Institute of European Right

COMMENTARY

Europe's Boundaries: Enlargement in an Era of War and Alliances

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> On April 10-12, in Tallinn, a forum titled „Europe's Boundaries: Enlargement in an Era of War and Alliances" was held, organized by the Institute of European Right and the International Republican Institute. It was attended by subject experts from Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova. This memo has been prepared based on the presentations and discussions that took place during the event with Chatham house rules in place."

UKRAINE – CANDIDATE STATUS AND ADVANCING REFORMS DURING WARTIME

Introduction to Ukraine's EU Integration Efforts

Ukraine's journey toward European Union (EU) integration is a testament to the country's resilience, strategic reforms, and public and governmental commitment, even in the face of the most challenging circumstances. The EU integration process for Ukraine has been characterised by a significant legislative and reformative push aimed at aligning the nation's standards with those of the EU, particularly in pivotal areas such as energy efficiency and anti-corruption measures.

The integration efforts traced back to widespread public demonstrations advocating for closer ties with the EU, which eventually evolved into a comprehensive governmental agenda to achieve EU association. This historical backdrop set the stage for a series of reforms, aiming to overhaul various sectors to meet the EU's stringent requirements.

A key aspect of Ukraine's integration efforts has been adopting a substantial legislative framework strategically designed to foster energy efficiency and combat corruption. These reforms were essential for meeting EU criteria and advancing Ukraine's domestic agenda for sustainable development and transparent governance.

Institutional Developments and Legislative Reforms

The institutional landscape in Ukraine underwent significant changes to streamline the EU integration process. This involved the establishment of new constitutional amendments and the creation of specialised governmental positions dedicated to overseeing the integration efforts.

One critical challenge in the integration process has been coordinating legislative efforts across various sectors. This process involved multiple stakeholders, including governmental bodies, non-governmental organisations, and international partners, working to ensure that Ukraine's laws and regulations align with EU standards.

Strategic innovations and collaborations have characterised Ukraine's approach to overcoming bureaucratic and legislative hurdles. Notably, the 'self-screen' initiative stands out as an innovative measure that expedited the alignment of Ukrainian laws with EU norms, showcasing Ukraine's proactive stance in navigating the complexities of the integration process.

Challenges and Adaptations Amidst Russia's War

The ongoing Russia's war against Ukraine has necessitated significant adjustments in the approach to reforms and EU integration. Despite the immense challenges posed by the war, Ukraine has demonstrated remarkable resilience and innovation in sustaining its reform and integration efforts. The war has catalysed the adoption of unique strategies, including delegating specific tasks to non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and fostering international collaborations to ensure the continuity of critical reforms.

The war has compelled the Ukrainian government and civil society to adopt innovative approaches to continue the reform process. This includes leveraging the expertise and resources of NGOs and international partners to fill gaps caused by the conflict. An example of this innovation is the 'self-screen' initiative, where Ukraine undertook a comprehensive internal review of its legislation to expedite alignment with EU norms, showcasing Ukraine's proactive stance in navigating the complexities of the integration process.

The collaboration with international partners has been instrumental in supporting Ukraine's reform agenda during the war. The financial aid, technical assistance, and diplomatic backing from the EU and other allies have bolstered Ukraine's capacity to continue its reform initiatives and reinforced the international community's unwavering commitment to Ukraine's EU aspirations.

Anti-Corruption Measures

Ukraine has recently revamped its anti-corruption framework significantly, showcasing a commitment to transparency and accountability. This commitment has been pivotal in Ukraine's efforts toward EU integration, particularly in dispelling outdated stereotypes of pervasive corruption.

Ukraine's anti-corruption strategy has been marked by the establishment of robust institutions and reforms, including the National Anti-Corruption Bureau (NABU) and the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO). These bodies investigate and prosecute corruption, signalling a structural approach to combating the issue. Laws have been enacted to enhance public access to information, protect whistleblowers, and improve the transparency of public procurement processes through initiatives like the *ProZorro* e-procurement system.

It is essential to recognise that corruption exists across all states, including EU member states. The narrative that Ukraine is singularly "corrupt" is increasingly viewed as an outdated stereotype. Efforts have been made to openly disclose instances of corruption, supported by a robust anti-corruption infrastructure, including dedicated bodies for investigation and prosecution and journalistic efforts to bring such issues to light. This openness and establishment of mechanisms for transparency and accountability are significant steps in changing the narrative around corruption in Ukraine.

Despite significant advancements in establishing an anti-corruption framework, challenges persist, including resistance from entrenched interests and the need for ongoing reform and adaptation. However, Ukraine's proactive approach to combating corruption, including innovative strategies

and international collaborations, has been recognised, with improvements in global corruption perception indices indicating a positive trajectory.

EU Integration Process and Diplomatic Engagements

Ukraine's EU integration process has been significantly shaped by its diplomatic efforts to secure the endorsement and support of EU member states for its candidate status. These diplomatic initiatives have been critical, especially given the complex political dynamics within the EU and the ongoing war in the region.

Ukraine has actively sought to build alliances within the EU, engaging in bilateral and multilateral discussions to present its case for integration. This has involved highlighting Ukraine's strategic importance to the EU, its commitment to democratic values, and the mutual benefits of Ukraine's accession to the EU. High-level meetings, diplomatic visits, and participation in EU forums have been pivotal in this endeavour.

Despite facing diverse political perspectives within the EU, Ukraine has made significant strides in securing endorsements for its EU aspirations. This success can be attributed to Ukraine's ability to articulate its mutual strategic interests and commitment to undertaking necessary reforms. These diplomatic efforts have resulted in tangible support, including financial aid, technical assistance, and political backing for Ukraine's EU candidacy.

International Support and Collaboration

The international community's support has been crucial in enabling Ukraine to navigate the challenges posed by the war. Financial aid, technical assistance, and diplomatic backing from the EU and its partners have bolstered Ukraine's capacity to continue its reform agenda. This collaboration underscores the recognition of Ukraine's strategic importance and the shared commitment to its successful integration into the EU.

A global network of support and collaboration has significantly bolstered Ukraine's relentless pursuit of reforms and EU integration. This international backing has played a crucial role in sustaining Ukraine's momentum towards EU integration, even amidst the challenges of ongoing conflict and the need for extensive reforms across various sectors.

International partners have provided a broad spectrum of support, from diplomatic backing and technical assistance to financial aid. This multifaceted assistance has been vital in facilitating Ukraine's continued progress on the reform agenda necessary for EU integration. The collaboration has extended beyond mere financial support, encompassing expert guidance, capacity-building initiatives, and advocacy on international platforms, thereby amplifying Ukraine's efforts towards meeting EU standards and requirements.

International support has been extended through comprehensive assistance programs, targeted initiatives aimed at specific sectors, and high-level diplomatic engagements. These mechanisms have been designed to address immediate needs and long-term strategic objectives, ensuring that Ukraine's path towards EU integration is supported at every step.

Future Outlook and Strategic Recommendations

As Ukraine continues its journey towards EU integration, a forward-looking strategy that considers the current geopolitical context and the ongoing need for reform is essential. The future actions and strategies recommendations aim to further Ukraine's EU integration aspirations, ensure sustained progress, and align with EU standards.

The importance of continuing with the reform agenda cannot be overstated. Despite the challenges posed by the war, Ukraine must maintain its focus on implementing crucial reforms, particularly in areas such as anti-corruption, judicial reform, and economic restructuring. These reforms are not only vital for EU integration but also for strengthening Ukraine's governance and resilience.

Ukraine should continue to actively engage with and leverage the support of its international partners. This includes seeking financial and technical assistance and advocating for Ukraine's integration into the EU on global platforms. Strengthening diplomatic relations and building alliances within the EU will be vital in securing support for Ukraine's candidate status and eventual membership.

A strategic approach to diplomacy and communication is essential. Ukraine must effectively communicate its progress and achievements in the reform process domestically and internationally. Highlighting successes and demonstrating commitment to EU values can help garner further support and counter any narratives that may undermine Ukraine's EU aspirations.

MOLDOVA – THE STATUS QUO OF THE REFORMS AND MAIN CHALLENGES

EU Integration Process and Political Commitment

Moldova's journey toward EU integration embodies a political resolve that transcends the boundaries of its modest geographical size. The narrative of Moldova's EU aspiration commenced with a collective decision by the nation's political elite, heralding a new chapter of progression in its relationship with the EU. The formal request for EU accession, lodged in March 2022, marked a significant milestone, evidencing Moldova's commitment to aligning with European standards and values.

By June 2022, Moldova had achieved a pivotal moment in its integration journey—securing candidate status, a testament to its persistent endeavours and the EU's acknowledgement of them. This accomplishment was followed by the European Commission's decision in December 2023 to initiate the negotiation process, underscoring the mutual interest of Moldova's accession to the EU.

The political class's determination to pursue EU integration reflects a broader societal consensus, recognising EU membership as a conduit to stability, prosperity, and democratic governance. The constitutional referendum initiative further illustrates this collective aspiration, which aims to embed Moldova's European trajectory into the national fabric, ensuring its continuity beyond the vicissitudes of political changes.

Strategic Framework and Implementation Plans

Moldova's strategic approach to EU integration is underpinned by a comprehensive framework encompassing key policy documents and action plans. The Association Agreement, ratified in 2014, laid the groundwork for enhanced cooperation, further elaborated in the Association Agenda for 2019-2027. These documents delineate a roadmap for reforms and alignment with EU norms, spanning various sectors and governance levels.

The National Plan for Accession and an elaborate action plan comprising over a thousand targeted actions epitomize Moldova's systematic and inclusive approach to integration. This action plan mobilizes various stakeholders, including governmental institutions, civil society, and the international community, ensuring a cohesive effort toward achieving EU membership.

International Support and Collaboration

Substantial international support has buoyed Moldova's EU integration efforts, reflecting the global community's interest in Moldova's stability and prosperity. This support encompasses financial aid, technical assistance, and strategic advice, facilitating the implementation of necessary reforms and capacity-building initiatives.

The EU has been a cornerstone of this support, providing over 1 billion euros in aid since October 2021. This assistance has been instrumental in addressing immediate challenges, such as refugee flows and energy security, while also contributing to long-term development goals. Moreover, partnerships with UN agencies and countries like Romania, Germany, and the USA have bolstered Moldova's institutional capacities and resilience.

Legislative and Institutional Reforms

Moldova's strategic approach to EU integration encompasses an array of legislative and institutional reforms, aiming to align its governance structures, legal frameworks, and administrative procedures with European standards.

A cornerstone of Moldova's reform agenda has been the overhaul of its justice system. This initiative aims to enhance the integrity, independence, and effectiveness of judicial institutions, thereby instilling public trust and meeting one of the crucial benchmarks set by the European Union. Establishing a functional Superior Council of the Judiciary and appointing members through a transparent and merit-based process underscores Moldova's endeavours to depoliticise and professionalise its judiciary.

Parallel to judicial reforms, Moldova has vigorously pursued measures to combat corruption, recognising its corrosive impact on governance and public trust. The operationalisation of specialised anti-corruption bodies, alongside legislative measures to protect whistleblowers and improve public procurement transparency, signifies Moldova's resolve to root out corruption. These efforts are complemented by a functional needs assessment of anti-corruption institutions to enhance their capacity and effectiveness.

Reforming the public administration sector has been pivotal in Moldova's pursuit of EU integration. Adopting a new public administration reform strategy focused on digitisation and enhancing citizen engagement reflects a forward-looking approach to governance. Concurrently, electoral reforms, informed by recommendations from international observers, have been undertaken to ensure the integrity and fairness of the electoral process.

Challenges and Geopolitical Considerations

Moldova's EU integration journey is intricately linked to its geopolitical context, particularly the challenges posed by the Transnistria and Gagauzia regions. These regions' distinct political and cultural dynamics and open Russia's physical and hybrid coercion represent complex challenges to Moldova's sovereignty and territorial integrity, influencing its foreign policy and EU integration trajectory.

The situation in Transnistria, marked by separatist tendencies and Russia's influences, necessitates a nuanced approach that balances hard diplomatic engagement with safeguarding national sovereignty. Similarly, with its unique cultural and political landscape, the Gagauzia region requires a tailored approach that respects its autonomy while ensuring full alignment with national and EU standards.

Moldova's strategic orientation towards the EU occurs within a broader geopolitical landscape marked by competing influences. Navigating these dynamics, particularly Russia's historical and ongoing influences, is pivotal for Moldova's foreign policy and EU aspirations. Therefore, Moldova's commitment to EU integration entails a diplomatic balancing act, wherein it must assert its sovereign choices while managing Russia's anti-EU agenda and other complex regional and international relationships.

ARMENIA – ACCESSION PROGRESS IN THE CONTEXT OF REGIONAL CRISIS

Overview of Armenia's EU Integration and Regional Challenges

Armenia's journey towards European integration is deeply entwined with its complex regional context and historical resilience. This chapter outlines Armenia's progressive yet challenging path towards EU membership, marked by geopolitical pressures and internal reforms. The nation's historical engagement with Europe began significantly in 2007 by establishing foundational agreements that set the stage for deeper cooperation.

The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement defined Armenia's early interactions with the EU, which later evolved into more comprehensive frameworks such as the Eastern Partnership in 2009. Armenia's commitment was evident from its active participation in these initiatives, which aimed for enhanced political and economic integration with the EU.

Armenia's EU aspirations were notably disrupted in 2013 when external pressures, mainly from Russia, coerced a shift in its foreign policy trajectory—from pursuing an Association Agreement with the EU to joining the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). This pivot altered its immediate inte-

gration plans and sparked significant public unrest, reflecting widespread dissatisfaction and highlighting the nation's struggle for geopolitical autonomy.

Progress in EU Integration Initiatives

Armenia has reinvigorated its EU integration efforts despite earlier setbacks, demonstrating substantial progress through strategic reforms and alignment with EU standards. This chapter details the milestones achieved in renewing and strengthening Armenia's commitment to European integration, mainly through the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which came into force partially in 2018 and entirely in 2021.

The CEPA represents a pivotal element in Armenia's EU integration, encompassing various reforms and regulatory alignments. Notably, Armenia has established an interagency committee to oversee the implementation of CEPA, involving key governmental stakeholders. This body plays a critical role in synchronizing national legislation with EU norms, a process detailed in a comprehensive roadmap comprising over 300 specific actions.

Substantial reforms under CEPA have catalysed changes across various sectors, including justice, governance, and anti-corruption. These reforms comply with EU expectations and enhance Armenia's domestic administrative capacities and governance quality. Furthermore, the political dialogue between Armenia and the EU has deepened, reflecting a mutual commitment to navigating the integration challenges.

These chapters encapsulate Armenia's resilient pursuit of European integration within a challenging regional landscape.

Geopolitical Challenges and External Influences

Armenia's strategic orientation towards the EU is heavily influenced by the geopolitical dynamics of its region, which includes the direct and indirect involvement of neighbouring countries and regional powers.

Armenia is at the crossroads of regional interactions involving several significant powers, including Russia, Turkey, and Iran. Each state has historically influenced Armenia's political and economic decisions, significantly shaping its foreign policy. The geopolitical tension escalated around 2013 when Armenia was pressured to join the Eurasian Economic Union, highlighting the delicate balance it must maintain among competing regional interests.

The influence of external powers has necessitated a cautious approach to international relations and integration policies. Under Russian pressure, Armenia's decision to pivot towards the Eurasian Economic Union marked a significant shift in its international alignment, temporarily derailing its EU accession plans. This shift was met with widespread public dissent, illustrating the population's preference for closer ties with the European Union.

Institutional Reforms and Public Sentiment

In response to internal demands and the prerequisites set forth by the EU, Armenia has embarked on a series of institutional reforms to align its governance structures with EU standards.

One of the core areas of reform has been the judicial system, where efforts have been made to increase transparency and reduce corruption. These reforms are crucial for satisfying EU requirements and restoring public trust in governmental institutions. Initiatives have included restructuring judicial oversight bodies and enhancing legal frameworks to combat corruption effectively.

Public sentiment in Armenia has played a critical role in steering the country towards European integration. The Velvet Revolution of 2018, driven by widespread demand for democratic reforms and anti-corruption measures, marked a significant turning point. This popular movement led to a government change and renewed the focus on EU-aligned reforms. The public's continued engagement and support for EU integration are vital to Armenia's reformative agenda.

Future Outlook and Strategic Planning

Armenia seeks to deepen its relationships within the European framework through strategic agreements beyond the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA). These efforts include negotiations for new partnerships that could give Armenia a more significant foothold in the European market. The focus is on creating beneficial agreements that respect Armenia's sovereignty and regional position.

One key aspect of Armenia's future strategic planning involves enhancing its economic integration with the EU. This includes efforts to secure better market access for Armenian products, which would be crucial for the country's financial health. Discussions about adopting measures similar to the Generalized Scheme of Preferences (GSP Plus) indicate a move towards improving trade relations and easing export to EU markets, which is vital for Armenia's economic diversification and growth.

Armenia also enhances its political and socio-economic resilience by aligning more closely with EU standards and practices. This includes implementing reforms in critical areas such as judiciary, public administration, and anti-corruption measures. The EU's readiness to support Armenia with a substantial financial package, as evidenced by recent commitments, is a strong indication of the EU's support for Armenia's reformative and integrative efforts.

Strategically, Armenia continues to navigate its relationships with neighbouring powers while advocating for its interests within the European framework. The delicate balance involves engaging constructively with regional powers and utilising the EU's support to bolster its standing and independence in regional matters. This strategic navigation ensures that Armenia can pursue its European aspirations without exacerbating regional tensions or compromising its security.

The future outlook for Armenia's EU integration is cautiously optimistic. It involves a complex interplay of advancing internal reforms, securing beneficial external agreements, and effectively managing geopolitical challenges. As Armenia continues to align more closely with EU standards and

seeks deeper integration, the nation looks toward a future where its European path could bring stability, prosperity, and enhanced regional influence.

FINLAND AND SWEDEN – WHAT DOES NATO EXPANSION MEAN FOR EUROPE'S NORTHEASTERN BORDER

Introduction to Finland's Strategic Culture and Military Alliances

Finland's strategic culture has long been defined by a doctrine of self-reliance and military non-alignment, which distinguishes it from its Scandinavian neighbours. This distinction became increasingly significant as both nations pursued NATO membership amidst Russia's war against Ukraine.

Historically, Finland has cultivated a robust national defence strategy focused on territorial integrity without assuming external military assistance. In contrast, Sweden's strategic posture has relied on the presumption of support from major allies like the United States in times of conflict, particularly against potential aggression from Russia.

Recent geopolitical shifts, notably Russia's war in Ukraine and increasing assertiveness in the Baltic region, have necessitated a reevaluation of Finland's strategic stance. The session highlighted Finland's transition towards a more alliance-oriented posture, reflecting its NATO membership aspirations and the need to enhance its strategic depth and deterrence capabilities.

Impact of Finnish and Swedish NATO Membership

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO represents a pivotal shift in the security landscape of Northern Europe, altering the strategic calculus for Russia and enhancing NATO's operational scope. From Russia's perspective, the expansion of NATO into Finland and Sweden significantly alters its strategic environment. The session pointed out that the presence of NATO members along its border introduces new military and geopolitical challenges for Russia, compelling it to reconsider its postures and strategies in the Baltic region and beyond.

For NATO, the inclusion of Finland and Sweden extends its territorial reach. It integrates their advanced military capabilities and infrastructures, such as airfields and strategic islands, into broader regional defence plans. This enhances NATO's ability to project power and secure its interests across the Baltic Sea and the Arctic regions.

Geopolitical Challenges and Regional Security Dynamics

The strategic placement of Finland and Sweden in the Baltic region introduces unique geopolitical challenges, particularly with the increased responsibilities following their NATO memberships. These challenges revolve around maintaining regional security in the face of potential Russian aggression and ensuring the integrity of NATO's supply lines.

The Baltic Sea serves as a critical arena where NATO and Russian interests intersect, particularly with Russia's increasing military and hybrid threats. The session highlighted concerns about Russia's capabilities to disrupt NATO's maritime operations, including potential hybrid threats similar to the Nord Stream 2 pipeline sabotage. This underscores the importance of robust defence strategies and regional cooperation to secure naval routes and ensure regional stability.

With the accession to NATO, Finland and Sweden bring strategic military assets that enhance NATO's defensive posture in Northern Europe. The integration of their advanced military technologies and infrastructures, such as airfields and the strategic position of the Åland Islands, significantly bolsters NATO's capability to respond to threats. This strategic enhancement aids in forming a cohesive defence strategy across the Nordic countries, fortifying the entire region against potential adversaries.

Military and Defense Infrastructure Developments

As new NATO members, Finland and Sweden are pivotal in the Alliance's plans to enhance infrastructure and logistics across Northern Europe. This development is crucial not only for peacetime preparedness but also for ensuring effective response capabilities during crises.

The session discussed the strategic importance of Finnish and Swedish airfields and other military installations, which play vital roles in NATO's defence strategy. These infrastructures are essential for the rapid deployment of forces, logistics support, and execution of military operations across Europe, especially in reinforcing NATO's eastern borders.

One of the critical challenges highlighted was the need for improved logistical interconnectivity between the Nordic countries. The discussion pointed out that most transportation routes are oriented north-south, which does not align with the strategic military need for east-west connections. Addressing this misalignment requires significant investments in infrastructure to ensure that military and humanitarian aid can be transported efficiently in times of crisis or war.

Future Defense Strategies and Cooperation

Including Finland and Sweden in NATO strengthens the Alliance and opens up new possibilities for regional cooperation. These countries bring to NATO unique geographical advantages and military capabilities that are pivotal in the Baltic Sea region. Future strategies may involve more integrated defence plans with neighbouring countries, increased joint military exercises, and sharing of critical intelligence, thereby strengthening the overall security architecture of Northern Europe.

Given the complex security environment, NATO may need to adopt more flexible and dynamic defence strategies that can quickly adapt to changing threats. This includes the development of rapid response teams, enhanced cyber defence capabilities, and strategies to counter hybrid threats that effectively blend conventional warfare, cyber attacks, and misinformation campaigns.

Conclusion and Strategic Recommendations

One key recommendation is strengthening NATO's eastern flank through enhanced military presence and infrastructure development in Finland and Sweden. This could involve the construction of new bases, upgrading existing military facilities, and improving logistical networks to support rapid military deployment and operations.

Additionally, Finland and Sweden should engage in proactive diplomacy within NATO to ensure that their security concerns and strategic interests are adequately addressed in the Alliance's overall strategy. This includes advocating for policies and initiatives that enhance mutual security and defence capabilities and actively participating in NATO decision-making processes.

Continuous modernisation of military capabilities and sustained investment in defence infrastructure are crucial to keeping pace with evolving security threats. Finland and Sweden should leverage their technological advancements and robust defence industries to contribute to NATO's collective defence capabilities.

BALTIC STATES – PATH TO THE EU: REFLECTIONS ON THE ROAD TO THE EU. RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE EASTERN PARTNERS

Introduction to EU Integration Process: Historical Context

The journey of Lithuania and Latvia toward European Union membership encapsulates a significant period in European history, marked by the post-Cold War realignment and the expansion of the EU. These nations' aspirations to join the EU were fuelled by their desire for economic stability, political recognition, and security assurances.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent independence of Baltic states created a geopolitical vacuum that both Lithuania and Latvia sought to fill through integration with Western institutions. The EU represented a political and economic alliance and a crucial part of their national security strategy against potential Russian influence or aggression.

All three Baltic countries began their journey towards the EU in the mid-1990s when they were granted the European perspective at the European Council meeting in Copenhagen in 1993. The EU has set the Copenhagen criteria for the membership of those countries if these countries choose to do so. This initial phase involved much closer trade relations, EU law approximation, and technical assistance for aligning their legal systems and economic policies with the EU per the Copenhagen criteria. The Europe Agreements, signed in 1995, were the foundation for a subsequent European integration process.

Lithuania applied for the EU in December 1995, reinforcing its pre-accession process as concluded in the European Commission's opinion on this application in 1997. However, the European Commission has recommended opening the accession negotiations with Estonia, which joined the first group of accession candidates. Slovakia was also left in the second group, as the Meciar

Government did not meet political criteria. Unfortunately, we are in a very similar situation to Georgia today. On the other hand, we see huge European aspirations for Armenia, which can be a story of success.

We should also consider the Belarusian people's aspirations and the declaration of the Belarusian United Transitional Cabinet on Belarus' future in the EU. Our support should help develop the practical elements of the European integration agenda in cooperation with Sviatlana Tshikanouskaya, a leader of Belarusian democratic forces.

Preparatory Steps and Europe Agreements

Preparing for EU membership was intricate and required significant adjustments within the Baltic countries. These adjustments were administrative, legal, and political and necessary to comply with the EU and its Single Market standards.

A significant aspect of the preparation involved overhauling national legislation to align with EU laws. This process, known as "law approximation," was not merely a legal transposition but a transformative shift towards European legal and regulatory norms, standards, and institutions. Each country set up specialised bodies, departments, committees, and task forces to oversee this process, ensuring all government sectors had sufficient resources and understanding of what was necessary to implement the EU legislation.

The first-generation association agreements, the so-called Europe Agreements, have introduced a structured approach to European integration. For instance, the Free Trade Agreements enabled a gradual integration into the EU's single market, boosting both countries' economies and laying the groundwork for foreign direct investments and better regulation initiatives. These agreements were crucial in establishing a track record of making commitments and building capacities to meet EU standards, which proved fundamental during the formal negotiation phases.

One significant challenge was the geopolitical landscape, particularly Russia's influence, which had long-standing ambitions in the Baltic region. Internal political dynamics, such as government changes and policy priorities, also posed challenges. For example, thankfully, at the key moment of the pre-accession process in Lithuania, we had the Kubilius Government, which had set the right fundamentals for Lithuania's catch-up with the first wave of accession countries.

There might be a few examples. First, we will address the closure of Ignalina NPP, a soviet heritage company with no decommissioning strategy at this time. With EU and Lithuanian efforts, this was addressed by a long-term EU Ignalina Programme with a separate budget under the EU's internal policies heading. This unique solution for the EU was addressed by a separate protocol No. 4 in the Accession Treaty. This also greatly impacted the address of energy security reforms and the later unbundling in Lithuania. Another specific matter was linked with Kaliningrad transit. Lithuania successfully integrated this arrangement into an EU legislative framework as a European scheme, not a bilateral matter that the Russian Federation was supporting very much.

Negotiation Process and Institutional Adaptations

After the European Council's decision in Helsinki in December 1999, Lithuania and Latvia joined Estonia in an intensive accession negotiation phase, which involved adapting numerous institutional structures and legal frameworks. The catch-up process has started. The negotiation process covered various aspects of governance, from judiciary reforms to environmental regulations. Each negotiation chapter required detailed planning and a robust administrative setup to manage the complex discussions and ensure compliance with EU norms.

Both countries undertook significant institutional reforms to meet the stringent EU criteria. This involved overhauling their judicial systems, restructuring public administration, and enhancing transparency and accountability mechanisms. As an outcome, Lithuania and Latvia managed to catch up with a first group and to close the accession negotiations at the European Council in Copenhagen in 2002.

Consolidation of Public Administration for EU Membership

The transformative journey of the Baltic countries towards EU membership necessitated extensive reforms in public administration to have the necessary capacities to take over the EU's obligations. These countries undertook sweeping reforms to enhance public administration's efficiency, transparency, and accountability. This was critical not only for meeting EU standards, competition policy or EU customs regulations but also for improving the delivery of public services. The reforms included the restructuring of government agencies, in particular state-owned enterprises, the introduction of new public management, and the adoption of European best practices in such areas as ICT or digital agenda.

Compliance with EU regulations required both countries to adapt their institutional frameworks significantly. This involved updating legal bases, enhancing institutional capacities, and developing new administrative procedures aligned with EU norms. Specialised EU integration units within various ministries were established to ensure that all legislative and policy measures aligned consistently and effectively with EU directives. The Government European Integration Commission was established to oversee the necessary decisions by the line ministries. There was also an ad hoc Office, a public project of international advisors (PHARE SEIL) subordinated to the European Committee in Lithuania to give quick, short-term technical assistance. The European legislation priorities were constantly flagged to the Seimas. This exercise required close cooperation between the executive and legislative powers.

Competitiveness and Socio-Economic Aspects

EU integration had profound socio-economic impacts, including increased labour mobility, access to broader markets, and significant inflows of EU structural funds and FDIs, which were instrumental in modernising infrastructure, reforming national industries, introducing effective public financing and boosting economic growth. However, this also brought challenges, such as labour migration and the need to prepare local industries for increased competition within the EU single market.

Managing Accession through Reporting and First Membership Steps

The accession process culminated in a series of final steps that solidified the membership of Baltic countries in the EU. As the final stages of accession approached, each negotiation chapter was systematically closed, signifying compliance with EU standards. This included detailed assessments by the EU to ensure that all reforms and adjustments were implemented correctly. Informal contacts and exchanges between the EU and national administrations were key at that moment for the trust building and the country's success during the negotiations. Closing chapters was a rigorous process requiring meticulous documentation and supporting additional information provided in quarterly progress reports and on a constant basis.

After the Treaty of Accession was signed, the transition phase began, which involved actual implementation. The new element in this exercise was the creation of EU legislation, which was not known before to national administrations and had to be quickly introduced into national coordination. The new member states, as observers, had just a year to learn how to work as full members in the EU institutions, the Council to begin with.

Lessons Learned and Recommendations for an Effective Management of Accession Process

Reflecting on the experiences of our accession, several recommendations emerge that could be used by countries aspiring to join the EU. These recommendations span from the preparatory phases through to the final stages of accession and EU membership:

1. Clear Strategic Planning: Aspiring member states must identify critical areas for reform and establish dedicated bodies to manage the EU integration process well before the opening of accession negotiations. Early identification and prioritisation help ensure a focused and efficient approach. This, however, requires the EU to give a target date, at least a technical one.
2. National Plan for EU Law Approximation: A plan or coherent strategy for systematically revising and approximating national laws to meet EU standards is crucial. It should have approximation road maps and timetables, the necessary budget, administrative resources, and constant technical support or training provision. The institutions should be capable of implementing EU obligations and should be sustained by ongoing training for public officials.
3. Active Engagement with EU Institutions: Developing strong relationships with existing EU members and institutions is critical to facilitating a smoother negotiation process and building trust. Early and broad engagement can help manage expectations and build necessary alliances within the EU.
4. Strengthening Institutional Capacity: Building institutional capacities is vital for long-term compliance with EU regulations. This includes enhancing the capabilities of public administration bodies and ensuring they are equipped to handle new regulatory frameworks.
5. Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish mechanisms for continuous monitoring and evaluation of reforms to ensure alignment with EU standards. Regular reporting and transparency can aid in maintaining trust and demonstrating commitment to the accession process.

6. Progress Reporting (1): the reporting should be consistent and indicate the transposition stages: translation stage, draft law prepared by the ministry, submitted for approval, adopted by the government, sent to Parliament for adoption, deliberation started, hearings in committees, first reading, second hearing and adoption; you may indicate the planned dates if there is no progress available;
7. Progress Reporting (2): in highly complex chapters of EU law, the government may choose to introduce strategies for transposition in packages; it could be the preparation of the national law approximation strategy in a given sector or sub-sector – we were doing that extensively in complex sectors of environment, transport, energy acquis – this is an elegant way to cover large pieces of EU legislation;
8. Progress Reporting (3): focus on implementation; this should cover adoption of the national action plans for a given sector (at least for complex pieces of EU legislation, can be also part of national approximation strategies); it is recommended to include administration resources (would be good to indicate approximate staff numbers, planned budgetary provisions which will be adopted in the forthcoming budget), as well as institutions responsible for the implementation of acquis in a given area, such as competition council, telecommunications agency, phyto-veto-sanitary agency, national development agency for EU structural funds, certification agency, customs authority, financial services regulator, energy regulator, consumers protection agency, environmental impact authority, in particular national authorities or agencies responsible for EU legislation packages to ensure the proper functioning of EU internal market in a vast and complex areas of energy, transport, competition, industry policy, SOEs, etc.;
9. Progress Reporting (4): focus on public administration capacity building in general; this is crucial, and has already started with SGUA programming for Ukraine with public administration and public finance management support; you should indicate training plans, programmes (language, drafting, specific skills, policy-making level skills, EU administration skills, twinning with EU institutions, study visits as more as possible; do not be afraid to communicate your needs – which will show you know how to address them with assistance of the EU); you should also consider adoption of national EU approximation law or/and at least a strategy, which would ensure national planning and supervision of approximation plans in all EU acquis sectors by an authority with an adequate staffing and budget – you will need a budget for short-term impact studies, perhaps event for setting a boast of international EU experts to do different assignments next to office or ministry for European integration; this is crucial for a confidence-building with EU institutions, in particular European Commission, who is now your best friend and ally;
10. Progress Reporting (5): if there is not much to report on progress in a given sector in a given year, at least indicate planned measures and deadlines, such as the adoption of strategies or action plans (as above) – this will show your awareness of a given EU sector or sub-sector;
11. Progress Reporting (6): the EU member states will scrutinise implementation capacities on every budget line and EU legislation. You need to have a plan for how you will address them in a given timeframe, so if you are ready for 2027, then that should be your technical timeframe for fulfilling EU membership obligations, the rest will go for the transitional periods (3 to 7

years); you may indicate it already at the reporting stage; there might be about approximately up to 50 transitional periods for different packages of legislation) – however, do not count much on the derogations, as this might send a wrong message and jeopardise your readiness; there are also political opt-outs (linked with exercising of national competencies) you might want to report about, but our recommendation is to remain in the core of European integration;

12. Public Information and Communication: Effective communication strategies to inform the populace about the changes and benefits of EU membership are crucial. Public support is essential for EU directives' smooth implementation and stability during the transition phase.
13. Public Support and Participation: Fostering public support through transparent and inclusive processes is necessary to implement EU mandates successfully. Engaging the public society in the integration process helps ensure its inclusiveness and builds a broader national consensus on EU membership.

ESTONIA – DECODING RUSSIAN AND CHINESE INTERFERENCE

Estonia's Security Context

Estonia's strategic position in the Baltic region, coupled with its history, has shaped a unique security context that is influenced heavily by its proximity to Russia. This chapter overviews Estonia's historical security concerns and evolving defence strategies.

The Soviet occupation had a lasting impact on Estonia's national security policies, which have since heavily favoured Western integration, culminating in membership in the EU and NATO. The persistent threat from Russia has necessitated a robust and responsive security framework within Estonia, focused on both traditional military threats and emerging cyber threats.

Estonia's role within NATO is strategically significant. Its location serves as a frontline of NATO's eastern border, making it a critical point of defence against potential aggressions from the East. Estonia's membership in NATO enhances its security and strengthens the region's collective defence mechanism, providing a deterrent against potential Russian expansionism.

Geopolitical Challenges and External Influences

Estonia's security environment is continuously shaped by external influences, particularly from Russia and China, which present diverse challenges ranging from military threats to sophisticated cyber and informational warfare.

Estonian intelligence has consistently reported the potential for military threats from Russia, although the likelihood of direct military confrontation remains low in the immediate future. However, the threat of hybrid warfare tactics, such as cyber-attacks, disinformation campaigns, and other indirect aggression, remains high. These tactics are aimed at destabilising Estonia's political and social systems, undermining public trust in the government, and swaying political outcomes.

While not as pronounced as Russian threats, Chinese influences in Estonia have increased, mainly through technological and economic engagements. China's approach has been more subtle, involving economic investments and cultural initiatives that could potentially sway Estonia's policies or public opinion in China's favour. Chinese propaganda in Estonian media, often disguised as legitimate advertisements, represents a new front in the informational warfare that Estonia must manage.

Estonia's Defense and Security Strategies

Estonia has developed a multifaceted defence strategy to address conventional and non-conventional threats, particularly given its proximity to Russia. This strategy involves significant integration with NATO forces and the development of domestic capabilities in both cyber and traditional defence realms.

Estonia's defence strategy is robustly intertwined with NATO, relying on the alliance's collective security guarantees. Since joining NATO, Estonia has significantly modernised its military, increasing its defence spending to meet NATO's guideline of 2% of GDP. The country hosts NATO troops on its soil and participates in multinational defence exercises, enhancing its deterrence posture against potential aggressions from neighbouring Russia.

Estonia has also invested in strategic defence initiatives, including procuring advanced technology and weaponry and strengthening its cyber defence capabilities. These initiatives are crucial in maintaining the country's readiness against both physical and cyber threats. Estonia's approach to national defence exemplifies a comprehensive strategy that combines reliance on international alliances with robust national defence mechanisms.

Recommendations for Strengthening Defense Strategies:

- Enhanced Cybersecurity Measures: Given the evolving nature of cyber threats, Estonia should continue to invest in cutting-edge cybersecurity technologies and workforce training to safeguard its critical infrastructure.
- Continuous NATO Collaboration: Maintaining and enhancing collaboration with NATO through joint exercises and strategic deployments is vital for strengthening Estonia's defence posture.

Cybersecurity and Information Warfare

In response to the increasing threats of cyber-attacks and information warfare, mainly from Russia, Estonia has become a global leader in cybersecurity. The country's approach to these threats is highly proactive, involving defensive and educational measures to protect national security.

Following the 2007 cyber-attacks, which were orchestrated by Russia, Estonia established the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence in Tallinn. This centre is a focal point for cybersecurity research, training, and cooperation. Estonia's national cybersecurity strategy involves regular updates and drills to prepare for and mitigate potential cyber incidents.

Estonia significantly emphasises combating disinformation, recognising the hybrid threat posed by Russian propaganda. The country has developed strategic communication tools and public awareness campaigns to educate its citizens about recognising and resisting foreign disinformation efforts. This is complemented by actively monitoring media channels to prevent the spread of harmful narratives.

Recommendations for Enhancing Information Security

- Public Awareness Programs: Increase investment in public education programs to enhance citizens' media literacy and critical thinking and help them discern between credible information and propaganda.
- International Cooperation in Cybersecurity: Strengthen international partnerships in cybersecurity to share best practices and intelligence and coordinate responses to cyber threats.

Economic and Diplomatic Maneuvers

Estonia's response to the economic challenges posed by regional tensions, particularly with Russia, highlights a nuanced approach to maintaining economic stability and leveraging diplomatic relationships to secure national interests.

Estonia faces significant economic challenges due to imposed sanctions against Russia, impacting bilateral trade relationships. While necessary for political reasons, the sanctions have prompted Estonia to adapt its trade and economic strategies to minimise adverse impacts. For instance, Estonia has increased its focus on diversifying its export markets and enhancing economic ties within the EU and other regions.

Diplomatically, Estonia has proactively engaged with EU institutions and other international bodies to discuss and develop strategies to mitigate the economic fallout from sanctions. This includes seeking financial aid packages from the EU to support sectors most affected by the trade disruptions. Estonia's diplomatic manoeuvres also advocate for continued support for all EU member states that bear the economic brunt of geopolitical tensions.

Recommendations for Economic and Diplomatic Strategies

- Diversification of Economic Partnerships: Estonia should continue diversifying its trade partners and reducing dependency on any single country, particularly those with geopolitical tensions.
- Active Diplomatic Engagement: Maintaining active diplomacy is crucial for navigating economic sanctions. Participation in international forums and consistent engagement with EU policy-making processes are vital for securing Estonia's financial interests.

Future Outlook

Estonia's security apparatus must remain vigilant and adaptable to the shifting geopolitical landscape. This includes avoiding emerging threats, such as hybrid warfare tactics and cyber threats from state and non-state actors. Estonia's ongoing commitment to NATO and strengthening its national defence capabilities will be critical in ensuring its sovereignty and security.

To bolster its resilience against potential economic downturns and security threats, Estonia should strengthen its international cooperation within the EU and with other global partners. This cooperation should encompass security, financial, and technological aspects, ensuring Estonia can leverage global advancements and support.

Institute of European Right

The Institute of European Right is a think tank in Vilnius working in the tradition of the moderate right. We produce policy analysis and research, hold conferences, discussions and training, and work with partners in Lithuania and across Europe.

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