



Four priorities after EU Enlargement

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Over the past few years the Baltic world has been transformed. Historic cultures are flourishing once again. New civic structures built on democratic values have been created. Economic reforms are making a mark.

The Baltic Sea is resuming its role as a regional unifier. Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are about to enter NATO and, together with Poland and others, accede to the European Union, even as both EU and NATO develop their partnerships with Russia. These changes are truly stunning. Northern Europe has become one of the world's most dynamic regions - a laboratory where standards are being set for 21st century political stability, economic growth and social responsibility.

But after enlargement, what perspectives do the Baltic states offer to the larger European project? How can Baltic membership in NATO and the EU be used to strengthen relations with Russia and engage countries such as Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova? How can the United States remain a positive and activist force in the region, rather than turning away to other challenges?

We believe that the answers to these questions are to be found less in abstract notions than in practical achievements. The people of Northern Europe have the opportunity to build further on their remarkable accomplishments - together with their allies and partners - if together we are ready to put our mutual commitments to work in ways that make a tangible, positive difference in the daily lives of ordinary people, particularly in the Baltic countries and in northwest Russia. Four areas deserve priority attention.

The first is building a healthy neighborhood. The greatest danger individuals in this region may face today are sick Russians, not healthy ones. The spread of tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS is alarming. It is a direct and present danger for the region. Fortunately, this has been a productive area of cooperation, but it deserves priority attention. Healthy societies also need a healthy environment. Only now are we beginning to fully comprehend the environmental damage done to this region through the inadequate disposal of nuclear material and other toxic waste. Great strides are being made, but there is a great deal more to be done. Societies can also be crippled by organized crime and

corruption. Here too there are good signs of regional cooperation, which must be intensified. Finally, the further development of civil society, including active efforts at social integration and productive cross-border cooperation between communities in the Baltic countries and in northwest Russia is essential to building new constituencies on both sides of these borders committed to mutually profitable relations.

The second, related challenge is engaging Russia. Russia's development will be key to the future of the region and of Europe as a whole. It is in Northern Europe that the EU and Russia meet and will soon share an even more extensive common border, which is becoming more direct and softer. The importance of this common condition will grow. The EU's "soft empire," which is much more than a purely interstate project, offers new possibilities to engage Russia more fully in pan-European cooperative efforts and to encourage the efforts of the Russian people to transform their own political, economic and social institutions. Baltic membership in NATO will also make Europe safer and offers new possibilities for enhanced NATO-Russian partnership.

A third area of opportunity is to develop our commercial ties, including those between U.S. business and the Nordic-Baltic region. Despite much talk of political drift between Europeans and Americans, our economic ties continue to deepen. Transatlantic economic relations, driven largely by mutual investment flows, provide an anchor at a time of political unease. During the Cold War, west Europeans and Americans worked hard to shield their core security relationship from occasional economic conflicts. Today Europeans and Americans must work harder to shield their core economic relationship from occasional political conflicts.

This leads to the fourth priority area of political security, which includes joint or complementary efforts to deal with terrorism joined to weapons of mass destruction but also means devising positive agendas of transformation for some of Europe's remaining sore spots, such as Belarus, Ukraine or Moldova. It also means encouraging central authorities in Moscow to be less suspicious of efforts to create a positive future for Kaliningrad, which should be supported.

Serious thought should be given to concrete ways to advance these goals. One opportunity comes in March, when the Baltic and Nordic countries plan to meet in Vilnius in advance of this spring's EU Summit. Another opportunity could come through a meeting this spring in the region between the United States and its Nordic-Baltic partners in so-called 8+1 format. Official meetings are important, but in the end they are inadequate to the task of engaging societies in a transformative agenda. Following enlargement, the danger is that these meetings become afflicted with a well-known bureaucratic malady - process without purpose.

Former President of Estonia Lennart Meri once remarked that the strength of Europe comes from its diversity. Dual enlargement provides the people of the Baltic region - and of the broader Euro-Atlantic community - with the security and solidarity they need to channel this diversity in ways that can make a tangible, positive impact on people's lives.

This is not a challenge for governments alone; it must be embraced by the private sector and a growing community of NGOs.

The peoples of the Baltic Sea have good reason to celebrate this spring. But celebrations alone would diminish this region's very real achievements. The opportunity - and the challenge - is to use the opportunity presented by dual enlargement to build a "culture of cooperation" all along the Baltic Sea and to offer that message and engage with others far from Baltic shores, who are struggling with their own difficult transitions.

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