

**THE EUROPEAN UNION FROM A LITHUANIAN PERSPECTIVE <sup>1</sup>**

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**A pre-determined destiny - a united Europe**

Robert Schuman's declaration half a century ago was the beginning of a new Europe - peaceful, secure, and prosperous. The French Foreign Minister offered the means to reconcile two of Europe's largest countries, France and Germany, through the unification and joint control of their coal and steel industries. Schuman's declaration also emphasized the possibility for every European country to join this French and German cooperation institution. The idea led to the formation of a union which lacked the conceptual and technical possibility for further military conflicts between its member states.

Lithuania was not able to participate in the process of European integration from its beginning. Had there been friendlier soil and no occupant on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea, the ideas of the two great French statesmen Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman would have matured there to form a strong branch of the blooming European Union (EU) tree. Although belatedly, this branch is now developing rapidly in an unstoppable manner. After the restoration of independence, Lithuania, as well as Latvia and Estonia, is free to choose its own domestic and foreign policy.

Whether by coincidence or with pre-determined synchronization and similarity, the paths of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania from oppression to freedom were nearly identical and they are now progressing, separately but in tandem, to the same goal, membership in European and trans-Atlantic structures.

The decisions of these states to apply for EU membership were driven primarily by the inherent historical and cultural gravitation of the Baltic nations towards Europe's development.

Aspirations to join the EU are also motivated by the growing understanding that in the times of rapid globalization the best way to express and ensure Lithuania's national interests is through the collective decision making and solidarity of the EU.

Lithuania's integration into the EU is, however, not a blind endeavor. There is open, democratic debate between Lithuanian politicians and the public at large and an orderly, regular process of analysis, planning, and the implementation of assorted weekly decisions taken by the Government and its agencies. And these methods of integration help identify the costs and benefits of membership in the EU and determine how Lithuania will contribute to its future destiny.

**What is the EU for Lithuania?**

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<sup>1</sup> This article is a contribution to a book of essays entitled "Europe 2020," which will be published in the United Kingdom. Other contributors will include the ministers responsible for EU issues in member states, Norway, Switzerland, and the applicants for EU membership.

The European Union is an exemplary form of voluntary inter-state cooperation, of a previously unknown scope and closeness. The productivity of such cooperation lies in the high standards applied jointly throughout the Union. Presently, Lithuania is undertaking profound reforms to strengthen its market economy. There are many known, but possibly unexplored, models for market economies. The EU represents a model-in-operation whose success, based on free market rules and the principles of social cohesion, seems very suitable for Lithuania. Lithuania does not have to re-invent the wheel, or risk failure in experimental, theoretical, social, and market models. Relying on the thorough application of common rules and the experience of EU Member States, Lithuania is developing a prosperous, stable, and vibrant economy. The EU is, thus, a model for democratic, economic, and social reforms in Lithuania.

The imposition of EU standards in Lithuania also means the adoption of practice-tested-and-proven rules of fair play on a level playing-field inside the Internal Market. It will open up avenues to European markets for Lithuanian products and services, which are gradually becoming more competitive. It will allow better use of the intellectual potential of the Lithuanian people, which cannot be fully utilized when confined to narrow national borders. Another freedom inherent in European integration is the movement of people. Exchanges are mutually enriching, especially in the context of people-to-people relations. Lithuanians will be traveling to other countries looking for their fortune. Some Europeans will also go to the Baltic states to test and prosper in new markets while becoming familiar with different cultures. This mutual exchange has already been occurring for many years.

A vital condition for sustaining economic viability is participation in the flow of free capital inside the Internal Market by using modern banking procedures and benefiting from the capital available to enterprises. Sensitive discussions are taking place in the Candidate Countries concerning the acquisition of agricultural land by foreigners. In Lithuania this will require amendments to the Constitution. The discussion there, however, is based on rational arguments related to the consolidation of the land market, the restructuring of the agricultural sector, and the revitalization of rural life and the economy in general.

Access to new technologies and the development of knowledge-based industries is also essential for the modernization of the Lithuanian economy. Lithuania especially noticed the conclusions of the March 2000 Lisbon Summit and thus became more interested in promoting electronic commerce and virtual communication. The Lithuanian Government declared Information Technologies among its strategic priorities and is facilitating the promotion of e-business. Thus, laws on electronic signature and e-commerce have already been prepared. This is a national effort, corresponding to British Prime Minister Tony Blair's call to make Europe the best place in the world to do business in the new high-tech knowledge economy.

Thus, the EU's Internal Market is a potential pool of income, financial sources, and technological innovation for Lithuania's economy and society.

The evolving foreign and security policies of the EU offer new perspectives for the Baltic states. Membership in a united and globally influential union of more than two dozen states will guarantee that Lithuania's interests, which, in general and in many details, correspond to the common interests of the EU, can be raised and heard more

effectively. Lithuania's membership in the EU is also a safeguard of security, stability, and prosperity.

Membership in NATO is another vital priority of Lithuania's foreign policy, which is based on the realization that the Alliance is the most effective instrument for the collective defense of European democracies. The connection between these two goals has been most recently re-confirmed by the nine foreign ministers of NATO candidate countries in the Vilnius Conference on May 19, 2000.

Lithuanians understand that European integration is conducive to the fostering and cherishing of national cultures and ethnic identities. They regard the EU not as a "melting pot" but rather as a "salad bar." The slogan of the Feira Summit "Europe: unity in diversity" and the policies based on it are a sound guarantee that Lithuania through its culture and expression will contribute to what is generally called European civilization.

The overall view of what the EU means for Lithuania would require a more detailed breakdown, a long list of the benefits Lithuania will gain as an EU member. This explains the general consensus that has emerged in Lithuania regarding EU membership.

The policies of the Lithuanian Government reflect this consensus. On a number of occasions, French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin has very correctly noted that European affairs are no longer "foreign" affairs. Nowhere is this more evident, even outside the Union, than in Lithuania. All the economic and social strategies as well as the programs of the Lithuanian Government are shaped by the goals of future integration.

In the context of accession negotiations, the expectations of the Candidate Country governments and populations, while ambitious, should correspond with reality to the greatest possible extent. In particular, a realistic attitude is needed now that the pre-accession preparations have crossed the point of no return. Lithuanians realize that they are now the masters of their own destiny.

Ambition promotes the success of goal-oriented policies. Lithuania's experience shows that the accession negotiations accelerated the search for solutions to the challenges that emerged with the start of negotiations, and thus for domestic reforms. The challenge of impending negotiations helps Lithuanians to produce relatively quick but quality solutions.

Lithuanians are constantly reminded that membership in the EU is a moving - or rather evolving - target. On the one hand, this postulate is based on the absolute certainty that by the day Lithuania is admitted to the Union, the latter will have developed additional *acquis communautaire*. Yet, perhaps for natural reasons, it is not fully clear to where the target is moving. The complexity of this issue is illustrated by the still nebulous outcome of the Inter-Governmental Conference, even the scope of which is not yet precisely defined, as well as by the intensified discussion on federalist trends in the EU.

The concepts of enhanced cooperation and federalism are part of the wider political and scholastic discussion that started several decades ago. This discussion will continue and perhaps intensify in the future, and this is desirable.

It is undeniable that some of the most ambitious initiatives were created in a circle of countries narrower than the current EU. It would, however, be false to assume that the future motor of European integration lies in what is called the "core", "nucleus" or "center of gravity". European integration has progressed to the point where its engine

runs on a regular basis. The best example of this is the development of the Internal Market.

It is also worth analyzing the basic assumptions that drive this discussion. One assumption is that an enlarged EU, with its greater diversity, is bound to meet crises and paralysis. This, however, is a rather questionable premise, for in the history of the EU there have been crises when it grew to 6, 9, 10, 12, or 15 members. Crises in the EU, however, tend to be of a political rather than institutional nature.

History has shown that the EU always overcomes the crises. The same history, however, undeniably also demonstrates that the EU adjusts as it grows. The successful outcome of the IGC could be yet another example of this fact.

### **What is Lithuania for the EU?**

This question has at least two underlying implications. The first is regularly raised in Lithuania and among the EU Member States: what will Lithuania and the other Baltic states contribute to the European Union? The second addresses the question whether the three Baltic states should be regarded as a group, or as individual states.

What will Lithuania contribute as an EU member? In answering this question a few facts should not be forgotten: the potential of the Baltic Sea region is expected to increase significantly and the Baltic states will be the external frontiers of the Union and be able to promote broader stability.

Lithuania is becoming part of the eastern rim of the EU. In other words, the eastern border of Lithuania will become the external border of the Union. Lithuanians accept the special responsibility for safeguarding EU's values and integrity, which will be entrusted to them.

There is, however, another conceptual vision of Lithuania's eastern border, namely that of an interactive frontier. There is a general consensus in Lithuania that the country's location at the trading crossroads of East-West should be consolidated and strengthened for at least three reasons:

- the trade and investment opportunities have an enormous economic potential for all parties: Russia (Ukraine, Belarus), the EU, and Lithuania;
- it will help anchor Russia within Europe, with a view to develop genuine strategic partnerships between Europe and Russia;
- it promotes state-to-state and people-to-people contacts, which are essential ingredients for building confidence and stability in the Baltic Sea region.

The practical viability of these motives is illustrated by Lithuania's experience with its neighbor, the Kaliningrad region:

- the trade across the Lithuanian-Kaliningrad border, especially between sub-regional actors, is vibrant and promising; Lithuanian entrepreneurs invest in the region's economy with considerable, but realistic expectations;
- the joint Lithuanian-Russian Nida Initiative<sup>2</sup> of cooperation on practical matters and its submission to the EU's Northern Dimension framework is a good example

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<sup>2</sup> In February 2000 Lithuanian and Russian Governments agreed on 15 practical projects in the fields of environment, energy, transport, education, cross-border cooperation etc., with the aim to involve

of how mutually beneficial partnerships can originate at the regional level, and offers a concrete contribution to the broader agenda of Russian-European relations;

- Lithuanian relations with Kaliningrad are also a very relevant test of the importance of confidence-building measures in the field of business, cultural or people-to-people contacts. They have a positive impact on sub-regional contacts and also aid the prospects of the Baltic Sea region to become one of the most promising European regions in terms of economic growth based on modern economies.

Lithuania is also a potentially productive part of the EU's Internal Market. Skilled and disciplined labor is essential for the EU's stronger industrial capacity. Lithuania's membership in the enlarged EU will increase the EU's economic capacity. Central and Eastern European countries will not just take their "fair share," but also give their "fair share." Lithuania will become a rapidly growing market able to purchase more EU products and services.

Along with other Central and Eastern European countries, Lithuania will also contribute to the strengthening of the EU's role in world policies, in such areas as promoting global trade, responding to threats to international peace and security, or carrying the message of freedom, democracy and human rights around the world. The deeds speak for themselves: the Candidate Countries already added their voice to the EU's joint foreign policy and are eager to contribute to its further elaboration. Lithuania's knowledge of the neighborhood will be useful for the design and implementation of EU's policies towards Eastern Europe.

### **The three Baltic states: "unity in diversity"?**

The review of recent history may suggest that the image of the Baltics as a single entity is logical. This may also be suggested by their geographical proximity. In the past century the three nations suffered similar fates, so these common factors exist today and will naturally continue in the future.

An important expression of Baltic cooperation is their trilateral institutions functioning at various political and executive levels, and the significant number of trilateral treaties. A free trade agreement on agricultural products, for instance, is not only a significant feature of Baltic cooperation, but also a serious test for one of the most sensitive sectors of the economy - a sort of rehearsal for what will come on a larger scale with EU membership.

On the other hand, Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia have their own lives. They are, first of all, sovereign states with their own models of state administration and domestic policies. They had their own separate histories for centuries and were at times influenced by different factors. Again - needless to say - they have unique cultures, which among other things include trilateral jokes about each other!

Reform and modernization of the Baltic countries is homework for each individual country. There are things which can be worked out better together (for instance customs procedures), but when they come to the accession negotiation meetings in Brussels, they bring with them only their individual issues.

And that is how the Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians would like to be regarded and judged. The European Union is correct to declare this individualistic approach in the accession negotiations with the Baltic states and the other Candidate Countries. Sometimes Lithuania would like to see even more individual, more carefully crafted, solutions to individual problems or concerns.

There are, however, also practical considerations about the enlargement of the European Union. The membership of the Baltic states is only a matter of time for the political decision has been made on both sides. If the Baltic states join separately, they would be separated by temporary EU borders, which would be arbitrary and have to be demolished eventually. The existing free movement of people and goods as well as the development of common infrastructure (e.g. Via Baltica, electricity market, etc.) projects would be fragmented.

This suggests that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania must prepare for the successful exam *vis-à-vis* the EU individually, but that the eventual accession of all three Baltic states into the EU will be performed in a harmonized manner. Thus, from the practical point of view, it would be the most desirable outcome to ensure that key EU freedoms extend throughout the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea.