis, *Historical Dictionary of Lithuania* (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2011), p. 118.

116 Sužiedėlis, *Historical Dictionary of Lithuania*, p. 68.

117 Sužiedėlis, *Historical Dictionary of Lithuania*, p. 217.

118 "Rusijos kariuomenės išvedimas," *Lietuvos kariuomenė*, updated 14 April 2009, accessed 20 April 2019, https://kariuomene.kam.lt/kariuomene/lt/kariuomenes_atributika/karo_istorija/rusijos_kariuomenes_isvedimas.

tions were re-orientated toward Europe and the US,[119] the political events on the ground were convoluted.

Gediminas, a professor who helped develop the Internet networks at Lithuanian universities, remembered that in 1992 he was invited by the University of Hamburg to work on a project that explored potential futures of mobile network development in the European Union. In this context, he was asked to write a forecast regarding mobile network development. He stated that his positive prognosis about speedy post-Soviet telecom industry recovery in Lithuania was not received well by academics from the University of Hamburg. Gediminas said:

> [He] says, 'This will not happen.' I explained to him, 'I understand that in 1992 the Soviet industry is collapsed, economy: horrible, but'—I tell him—'I know what condition we are in, I know our mentality, we will not sit in this hole for long.' He anyway told me to lower these perspectives. I tell him, 'If you attempt to lower them, I am taking back my [paper].' Then he gave up: 'Well, okay, whatever.' The book was then published, I have it here now, where I mistakenly guessed 28 times lower.[120]

In this example, "the Other" starts to emerge through the voice of a local telecom industry actor. In this context, Gediminas not only remembered an interaction, but also produced an image of "the Other" as prone to negatively judge, and eventually misjudge, the development of Lithuania's telecom industry.

In the field, "the Others" were also said to have been cautious in establishing new relations with Lithuania's telecommunications sector. One example is participation in international academic telecom network, GEANT. In 2004, the Lithuanian Research and Education Network (LITNET), which has provided data transmission services for the Lithuanian research and education sector since 1991,[121] was accepted into the European research and education data network community, GEANT. GEANT provides digital infrastructure services for research and education communities, such as LITNET, and thus constitutes a pan-European, non-commercial data transmission operator. According to one LITNET associate, Linas, Lithuania could have been accepted to GEANT earlier than 2004, but a member from the Netherlands vetoed the decision due to Lithuania's size and alleged weakness. Linas stated that "their attitude was that it is impossible to balance geographical expansion and qualitative expansion. This means that having connected to a line of weak and small, it will be impossible to lead the world. . . . in that area of computer networks for science and studies."[122] Linas recalled how one of two people responsible for the veto later regretted his decision. According to Linas, they argued:

> 'We emerged out of a small club and everything must happen in a small club. We don't need any Eastern Europeans here.' Well, one remained hostile, while the other one was coming to our countries and conducting meetings, saying, 'I am also sorry, I

119 Sužiedėlis, *Historical Dictionary of Lithuania*, p. 68; Gražina Miniotaitė, "Convergent Geography and Divergent Identities," pp. 211–212.

120 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

121 "Apie mus," *LITNET*.

122 Interview with Linas, 17 March 2017.

> was vetoing, and I want now to get to know you, because it appears that my decision was wrong.' He was travelling here, saying, 'It is my pilgrimage.' But he retired.[123]

These two quotes of Gediminas and Linas narrate the perception that Lithuania's public telecom sector stakeholders were mistrusted and had to cross geopolitically reasoned obstacles that hindered their integration into international public telecommunications community. Although Lithuania was accepted into GEANT—which presents itself as "a positive example of European integration and collaboration"[124]—in 2004, namely the year when Lithuania also officially became "European" via EU and NATO membership, the quote above demonstrates how this acceptance into this European telecommunications organization was initially met with caution.

Similarly, Aloyzas, a Minister from the dissolved Ministry for Communication and Networks, related that Lithuania's position in international meetings on telecommunication issues corresponded little with those of countries from "the western" world. Aloyzas recalled that once he was a member at an International Telecommunication Union (ITU) expert group, which consisted of approximately 25 people from different countries and met for a week to discuss particular telecommunications industry issues. During one such discussion about telecommunications market development and equal participation rights, Aloyzas claimed to understand the misleading nature of a statement regarding equal market participation for small, and thus less powerful countries, through a comment made by representatives from the US. He remembers their remarks as:

> 'Lithuania, in general, the budget does not have any money, and [Lithuanian] company more so.' And they [participants in a discussion] are laughing, saying, 'Yes, but if Lietuvos Telekomas would come to the US, it will also have the same rights.' You understand, the statement 'same rights' is very deceiving.[125]

Accordingly, in another example the Minister contented that the US's involvement in Lithuania's telecom industry illustrated that large and economically wealthy countries obviously have different power capacities. He stated, "the first day the Americans came here [to Lithuania], while we were speaking, drinking wine, they are saying 'What does it mean, Lithuania? The entire country of Lithuania has a budget smaller than an average American city. A contract,' they say."[126] Notwithstanding this patronizing tone, the interviewee claimed to understand such statements, because international cooperation and foreign investments should benefit all participating sides:

> But from the other side, you understand . . . there has to be some benefit. . . . America, what was it doing. . . . in the beginning, in 1993, a stack of American emissaries were coming to Kaunas, picking up our best students, and taking them away. We were trying to say 'Let's organize here,' they were telling, 'Well, we can do it here too, but . . .

123 Interview with Linas, 17 March 2017.

124 "GÉANT – at the Heart of Research and Education Networking," *GEANT*, accessed 29 March 2019, https://www.geant.org/About.

125 Interview with Aloyzas, 7 November 2017.

126 Interview with Aloyzas, 7 November 2017.

> why?' They gather such an international team, 20, 30 people, bring them to Malaysia to do a project . . . After the project is finished, they throw them across to another country . . .[127]

On the one hand, this perspective acknowledges that project-based, short-term investments are practiced in the globalized economy. On the other hand, this illustrative perspective of international patronizing attitudes contributes to an image that actors from powerful nation-states, such as the US, have means to control the less powerful ones, such as Lithuania or Malaysia, which are dependent on the decisions made beyond their participation.

In all of the examples above, foreign countries and transnational organizations, such as members of GEANT network from the Netherlands and international participants at ITU meetings, especially from the US, were described as perceiving post-socialist Lithuania as a small and weak state in relation to its telecommunications development and international cooperation. These examples in the field established a geopolitical imaginary of "the Others" as acting in a condescending manner toward smaller countries such as Lithuania through judgments that assumed a patronizing tone and practices of exclusion. However, while some GEANT members may initially have declined Lithuania's accession, academic network LITNET is currently a full member. Thus, notwithstanding the present accuracy of these statements, such geopolitical imaginaries still exist in the field of key telecom stakeholders as critical remembrances that follow a canonical binary that comprises powerful patronizing "Others" as western and deficient Lithuanians as local. According to this everyday geopolitical imaginary, the world is divided into West and East, big and small countries, and unequal distributions of power. Yet in these cases, "the Others" are not praised as modernizing or helpful agents, but rather are described as ignorant, arrogant and patronizing.

3.1.3.2 Help from Norway?

In addition to descriptions of "the Others" as patronizing and condescending, I use the following section to illustrate examples of Soviet, local academia, and business critique of Norwegian involvement in telecom development. These illustrations from the field thus question the previous positive description of Norway as helpful.

Norway's initial involvement in helping Lithuania establish international connectivity did not pass unnoticed by the Soviet Union, which still operated in the region in the beginning of the 1990s; as mentioned earlier, the last Soviet soldiers left Lithuania in 1993. Norwegian Romas recalled how during his first trip to Lithuania the Soviets did not allow him to leave Lithuania and instead sent him to a psychiatric hospital. The lack of, and thus need to establish, international communication networks in Lithuania emerges beautifully through his experience, as he is the person who actually helped internationalize Lithuania's telecommunications, but also had difficulties communicating his arrest to Norway. Romas stated that the Soviets thought that he was working against the Soviet system and wanted to make him an example for others. The prison he was sent to was actually a psychiatric hospital in the city of Klaipėda where instead of

127 Interview with Aloyzas, 7 November 2017.

treatment he received local support. He remembered that "the doctor said, 'I don't know what to do, but you cannot be here, so you will be my guest, you will be living in my house.'" Locals, including the local police, helped him get in touch with the Norwegian embassy:

> They saw that in my car . . . I [had] a mobile phone, not what we have today, but this NMT [Nordic Mobile Telephone] system . . . They managed to take a cable and to connect [it] . . . Then we got a signal to this island in Baltic sea, Gotland, and I was able to call the foreign ministry in Oslo and say that I am stuck in Klaipėda. Then foreign ministry in Norway called the Norwegian embassy in Moscow and the Norwegian embassy started to negotiate with Moscow, to let me out. . . . one evening . . . they got my number, and said, 'Tonight, till 12, midnight, you need to get out.'

Romas left Klaipėda on the Mokran ferry, which he claimed was used to transport military equipment from Eastern Germany to the Soviet Union. Romas stated, "[The] staff was Lithuanian on this ship, the captain was very friendly, was drinking cognac, we had nice journey, sailing over. . . . But after that, I came back here many times and . . . never [had] any problems."[128]

This narrative of the Soviet attempt to imprison Romas as he came from Norway in the early 1990s illustrates an instance of the somewhat expected, albeit unsuccessful, Soviet attempt to stop foreign influence in the region that it still, in a way, controlled. The Soviet Union thus did not perceive Norway's involvement as help, but rather as an anti-Soviet activity, which they did not manage to stop because technologies, investments as well as people from the West continued their interactions with post-Soviet countries as the Soviet Union disintegrated. Through this example, the Soviet critique of Norway's involvement in Lithuania's telecommunication development focuses on this involvement as an attempt to control telecom-related activities in Lithuania.

Another criticism of Norway's help in the 1990s—due to Lithuania's dependencies on Norway—was expressed by local academics. Gediminas, who earlier positively described Scandinavian involvement as "invaluable," differentiated his statement through an example from his view and views shared by a few other stakeholders in the field: problematic hardware donations from Norway.[129] He stated that Norwegians wanted

128 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

129 An article in one of the most visited Lithuanian news websites "15min.lt" titled "Lithuania's Internet History: From the First Signal to the Fiber Web" describes some moments in Lithuania's telecommunication history. It is based on an interview with the professor Laimutis Telksnys and mentions some very similar stories he told me as well. In the article, which starts and continues with a highly positive evaluation of Lithuania's Internet development that is worth quoting: "From an orphan waiting for technical allowances to the global Internet leader—such a way Lithuania has galloped in 21 years," the journalist Gediminas Gasiulis also mentions Telksnys's critical position toward the extensive usage of Norway-donated Norskdata computers. Lithuanian Research and Education Network (LITNET) used Norskdata computers in the beginning of the 1990s. Gasiulis quotes Telksnys as stating that Norwegian computers were sufficiently modern, however, did not support the Internet connection. Understanding that these computers would soon become outdated, Telksnys was thankful for the donations, but criticized the attempt to "stuff" Lithuania with outdated technology." (Gasiulis, "Lietuvos interneto istorija.")

to donate their old Norskdata computers to Lithuania on a massive scale. Even though Gediminas was grateful for their help in establishing the first Moscow-independent international data transmission channel in Lithuania, he was critical of the integration of a possibly outdated technology into Lithuania's economy. He asserted, "I say, if we stuff Lithuania's economy with outdated computers—what will happen? Because we are [then] moving not forward, but backward."[130] He further claimed that the Norwegian ministry lodged a complaint against his refusal to accept the computers at Lithuania's Foreign Ministry, that "I was, later, brought 'on the carpet,' I explained my motives by saying—what, we want to stuff ourselves with old things [*užsichlamint*]? Well, around five sessions in Norway were needed . . . It succeeded [to not receive the old computers]."[131]

Similarly, Jonas, a professor from Kaunas Technical University, contended while Norwegians brought the Internet to Lithuania, their help could be considered as a "double-sided coin." Jonas stated that in the beginning of 1990s, Norwegian-produced Norskdata computers were not much better than Soviet minicomputers.[132] He posited:

> Mini machines, they were already retreating . . . The Norwegians were massively exchanging them to newer ones, Western, IBM, or others. Not to their own construction. And the production of these machines [Norskdata] was terminated. They had many of these machines, and they were bringing them [here]. . . . For free.[133]

After some time, Lithuanians said,

> 'Thank you, but we do not need them anymore, do not bring them [here].' Because we had really stuffed our basement with terminals and later threw them out, because . . . it was not a miracle, the qualitative difference [between them and] the Russian machines [was not high] and it was already visible, that it was the past, because the Norwegians are throwing them away.[134]

Romas also agreed that while at some point the Norskdata computers became outdated, but disagreed that they were useless in Lithuania:

> From 1995 personal computers arrived and arrived to stay. It was cheaper, they came with a hard disk, they came with [an] operative system, they came with applications, [a] network card that you are able to connect. So this was all fine. You can say in 1991 there [were] no real alternatives. 1992, [there were] no real alternatives. 1993, [the PCs] started to come . . . This is wrong, if they think, 'Ah, we are sitting with a lot of garbage.' But it was not garbage when it came. But in 1996, I agree, then this [became] outdated.[135]

130 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.
131 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.
132 Soviet dupes of Western superminicomputers of IBM or HP.
133 Interview with Jonas, 28 March 2017.
134 Interview with Jonas, 28 March 2017.
135 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

At times, Norway's and others involvement in the field was also described as a business undertaking in the context of a new emerging market. Although Lithuania's political orientation in the early 1990s was still developing, some international telecommunications companies were interested in establishing their presence, such as Alcatel, AEG, Ericsson, NKT Electronic, and others.[136] According to Vidas, a politician in the telecommunications field, Scandinavian countries aimed to both expand their markets and political influence by investing in the Baltics, while Germany, on the other hand, showed no interest in the local market because it was afraid of repercussions in the Soviet Union in relation to Germany's unification. He posited, "I think because they really wanted to unite Germany and were afraid to bother Gorbachev."[137] Lithuania's telecom market was liberalized on 1 January 2003. Today, the main Internet service providers in the country are Telia Lietuva, Tele 2, Bitė Lietuva, LRTC, Cgates, and Init, which are part of 88 ISP providers in the country.[138] Yet as Lithuanian telecom operator Mindaugas—and his perspective is both illustrative and has been shared by other stakeholders—complained, today the main actors in the Lithuanian telecom scene belong to foreign owners, are only interested in their business' success, and could not be bothered to provide Internet access to the entire population. He stated:

> The problem is the following: all of these actors, who act and do something, they are non-Lithuanian. This is, that none of the [telecom] operators, except for LRTC, which in that scale is very weak and has a minimal influence in those villages. There is thus Telia which belongs to Swedish-Finnish operators, there is Tele2 and Bitė, which belong to the Americans. They all are foreign.[139]

Despite this rhetoric, Mindaugas later softened his nationalistic argument, especially after I tried to question his previous statement, by contending that each telecom business seeks profits notwithstanding their territorial and national origins, which demands stronger government involvement:

> *Mindaugas:* Roughly all of the social responsibility of operators in Lithuania equals zero. . . . because it is their business interest, nothing more.
> *Author:* But it is not, how to say, if it was a Swedish owner, or Lithuanian business.
> *M:* There is no difference, none, it is purely such a business concept, that we will do there, where it is useful for us. We will not do there, where it is not useful . . .
> *A:* Do you think it is problematic, or?
> *M:* . . . it calls for state intervention. . . . I wouldn't say that it is problematic. It is normal . . . there were plenty ideas that . . . we will make the Internet into a universal service, [meaning], that it is an obligation of bigger operators in such [low density, rural] areas [to provide access]. Well, they said, 'No problem, we will provide a bill, because it is

136 Interview with Vidas, 8 November 2017.
137 Interview with Vidas, 8 November 2017.
138 Numeracija.RRT, "Duomenų perdavimo paslaugų teikėjai," *Numeracija.RRT.lt*, accessed 20 March 2020, https://numeracija.rrt.lt/savitarna/user/#/internetActivities.
139 Interview with Mindaugas, 7 February 2018.

> not worth for us.' Although their overall profitability is infernally huge, total sum, but this thing for them is not worth it. In such a case, that state intervention . . . [140]

In summation, while foreign actors were praised and admired by local telecommunications stakeholders as modern and helpful, their actual involvement in developing Lithuania's first data transmission channels and emergent liberalized telecom industry was also criticized as patronizing through geopolitical imaginaries that were built on long forgone remembrances of foreign telecom industry practitioners. This critique transpired among the lines of "the Others" patronizing: under-evaluating, excluding local participation, and pursuing business interests in Lithuania's telecom industry, which was expressed by multiple telecom industry stakeholders on the ground. While the imaginary of "the Others" as patronizing continues to support binary geopolitical imaginaries of foreign involvement in local telecom industry, it departs from unconditional acceptance and praise of "the West" as explored in the "Modernizing" sub-chapter, and from a less unconditional, but still positive imaginary of the helpful "Others." According to artist collective There There, Eastern Europeans are often presented in a patronizing and condescending manner as a unified group of people who are likely to rob, prostitute, work for less money, and eventually take one's job.[141] They claim that this perspective has survived and thrived due to the fragmented nature of Eastern European societies: "The reason is simple: while Eastern Europeans are constructed and treated as a nation externally, the individuals belonging to this imagined community are not actually organized into a palpable community internally."[142] I am not convinced that societal fragmentation and the lack of one voice is the sole reason for these stereotypical representations. In this context I also wonder about the genre of movies produced in Eastern Europe by Eastern Europeans that celebrates and internationally popularizes unified image of societal demise, such as those made by Šarūnas Bartas or Sergey Loznitsa. However, in such a context, an imaginary of underdeveloped Eastern Europe is not only maintained by the locals—which I will explore in a later chapter, "Lagging"—but also emerges in local remembrances regarding patronizing "Others," those who supposedly distance themselves from, criticize and undervalue Lithuania's telecom industry.

The "Modernizing" geopolitical imaginary aligns closely with a realist geopolitical narrative of hierarchically diverse regions and nation-states by describing foreign telecom market players in general, and Sweden and Estonia in particular, as more advanced than Lithuania's telecom industry in social, organizational, technological, and even marketing areas. The "Helping" imaginary describes foreign telecommunications industry actors, such as Scandinavian countries and the US, as helping Lithuania's telecommunications industry to develop and thrive, although this imaginary can be also contextualized in the changing post-Cold War political arena with an aim of the western part of Europe and the US to befriend and desecuritize post-Soviet Eastern Europe. The "Patronizing" imaginary, in contrary to the first two, transpired among the lines of "the

140 Interview with Mindaugas, 7 February 2018.

141 There There, "Eastern Europeans for Dummies," *Kajet*, updated 24 November 2019, accessed 12 January 2020, http://kajetjournal.com/2019/11/24/there-there-eastern-europeans-for-dummies/.

142 There There, "Eastern Europeans for Dummies."

Others" as undervaluing, excluding, and pursuing solely business interests in Lithuania's telecom industry, which was expressed by multiple telecom industry stakeholders on the ground. I now move on to the other part of the binary to explore imaginaries that were maintained in the field by many stakeholders about themselves, which I frame under self-descriptive imaginaries, or "the Self" as "Competing," "Transforming," and "Lagging."

3.2 The Self

3.2.1 Competing

3.2.1.1 The Competitive Market

Internet service belongs to a data transmission market that as of 2020 comprised 88 data transmission service providers in Lithuania, a country with less than 3 million inhabitants.[143] The main source of income for data transmission services from 2012 to 2017 came from Internet retail access (89.3 percent).[144] According to the Communications Regulatory Authority, Internet access is a data transmission service that belongs to the electronic communications market and is categorized into services including: fixed (FTTx, DSL, wireless, KTV networks, and others); mobile (services based on technologies, such as UMTS and LTE); retail; wholesale Internet; and other data transmission services.[145] In 2019, the leading Lithuanian earner from fixed retail Internet services was Telia Lietuva, while Tele2 and Bitė Lietuva have led the mobile retail Internet access market since 2018.[146] Telia Lietuva led the 2019 Wholesale Internet access market, although its position within this department has fluctuated over the years.[147] Thus, while retail Internet access services are highly important for Lithuania's telecom market, the notion that Lithuania has a large number of data transmission service providers is rather deceptive, because not all of the providers work in the entire country. As Mindaugas, a wholesale operator employee, contended during an interview, most of the

143 Numeracija.RRT, "Duomenų perdavimo paslaugų teikėjai."

144 Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba,*Lietuvos ryšių sektorius, 2017, Nr. ND-11*, (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba, 2018), p. 37, https://www.rrt.lt/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Lietuvos_rysiu_sektorius_2017_20180819.pdf.

145 Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnybos strategijos departamento ekonominės analizės skyrius, *2018 m. IV ketvirtį vykdytos elektroninių ryšių veiklos ataskaita pagal elektroninių ryšių tinklų ir (arba) paslaugų teikėjų pateiktą informaciją, Nr. LD-880*, (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba, 2019), pp. 21–32, https://www.rrt.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Ataskaita_2018_IV_ketvirtis-03.28.pdf.

146 Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnybos strategijos departamento ekonominės analizės skyrius, *2019 m. II ketvirtį vykdytos elektroninių ryšių veiklos ataskaita pagal elektroninių ryšių tinklų ir (arba) paslaugų teikėjų pateiktą informaciją, Nr. LD-2314* (Vilnius: Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba, 2019), pp. 25, 31, https://www.rrt.lt/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/Ataskaita_2019_II_ketvirtis.pdf.

147 Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnybos strategijos departamento ekonominės analizės skyrius, *2019 m.*, p. 22.

data transmission providers are not relevant on a national scale, because they comprise "family business, which work in some *Laižuvos* village. Well, he has connected his twenty houses, one street, buys a stream from another provider, 'formalizes' himself as a provider."[148] Telia Lietuva employee Povilas claimed that due to the few substantial market participants, competition in Lithuania's telecom sector is weak and reminiscent of oligopoly.[149] In short, there are many data transmission providers in Lithuania, but the main telecom operators in diverse areas of Lithuania's data transmission and Internet access market are Telia Lietuva, and other market leaders including Tele 2, Bitė Lietuva, Lietuvos radijo ir televizijos centras, and Cgates.[150]

Although these examples speak to the limited number of leading companies that are influential in Lithuania's telecom market, many stakeholders in the field described the local telecom market as highly competitive.

In capitalist market economies in particular, competition is said to be a crucial force that disciplines companies and individuals to expand their revenues at the expense of their market rivals.[151] Traditional neoclassic economists argue that perfect competition conditions comprise multiple small companies that produce similar products and compete anonymously in a capitalist market. In contrast, economist Jim Stanford claims that while in "real-world competition" some industries require high initial investments that limit the number of companies that compete,[152] the intensity of competition can still be fierce.[153]

Regardless, it should not be forgotten that the usage of this concept is socioeconomically and historically contingent. In his book *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, William Davies defines capitalist neoliberalism as an ubiquitous system that values economic worth above all else. He states that "economic valuation [is] the 'ultimate' test of validity across all realms of governance and decision making that is maintained by specific language of 'competitiveness' and 'efficiency'."[154] While competition as a concept is praised in current capitalist market economies, in post-socialist countries it only became a regular term after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. For example, psychologist Márta Fülöp argues that in Hungary the term was banned during socialist times and has become highly popular since the 1990s.[155] In the case of the European Union, policies that serve to foster competition have been in place for over 60 years, since the 1957 Treaty of

148 Interview with Mindaugas, 7 February 2018.

149 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 19 February 2018.

150 Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba, *Lietuvos ryšių sektorius, 2017, Nr. ND-11*, pp. 37–38.

151 Jim Stanford, *Economics for Everyone: A Short Guide to the Economics of Capitalism* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), pp. 129–130.

152 Stanford, *Economics for Everyone: A Short Guide to the Economics of Capitalism*, p. 131.

153 Stanford, *Economics for Everyone: A Short Guide to the Economics of Capitalism*, pp. 131–135.

154 William Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism: Authority, Sovereignty and the Logic of Competition* (London: Sage, 2014), p. 194.

155 Márta Fülöp, "Competition as a Culturally Constructed Concept," in *Travelling Facts: The Social Construction, Distribution, and Accumulation of Knowledge*, Caroline Baillie and Elizabeth C. Dunn, eds. (Frankfurt: Campus Verlag, 2004), pp. 130, 144.

Rome.[156] While the usage and exact meaning of the concept of competition is culturally and historically contingent, in market economies it is rooted in the current vocabulary of capitalism. The drive for economic success thus does not only comprise visible effects but is also represented through language and laws that define competition as a valuable in current market economies.[157] It is thus consequential to assume that the current self-description of "competitive" not only corresponds to a real capacity to outperform others, but also shows oneself as able to function and even thrive under capitalist market conditions.

Competition also has a place in memories regarding the first steps of the development of post-socialist Lithuania's telecom industry. Romas regarded Lithuanian academics with whom he had contact while developing this first Internet connectivity as secretive and highly competitive. He remembered:

> 'If you get the book, don't copy this book, don't share it, because I have the book, this information. As long as I had this information only for myself, I am the king.' . . . People wanted to have jobs, they wanted to secure jobs. They wanted to have control over their domain . . . But this is normal in all countries.[158]

Vytenis, a leading manager of one wholesale Internet provider, told me that currently Lithuania's telecom market competition is very intense. He stated that "in other countries the Internet competition is lower, both in the West and in the East. In Lithuania, the competition is much higher. Due to this, conditions for customers are better."[159]

Vilius, who leads an IT department in a mid-size telecom company, contended that Lithuania's current telecom market is so competitive in terms of high speed and technology that it works against its own profit premises. He stated that

> there is no mass psychosis about the speed [in Latvia or Estonia]. Such as here. We win the question of psychosis 6:0 against everyone. Well, we are the first in the world, aren't we? Lithuania. Imagine. After such mass psychosis someone is still capable of doing business.[160]

Vilius's statement exemplifies the frenzied desire of telecom operators to sell fast Internet service for a low price that can be expressed through the metaphor of the "new rich," which is used to describe people in post-socialist regions who aim to convince others of their wealth by flaunting it through expensive clothing or luxurious cars, even if they are otherwise poor. Vilius stated, "We immediately had to start from a BMW. . . . when you sell a lot and very cheaply, then no one makes a profit."[161] According to Vilius, this craze was caused by competition and piracy. He stated that

156 OECD, *Annual Report on Competition Policy Developments in the EU, 2017*, in DAF/COMP/AR(2018)49, ed. OECD (2018), p. 5, https://one.oecd.org/document/DAF/COMP/AR(2018)49/en/pdf.

157 Davies, *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, p. 199.

158 Interview with Romas, 5 February 2018.

159 Interview with Vytenis, 16 January 2017.

160 Interview with Vilius, 16 March 2017.

161 Interview with Vilius, 16 March 2017.

> The desire to be a provider which sells the biggest plan. That 'war of 100 megabits,' if you remember. Everybody wanted that 100 megabits, notwithstanding the price. . . . Oh, and the reason why is piracy. . . . [People] use, all Lithuania is using, was watching many films. Movies were stolen and saved in particular servers: Torrents, 'Linkomanija' . . . Now it is getting less of those, but now there is another problem: now, the IP television has appeared . . .[162]

Vilius also described how this competition regarding Internet speed in Lithuania was irrational because the high quality of technology investments and cheap price of services resulted in reduced income for telecom operators. It was claimed that the desire to have a fast Internet connection originated not only from operators, but was also fostered by a locally flourishing piracy culture—a phenomenon that was widespread during my own experience of growing up in Lithuania. In the 1990s, it was unusual to buy legal content, such as CDs or even cassettes, because it was too expensive. I remember wandering in Vilnius' bazaars and searching for interesting CDs, the illegality of which did not concern me. There was widespread usage of illegal content, also in private, academic, and political realms. With the spread of the Internet, people started using Kazaa, Soulseek, and other similar online peer-to-peer content sharing services. Even at public places such as universities, illegal content—or what is currently perceived as illegal, although in the context of Lithuania it was understood as a substantial way to access information—sharing among teachers and students was common. Accordingly, the desire to gain access to information notwithstanding its legal status and inability to buy it on the market resulted in high levels of peer-to-peer sharing practices in Lithuania, but also developed a culture in which illegal content downloads have become, and are currently considered, mundane. Accordingly, irrational competition—"to be a provider who sells the biggest plan"—through fast and cheap Internet services combined with a lack of data sharing policies contributed to the emergence and maintenance of peer-to-peer practices, which were maintained by cheap and robust Internet access, known as the "BMW Internet." A 2017 European Commission report found that Lithuania was among the four cheapest countries (together with Latvia, Hungary, and Romania) in the European Union for fixed broadband Internet.[163] For example, in 2019 Telia Lietuva offered fiber Internet (up to 100 Mb/s) for 10 euro and 90 cent. This irrationally competitive self-perception against the backdrop of free—or illegal—information exchange maintenance is one imaginary common amongst local telecom industry stakeholders.

Many infrastructure builders, managers, and product developers from the field stated that other industry participants are highly competitive. Most of the time, they spoke of competitive telecom industry's producers and clients, but sometimes they exemplified telecom industry workers' attitudes toward society in general. For example, among telecom stakeholders I heard statements such as "people are wolves, they fight for their existence."[164] Although in previous examples competition was presented

162 Interview with Vilius, 16 March 2017.

163 European Commission, Directorate-General of Communications Networks, Content & Technology, *Fixed Broadband Prices in Europe 2017* (European Union: European Commission, Directorate-General of Communications Networks, Content & Technology, 2018).

164 Fieldwork report, Miglė Bareikytė, 16 June 2017.

through stories regarding local telecom operators as striving to be the best and win in the telecom market at any cost, the insistence upon the market as competitive also implies the desire to take telecom market participants seriously. It not only presents a self-description of competition, but also suggests that the local telecom industry has managed to adapt and became proper competitive capitalists.

3.2.1.2 Maintaining Competition

How did the local telecom industry become as competitive as suggested by its participants? Some fieldwork explanations describe the aggressive marketing of services as well as management culture, new networking technologies such as LAN as an alternative to ADSL in the 1990s, and the emergence of the Communications Regulatory Authority regulatory body, which all foster and help maintain a competitive market environment.

Telecom company employee Tomas described the telecom market's competition through the term "price wars." "Price wars" is an industry tactic that is used to attract more clients by offering them lower than usual market prices for a high-quality service.[165] "Price wars" were perceived as a big problem for Lithuania's telecom operators because they reduce potential telecom profit, as illustrated by Tomas:

> Oh, the biggest of Lithuania's Internet problems . . . We, Lithuanians, try to sell a service or any good thing in a simplest way: we do not want to earn from it, we, instead of providing something or explaining to a person what [they are] getting, very simply [we] look, 'Aha, the neighbor sells it for five 'litas' [Lithuania's currency prior to euro], well, I will sell for four.' . . . And this sometimes leads to despair and collapse of the markets, as it was in the time of GSM, which is not recovering even now, and until this day the GSM prices in Europe are cheapest here, and due to these price wars, concretely, Tele2 [mobile operator, a competitor] came and said, 'Everything will anyway be cheaper at ours.' . . . and thus it was practically the same with data transmission.[166]

Tomas links these price wars with the irrational competitive mentality of the telecom industry or even the people itself (as in "we, Lithuanians"), because it "leads to despair and collapse of the markets." Moreover, Tomas claimed that lying about the actual quality of the provided service also helps win the competitive fight. He stated:

> For example, I will tell you, I am selling 200 Mb for 10 euro, and TEO comes with, 'And I will sell you 300 for the same 10 [euro].' And we both do not risk anything, because, for example, if you are a normal customer, you have a normal device . . . we both know that even with the best intentions your computer will not physically process more than 50 Mb. I can offer you 1000, you will not eat that anyway. I risk nothing. This is a bluff, it is selling of, well, how to say, of glitter.[167]

165 Interview with Vytautas, 5 July 2017.

166 Interview with Tomas, 27 March 2017.

167 Interview with Tomas, 27 March 2017.

According to Tomas, either you exaggerate the quality of your service or you will ultimately lose the competitive fight.[168] While tactics such as price wars and bluffing, but also intense advertising campaigns, help telecom companies take over each other's clients, the whole industry loses profit due to the resulting lower service prices. Povilas from Telia Lietuva said that "If you want income, do nothing."[169] In fact, companies also conserve some of their product rhetoric for future use. Povilas argued that the industry trains consumers to limit their desires so that they can fulfill them later, and that furthermore they are "not-giving-as-much-as-they-could. They could open the taps—be it 1 GB or 2 GB essentially does not cost—but then you fully close future income and perspective of growth."[170]

Physical infrastructure also aids competition. This includes part of the physical communication channels known as "canalization," or the underground telecommunications channel system that is a legacy infrastructure in the current telecom industry, most of which belongs to Telia Lietuva. The Communications Regulatory Authority states that since network cable channels comprise a passive part of electronic communication infrastructure, and additionally due to Telia Lietuva's big influence in the wholesale fixed market, the company is required to provide other market players[171] access to their infrastructure.[172] Some telecom industry participants in the field complained that privatized Lietuvos Telekomas (now Telia Lietuva) at first used high wholesale service maintenance costs to obstruct access to their physical underground infrastructure to other service providers. According to Vytenis, a leader of one small wholesale Internet provider, "formally—they [competitors] could [rent], but practically—no."[173] Regardless of whether Telia Lietuva resisted renting their infrastructure to smaller Internet service providers and the breadth of the resistance to these practices, the point is that access to Telia Lietuva's physical network infrastructure was described by practitioners as yet another way to compete in the local telecom market.

Technologies were also argued as central for the emergence of Lithuania's competitive telecom industry. Linas, an expert from the Lithuanian Research and Education Network LITNET, stated that in the 1990s the Internet in Lithuania was accessible and used by limited groups of people such as academics, politicians, and government employees. He claimed that at first, the recently privatized Lietuvos Telekomas failed to fully monopolize the Internet service market because the low key emergence of LAN networks, developed against the backdrop of Lietuvos Telekomas DSL Internet service, fostered the development of alternative data transmission providers. Linas said that this led to the mushrooming of small data providers in Lithuania:

168 Interview with Tomas, 27 March 2017.

169 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 14 February 2018.

170 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 14 February 2018.

171 I observed how the company carries out this obligation in the chapter "Wholesaling."

172 Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba,*Įsakymas dėl elektroninių ryšių infrastruktūros įrengimo, Nr. 1V-978*; Lietuvos Respublikos ryšių reguliavimo tarnyba, *Dėl ūkio subjekto Teo Lt, Ab, Nr. 1V-629*; RRT, e-mail message to author, 11 April 2019.

173 Interview with Vytenis, 16 January 2017.

> Through this, such a nuance appeared, that in the apartments 'neighbor gangs' [*chebra*] started to set off, who, it means, purchases this one ADSL from Teo, shares the costs and lays fiber-optic [cable] in between. The copper is used as much as it carries between the computers, somewhere copper is overfilled, so they started laying [fiber-] optic. And in this way a few companies in Kaunas, such as Doketa, LTK, perhaps that same Init, started moving, other cable TV operators. In Vilnius, Skynetas moved in this way. And this thing started to develop, and suddenly from these homegrown ADSL users, who became small Internet service providers out of five, six, ten, twenty [users], who started to buy not ADSL anymore, but normal Internet connection from the same Telecom and simply to share it, and accumulate part of the *content* . . . this blossoming around plus [or] minus [the year] 2000 was very strong and had a very big influence on competition, competitive conditions, which, let's say, enabled ordinary resident to buy. . . . And from that time Lithuania is a country with one of the cheapest and best connectivity for its residents, because Teo only after some time woke up with its all mass and whole procedures, [and saw] that this segment is already almost bought out in the cities.[174]

Tadas, head of the Network Department at Telia Lietuva seemed to agree that there was indeed a time when Lietuvos Telekomas missed out on 1990s developing data transmission technologies. He stated that "Lietuvos Telekomas at that time, it, how to say, was not moving that rapidly—if [we] speak about the 1990s, 1995, 1997—which allowed other market players to take its place, how to say, to be sporty and become stronger in the market."[175]

Local small ISP providers and Internet access sharing between neighbors, mostly in cities, not only increased the usage of the early Internet, but also created a competitive base of Internet Service Providers that Lietuvos Telekomas had to compete with upon initiating its own Internet services.[176]

Most of the Lithuanian telecom market participants I encountered described the local telecom market as highly competitive, an adjective that described themselves as well as their working conditions, colleagues, and clients. Such a competitive imaginary resulted through common stories about specific tactics such as price wars, bluffing, and the implementation of and access to technological solutions, such as a communication channels and mushrooming LAN networks, which were intensively used to win over the customers. Correspondingly, this self-imaginary of a competitive Lithuanian telecom market can be interpreted not only as a representation of the actual character of the industry and relations between its participants. It can also be understood as a term that indirectly stresses various ways that post-Soviet Lithuania's telecom market used to catch up to, and finally became full-fledged members of, capitalist market economies, which require its members to maintain competition. It seems that in Lithuania's context, this self-description as competitive connotes not only an actual stressful and convoluted telecom industry environment, but also emphasizes how the

174 Interview with Linas, 17 March 2017.

175 Interview with Tadas, 13 March 2018.

176 Interview with Linas, 17 March 2017.

local telecom field finally withdrew from its post-Soviet space of state-led socialism and emerged as proper capitalists. This self-description relates to what author Petrică Mogoș describes as "utopian capitalism"—an imaginary that embraces its subjects and provides them with hope for a better future if they manage to compete within the context of capitalist market economies. He posits that

> Its subjects are guided by daily rituals and performances delineated by the reward and assurances of capital: look ahead, work hard and set money aside, your house with white picket fence awaits. The future—the apparently attainable future that came after the fall—becomes just another way of justifying this utopian capitalism and of giving purpose to a life tied to the grid. . . . The process of imagining, mediated by desire—just like the one experienced decades earlier—has become a practice of self-making and self-purposing, only that this time it's here to stay, as no alternative seems to emerge on the horizon.[177]

Why utopian capitalism? While the telecommunications sector has often been equated with intensive competition, but also with economic prosperity, and Lithuania's telecom industry's conditions of access and quality in a competitive market have progressed over the recent decade, the country has also suffered from massive emigration. Since 1990, the number of inhabitants sank by almost 24 percent; 75 percent of émigrés were 15 to 44 years old.[178] Thus the local telecommunications industry's geopolitical imaginaries of competitive, and thus successfully capitalist, represent only one geopolitical imaginary of the self.

3.2.2 Transforming

3.2.2.1 Past Transformation

Multiple telecom industry stakeholders contended that Lithuanian telecom market participants are not only capable of accepting the telecommunications industry's ubiquitous changes, but also manage to skillfully readjust themselves to new state of affairs due to their historical legacy of societal flexibility. Lithuania's turbulent post-socialist transformation has been shaped by a socioeconomic environment of opportunism and corruption coupled with one of Europe's highest poverty levels.[179] Telecom company employee Tomas contextualized the emergence of private telecommunication networks in the 1990s as a time of capital accumulation that was characterized by privatization and suspicious business practices.[180] In the 1990s, it was necessary to nurture one's capacity to adapt to economic, political, and cultural changes in order to survive. In successful cases one could even develop a business, for instance, by importing valuable technologies and selling them for outlandish prices:

177 Mogoș, "Performing the West," p. 89.

178 "Migracija skaičiais." *Europos migracijos centras*, accessed 15 January 2020, https://123.emn.lt/.

179 Nacionalinis skurdo mažinimo organizacijų tinklas, *Skurdas ir socialinė atskirtis Lietuvoje, 2018* (Vilnius: Nacionalinis skurdo mažinimo organizacijų tinklas, 2018), p. 6, https://www.eapn.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/EAPN-PW2018-Lithuania-LT-FINAL.pdf.

180 Interview with Tomas, 27 March 2017.

> There were the fiery 90s: there was both the capital accumulation, and . . . let's say, there wasn't even talk about the Internet in those days. Privatization took place. . . . A vision existed, that we will produce some, well, how to say, high technologies. But the very beginning was quite diverse. . . . Well, yes, in those times survival was important. There is no need to think that the first 200 clients, for example, would have enabled us to survive and develop further. . . . We have built local network in several companies, which was wonderful and strange in those times, and in general not heard of . . . This gave [us] some, well, how to say, basis, an experience, which had not existed. No academic institution taught that. . . . before the collapse of the Soviet Union, first personal computers were already arriving from the US. The differences in prices were so [high] that those, who had relatives, having brought the personal computer—I don't know if it is crucial to say that . . . from the profit, a little masonry house in Garliava could [be built].[181]

The capacity to adapt under difficult circumstances of transformation in the 1990s was not only described in the field as a new post-Soviet societal skill, but rather one that was already practiced during the Soviet Union. Professor Gediminas told me about do-it-yourself practices of technology development and hacking as widely spread methods of accessing information. Gediminas claims that one of the reasons he was accepted into the Institute of Automation and Telemechanics in Moscow was his do-it-yourself skills, which were widely spread as a practice among Soviet youth. These young people often hacked radio signals to listen to western radio stations or unfiltered the Soviet-made noise that aimed to disturb access to such foreign radio stations, such as the American Voice. He stated:

> What problems were there during those times? They did not allow us to listen to Western music. Then it was needed to build such receivers and antennas, which could receive [foreign stations]. For example, I had made such antennas, which could receive all the German stations, because they were closer. Exceptionally good was the station close to Luxembourg, which provided the most modern music. . . . So here I read antenna-theory and made such a receiver, so that Luxembourg was playing at my place as well.[182]

Gediminas claims that in those days, radio receivers were necessary to perform male identity and were thus mainstream. He remembered that "in those times, a lad, who couldn't make a radio receiver—make [it], not buy—was not considered to be a lad, thus, I made it."[183] Lukas, another crucial actor in developing telecommunications networks in the Soviet Union as well as post-socialist Lithuania's first Internet networks, used to personally fly to Leningrad (now Saint Petersburg) to handpick micro-schemes for his projects, because of the lack of resources and their distribution in the Soviet Union.[184] Such and similar memories hint to the idea that creative tinkering was not only a result of exceptional, harsh transformation conditions, but also was part of the Soviet male

181 Interview with Tomas, 27 March 2017.

182 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

183 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

184 Interview with Lukas, 9 February 2018.

gender experience. Vakaris, a Telia Lietuva employee, contended that "in Lithuania it is a matter of honor to make things by oneself—people arrange their technology by themselves, wire the cables, place their satellites on the roofs, share the Internet."[185]

Telia Lietuva employee Kristijonas contended that the capacity to not only endure, but also to adapt to ongoing socioeconomic changes in Lithuania, raised the societally accepted standard of flexibility. He stated that "Lithuania underwent hard times, people needed to adapt a lot, and now they expect others to be flexible too."[186] In this self-imaginary, those who were flexible could adapt and thus survived and flourished in the context of Soviet and post-Soviet transformation.

3.2.2.2 Ongoing Transformation

Key stakeholders described their industry as also currently transforming. In 2017, 75 percent of Lithuanian households had Internet access.[187] Lithuania's Internet in 2020 was of exceptional quality and its public Wi-Fi was one of the fastest in the world.[188] Thus, key stakeholders argued that the telecom industry has been constantly transforming (in the Soviet, early post-socialist and current times): undergoing structural and technological changes, which demand employee flexibility, namely the capacity to endure and adapt to changes and keep the industry evolving.

I was told that one such example of current market transformation is the ongoing telecom market structural change. According to Andrius, a leading manager at Telia Lietuva:

> The telecom industry of the operators is not growing. In my view, it is even falling. . . . Actors are consolidating, the smaller are being bought by the bigger ones, and this tendency goes on for a few years, but this fall is more related to, let's say, when fragmenting into services [for instance] voice telephony, as an industry which was very powerful, has certainly fallen. The Internet industry, it is growing.[189]

Due to the fact that new investments must be constantly made in order to remain competitive, some operators either go bankrupt, sell out, or consolidate.[190] Vytenis, the leading manager at a smaller telecom operator, was of a similar opinion. He stated that it was just a matter of time before small telecom companies like the one in which he worked would go bankrupt or be bought by stronger ones:

> it is only a question of time, in that sense. The only nuance is that, on which side of barricades will you find yourself, you know. If you are, will be working for profit and you will have your own users, then you will be bought. If others see that you are

185 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 26 June 2017.

186 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 23 June 2017.

187 "Lietuva pagal interneto naudojimą namų ūkiuose vis dar atsilieka nuo ES vidurkio," *Informacinės visuomenės plėtros komitetas*.

188 Helen, "Top 10 Countries with the Fastest Public WiFi," *RottenWifi*, published 13 March 2020, accessed 10 April 2020, http://blog.rottenwifi.com/top-20-countries-fastest-public-wifi-2016-infographic/.

189 Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018.

190 Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018.

> profitable, but losing your users and they can take over those users from you, then they will and it is only a question of time. . . . Some networks [service providers] are working on almost a principle of enthusiasm . . .[191]

Tadas, a long-term Telia Lietuva industry employee, similarly shared that one of the biggest challenges in his work is the constant transformation of the telecom market. He compared the telecom business to a constantly moving escalator in which successful companies have to run to move forward. He posited "the example of an escalator: if you stand, you are going down. If you are climbing up, you remain at your place. If you are running, then you are somewhat going ahead. In *telco* you have to run . . . I think it is a given."[192] At the same time, Tadas claimed that current changes in the telecom market have intensified due to the need for, among other factors, more efficiency in times of mobile Internet, because this also conveys the decline of certain aspects of the telecom industry, especially fixed telephone service:

> The problem is that *telco* has always lived very well, and with the emergence of mobile data and all the other things, their good life is declining. Declining all the time. . . . I think that the *telco* domain, which was developing for the last 20 years, so to say, its development will slow down in the future.[193]

The decline of fixed telephone service profit is not only a problem in Lithuania's telecommunications industry. The 2019 European Telecommunications Network Associations report found that revenue in Western Europe's telecom industry has been falling due to a decline in purchased voice services, while in Eastern and Central Europe its growth is maintained by mobile data and fixed broadband services.[194] While the telecom market has been described as undergoing constant changes through both structural and technological changes, such as consolidation and the decline of fixed telephone usage due to the spread of mobile Internet, the question of where this transformation will lead is still open. Vakaris, a Telia Lietuva industry practitioner, contended that user boredom could eventually become a problem in the future telecom industry. The new industry's product "IPTV[195] offers a new type of content with feedback, but it is almost boring already".[196] While the transforming telecom industry attempts to attract more clients with new technologies, it also needs to always find and offer new services in order to grow.

These stories about the current local telecom industry's transformation were told in the midst of utterances about flexibility—i.e., worker capacity to adapt to ongoing labor market and work organization changes—and reminded me that the capacity to adapt is not only a Soviet or an early post-Soviet phenomenon. It also fits within the context

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191 Interview with Vytenis, 21 March 2017.

192 Interview with Tadas, 13 March 2018.

193 Interview with Tadas, 13 March 2018.

194 Analysis Mason, *The State of Digital Communications 2019* (European Telecommunications Network Operators' Association: 2019), p. 30, https://etno.eu/datas/publications/annual-reports/ETNO%20Annual%20Economic%20Report%202019%20final%20web.pdf.

195 IPTV – television over Internet Protocol networks.

196 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 26 June 2017.

of a new kind of imaginary produced within capitalist economies described as "post-Fordist," "creative," and "immaterial," which combines intellectual, communicative, and relation-fostering skills in producing new ideas and services and generally hopes for ongoing creative flexibility to increase production.[197]

Telecom market practitioners stressed the need to creatively adapt to ongoing industry changes in their everyday labor practices. Accordingly, current telecom market participants emphasized the importance of flexibility and malleable work organization. One example of this flexibility is the outsourcing of physical network constructors (i.e., workers from outsourced companies, who dig the earth and lay cables). I participated in Telia Lietuva meetings in which outsourced physical network builders and telecom company managers gathered to discuss their common telecom network development projects and was told that the process of building physical networks requires all stakeholders to be prepared to adapt to ongoing changes due to the unforeseen actions of various involved stakeholders, such as building constructors or clients. Additionally, telecom workers who are responsible for user connectivity shared that it is very difficult to plan their weekly work schedules due to unforeseeable causes of broken network connections that need to be repaired, different architectural arrangements in user residences that enable or hinder cable repairs, and even different client personalities that make the possibility to plan and control daily tasks difficult. The industry stakeholders not only underlined the pragmatic need to adapt to everyday challenges in order to keep clients, but also a particular expectation of flexible learning. Experienced industry worker Aurelijus is a case in point. He argued that workers' flexibility crucially comprises openness, the ability to acknowledge one's faults, the desire to search for solutions and the ability to learn. Aurelijus emphasized the importance of developing a mentality that aims to evolve and change:

> to not close oneself in thinking that it is possible to work only in one way, as if there is no other way. Constantly search for something. . . . what does it mean, 'I cannot do it'? But some [companies] . . . expand, other companies are built . . . Why can't we do that? It means, I do something not so well. What do I need? Competence—I have. Let's search for solutions, what can we do, how can we do it. We have to find. . . . Knowledge can be gained. As I said, I did not know what this data center was, from where to start, what can it be eaten with. In the beginning it looked scary: new people, new workers, quite a new team brought together from other departments. . . . And we did [it].[198]

This flexible mentality was not only described as desired, but also as practiced by telecom operators in their daily labor practices through dynamic and adaptive work organizational practices. Matas from Telia Lietuva's Technology Department described how their access to co-workers is optimized through multiple technologies in order to reach them in real time and carry out everyday work problems:

197 Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labour."

198 Interview with Aurelijus, 7 March 2018.

> organization does everything to suck from us the last drop of energy [laughs]. In that sense, well, Microsoft products, the business of Skype, Outlook—everything is integrated, you always see people's *presence*. In that sense, you pick up the telephone to call, then you see if he is in a meeting, if he is *busy*, i.e., does a job he planned, if he is *available*, in that sense, he is in that moment at his work place. . . . [it] helps, but sometimes it . . . well, in reality it increases efficiency. But also . . . if something malfunctions a little bit, then the brain does not do the planning anymore . . . But planning your own and others' time, it helps very much. It is not common in general in the organization to conduct, well, some *blitz* meetings out of nothing, you know. Although sometimes, well, what concerns purely telephone conversations . . . new generation in general likes for everything [to use] emails, messages, but in most cases, it is not as effective and plus it sometimes forms not a really good culture: 'I wrote and that's it, my responsibility with this, you know, ended.' So most of the time, anyway, if you seek an end result . . . you pick up the phone, find out to the end. Plus, technologies allow you to do that sufficiently effectively. That person says, that something else is needed, so you in one click throw this person already in a conference call, if you need, throw another one. Herewith that *presence* is also visible. Can you disturb that person? No, you cannot. And thus you solve it.[199]

Matas's example illustrates how software and equipment solutions are used to optimize the company's internal communication and help organize daily labor practices. The imaginary of the enduring, flexible employee and company are maintained through stories how telecom industry workers adapt to a dynamic work environment. Flexibility in Matas, Pijus, and Aurelijus's examples is narrated as the capacity to constantly adapt to a quickly changing labor environment and needy clients, and was thus characterized among telecom industry workers as an unavoidable daily reality.

At the end of my participatory observation at Telia Lietuva's Technology Department, I learned that this department was going to be dissolved. This obviously brought into question the meticulous schemes that I had previously prepared with the help of employees and which outlined the general structure, responsibilities, and communication patterns in the Technology-related departments. Instead of perceiving the defeat of my goal to capture the complexity of company's structure in writing, I attempted to also adapt to these changes. As my internship mentor told me, "Tasks [at the company] are organized; without organization everything would collapse."[200] Yet notwithstanding those labor practices that keep the company in shape, this self-imaginary of both employees and myself in the field as constantly transforming and flexible prevailed. After the dissolution of the department, employee Matas was not surprised and contended that it is common for management standards at the company to change "twice a year".[201] Nerijus from B2B also contented that that telecom industry finds itself "in constant transformation,"[202] which he clarified through examples of the decreasing

199 Interview with Matas, 22 February 2018.

200 Fieldwork report, Miglė Bareikytė, 18 February 2018.

201 Interview with Matas, 12 March 2018; Interview with Matas, 22 February 2018.

202 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 14 February 2018.

number of workers, mechanization of labor processes, and the constant renewal of technologies, all of which are necessary for the survival of the telecom company.

This imaginary of a constantly transforming telecom industry, which consists of changes, requires employee flexibility and the capacity to adapt, also touches upon the limits of this transformation; the telecom market's continuous transformation in developing new network solutions seems to have possibly encountered a dead end. A new, interesting service is needed, but its actuality is still vague. Consequently, Telia Lietuva, the main telecom operator in Lithuania, describes itself as a "new generation telco"—a company that searches for new directions in the telecom business. If old telecom companies gained much of their revenue from fixed telephone services and, later, from broadband data transmission services, the future for this industry might also mean developing more value-added services.[203] Andrius, a Telia Lietuva employee, stated that a new generation telco can have multiple meanings:

> There are as many people as descriptions. We sometimes have internal discussions: 'Ok, what does *new generation telco* mean?' Because this concept came from our group—*new generation telco*—it is a term which means that we are transforming into something new. Now, what this new is, could be understood in a variety of ways. For some, it is a next technology, technological leap, i.e., an investment into something, which will foster better quality of services. . . . For some, it is an offer of new services. . . . I.e., the passage to other industries, integration of things, which were not integrated earlier.[204]

Multiple fieldwork stakeholders painted a self-imaginary of a constantly transforming local telecom industry that not only adapts but also attempts to thrive under current conditions of the ongoing market request for creative flexibility, not least due to its ongoing transformation and Soviet and early post-socialist legacies that trained people to adapt to difficult circumstances. This imaginary is geopolitical because it illustrates how the local telecom industry perceives itself as intensively needing to quickly change and adapt to new socio-political environments that it depends upon (Soviet socialism and the capacity to adapt under controlled conditions with DIY-tinkering as well as the fast shift to post-socialist capitalism with its concurrent demands for flexibility, technological and organizational changes, and demand for growth). As philosopher Miroslav Petříček writes, "'Transformation' has the character of a verb. Just like 'imagination', for example. Its product is change, not the state of things, for transformation signifies alteration."[205] The imaginary of a changing, transforming, flexible telecom industry is therefore twofold. It not only celebrates the local industry's capacity to adapt to the new conditions of, and endure, post-socialist capitalism, but it also stresses change as ongoing and imposed on local telecom industry through market requirements of new

203 "The Future of Telecom Operators in Europe," *Kearney*, accessed 12 August 2019, https://www.kearney.com/communications-media-technology/article?/a/the-future-of-telecom-operators-in-europe

204 Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018.

205 Miroslav Petříček, "Transformation," *Atlas of Transformation*, 2011, accessed 27 February 2019, http://monumenttotransformation.org/atlas-of-transformation/html/t/transformation/transformation-miroslav-petricek.html

services and the constant modernization of equipment without a possibility to slow down.

3.2.3 Lagging

3.2.3.1 Lagging Market, Small Country

The last prevalent geopolitical imaginary regarding the self-perception of telecom industry stakeholders concerned the issue of lagging behind. In the context of Eastern Europe, the term "lag" was used by the World Bank to describe Eastern and Southern European regions. According to World Bank, the latter were designated "low-growth" and the former were named "lagging regions" and characterized by inequalities of wealth, opportunity, and productivity, that can also be interpreted as failing to keep up with the progress of others. In the field I also encountered a local telecom stakeholder self-imaginary as lagging behind the others in terms of size and innovation legacies.

Lithuania's territory comprise 65286 square kilometers and in 2015 was inhabited by 2.9 million people. Lithuania is not the biggest European Union country, but also not the smallest; smaller territories include Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Slovakia, and Slovenia, while six countries in the EU have less inhabitants than Lithuania.[206] Notwithstanding these statistics, a prevalent self-perception as lacking in size and, thus, agency appeared as another geopolitical imaginary directed to the incapacities of the self. This imaginary of lacking in size was rooted in ideas of Lithuania's telecom industry as too small and globally insignificant to dictate global conditions, which ultimately left it to observe history from the sidelines. As literary critic Violeta Kelertas claims in her book *Baltic Postcolonialism*, before 1991, the US delayed Lithuania's recognition and some politicians presented it as a country that was too small to exist as an independent state.[207] Similarly, many field participants in both private and governmental sectors expressed the imaginary of the Lithuanian telecom industry as lacking in size, agency, and thus related international influence.

Lithuania's small size was used as an argument for one of the crucial events in the telecommunications development in Lithuania, the privatization of main telecom operator Lietuvos Telekomas in 1998 to TeliaSonera. For example, Donata, an industry expert with experience in both academic and private telecom sectors, claimed that Lithuania is too small to autonomously develop its infrastructure. She stated:

> I doubt it, we are a little bit too small, it is the same as with banks. All say, 'Maybe it would have been good, that it would have been Lithuanian banks here, and now all are Scandinavian or so.' But [we] have to put up with it, we are in the European Union and I don't think there really were those alternatives.[208]

At Telia Lietuva's department responsible for infrastructure building, I learned about the practice of outsourcing that is used to temporarily employ physical telecom in-

206 "The European Union and Countries in the EU," *Schengenvisainfo.com*, updated 24 November 2020, accessed 21 January 2021, https://www.schengenvisainfo.com/eu-countries/.

207 Violeta Kelertas, *Baltic Postcolonialism* (Amsterdam: Brill | Rodopi, 2006), p. 2.

208 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

frastructure constructors. Some of the contractors build telecommunications network infrastructure not only for telecom companies in Lithuania, but also abroad, such as in Sweden, Germany, and Norway. Industry employees told me that companies from other European countries would not come to Lithuania to build their networks due to the country's small market size and low paying power.[209] Similarly, at Telia Lietuva I was told that Lithuania and its telecom industry consist of a small market with an unsubstantial global contribution because development trends in the global market are dictated by big players and the TIER 1 level of telecom operators,[210] which have access to the entire Internet network.[211] Also, Telia Lietuva employee Andrius stated that in discussions in which over-the-top (OTT) service providers and telecom operators argue about telecommunications infrastructure usage, Lithuania's telecom operators have no direct influence:

> Telia Lietuva . . . when they are developing their Internet networks, they are not in any way influencing Google, Amazon, YouTube. That is why there are no discussions. We can only understand that it is happening and search for our own particular solutions on how to do it here. But what it means for Lithuania is that it fostered investments, and our company every year is investing many millions into the networks for the users to receive quality service.[212]

Through these illustrative examples, Lithuania's telecom market emerged as lacking agency, influence, and relevance in the global market due to its size. Several industry stakeholders contended that the local telecom industry provides little global contribution and is dependent on decisions made by big players, such as OTT companies and equipment producers. Lithuania's telecom market observes but cannot set trends, because it is too small. Such views that small countries with small markets have little agency in shaping global media economies are widespread. Even in the introduction

209 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 19 June 2017.

210 According to Andrius from Telia Lietuva, "Of course, the dream of an operator is to create a Facebook, offer something similar to Youtube, but . . . sorry, but operators will not make it so easy, because for it perhaps other competences are needed" (Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018). Data transmission technologies are usually grouped according to the carriers—material communication lines. In order to transmit the data, there has to be a sender, receiver, and data carrier. The traditional function of an operator is to carry information and mediate between the source and user: his function is that of the tube. So-called OTT (over-the-top) content and application providers, such as Facebook, Google, Amazon, etc., save user's data, but they are usually not building their own data transmission infrastructure and use that of the operator's. This situation raises conflicts between the OTTs and the operators because the OTT companies do not share the profits despite using data transmission channels. On the other hand, currently the operators—and there are many different strategies—search additional income due to changes in market profit structure (the rise of the Internet and TV, the fall of the fixed telephone), and are also trying to offer OTT services and save data, which earlier was not the case. Since the competition in Lithuania is described as high, operators need to continuously invest to sustain high quality and speedy network connections. In the fight between the OTT and operators, according to Andrius, OTT will always win, because the consumer will support the OTT (Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018).

211 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 23 June 2017.

212 Interview with Andrius, 2 February 2018.

to the stimulating *The Political Economy of Media*, media scholar Dwayne Winseck contends that in researching global media economies, it is sensible to focus on the top ten media and Internet companies in terms of their capitalization and revenue, most of which come from the US.[213] While such a perspective is reasonable, it also implicitly creates conditions in which small markets and countries are not given attention in global scholarly debates on media technology development.

The self-imaginary of the local Lithuanian telecom industry as lagging is based on a general feeling of historically unavoidable lack of size and global contribution, which was only occasionally countered with arguments such as the proposition that even small countries and markets can claim global contribution by providing, for instance, transit roles for data transmission. For example, notwithstanding the claims of Lithuania's unsubstantial global telecom industry contribution, some acknowledged local agency in maintaining global telecom networks. Telia Lietuva employee Lina claimed that Lithuania's telecom industry plays an important role as a site of transit. She stated that "we are that transit between Europe and Scandinavia, everything happens through us. We are in fact very important and our role, what concerns the Internet, is very, very important. For Lithuania itself and for our neighbors, and in general Europe."[214] On a similar note regarding Lithuania's telecom market contributions, in 2019 Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda expressed pride in the fivefold increase of the number of fin-tech start-ups over the past five years.[215] The Invest in Lithuania governmental organization reported that over 200 fin-tech companies and thousands of highly motivated IT specialists worked in Lithuania.[216] Technology journalist Andrii Degeler noted Baltic countries' leadership in technology development in the Soviet Union and post-Soviet independence as well:

> The three countries still have a powerful presence within the avant-garde of the post-Soviet republics in terms of technology entrepreneurship and government support of innovation. Estonia, for example, is well known as the country where Skype was born, as well as its e-Residency program. Another Baltic state, Lithuania, has recently approved an official startup visa program, which will allow founders from outside the EU to easily open business in the country.[217]

Despite these representative claims, Degeler quotes several Lithuania's start-up scene actors, who argue that while start up scene in the country is developing, emigration of

213 Dwayne Winseck, "Introductory Essay: The Political Economies of Media and the Transformation of the Global Media Industries," in *The Political Economies of Media: The Transformation of the Global Media Industries*, Dwayne Winseck and Dal Yong Jin, eds. (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), p. 6.

214 Interview with Lina, 12 March 2018.

215 "The President Opened the Financial Technologies Conference," *President of the Republic of Lithuania*, updated 27 November 2019, accessed 13 January 2020, https://www.lrp.lt/en/media-center/news/the-president-opened-the-financial-technologies-conference/33478.

216 "Lithuania's Fintech Sector at a Glance," *InvestLithuania*, accessed 15 March 2020, https://investlithuania.com/fintech-report-2019/.

217 Andrii Degeler, "Lithuania: Up-and-Coming Startup Ecosystem with Talent and Ideas," *Thenextweb.com*, published 28 November 2016, accessed 15 January 2019, https://thenextweb.com/news/lithuania-up-and-coming-startup-ecosystem-with-talent-and-ideas.

talents and the lack of an existing financial support environment for entrepreneurial experiments is still a problem in Lithuania.[218]

When I discussed Lithuania's telecom market with Aloyzas, one of the former Ministers from the now-dissolved Ministry for Networks and Informatics, he contradicted the positive official governmental position that promotes a vibrant and innovative Lithuanian telecom and IT sector. Aloyzas, akin to the imaginary of Lithuania as small and non-influential in the aforementioned examples, specified why Lithuania is lagging through highly self-critical examples. I chose to further the self-imaginary of Lithuania as lagging through Aloyzas's statements because they disclose an inherent contradiction that I often encountered in the field: the need for dignity alongside ubiquitous self-criticism.

In the context of a discussion regarding Lithuania's telecom market, Aloyzas argued that Lithuania lacks innovative developments in the realm of technology not only due to its size, but also because it allegedly has no legacy to innovate and its inhabitants lack applicable skills. According to Aloyzas, Lithuanians have long idealized themselves for being intelligent despite lacking practical skills:

> Therefore, all the time we have been claiming two major things: that Lithuania is a transit country in a very comfortable geographical location, connections [between] East [and] West; second thing, we have so many educated people that we are capable of doing anything in any way. Well, good. It appeared, that we indeed have educated people—that was in order, all good. Not as many, as we here thought we have. Second thing, it appeared, that [they are] educated not quite rightly. That 'he [reads] many books,' means nothing. Well, [he reads] all those books, so what? He does not know how to work.[219]

Although physical telecom infrastructure has been successfully developed in Lithuania, he argued that the country is too small and financially weak to develop innovative technology. Aloyzas stated, "This is a prerogative of big states. Even today in the electronics industry in some areas, for instance, *some* England and France, cooperate and build one common factory, because it is too expensive and irrational to do it alone. Thus, there is no need to talk about Lithuania."[220] Aloyzas related Lithuania's size—its smallness—to the country's inability to self-develop big high-tech projects. He expressed the idea that technologies belong to the "chosen ones."[221] While Lithuania was a leader in the Soviet Union and later became one of the global leaders in physical telecommunications infrastructure, substantial innovations could not be developed here due to country's small size and lack of funds:

> We developed infrastructure, this is a different thing. And while using that infrastructure, for example, we can produce software products . . . we have those possibilities and we can do that on the contemporary level and nothing in this situation, nothing

218 Degeler, "Lithuania: Up-and-Coming Startup Ecosystem with Talent and Ideas."

219 Interview with Aloyzas, 9 November 2017.

220 Interview with Aloyzas, 9 November 2017.

221 Interview with Aloyzas, 9 November 2017.

> will be worse than in any other state. But then again, these are one-timers, which really find niches there . . . but wanting [to change] something in the global production, well . . . There is Apple, there is, for instance, Motorola . . . or something else, which produces and wants to join this on that level, well, how? How? How can you make something [substantial], if, let's say, a factory of micro-schemes, microprocessors, its installation, its cleanliness, there might be one speck of dust in a cubic meter, it costs a billion. What is Lithuania's budget? So what are we talking about.[222]

Aloyzas also reasoned that not only a country's size, but also its respective absence of innovation culture causes its lack of future innovations:

> Such are the perspectives, that Africa lives by growing bananas. But here is and cannot be any big perspectives. . . . Simple example, you take out of your pocket a Swiss knife, which are common in the world. Because a conversation has started, that Switzerland is such a small country . . . why can't we [do] similarly? . . . To get into that market in this way today, these [Swiss have] centuries of traditions, and where are those centuries of traditions here? What, right, we can [make] cheese? We can, right. It is good, no doubt. What else [is] Lithuanian? We did not do anything like this a hundred years ago . . . there was that Soviet Union, we produced [parts] for all those antique tractors in the Soviet Union, you understand, there was such specialization. Fuel pumps were produced in Lithuania, wheels—somewhere else . . . As soon as the Soviet Union discontinued producing those tractors . . . well, so where should we put them? In a scrap-iron pile, and they are not needed anymore. And there are many such things.[223]

Aloyzas argued that Lithuania is a small country that lacks the legacy to innovate. He reasoned that Lithuania's dim future regarding technology development was due to its past participation in an unprogressive "antique tractor producing" Soviet Union economy based on territorial division of labor and lack of funds. Despite this, in contrast to his own statements of lagging behind, Aloyzas also contended that Lithuania's telecommunications infrastructure has been always successfully developed, both in current and Soviet times. In other words, Aloyzas's stories are prime examples of a contradictory description of Lithuania's technology development: small, poor, lacking a legacy of innovation, yet capable of developing the telecom industry both in the Soviet Union and in the post-Soviet realm. Experienced politician and telecom industry practitioner Aloyzas's paradoxical perspective reminded me of philosopher Boris Groys's argument regarding the everyday societal practice of dialectical materialism in the Soviet Union, where internal contradictions and paradoxes were not only theorized, but also practiced as apparent contradictions in daily life.[224] This contradictory perspective of success and lack combined with a country's small size and absence of a legacy of innovation (condescendingly expressed through the racist comparison of "Africa lives by growing bananas") sits alongside local agency to operate under difficult conditions, develop robust

222 Interview with Aloyzas, 9 November 2017.

223 Interview with Aloyzas, 9 November 2017.

224 Boris Groys, *The Communist Postscript* (New York: Verso Books, 2009), p. 35.

telecommunications infrastructure, and—as argued by some—provide an important transit service to transmit the data.

In summation, several fieldwork participants narrated a geopolitical imaginary of Lithuania—as both a country and a market—as lagging and furthermore failing to keep up with and lead telecommunications development due to its size and lack of legacy and skills regarding innovation; thus Lithuania's telecom industry was narrated as lacking the agency to influence and impact global telecommunications industry developments that was guided by large equipment producers and big ICT companies. Despite these positions, the geopolitical imaginary of lagging is contradictory. It is based on stories from the field that present Lithuania as irrelevant both as a country and a market due to its unavoidable lack in territorial size and innovation-debilitating historical legacies. It simultaneously argues that Lithuania also has a highly developed telecommunications infrastructure, a skilled IT sector, and plays an important role in geographic transit. Thus, the geopolitical self-imaginary as lagging is based on a contradiction between intense self-criticism and the quest for dignity.

3.3 The Cooperating Telecommunications Industry

> How we buy gas from Kazakhstan . . . information also walks very similarly. . . . we need a gas flow from Kazakhstan. For example, we buy 10 billion cubes, but we agree . . . that the Russian infrastructure, roughly speaking, will be used, the one which comes to us. . . . So do not imagine, that somehow they are marked with flags: 'The first billion is Lithuania's, the last remains,' no. No, they give that 10 billion to the Russian gas network, and we take 10 billion from the Russians. Because the gas is the same.
> *Interview with Tomas, 27 March 2017*

"The Cooperating Telecommunications Industry" comprises a part of everyday telecom geopolitical imaginaries that I call transnational, because they refuse to divide the telecom industry into local and foreign sections and instead describe globally located industry stakeholders as constantly interacting entities that exchange ideas and equipment.

Before delving into this topic, I would like to reflect on my own experiences in the field. Many people from the industry explored its complexities with me because I wanted to learn from them and use their knowledge in my research. I do not idealize the people that I met, because most of them knew that I wanted to speak about their industry in order to gain research-relevant information and that furthermore I would benefit from stories told from their perspectives. Notwithstanding such utilitarian framing, most of my direct, field-based experiences with telecom industry practitioners contrasted the aforementioned hierarchical binary of geopolitical imaginaries

described as "the Self" and "the Others." At times, I remember silently comparing my own academic work environment with that of private telecom companies. I wondered if it could really be true that precarious academic conditions foster development of a less cooperative subjectivity than a stable office job in a corporate, private, profit-oriented telecom sector. Simultaneously, my fieldwork also revealed deeply engrained and prevailing self-criticisms in the industry that are not visible in the self-conscious official rhetoric of technological innovation and development. In their self-descriptions as competitive and lagging alongside "Others" as powerful, modernizing, and patronizing—by developing binary imaginaries of themselves and Others—various field participants illustrated how openly they judge themselves and others as well as the often self-depreciating nature of these judgments. Despite this, in the field where cables are laid, in apartments where the equipment is installed, in offices where production is managed, and even online, via e-mail, most of the field participants answered my never-ending questions and encouraged my research. During those moments, it seemed that binary everyday geopolitics of "us versus them" dissolved in actually visible acts of cooperation. When I linger on this information, it seems only obvious that telecom industry participants are used to cooperating. Equipment used for globally accessible services such as the Internet, the telephone, or the earlier telegraph, had and has to be interconnected; these interconnections must be standardized and maintained in order to carry international data transmission signals. As mentioned in the introductory quote in which an industry expert compares information to gas that flows from one place to another through international physical infrastructure networks, cooperation between international telecom industry stakeholders was also often described as a practical and international daily necessity.

As early as the nineteenth century, the German Siemens Halske company built an electrical telegraph line between St. Petersburg and Warsaw that went through current Lithuanian territory, which at that time was part of the Russian Empire. Later, Siemens also actively supplied equipment to independent inter-war Lithuania's (1918–1940) factories, cinemas, and other institutions. The *Universal Lithuanian Encyclopedia* states that after the Soviet and subsequent Nazi German occupations, Siemens finished its activity in Lithuania in 1941, which it only renewed in 1995.[225] Despite this gap, there are many examples of the Soviet Union's continued cooperation with private telecom companies based in capitalist countries. For example, in 1926 the Soviet Union signed a technical assistance contract for automatic telephony with the Swedish company Ericsson. Historians Kristin Roth-Ey and Larissa Zakharova state that the Soviet Union later questioned this decision and ultimately switched to an automatic, step-by-step Siemens telephone system.[226] Similarly, historians Thomas Haigh and Petri Paju's research about the history of IBM illustrates how IBM maintained its presence in Hungary even after the

225 Mokslo ir enciklopedijų leidybos centras, "Siemens Ag," in *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*, https://www.vle.lt/Straipsnis/Siemens-AG-86173.

226 Kristin Roth-Ey and Larissa Zakharova, "Communications and Media in the USSR and Eastern Europe," *Cahiers du monde russe. Russie-Empire russe-Union soviétique et États indépendants* 56, no. 2–3 (2015), pp. 273–89, https://journals.openedition.org/monderusse/8182#tocto1n1.

country's pro-Soviet turn and the emergence of the Iron Curtain.[227] Sociologist of technology Eglė Rindzevičiūtė's book *The Power of Systems* explores the International Institute of Applied Systems Analysis in Austria, which during the Cold War served as an international collaborative scientific think tank established by the US and Soviet governments.[228] Additionally, during my own fieldwork, cybernetician Gediminas told me that while studying in Moscow he met renowned scientists Norbert Wiener and Claude Shannon at Moscow University, where they gave lectures and participated in conferences.[229] Gediminas stated that Soviet and American academic cooperation continued because cooperation had been always important for scientists, but one should not forget the essential role of intelligence.[230] Politician and academic Aloyzas also exemplified the Soviet Union's internal, inter-republic collaboration through a condescending description of Central Asian Soviet republics. He stated that Lithuania was one of the leading Republics in the Soviet Union because of its telecommunications development and also due to Lithuania's good relationships with the right people in the Soviet Union.[231] He additionally asserted that Lithuanians were trusted with the testing of new telecommunication technologies due to their work quality. Aloyzas posited that "they knew that Lithuanians, if they take the job, they will do it. If they [Soviet Union's government] brought it to somewhere in Central Asia, there [people in Central Asia] would drink it away and break it, and here the job was done—thus, [they] trusted [us]."[232] These signs of telecom market cooperation through business consolidation are also present in today's post-socialist Lithuanian telecommunications market. In 2017, the largest telecom operator, Telia Lietuva, merged with Omnitel, one of the largest telecom providers. This is not unique, but rather fits within a broader trend of the reported consolidation of the European telecommunications industry.[233] Thus, international capitalist, communist, and post-socialist capitalist cooperation has always been part of the global telecom sector.

In contemporary Lithuania, the Communications Regulatory Authority (CRA), a regulatory organ that coordinates national telecommunications network development and international compatibility, secures a seamless flow of information through international workshops and conferences. In these meetings, network regulatory organizations from the European Union as well as representatives from other countries beyond the borders of EU, such as Belarus, Russia, Ukraine, and Georgia, discuss future telecom developments that require neighborly cooperation. Rimas, an employee from CRA, told me that coordination between different nation states in the EU and beyond for radio frequency range allocation is a case in point:

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227 Petri Paju and Thomas Haigh, "IBM Rebuilds Europe: The Curious Case of the Transnational Typewriter," *Enterprise & Society* 17, no. 2 (2016), pp. 265–300.

228 Eglė Rindzevičiūtė, *The Power of Systems* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

229 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

230 Interview with Gediminas, 14 March 2017.

231 Interview with Aloyzas, 7 November 2017.

232 Interview with Aloyzas, 7 November 2017.

233 Živilė Barkauskaitė and Rūta Slušnytė, "Europos telekomunikacijų bendrovės toliau konsoliduojasi," *Verslo Žinios*, updated 16 March 2014, accessed 12 February 2019, https://www.vz.lt/archive/article/2014/3/16/europos-telekomunikaciju-bendroves-toliau-konsoliduojasi.

> [You] drive to Latvia, drive for ten kilometers and you can still talk, it means, in Lithuanian tariffs. It means, the signal passes through. Well, a signal does not recognize borders. . . . it is such an important and difficult job to coordinate station parameters with our neighbors. It happens, coordination takes places, let's say both with Latvians and Belarusians. Also, we have a border with the Polish, and we have a border with the Russians in Kaliningrad Oblast. They have their own systems, thus if we—we would say, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia—we all are members of one, now the European Union . . . then the European Union requirements for Russia, without a doubt, are not valid, because it is not a member of the European Union.[234]

Both regulatory bodies and private telecom operators have to cooperate with equipment providers and Internet companies to develop and upkeep the industry. For example, telecommunications equipment, such as switches or transmission lines, is not produced in Lithuania, thus local telecom companies need to purchase it abroad.[235] According to Aloyzas, during the Soviet period, telecom equipment was usually purchased from friendly states, but an international equipment supply emerged after Lithuania gained independence.[236] In the field I was told that suppliers provide telecom companies not only with equipment, but also with forecasts regarding new technological developments, which are exchanged during conferences and meetings. Lithuania's telecom industry currently buys telecom equipment from Western (Jupiter, Cisco, Ericsson) and East Asian (such as Huawei) companies, although western equipment is more expensive than that from East Asia.[237] In one fieldwork conversation with Telia Lietuva employees, they shared that China attempts to draw in creative western equipment developers and, thus western thinking, into the equipment development process. I provocatively asked how Telia Lietuva workers feel about the fact that their physical telecom network equipment is produced in China, while the owners of their company come from Sweden. Employees seemed agitated, confused, and, perhaps, a bit angry about this question. They stressed the importance of international cooperation:

> The industry is international, and we all cooperate. The Internet is a seedbed of globalization, and we feel that. Equipment is global and high-tech equipment also comes from China. The Chinese have the know-how of production, while programming skills come from the West. Technology is global, in China it costs less to produce it, but it is not 'Chinese' or 'American.' Both telecom industry suppliers and operators take part in the equipment standardization process.[238]

In addition to global cooperation among telecom operators and equipment suppliers, I was told that telecom operators and over-the-top (OTT) service providers also collaborate. One OTT, Google, cooperates with multiple telecom providers worldwide—via locally placed servers, which are located close to the users are also available in Lithuania's cities of Kaunas, Klaipėda, and Vilnius—and in this way cooperate with local tele-

234 Interview with Rimas, 22 March 2017.
235 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 26 June 2017.
236 Interview with Aloyzas, 7 November 2017.
237 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 23 June 2017.
238 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 23 June 2017.

com operators to quickly deliver popular content to Google users.[239] For this reason OTTs and telecom operators work together, although Vakaris from Telia Lietuva told me during my fieldwork that Google protects their image by not naming their specific international telecom operator cooperators.[240]

Not only telecom operators coordinate their work with the OTT providers, but in such an increasingly consolidated industry they also need to coordinate work between their own merged companies. In Telia Lietuva's case, this results in frequent internal debates among Telia Lietuva and their mother company, Telia Company, which is a multinational company located in Sweden. This cooperation transpires during face-to-face meetings and tele-conferences to coordinate international company systems and the development of long-term solutions for tasks, such as organized equipment purchasing or software development.[241] At Telia Lietuva, the company also exchanges information about its situation and plans with Telia Company's daughter companies in other countries, such as Estonia, Finland, Denmark, and others.[242] Employee Gabrielius said, "Now we try strategies which lead to that Telia Company, the whole Telia group, to concentrate around the Baltic Sea, and all the countries and solutions should be as common and useful for all the group around the Baltic Sea as possible."[243] In the field, company workers seemed to enjoy this cooperation. Also Povilas from Telia Lietuva stated:

> It is effective. It is very interesting to learn what other countries in our group—Denmark, Estonia—what they did, how they are doing, what they implemented, that we could take and use it. This is perhaps the most interesting part. Where do the limits of usefulness appear: they [Swedes] are far from our market, used to richer clients and does not see who this Lithuanian client is.[244]

Not only governments and diverse groups of private corporations develop telecom networks together, but many people from various social and ethnic backgrounds have contributed to Lithuania's telecom development. Although Lithuania as a nation state is often conflated with Lithuanian ethnicity, it is important to remember that the development of telecom networks in such a culturally and socially complex environment as Lithuania involves contribution from diverse social and cultural groups. For instance, historian Jonas Rudokas writes about the diversity of workers in 1968 in the computer development department known as *Skaičiavimo mašinų specialus konstravimo biuras* (The Special Department for Computing Machine Construction) at the Soviet Union era Vilnius Computer Factory, whose workers were 63 percent ethnic Lithuanian, 16 percent Russian, 11 percent Jewish, and 10 percent Polish.[245] They produced multiple punch machines and electronic computing machines, such as minicomputers including SM 1700,

239 "Introduction to Ggc," Google, 2020, accessed 17 March 2019, https://support.google.com/interconnect/answer/9058809?hl=en.

240 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 26 June 2017.

241 Fieldwork report, Miglė Bareikytė, 8 March 2018.

242 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 21 February 2018.

243 Interview with Gabrielius, 5 March 2018.

244 Fieldwork report, Bareikytė, 21 February 2018.

245 Jonas Rudokas, *Istorija, kuria galime didžiuotis: Lietuvos liaudies ūkio taryba, 1957–1965* (Vilnius: Gairės, 2002), p. 261.

M500, M5010, M5100, SM1600,[246] and Lithuania's first computer, known as *Rūta*, in 1964.[247] Also, different social groups participated in Lithuania's telecom and Internet development processes, especially students. According to a telecom industry worker, there was a time in the 1990s when the Lithuanian Research and Education Network (LITNET)—which also established the first Internet connections in the country—was highly important to students because it provided their dormitories with an Internet connection and diversified their information access. LITNET was built upon cooperation between people from diverse countries and roles (Lithuanians, Norwegians, professors, and students, among others) from different institutions (universities, governmental institutions, and even commercial telecom operators which rented cables to LITNET). In order to get early access to the Internet through LITNET, students literally used shovels to physically install cables in their dormitories. Vytenis, a telecom company employee, told me a story about the so-called "second barakas," a dormitory at the Kaunas University of Technologies that was famous for its association with Ričardas Baltaduonis, the future director of popular news website Lrytas.lt. Vytenis stated that "with his own hands, and a shovel, he was digging the first fiber-optic cable,"[248] and thus connected university buildings with the university dormitory campus in order to provide students with an Internet connection. Students thus organized and laid data transmission networks from LITNET in their dormitories. Vytenis related that, "a student initiative is always welcome. And that, what is provided by the government, always takes time. Not everyone wanted to wait for so long, and it could have been a couple years of waiting."[249] Since the cables were made of copper, he said that "every autumn or spring, the lightning would start, and . . . each spring everything would burn . . . After a few years of exploitation of the old cable, the government and everyone else decided, that the barracks need to get fiber-optic cable . . ."[250] Vytenis further added that there was a lack of knowledge and funds for establishing the student dormitory Internet connection:

> We needed to build everything from zero then, we did not know what equipment to use. We would buy the *switches* that were very cheap . . . or else there was no money. And Cisco equipment would not have been bought for many more years, so we would buy some Chinese ones, which were burning constantly, and we needed to exchange them constantly . . . It was a hassle, but all of it was a pleasant hassle.[251]

Before the establishment of this connection, most of the student's information came from Russia, but afterwards students suddenly were able to access many new films,

246 Pakštas and Pakštienė, "Networking in Baltic Countries: Current Developments" p. 461; Laimutis Telksnys and Antanas Zilinskas, "Computers in Lithuania," *IEEE Annals of the History of Computing* 21, no. 3 (1999), p. 35.

247 Albertas Čaplinskas and Gintautas Grigas, "Skaičiavimo technika ir programavimas Lietuvoje," in *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*, https://www.vle.lt/Straipsnis/skaiciavimo-technika-ir-programavimas-Lietuvoje-118078.

248 Interview with Vytenis, 21 March 2017.

249 Interview with Vytenis, 21 March 2017.

250 Interview with Vytenis, 21 March 2017.

251 Interview with Vytenis, 21 March 2017.

games, and other content from more sources via file-sharing communities on networks such as IRC or Kobraktu.lt.[252] LITNET thus emerged through cooperative labor between formal academic institutions and their employees, but was also as a network maintained by informal student work. Additionally, when I spent time at Telia Lietuva, I could hear employees speaking English, Lithuanian, Russian, Polish, and Swedish. Often people in hierarchically higher positions, such as managers, would include English buzzwords in their daily communication, but I also heard Lithuanian, Polish, and Russian on a daily basis. This is not to say that such diverse cooperation took place without any internal conflicts,[253] but it is important to emphasize that in the local Lithuanian context, telecommunications networks resulted from the labor practices of a complex socio-cultural group of people.

In short, public and private companies and multiple diverse groups of people cooperate to secure the transnational flow of signals. Illustrations above exemplify that this cooperation between telecom industry stakeholders is a well-established historical practice that has comprised states, private companies, academia, and individuals in order to form an imaginary of Lithuania's local telecom industry as transnational and part of global interactions. Accordingly, a part of local telecom industry stakeholders in the field did not describe their activities through the framework of binary imaginaries ("we versus the Others" as modernizing, competing, etc.), but worked against sharp identification through the notion of transnational cooperation. In such transnational geopolitical imaginaries, divisions between "we" and "the Others" shrank, while territorially unbounded imaginaries of cooperation rose. By and large, telecom industry geopolitical imaginaries of cooperation complicate narratives of starkly divided local and foreign telecom industries. This chapter illustrates that local telecom industry participants not only imagine geopolitics through binary categories in their descriptions of the roles of foreign actors and themselves in developing and maintaining the telecom industry; the examples above bring about the plausible conclusion that some local industry stakeholders—private companies, academia, governmental institutions—also perceive themselves as cooperating with each other in order to maintain an international flow of data, share resources, and explore and develop new networking technologies. Such imaginaries of cooperation include laborers from various cultural and social backgrounds, yet it is important not to forget that today such borderless cooperation takes place in a capitalist market economy—although this does not mean that all media technologies are driven by the market. As media scholar Dwayne Winseck argues in an essay on global media industries, media technology development also depends on nonmarket logics that are eventually integrated into their development:

> In other words, digital network media are immersed within the market, but they also enable and depend upon forms of expression that are not market driven. These ideas

252 Interview with Vytenis, 21 March 2017.

253 E.g., historian Justan Stončius has studied and shown that antisemitism existed in the Soviet Union and Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic as an everyday phenomenon and through the Soviet statist critique of Zionism (Justas Stončius, "Antisemitizmo raida sovietinėje Lietuvoje," *Darbai ir dienos*, no. 68 (2017); Justas Stončius, "Anti-semitism in Soviet Lithuania in the Period 1944–1990," (PhD diss. summary, Klaipėda University, 2018).)

> line up well with Benkler's concept of the 'social production of information' and what others call 'gift culture', the 'digital commons', and 'mass self-expression' (Andrejevic 2007; Castells 2009)—an amalgamation of which I call the 'social ecology of information' . . . These ideas also fit well with the cultural industries school's emphasis on how the uncertainty and habits of people's lives and patterns of media use erect strong barriers to the complete commodification of media and culture.[254]

This fits well with interviewee Donata's argument that the telecom industry is competitive, yet its sense of competition has always been interwoven with cooperation.[255] Thus, this cooperation served to help consumers and prospective employees get interested in and connected to media technology products.

In the transnational geopolitical imaginaries, the telecom industry emerges as a space that could not endure in an ever-changing geopolitical world without transnational cooperation. Without this cooperation, data flow would stop, radio transmissions would break down, and new technological developments would recede. However, imaginaries of cooperation do not exclude daily, binary, identity-based geopolitics; sometimes the same people made statements regarding both transnational and binary-based imaginaries. Thus, all of the shared imaginaries mutually frame the field of Internet as infrastructure, but imaginaries of cooperating telecom industry stakeholders constitute an important part of the field utterances. These geopolitical imaginaries narrate telecom industry stakeholders' actions as a result of a seamless network of cooperation, border-crossing, international, and local collaboration amongst different social groups that all work for the main goal: to secure international telecommunications operations. Cooperation thus does not erase experienced and imagined cultural and geographic differences, but it stresses an imaginary that is built upon the importance of local and global interactions crucial to maintaining global telecom industry networks.

254 Dwayne Winseck, "Introductory Essay: The Political Economies of Media and the Transformation of the Global Media Industries," p. 4.

255 Interview with Donata, 27 March 2018.

3.4 Chapter Conclusions: Geopolitical Imaginaries

> [F]or Eastern Europeans, the end of the Soviet Empire has only reinforced, as we have seen, a suspicion of all forms of systematic thought that had originated in Europe and had served to legitimate the totalitarian system of which they were the victims.
> *Karlis Račevskis, "Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States"*[256]

Sociologist Zygmunt Bauman once explored the concept of the stranger. Bauman states that strangers "are, in principle, undecidables. They are that 'third element' which should not be. The true hybrids, the monsters: not just unclassified, but unclassifiable. They therefore do not question this open opposition here and now: they question oppositions as such, the very principle of the opposition."[257] In this quote from Bauman's 1990 "Modernity and Ambivalence," the concept of the stranger is positively connoted via the implication that complex grey zones of strange ambivalence belong to and construct modernity. In this context, geopolitical imaginaries of telecom industry stakeholders create an overall imaginary of what I call "strange geopolitics." In this chapter, I map situated geopolitical imaginaries through the frequent reoccurrence of fieldwork-based stories, beliefs, and perceptions, which expressed various geopolitically charged roles of multiple actors, and thus implied dependencies and tensions regarding their roles in developing the Internet in Lithuania. I title these fieldwork-based geopolitical imaginaries "strange," because akin to Bauman's "strangers," they go beyond a realist geopolitical narrative of territorially distributed friend and enemy politics (which I explore in-depth in "Internet as Infrastructure: Conceptual Openings") by conveying complex contradictory geopolitical imaginaries on the ground that do not result in a cohesive, logical, rational narratives about oneself or "Others." In particular, strange geopolitical imaginaries concerned with the telecommunications industry, and thus Internet development, question clear oppositions between "us" and "the Others" through the creation of a third category: "cooperation." Even if binary categories of "us" and "the Others" were considered in isolation, they would still comprise internal contradictions in which "us" and "the Others" are simultaneously praised and criticized. Thus, the Internet as infrastructure in Lithuania is framed by strange geopolitics on the ground that question conceptual boundaries of realist geopolitics, according to which one state follows one geopolitical narrative, and present perspectives on the ground that tickle the boundaries of realist geopolitical narratives.

I focus on strange geopolitical imaginaries shared during my 2017 to 2018 fieldwork by multiple telecom industry stakeholders. I do not argue that these views represent official state policies or media reproductions, because that was not the focus of my field-

256 Karlis Račevskis, "Toward a Postcolonial Perspective on the Baltic States," in *Baltic Postcolonialism*, ed. Violeta Kelertas (Amsterdam: Brill | Rodopi, 2006), p. 172.

257 Bauman, "Modernity and Ambivalence," p. 148.

work. I focus on one community of practice comprised of public and private telecom industry-related stakeholders: government officials, academics, and private telecom industry workers. I thus do not discern their perspectives according to their position in the telecom industry, but rather perceive them as members of a key community of practice in the realm of Internet infrastructure.

Internet as infrastructure in Lithuania is thus framed by specific geopolitical imaginaries produced by telecommunications industry stakeholders, which I explore as "Modernizing," "Helping," "Patronizing," "Competing," "Transforming," "Lagging," and "Cooperating." I ordered these imaginaries under the terms "the Others," "the Self," and "The Cooperating Telecommunications Industry," and posit them as means to learn about how specific imaginaries frame the Internet as infrastructure development on the ground. In particular, these groupings provide insight into how local telecom industry stakeholders see foreign telecom industry actors as more advanced, helping and concomitantly looking down on the Lithuanian telecom industry. They also illustrate how the local telecom industry perceives itself as proper capitalist competitors in constant transformation and adaptation although lacking in global impact. Despite these imaginaries and their tensions, they also exemplify how the local telecom industry also perceives the telecommunications business as a transnational undertaking upheld by the cooperation of various political, business, and civil society actors.

Thus, this focus on geopolitical imaginaries allows an exploration of Lithuania's particular case and addresses the broader complexity of infrastructure. In short, Internet as infrastructure encompasses not only everyday labor practices that uphold its maintenance, but also the input from key stakeholders that serves to geopoliticize its development.

I use the term "strange geopolitical imaginaries" to describe a telecom field made up of fragmented narratives of identity-based and transnational imaginaries that result in conflicting evaluations of the roles and type of interactions between foreign and local telecom stakeholders. These imaginaries circulate around different historical phases of Lithuania's Internet development, such as the early post-socialist emergence of international data transmission networks in the 1990s, the liberalization of the telecom sector in 2003, Lithuania's accession to the EU and NATO in 2004, and the development of the current telecom industry.

According to an identity-based imaginaries, "the Others"—business companies, governments, and nongovernmental organizations—were described by locals as more advanced, profit-seeking, and exploitative, but also as actors who helped develop the local telecom industry. Locals described themselves as competitive, small, and underdeveloped, yet flexible and capable of enduring hardships. These imaginaries thus comprise an image of contradictory everyday geopolitics, a strange geopolitics, in which it is not clear if the mainly Western European and US based telecom industry participants involved in past telecommunications developments are currently perceived as friends or foes and whether the local telecom industry sees itself as irrelevant and weak, or flexible and strong.

In contrast to identity-based imaginaries, the imaginary of "cooperation" comprises an alternative telecom geopolitical imaginary of transnationalism. According to this narrative, there are no binaries, no "us" or "the Others," because telecom market partic-

ipants were told to have always cooperated. Similarly, in his treatment of cosmopolitan risk society as a result of globalization, sociologist Ulrich Beck argues that global risks generate "'compulsory cosmopolitanism', a 'glue' for diversity and plurality in a world whose boundaries are as porous as a Swiss cheese . . ."[258] Moreover, Beck claims that this new cosmopolitan transnational risk society "dissolves the identity of subject and reflection."[259] This second, transnational geopolitical imaginary aims to dissolve borders between "us" and "the Others" and stands in contrast to identity-based modernist geopolitical narratives. In this imaginary, local actors and their foreign industry stakeholder counterparts dissolve into a seamless network of global cooperation in which binary identities are exchanged for transnational interactions.

What results from these examples? They comprise the coexistence of strange, contradictory geopolitical imaginaries: of binary-identity and non-identity geopolitics of telecommunications, of a modernist "East-West slope,"[260] and transnationalist imaginaries. In short, such geopolitical imaginaries are not statist. They do not designate one clear national geopolitical imaginary within Lithuania's telecom industry, a categorization that is usually undertaken in realist geopolitical debates through the claim that Lithuania is either a buffer state between the West and Russia, a pro-western European Union periphery or a site of a telecom market that thrives as a result of either western imperialism or national achievement. When observed from the perspective of fieldwork, the geopolitical imaginaries produced by key local telecom industry stakeholders include more actors than usual: they were not only comprised of the local Lithuanian state or Google and Facebook's control of Lithuania's Internet development, but also include different European states, various actors, and contradictory evaluations of their involvement. Thus in Lithuania, universal and specific, modernist and cosmopolitan logics mix and maintain strange geopolitical imaginaries. Strange geopolitical imaginaries paint an image similar to that of political analyst Marius Laurinavičius's argument that Lithuania as a state finds itself in a zone of ambivalence due to its geographic and historical legacies.[261] They also question any stable realist statist geopolitical imaginary: imaginaries on the ground are messier, queerer, and thus more democratic than any one narrative could convey.

Although all of these examples are from my field research, there is still the question of the relation between these imaginaries and practice of infrastructuring. I posit that such complex imaginaries frame the Internet maintenance field of practice and convey another aspect of the Internet as infrastructure. These geopolitical imaginaries thus expand the perspective of Internet as infrastructure as a sole result of infrastructuring, or its maintenance through complex everyday labor practices. The Internet as infrastructure has to be produced and maintained, but in the field it is also framed by multiple geopolitical imaginaries that explain its various roles and tensions and also possibly shape its development. Lithuanian telecom industry's situated geopolitics is strange; it

258 Ulrich Beck, "Critical Theory of World Risk Society: a Cosmopolitan Vision," *Constellations* 16, no. 1 (2009), p. 4.

259 Beck, "Critical Theory of World Risk Society," p. 12.

260 Melegh, *On the East-West Slope*, p. 39.

261 Laurinavičius, Motieka, and Statkus, *Baltijos valstybių geopolitikos bruožai. XX amžius*, p. 25.

comprises a site where transnational and binary logics co-exist in the field but cannot be assimilated. Such an ambiguous imaginary of strange geopolitics thus shows how a post-socialist country continues to live through internal geopolitical contradictions in which where "the West" is longed for and criticized, the self is praised and despised, and "the East" or the Soviet Union is dissociated, but emerges unexpectedly in the present.

Strange geopolitical imaginaries are a means of distancing this research from understanding media technology development as the sole result of nationalist or foreign imperialist activity. A focus on particular everyday geopolitics allows this research to question the geopolitical assumption that one nation state has only one geopolitical identity as well as the assumption that technology development and maintenance only comprise situated practices. In this context, the question may arise as to why one should care about all of post-socialist Lithuania's complexities. I argue that these complexities are relevant because they contribute new conceptualizations, such as strange geopolitical imaginaries, to the field of infrastructure studies by exploring situated specificities of media technology development not only from a position of ahistorical universality or a sole "Western" experience, but also by "looking elsewhere,"[262] in this case to Lithuania's telecom industry. In this chapter I thus explore how a particular form of modernistic and cosmopolitan imaginaries merge in Lithuania's telecom sector, and how geopolitical imaginaries situate the Internet as infrastructure through common geopolitical stories on the ground. In the upcoming and last empirical chapter, "Critical Negotiations," I illustrate how the Internet as infrastructure is not only infrastructured through everyday labor practices, nor only framed through geopolitical imaginaries, but how it is also immersed in ongoing critical negotiations that become explicit during crucial changes in the industry.

262 By looking elsewhere, I mean quite literally looking into neglected places, but also exploring them with a situated and thus specific focus (e.g., Jason Hughes, "Looking Elsewhere," pp. 769–787).