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## The influence of the EU enlargement on the relations between the countries in the East Baltic Region

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Darius Degutis

*Ambassador of Lithuania in Poland*

## **The Influence of the EU Enlargement on the Relations between the Countries in the East Baltic Region**

W tym roku obchodzimy dziesiątą rocznicę wznowienia litewsko-polskich stosunków dyplomatycznych. Minęło dziesięć lat dynamicznego rozwoju, jaki odnotowały nasze kraje. Wydarzenia tego okresu mogłyby równie dobrze wypełnić stulecie, bo tak dużo zostało zrobione i tyle dokonane w naszych wzajemnych relacjach.

Stosunki litewsko-polskie mogą być przykładem dla całej Europy. Państwa nasze, kierując się dobrą wolą i wizją tworzenia dobrobytu, pozbyły się dziedzictwa nieporozumień i stworzyły to, co się określa partnerstwem strategicznym.

Jednoczą nas wspólne cele – Unia Europejska, rozszerzenie NATO o kolejne kraje Europy Wschodniej i Centralnej, czyli tworzenie jednolitej, niepodzielnej Europy i dążenie do tego, by ludziom powodziło się lepiej.

Za symboliczne można uznać, że następne dziesięciolecie stosunków litewsko-polskich rozpoczyna się wraz z początkiem nowego stulecia, a nawet tysiąclecia. Tę nową epokę Polska i Litwa, a także cała Europa, zaczynają w zupełnie nowych jakościowo warunkach – dzięki wspólnym wysiłkom wolność i demokracja stały się trwałymi zdobyczami naszych państw.

Przed nami członkostwo w UE. Polska, Litwa, Łotwa i Estonia wspólnie kroczą drogą wyznaczoną przez proces negocjacji o członkostwo. Jak nam to się udaje? Czego spodziewamy się i czego oczekujemy w przyszłości? Jak to przyczyni się do współpracy litewsko-polskiej.

Ladies and Gentlemen. Post-war European unification is often measured by decades featuring fundamental shifts. Ten years is an eye-blink in the European history. However, the past ten years were very special.

With all dramatic developments and achievements of the past decade, uniting Europe still remains a goal to be fulfilled. The final objective is clear – Western and Central Europe must become nothing more than geographical notions. There must be the only one politically and economically united Europe, and one European civilization. Enlargement of the European Union is essential for all projects that share this objective. It is, as R. Prodi says, the biggest political project ever undertaken in the world's history.

The EU leaders declared in Gothenburg that the enlargement is irreversible. The accession negotiations are the best testimony that the project is well under-

way. There is a fixed calendar for it – the time is set, the clock is ticking. It no more seems impossible to expect that in the year 2004 the European Union will grow and that we shall become part of it.

The vision of the new Union originates in the experience of the accession negotiations. The terms of membership that are to be negotiated by the end of next year, will determine whether the new European Union will be suitable for all.

Only yesterday we received very good news from Brussels that Lithuanian negotiators closed three more chapters on Free Movement of Persons, Customs Union and Competition. It means that so far Lithuania has concluded negotiations on 21 chapters. That is quite a remarkable achievement having in mind that Lithuania started negotiations much later than the first group, including Poland and Estonia.

However, beyond the membership negotiations, there still remains a number of unknowns. Questions concerning objectives and common policies will be vested in the future European Union, and institutional arrangements serving those policies as well as a source of financing will emerge.

Globalisation and search for the global role of the Union has opened new possibilities for common EU policies such as common foreign and security policy, justice and home affairs. EU should seek to develop a strong identity in the global politics, while the third pillar should gradually evolve from intergovernmental cooperation into a complex of community policies.

In relation to this, both countries: Lithuania and Poland are particularly interested in carrying out that EU policy towards Russia and Kaliningrad is right and best for all countries. Despite our common efforts, the potential of Kaliningrad is still not utilised. The degree of the region's openness to regional cooperation is insufficient. I can assure that when Lithuania becomes a member of the European Union, we shall do everything in our ability to make sure that Lithuanian border, although fully protected and controlled, will not be a barrier isolating our neighbours who are not members of the EU.

European institutions derive from objectives. There is hardly a need for a "revolution" in the way the Council, Parliament, Commission and other institutions interact. The institutions have to evolve gradually; the same way as the objectives of the EU are evolving – but that does not mean that there should be no change.

I am convinced consolidation and further development of the Community method are in the interests of everyone, particularly the candidate countries. Strong institutions guarantee a fair game. They underline the cohesion of the Union and have so far been the main methodological "engine" and the key for the success of European integration. They made the EU what it is today: a Union that integrates the big ones and protects the small ones.

Political integration would be a logical step in the evolution of the European Union. Thus, we need a guarantee that this development does not break loose and is out of control. Exclusive clubs or centres threaten solidarity and thus the grand idea of European re-unification. The worst that could happen is fracturing Europe into pieces. This may happen if the EU has two standards, two policies, two governments, two budgets – one for the selected, rich and lucky, and the other for the rest. It would go even against semantic meaning of the Union. The word "Union" means "One". One for all.

Of course, nothing is possible without means and finances. The bigger European Union will need a bigger budget. Especially because when enlarged it will include new members with specific needs.

Money is always the most sensitive and sometimes even unpleasant subject of disputes. Since the question about how the enlargement is financed is a fundamental issue, and it will have to be addressed, it would be also reasonable to look at the bigger picture and think whether it is a right moment to consider a gradual reform of the EU financing and budgeting. Perhaps we should take a closer look at the advantages offered by having sources of income for the EU budget that are more independent than budgets of member-states.

It is also vital to stimulate an interest of the European population in European politics and its future. The debate on the future should challenge people to learn and think more about the European Union. Positive decisions have stirred public interest in Lithuania. Lithuanians began to present their country among the member states. They realized that a number of votes in the EU institutions is important; but perhaps even more important is learning to use them in the interests of both: Lithuania and Europe.

I would like to conclude my remarks by sharing the views on how the EU integration of our countries could influence regional and bilateral cooperation. First of all I see a huge perspective for a very dynamic development of our trade relations. Lithuanian and Polish businessmen should make a better use of the opportunities that are widely provided in this region. It is not always wise to count on luck in tough competitive environment of the long established EU markets. We should rather learn the way to enhance our capabilities in Central and Eastern Europe. Lithuanian –Polish trade turnover is soon expected to reach 1 billion dollars. That is an exemplary figure. However, the more the better. That is why boosting our bilateral economic cooperation is one of the main priorities for the Lithuanian Embassy in Warsaw.

Presidents A. Kwaśniewski and V. Adamkus have recently agreed on making a special effort to improve significantly the quality of roads and railways that link our countries. Constructing the Warsaw – Vilnius highway (by integrating the Via

Baltica project), and modernizing the railway connection are expected to be given a special attention by the governments of Poland and Lithuania.

Swoje wystąpienie chciałbym zakończyć przedstawieniem mojej wizji przyszłości: nasze dobrze prosperujące państwa łączy wspólna strefa handlu europejskiego, bez granic i urzędów celnych. Wybudowana współczesna magistrala samochodowa pozwala bez żadnej kontroli, w ciągu kilku godzin dostarczyć towary z Wilna do Warszawy, a biznesmeni chcący z Warszawy dojechać do Wilna na negocjacje będą mogli wybierać pomiędzy podróżą samolotem a superszybką koleją, gwarantującą, że pociąg do Wilna dojedzie w ciągu czterech godzin. Oczywiście wybiorą przyjemniejszą podróż pociągiem.

Wierzę, że to nie jest jedynie wizja, ale całkiem realna przyszłość.