



Transforming Wider Europe: Ten Lessons from Transatlantic-Nordic-Baltic Cooperation

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The dual enlargement of the European Union and NATO in 2004 projected stability far across the European continent. This process will continue with the pending accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU, and with a real perspective of EU membership now given to Turkey. Moreover, the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine have opened new opportunities to advance freedom and democracy across an even wider swath of the European continent.

Unfortunately, this dynamic region faces a West that is distracted, divided, complacent, or uncertain as to why it should engage as an active partner for change. Many Western leaders have issued rhetorical support for a Wider Europe that is more democratic, more secure, and more of a partner for the West. But the concept remains relatively undefined, its mechanisms undeveloped, and support for it uncertain. Many have yet to decide whether Western engagement should be foremost about mollifying non-members or advancing a truly transformative approach to the region that would align – and eventually integrate – these nations into the European and Euro-Atlantic community.

Why should the West advance a transformative agenda with Wider Europe? The answer begins by appreciating the transformative power of the transatlantic partnership itself. For half a century European-American partnership protected the western half of the continent from threats from its eastern half, while transforming relations among western nations themselves and working to overcome the overall divisions of the continent. The West then joined in solidarity with those on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain who shattered walls with their stubborn insistence that they would “return to Europe.” Following the Cold War the transatlantic partnership seized the dynamic offered by a continent without walls and began to work toward a Europe whole, free and at peace with itself. It recognized the challenging opportunity of exporting stability so as not to risk importing instability. It acted first by anchoring the Visegrad countries into the Euro-Atlantic community. After hesitation and great human tragedy in the Balkans, it

extended that vision to those in southeastern Europe who were prepared to build democracy, market economies and peaceful relations with their neighbors. It then broadened that vision to include other new democracies from the Baltic to the Black Sea. The result has been the successive advance of democracy, security, human rights and free markets through most of the Euro-Atlantic region.

Today the challenge is to extend that vision to include the countries of Wider Europe, extending from eastern Europe and the Mediterranean to Eurasia. Working to achieve this vision is an opportunity for Europeans and Americans, after some bitter spats, to regenerate a sense of common cause. Successful reforms in countries such as Ukraine and Georgia would reverberate throughout the societies of the former Soviet space, offering compelling evidence that freedom, democracy, respect of human rights and the rule of law is not some quixotic dream. Success in this region would bring us one step close to a Europe that is truly whole, free, and at peace with itself. It would give the West new partners who could add their strengths to ours. It would enhance Western security, open new markets and enable Europe to diversify its energy sources. By anchoring democracy and respect for human rights in regions bordering the Middle East, it would also facilitate efforts by the United States and Europe to advance their second major transformative project – modernization of the Broader Middle East itself.¹

Ten Lessons from Transatlantic-Nordic-Baltic Cooperation

The West is perhaps at the same point in its relations with Wider Europe as it was with the nations of central and eastern Europe more than a decade ago, when the notion of Euro-Atlantic integration was considered excessively ambitious, potentially threatening, or simply unrealistic. That experience, while ultimately successful, tells us that anchoring the countries of Wider Europe to the West will be neither quick nor easy. It cautions us about trying to predict the exact course or nature of the process. But it also offers some useful lessons along the way.

The first and most important lesson is that closer association with the West begins at home. Western countries will deepen their links with neighboring nations to the extent they see that leaders and their people are making tough choices for democratic, free market reforms -- not as a favor to others, but as a benefit to themselves. This will require considerable effort and sacrifice, but the rewards can be significant. The Baltic states provide a tremendously positive example in

¹ For views on this approach see F. Stephen Larrabee, *NATO's Eastern Agenda in a New Strategic Era* (Washington, DC: RAND, 2004); various contributions to Ronald D. Asmus, Konstantin Dimitrov and Joerg Forbrig, eds., *A New Euro-Atlantic Strategy for the Black Sea Region*;" also the remarks by the Lithuanian Ambassador to the U.S. Vygaudas Ušackas, "What Lessons can Ukraine Draw from the Experience of Democratic Development in the Baltic States?" September 13/14, Washington, DC.

this regard. When the Soviet Union broke up, the Baltic states were arguably at a comparable or even worse situation as many countries in Wider Europe today. They, too, were burdened by the legacy of being a “former Soviet Republic.” They, too, were rebuffed initially for their “unrealistic” dreams of EU and NATO membership. Although they started two years later than the Visegrad countries and from a lower economic base, they launched such a determined and vigorous set of reforms that within just five years they had caught up with the leading membership candidates in Central and Eastern Europe. Whenever one Baltic country appeared to pull ahead, the others redoubled their efforts lest the EU enlarge to one instead of all three states.

Second, closer integration into western structures is likely to be accelerated to the extent a nation starts “acting like a member” even before it becomes a member. Countries seeking closer association with the West need to articulate clearly and consistently to Western partners how closer association would benefit the entire Euro-Atlantic community – and then they need to act on that basis. At home, the process of closer association with the West is likely to be accelerated to the extent that domestic reforms can be aligned right at the beginning with the EU’s “acquis communautaire” or that military reforms can be conducted in ways that enhance civilian control, transparency, and the types of capabilities that would enhance overall NATO/Partner effectiveness. Abroad, the transition states of Wider Europe could play more active, positive roles in resolving inter-regional tensions, such as engaging on the Transnistrian conflict or building civic society in Belarus. They should make full use of existing opportunities and instruments provided by the EU’s Partnership and Cooperation Agreements and its Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument, and NATO’s Partnership for Peace, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Individual Partnership Programs.

Third, even though the burden of change rests primarily with reformist nations, the West can both assist such efforts as well as help create an external environment that reinforces positive trends and helps put and keep these countries on a path that will bring them closer to the West. The Baltic and central European states that acceded to the EU and NATO in past years could tell their people they had to engage in tough reforms because they also knew that if they stayed the course, membership in Euro-Atlantic institutions was a realistic goal.² Clear statements expressing the West’s openness to reformist nations joining Euro-Atlantic institutions, and its readiness to support such a process that is rooted in successful reforms at home, are critically important to motivate leaders and publics as they advance their agendas. Both the EU and NATO have been inching forward with the nations of Wider Europe in this regard, but each institution, as

² Vygaudas Usackas, remarks delivered January 27, 2005 at the Nixon Center conference on “The Georgian and Ukrainian Revolutions: Policy Implications for the U.S. and the EU,” available at http://www.ltembassyus.org/Speeches/The_Georgian_and_Ukrainian_Revolutions.html

well as the nations that comprise them, must advance a generous vision of a Euro-Atlantic community whose doors are open to all European democracies willing and able to join them.

Such a vision, in turn, can serve a secondary benefit -- regenerating a sense of common cause in the West. Following the Cold War the West was beset by hesitation and drift until it united around a common agenda to quell the violence in the Balkans and extend its frontiers to new partners. Today, the West has experienced one of its most divisive periods, characterized by harsh splits over Iraq and loose talk of "disaggregation." Joining forces once again to extend the frontiers of freedom in Europe and beyond can help to turn the relationship around. The display of coordinated U.S.- EU support for free elections in Ukraine was perhaps the most recent dramatic example of what can be achieved by transatlantic entente.

Fourth, this vision should be underpinned with concrete manifestations of support and outreach that go beyond monetary assistance alone. In earlier phases of enlargement, both the EU and the U.S. offered a range of inducements credible enough for them to secure strategic leverage over the course of reform and practical enough to guide those reforms in ways conducive to Euro-Atlantic integration. Such leverage is likely to be low without the prospect of admission to Euro-Atlantic institutions, even if that prospect appears to be on the distant horizon. The credibility of an "Open Door" policy depends on the willingness and ability of the West to provide intermediate mechanisms and transitional vehicles to help guide and support reformist nations along what could be a long and winding road. For instance, when working with the Baltic states on their drive for integration, the United States, the EU and individual nations such as Denmark supplemented the "core" tracks of NATO and EU accession with other supportive mechanisms. The U.S. launched the Northern European Initiative and negotiated the U.S.-Baltic Charter and accompanying action plans, which not only provided important bilateral assurances to the Baltic states at a particularly sensitive time of transition but also harnessed the experience of Nordic partners to widen the agenda of cooperation to such areas as health, environment, human rights, economic development and promoting the role of women. Denmark and other Nordic nations were important partners along the way, facilitating such initiatives as the Baltic Battalion and providing a cooperative regional framework.

A "wider agenda with Wider Europe" could build on these experiences by developing intensified cooperation on a variety of issues beyond traditional foreign policy topics. Working together to create safe, healthy, productive and livable societies through bilateral and regional initiatives to advance economic development, the rule of law, health and environmental cooperation would be useful for all partners involved. The West might consider taking a chapter from the Stability Pact for the Balkans by launching a few, highly visible "Quick Start"

infrastructure projects linking regional countries to the West and to each other. Such initiatives can have two important “demonstration effects:” first by showing public opinion in transition countries that these closer partnerships can do real things for real people; and second by showing transitional governments that tangible benefits can come from intensified cooperation.

The United States might consider developing a Wider Europe equivalent of the U.S.-Baltic Charter by advancing some of these elements under a broad set of bilateral “Atlantic Accords” with reformist nations. Such a package with Ukraine, for instance, might include a common pledge to work to lift Jackson-Vanik trade restrictions; certify Kyiv's market economy status; facilitate Ukraine's membership in the World Trade Organization (WTO); encourage deeper NATO cooperation with Kyiv; and state a common commitment to Ukraine's territorial integrity.

Such initiatives would complement and reinforce the EU's own Neighborhood Policy (ENP), which seeks to facilitate reforms and “Europeanization” of Wider European nations, primarily through a new “European Neighborhood and Partnership Instrument” of increased funding over its next six year budget cycle. As Michael Emerson points out, however, the ENP is plagued by an inherent contradiction: it tries to replicate the comprehensive reform agenda of the enlargement negotiations without actually providing a perspective for membership or the opening of accession negotiations.³ The EU is understandably cautious about further enlargement, as it looks to take in Bulgaria and Romania, expanding again to 27 members, and with Turkish accession now a prospect. Yet the EU is committed by nature and by its own founding treaties to offer a perspective of membership to any European democracy. For most Wider Europe nations, full accession to the EU is at best a distant prospect. But as has been discussed the perspective such a prospect brings is a key motivation for the “Europeanization” of transitional democracies.

Given these dilemmas, the EU should consider more tailored and flexible approaches to the “*acquis communautaire*.” For example, the expiration in 2006 of the EU's Partnership and Cooperation agreement with Ukraine presents both sides with an opportunity to negotiate a qualitatively new and closer relationship, such as an Ukraine-EU Association Agreement and related free trade agreement. Progress in EU-Ukrainian relations could be accompanied by an EU-Georgia Action Plan that offers a road map for Georgia's economic and social reforms and turns them towards greater harmonization with the EU laws and practices. Intermediate steps towards deeper integration might also include an expansion of

³ See Michael Emerson, “European Neighborhood Policy: Strategy or Placebo?” in Daniel Hamilton, ed., *The New Frontiers of Europe* (Washington, DC: Johns Hopkins Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2005, forthcoming).

EU support for human rights, rule of law and democracy-building programs. Michael Emerson proposes additional Wider Europe initiatives that are worth considering, such as a broader “European space” of education, culture and research; a European economic area for trade and market regulations; an open-ended multilateral Pan-European Free Trade Area (PEFTA); what he calls a “modular” approach for the progressive inclusion of Wider Europe states in the EU single market, and a European infrastructure and network area, coupled with revision of the European Investment Bank’s mandate so it can operate in Wider Europe.⁴

NATO should also consider new outreach strategies to these countries. This might mean upgrading its Individual Partnership Action Plans and its broader regional Partnership Action Plans in ways that deepen links to the Alliance. Moreover, the transitions underway in Wider Europe provide yet another incentive for the Alliance and its partners to focus their cooperation through the Partnership for Peace on issues of civil security. In the age of catastrophic terrorism it may not just be national territory per se that is at stake but the ability of democratic governments and free societies to function. While some terrorists may in fact seek to acquire territory, the primary goal for most is likely to be to destroy or disrupt society. This means there is a need for the entire Euro-Atlantic community to supplement its traditional focus on the *security of the territory* with a post-Cold War focus on the *security of critical functions of society*. This is primarily an issue for civilian authorities, but NATO and its partners also have roles to play, particularly in civil-military planning capabilities and in disaster response. NATO/PfP disaster response efforts are still largely geared to natural disasters rather than intentional attacks, and remain very low priority. It is time to ramp up these efforts to address intentional WMD attacks on NATO or partners.

Cooperative efforts to protect our societies in the age of catastrophic terrorism have also become an urgent new additions to the U.S.-EU agenda. More effective cooperation is needed in areas ranging from law enforcement and financial coordination to information and intelligence sharing, customs, air and seaport security, and protection against bioterrorism. The more that nations of Wider Europe can be aligned with such efforts, the safer we will all be and the easier their transition will be toward deeper integration in the Euro-Atlantic community.

Fifth, efforts at closer Euro-Atlantic association must be advanced with an appreciation of their impact on Russia and neighboring countries. Success in Ukraine, Georgia and other states would be powerful evidence that democracy, free markets, respect for human rights and the rule of law can also take root on the territory of the former Soviet Union. Ukraine’s successful transition toward a full fledged democracy and rule of law would resonate profoundly throughout Russian

⁴ Emerson, *Ibid.*

society. Strong Western support by the West for Ukrainian and Georgian reform is critical not only for the sake of their own success but also for the future of democracy and the rule of law in Russia. As the West engages more deeply with reformist nations of Wider Europe, it is important to reach out to Russian and other leaders so that the motivations and possibilities of such changes can be understood, legitimate interests discussed, and new areas of constructive cooperation explored. Once again, there are lessons to be learned from past experience. Domestic reforms in the Baltic states were pursued in parallel to a gradual outreach by the Baltic states and western partners towards neighboring states, specifically Russia, including its Kaliningrad region, so as to lay the ground for profound and positive geopolitical change. Over time the neighboring states, particularly Russia, came to acknowledge that enlargement of the area of security and prosperity to Russia's borders could be beneficial for all concerned.

A sixth and particularly important lesson is that small states can in fact be masters of their own destiny. This may be a particularly important lesson for Georgia as it embarks down the difficult path of reform. The example of the Baltic states again offers guidance and orientation. Baltic countries were quick to turn their small size and perceived vulnerabilities into advantages. Estonia and Latvia, for instance, addressed concerns about treatment of ethnic Russian minorities by working with the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities and by ensuring that the international community agreed that they met the EU's "Copenhagen Criteria" on human rights issues. Lithuania addressed concerns about its weak economic performance and potential Russian reactions by launching robust and transparent economic reforms and engaging in active outreach to Russia, particularly the Kaliningrad region. Some of the smaller new EU and NATO states are among the most energetic reformers and prominent proponents of Euro-Atlantic solidarity.

Seventh, there is great scope for current member states to 'mentor' non-member partners. The 3+3 initiative between the three new Baltic member states and the three South Caucasus states is a good current example of what is possible. These two groups of comparably sized former Soviet republics with much in common but great differences in experience have developed mechanisms to explore collaboration and build on lessons learned, using "lead nation" concepts within an informal common framework. In cooperation with Georgia, for instance, Estonia is leading in police cooperation, Lithuania is focusing on transition strategies, and Latvia is offering help with conflict prevention and resolution. Wider Europe nations can benefit directly from the experience of new members of NATO and the EU, who in turn have profited from the support of such older members such as Denmark. In fact, leadership by individual member nations or coalitions can be essential, since big institutions like the EU or NATO themselves move slowly and operate by consensus. The 8+1 format of the Enhanced Partnership in Northern

Europe (EPINE) offers a flexible and ready-made format for such cooperative initiatives vis-à-vis Wider Europe.

An eighth and related lesson of recent accession is that the states of Wider Europe should be encouraged to be mutually supportive of each other's aspirations, rather than holding each other back in a zero-sum competition for Western favors. Here again one can point to earlier successes, including mutual support among the Visegrad nations, regional cooperation under the Northern European Initiative, the support network created by the Vilnius 10, and cooperative regional mechanisms created by the Stability Pact for southeastern Europe.

Ninth, efforts at Euro-Atlantic integration must be accompanied by active efforts by the parties themselves, as well as outside nations, to resolve regional tensions and conflicts. Many of central and southeastern Europe's historic animosities and territorial conflicts have either been resolved or are now attenuated in large part because of the powerful leverage provided by accession to the West, and the realization among both leaders and publics that the chances for such accession were limited unless they dealt with such tensions in advance.

A related but far more cautionary lesson is offered by Western approaches to the Balkans. Immediately following the Cold War, Western nations were divided about the need to engage in the Bosnian conflict. Western hesitations helped to fuel Balkan fires, leading to massive human tragedy. By the time the West finally united around a strategy of active intervention, all the parties concerned had paid a far higher price than they would have through early engagement. Even then, despite the Dayton agreements and further Western intervention over Kosovo, there continued an overall reluctance to understand that the only real solution to the region's problems – the only real “exit” strategy -- was an integration strategy that offered to southeastern Europe the same perspective of integration as that offered to central and eastern Europe – *if* the nations of the region were prepared to work together to create the conditions that would make such integration possible. This bargain, enshrined in the Stability Pact, the Sarajevo Summit and later documents, was only credible because it included a demonstrated Western commitment to engage and resolve lingering conflicts in the region.

A similar challenge is posed today by Wider Europe's four so-called “frozen conflicts” -- in Moldova (Transnistria), Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia), and the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan. These conflicts are not “frozen,” they are festering wounds that absorb energy and drain resources from countries that are already weak and poor. They inhibit the process of state building as well as the development of democratic societies. They generate corruption and organized crime. They foster the proliferation of arms and a climate of intimidation. They are a major source of instability within these countries and the broader region.

These conflicts severely undermine the prospects of these countries for Euro-Atlantic integration, while giving Moscow a major incentive to keep these conflicts “frozen.” Vladimir Socor has described well how Russian policy has evolved from thwarting these countries’ independence in the early and mid-1990s to its present goal of thwarting their integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions through policies intended to contribute to what he calls “controlled instability.”⁵ Until now the West has preferred to shelve these conflicts rather than risk falling out with Moscow in the post-Cold War, post-911 world. But when the West is pushing for democratic change in the broader Middle East and elsewhere, it is important not to create a double standard for democracy in Wider Europe or to look the other way when analysing Moscow’s behavior. Overcoming these conflicts is a precondition for putting these countries on a firm course of reform and anchoring them to the West, and a test of Western commitment to a Europe whole, free and at peace with itself. It is time to make their resolution a top priority, both on the ground and in relations with Moscow. Failure to do so now could mean paying a higher price later.

Refocusing on Southeastern Europe

Finally, even as we apply these lessons to Wider Europe we cannot forget their continuing relevance in southeastern Europe, because failure of integration strategies there will reduce the prospects for their success elsewhere.

Southeastern Europe is still an unsettled region, caught between forces of integration and disintegration. On the positive side, the region is at peace – for the time being. The conflicts and massive human tragedy that dominated transatlantic attention in the 1990s are painful memory. Efforts at reconstruction and return have come a long way. There is a real prospect of closer cooperation within the region, with the rest of Europe and with Euro-Atlantic institutions, including NATO. The prospect of Balkan integration within the European Union has been advanced by a series of official statements, from the Stability Pact forged during the Kosovo War to the Thessaloniki meeting of the European Council in June 2003. The EU has concluded Stabilization and Association Agreements with Macedonia and Croatia, negotiations are ongoing with Albania and could begin with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

On the other hand, transformation is painfully slow. The region is plagued by crime, corruption, and mutually incompatible nationalist agendas. Reconciliation is held back by the failure to apprehend indicted war criminals. Renewed violence remains a very real prospect. Many of these negative trends are related in part to

⁵ See Vladimir Socor, “Frozen Conflicts: A Challenge to Euro-Atlantic Interests,” in Asmus, Dimitrov and Foerbrig, *op. cit.*

the continuing failure to forge functioning, legitimate states. The EU remains engaged in critical missions in Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and its efforts are important tests of EU credibility in matters of security, particularly by U.S. officials skeptical of the European Security and Defense Policy.

A common factor of uncertainty relates to the future definition of the Serbian state. Since Slobodan Milosovic's maniacal drive for a "Greater Serbia" failed, the issue has increasingly been how to define a "Lesser Serbia" within the context of a democratic "Greater Europe." But the current union of Serbia and Montenegro is not functioning well because neither Serbs nor Montenegrins believe they draw much benefit from their association, and because Kosovo's future status remains undefined.

As crisis brews again in Kosovo, the international community is united in its complacency. The United States is distracted by Iraq and its war on terror and the EU is distracted by digesting 10 new members, ratifying its constitutional treaty, negotiating a new budget, and other challenges. The mistreatment of Kosovar Serbs after the Kosovo conflict war has greatly reduced international sympathy for Kosovar Albanian aspirations. And yet, as evidenced by deadly riots in March 2004, Kosovar Albanians continue to be frustrated with their unresolved status, poor economic conditions, and dealing with past injustices. They expect the international community to deliver in 2005 on its promise to address final status issues. Without active international engagement the prospect for renewed conflict and regional instability is high.⁶ Concerned about human rights issues, the international community has imposed on the Kosovars a policy of 'standards before status'—but it is doubtful that this will hold. Instead, the international community must chart a new course that advances progress simultaneously on the key standard -- protection of minority rights -- and on final status. While various models for Kosovo's future can be envisaged, a largely independent Kosovo is likely to emerge with some elements of its policies, such as human rights issues, under broader EU or international auspices for some indeterminate time – underscoring once more the need for the EU to consider more creative and tailored approaches to "Europeanization" of neighboring nations.

Conclusion

Together these ten lessons offer both orientation and elements of a roadmap for change in the West's relations with Wider Europe. They underscore the need to promote successful reforms in Ukraine and Georgia, facilitate democratic change in Belarus, tend to the problems of southeastern Europe as final status for Kosovo looms, face up to potential challenges with Russia, and engage more vigorously

⁶ See "Kosovo: Toward Final Status," Report #161 of the International Crisis Group, January 24, 2005; also Wesley Clark, "Set Kosovo Free," *Wall Street Journal*, February 1, 2005.

with states stretching from the Black Sea to the Caspian as we seek to strengthen our efforts to fight terrorism and transform the broader Middle East. They also offer one overarching reassurance – the transatlantic partnership can be truly transformative, *if* we choose to make it so.

(in Danish Yearbook of Foreign Policy, 2005, appeared January 2005)