

Some lessons on the way to European Union (Lithuania's example)

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History of European Union started on May 9, 1950. The aim of EU project was to prevent new World War by means of economic integration of different European nations. First 6 countries who signed the Schuman declaration were Belgium, France, Luxemburg, Netherlands and Germany. EU has passed several historical stages. Now it consists of 27 member states and it is open to new enlargement.

Republic of Moldova – EU relations are developing rapidly.

Let me **congratulate you** on some important achievements on Eurointegration path: first of all on the successful and rapid negotiations of the Republic of Moldova with the EU on **Association Agreement**, (negotiations started in January 2010) According to Valeriu Gheorghiu, head of Eurointegration department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, “There are only several issues left within the chapter of economic and sectorial cooperation, but in other respect four key chapters are practically closed and we could sign the Association Agreement in the nearest future, if it weren't for negotiations on the creation of Free Trade Area”.

Hopefully EU will soon make a decision to **start negotiations on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, which will be integral part of Association Agreement**, so called DCFTA later this year (as it was promised during the European Council meeting on May 5).

Republic of Moldova in many respects is ahead of Russia and Ukraine in the process of **visa dialogue**, though they started negotiation 8 and 3 years ago respectfully. (RM started visa dialogue only in June 2010. Only RM issues biometric passports).

Though these are important milestones and the recognition of Moldova's efforts to bring country closer to the EU, all this is true for the negotiation phase only, not yet for the implementation.

All the chapters of the Association Agreement provide that Republic of Moldova must adopt a list of EU legal standards (some of them will be in place in 6 months, some could be postponed up to ... 9 years, as stated in the Agreement).

It took almost 10 years for Lithuania from the conclusion of Association Agreement to join the EU. (Lithuania joined EU in 2004).

Having in mind process of negotiations, participation in various initiatives and programmes Republic of Moldova, one year ago became a leader among the Eastern Partners of EU. Today Moldova is still high on the agenda of the EU. Republic of Moldova still can become a success story in the region.

You **have** necessary preconditions to achieve this goal:

- **First**, you have Government determined to reform Moldova and advance it on Eurointegration path as well as public support for Eurointegration policies. When I came to your country one and a half year ago, I was very positively surprised by the activities of young people, of civil society and of impressive work that so many NGOs are doing in Moldova. In this respect young people in Moldova are a step forward from Lithuania, and **we could learn from you**. Public support and determination is very important factor, a very powerful one.
- **Second**, the EU is “hungry” for success stories in Eastern Neighborhood.
- **Third**, you have good friends inside the EU who are always ready both formally and informally to help you.

Lithuania will always be grateful to Denmark which in 1990s helped us a lot to understand how does the EU function, what are internal dynamics, etc.

It is no secret that Lithuania alongside some other EU member states, especially new EU member states, have a **more enthusiastic view** regarding Moldova’s Eurointegration aspirations than other member states. Such approach of ours derives from the understanding that both parties will be better off if there is more Moldova’s in the EU and more EU in Moldova. Both our countries had in a way **similar fate in the XX century**. We know what means to lose independence against ones will and being sidelined from European project for half a century. Elder generations of both our countries know what meant to live in backward society and had a very strong wish to escape from it, to implement reforms and to change our lives to the better.

Lithuania delivers its experienceto the Republic of Moldova in the fields of Justice Reform, Customs reform, Railroad communication via Transnistria, in the field of implementing of norms and standards in food safety for plant origin products, certification of ecological agricultural products, etc.

A year ago Prime Ministres of our countries have signed Joint Declaration on Cooperation in the field of European Integration, where the Govenment of Lithuania expressed its suport to RM in negotiations with the EU. The Parties agreed to establish

a new mechanism for enhanced political dialogue and establish Bilateral European Integration Commission,(which was established on September 29, 2010).

With the help of international sponsors Members of Parliament of Republic of Moldova payed two study visits to the Parliament of Lithuania in 2010-2011.

Lithuanian national has been appointed an EU High Level Advisor to Ministre of Justice of the Republic of Moldova and is actively involved in Justice reform.

Today I would like to share with you some of **Lithuania's experience on the road to EU which in many ways I believe might be useful or relevant** for Republic of Moldova:

- **Integration begins at home.** This is clearer for Lithuania now than it was back in 1990s. It is clearer now because being EU member we see that in daily lives. EU means a set of rules (sometimes very complicated rules). Moldova can adopt and apply those rules even today. Of course, EU membership perspective is a strong motivator, the one that mobilizes all internal efforts for the adoption of those rules.
- Main element of Lithuania's success was **domestic reforms** – our society, leadership, young, ambitious and enthusiastic bureaucrats embraced the opportunities of change and used that momentum to implement reforms. There is no doubt that Lithuania also faced skepticism from some of the EU member states, but the homework well done put EU in front the dilemma: offer something more for Lithuania or face embarrassment.
- **Biggest challenges are at home not abroad.** Once Lithuania started seriously implement reforms, the telephones in the EU integration secretariat did not stop ringing: domestic lobby was very intense and very serious challenge.
- Domestic reforms are impossible without **political consensus**. Lithuanian political parties signed an Agreement on major foreign policy goals. It was a forceful public commitment, which helped to consolidate efforts of population at large for robust reforms. It also served as an important message to our Western partners about the consensus existing in Lithuania with respect to Euro-Atlantic integration.
- We used **all cooperation formats** (for RM would be relevant: Eastern Partnership, Euronest, bilateral relations, Danube countries, Balkan countries, even cooperation with so called competitors- Ukraine, Georgia, etc.)

- **Cooperation with other countries and neighbors.** Our internal reforms have been pursued in parallel to a gradual outreach towards neighbors, specifically Russia and Kaliningrad region, so as to create conducive political environment for a profound geopolitical change in the region. Slowly and steadily our neighbors agreed that the enlargement of the area of security and prosperity to the borders of Russia is good for Russia itself. We also had this mixed relationships with other candidate countries: though informally we compete with each other, but at the same time we also cooperated. Cooperation and the art of making compromises is a key element in the EU, and if country shows its capability to make compromises with the neighbors and “competitors” it becomes more reliable that in the future such a country will not cause unnecessary problems.

“Real cooperation, more than political statements, is the path to follow for each nation. In order for this effort to be accomplished, a firm engagement is needed, as well as a style of tolerance and compromise”, said Miroslaw Lajcak, Managing Director fro Russia, Eastern Neighborhood and Western Balkans in the EU’s External Action Service, during his speech on the occasion of Europe Day in Chisinau.

- Capability to turn existent and/or perceived **vulnerabilities into advantages** and motivating force for the definition of clear goals and stick to them. In the case of Lithuania, we acknowledged that the Russia factor and weak economic performance were our major vulnerabilities and we addressed them accordingly by robust and transparent economic reforms as well as outreach to Kaliningrad region.
- That is related to another lesson that Lithuania learned: we learnt **the importance of being an integral part of the larger picture.** The mainstream thinking in Europe is the wish to have security, stability and prosperity on the continent. Lithuania through its domestic and foreign policy showed that we are part of that picture, part of the solution, not part of the problem.
- Lithuania ensured that **no one had reason to question your democratic credentials.** At the end of the day, the principal decision on country’s membership prospects in the EU will be made first and foremost based- on not so much- of the growth of GDP or low inflation rate (which are important), but rather on unquestionable reputation that “you are like us”;

- **Creating the network of friends and like-minded people** kept Lithuania visible internationally. We created an excellent forum to discuss Lithuania's concerns in a wider context.
- Lithuanians did not take things for granted. No complacency.

A sense of **unpredictability** on our future EU perspective did not get us discouraged, but was an important factor which influenced our successful historical journey to be an institutional part of Europe whole and free.

- 1. Be stable democracy, guaranteeing the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities;*
- 2. Be functioning market economy with the capacity to cope with competitive market forces within the EU;*
- 3. Accept the "acquis communautaire" , that is to say, all the EU laws and regulations that run over 80,000 pages.*

If people of the Republic of Moldova will make their clear choice over the direction of development of the country, I have no doubt that it is only the question of time when Republic of Moldova will be part of the EU.

Thank you for your attention.