

LITHUANIAN FOREIGN POLICY REVIEW

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**Leading through Values in
a Changing Global Order**

GABRIELIUS LANDSBERGIS

On Unwavering Support for Ukraine

THÓRDÍS KOLBRÚN REYKJÖRD GYLFAÐÓTTIR

**NATO's Next Chapter: Deterrence,
Ukraine, and Unity**

BORIS RUGE

**Solidly Brittle: On the Fragility
of Putin's Regime**

JAMES SHERR

On the Impact of Russia Sanctions

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Editor's Note

It is an honor to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of the *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review* (LFPR) for the seventh year. The annual journal continues to provide analysis of the most pressing international developments and the key challenges for Lithuania's foreign and security policy.

This year, the focus is on Russia's ongoing aggression against Ukraine and the global response. While Western rhetoric remains resolute, actual levels of support have started to waver. Domestic political and electoral cycles further cloud the future of these commitments. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has expressed hope that the war could end in 2025, but how that can be achieved without compromising Kyiv's principles remains uncertain.

In addition, Donald Trump's return to the U.S. presidency places the transatlantic relationship

under scrutiny. Some suggest that a decline in U.S.-Europe ties is inevitable, as Trump has been a vocal critic of European allies, particularly their insufficient defense spending. Others see an opportunity for change, arguing that renewed pressure could push European countries to do more, while a Ukrainian defeat would damage Trump's legacy—something he may seek to avoid.

Lithuania's outgoing Foreign Minister, Gabrielius Landsbergis, asserts that Lithuania has become a vanguard state, championing European security and standing firmly against Russian aggression. This, he argues, is the only way for smaller nations to endure the challenges posed by authoritarian regimes.

This edition features a remarkable group of international contributors exploring these themes. Boris Ruge, NATO's Assistant Secretary



General, outlines the Alliance's priorities for 2025. While NATO has made strategic decisions to address current challenges, many still need implementation. Ruge remains optimistic that member states will overcome international and domestic constraints to achieve these goals.

James Sherr examines the weaknesses of Russia's regime, emphasizing the importance of understanding these vulnerabilities to make the war—and other forms of aggression—more costly for the Kremlin. Daniel Fried adds an analysis on the impact of the Western sanctions on Russia. Nicolas Tenzer advocates for a European troop presence in Ukraine as essential to ensuring Ukraine's victory and safeguarding Europe from further Russian threats.

Lithuania's firm stance on its relationship with Taiwan, as well as its resilience against Chinese

pressure, is also analyzed from both foreign policy and business perspective. Lykke Friis examines Nordic-Baltic cooperation, while Denis Cenusa analyzes the European integration prospects for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

This publication would not have been possible without the support of our valued partners. Lithuania's Ministry of Foreign Affairs remains a key collaborator, providing essential backing while upholding editorial independence. The Konrad Adenauer Stiftung continues to be another long-standing and invaluable partner.

Please share the LFPR with your friends, colleagues, and partners!

**Sincerely,
Linas Kojala**

Lithuanian Foreign Policy: Leading through Values in a Changing Global Order



Gabrielius Landsbergis

The past several years have marked one of the most tense periods since the Cold War for our generation. Russia's illegal and unjustified invasion of Ukraine, coupled with the humanitarian crisis in the Middle East and escalating tensions in the South Caucasus and Indo-Pacific regions, has fundamentally altered the global security landscape. Authoritarian regimes have systematically attempted to dismantle the rules-based international order, wielding their diplomatic, political, and economic leverage to influence, threaten, and pressure countries worldwide, including Lithuania. As the authoritarian cooperation has intensified, previously isolated conflicts have merged into what effectively constitutes a unified global theatre of war.

Meanwhile, the Euro-Atlantic community, particularly the EU and NATO, has increasingly turned inward, becoming entangled in internal procedures and gradually losing its grip on external developments. The West's traditional sources of power and influence—democracy,

economic strength, and military capabilities—have been constrained by self-imposed limitations, preventing us from delivering clear and resolute responses to those who challenge our values and interests.

In the face of these mounting challenges, Lithuania has implemented a proactive and values-driven foreign policy, characterized by firm and decisive action both at home and abroad. In a landscape of hesitation and uncertainty, where major powers wavered in taking decisive action, smaller nations had no choice but to step in and take the lead. For these nations, including Lithuania, decisive action was not merely a choice but a necessity—their very survival, not just their influence and prosperity, hung in the balance.

Lithuania's efforts focused on telling the real story, gathering like-minded allies, encouraging partners to take action, and, above all, defending values and principles. Speaking out about the true nature of threats to the international order was not easy—and even harder to make others listen. Yet, Lithuania's

Gabrielius Landsbergis

served as the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the 18th Government of the Republic of Lithuania from 2020 to 2024, under Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė. Previously, he was a Member of the European Parliament from 2014 to 2016. Before entering politics, Landsbergis had a diplomatic career, representing Lithuania at the Embassy to the Kingdom of Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg. He also held a position at the Office of the Government of Lithuania.



Landsbergis emphasises the importance of the transatlantic bond
 (☒ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania)

own history, along with many other tragic examples, has taught a crucial lesson: remaining silent in the face of aggression only emboldens adversaries. The most horrific events, from genocides to the Holocaust, gained momentum precisely because of initial silence and inaction.

By speaking openly and loudly about what is uncomfortable, yet true, Lithuania has emerged as a vanguard state, championing European security and standing firmly against Russian aggression. Our unwavering, values-based foreign policy has gained respect and acknowledgment among democratic nations worldwide. We could see



By speaking openly and loudly about what is uncomfortable, yet true, Lithuania has emerged as a vanguard state, championing European security and standing firmly against Russian aggression.

clearly that the West *can* act, *can* stop imperialism, including Russian imperialism, yet needed to do much more.



Lithuania's unwavering commitment to Ukraine's military support has been a cornerstone of our foreign policy. When the war began, the very notion of providing offensive weapons seemed unthinkable in what had long been considered a continent of peace. Initial support was limited to defensive equipment—helmets and bulletproof vests—which, while important, could not decisively influence the war's outcome. Lithuania persistently advocated for comprehensive military assistance, recognizing that supporting Ukraine represented not only the defence of international legal principles such as territorial



Ukraine's president Zelenskyy awarded Landsbergis with the Order of Prince Yaroslav the Wise, third class (📧 Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania)

integrity, the inviolability of borders, and the prohibition of the use of force, but also served as the most effective measure to defend democratic values against authoritarian aggression. Our position was clear: support should not be measured by the metric of 'as long as it takes' but rather 'whatever victory takes.'

At the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania made every effort to remind its partners of the alliance's original mission: to stay resolute and ready to deter any aggressor. Regional defence plans were approved, committing to defend every inch of NATO territory from Day 1, and cooperation within the Nordic-Baltic region was solidified. Politically and institutionally, the summit brought Ukraine closer to NATO membership than ever before. Simultaneously, we

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made an unambiguous call for Ukraine to join the European Union, a stance that soon led to the beginning of official EU membership negotiations.

Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine compelled Lithuania to assert greater agency in international politics. At every opportunity and in every forum,

we reminded the world that peace, the rule of law, and international order cannot be restored through appeasement but through unwavering strength and resolve.

The Russian war against Ukraine was forcibly imposed on the West. No matter how much we may wish not to fight it, we have no choice but to do so.

We found ourselves in a situation where war has come to us without asking whether we want it or not. And the secret hope that "it will pass somehow" is a very misguided approach. It is a path to self-defeat. While Lithuania's clear position faced criticism both externally and domestically, this unwavering approach led to tangible progress: NATO's deterrence and defence posture on the Eastern Flank has been



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reinforced, and support for Ukraine has evolved from helmets to sophisticated weaponry and ammunition including ATACMS, HIMARS, Leopards, and eventually the permission—albeit limited—to strike the aggressor on their own territory. Lithuania has punched above its weight, and it truly has. This was achieved through persistence, consistency, and the courage to speak the truth.



Speaking loudly about the need to help Ukraine and win the war is necessary, but not sufficient. Words must be backed by actions. It is imperative to set an example by encouraging and uniting the democratic—especially the Trans-Atlantic—community for action. Fully understanding this, Lithuania has, for the first time in its history, developed and approved its Indo-Pacific foreign policy strategy. The aim was to stand with partners wherever democracy and the rules-based international order face challenges from

authoritarian regimes. This strategic pivot acknowledged a crucial reality: authoritarian regimes learn from and support each other. A Russian victory in Ukraine would embolden not just Moscow but also Beijing, Tehran, and Pyongyang, demonstrating the democratic world's inability to defend its values and interests. To prevent this, countering authoritarian aggression collectively, wherever it arises, is necessary.

This broader engagement has come with costs but has yielded significant diplomatic dividends. Our proactive stance in the Indo-Pacific region has helped to diversify economic dependencies and strengthen our global partnerships, leading to an unprecedented bilateral strategic dialogue with the United States. This created a compelling precedent for reciprocal support in Eastern Europe and Ukraine.

Lithuania has also undertaken very specific initiatives to curb aggression fuelled by Russia. We have actively supported the establishment of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression, an initiative now endorsed by many EU and NATO members, including the US. Our leadership in sanctions policy has been equally decisive: Lithuania has proposed one-fifth of all individual sanctions within the EU's fourteen sanctions packages against Russia. We will continue to advocate for closing loopholes, expanding restrictive measures, and ensuring the sanctions regime remains effective, with no exceptions or derogations that might weaken its impact.



We have actively supported the establishment of a special international tribunal for the crime of aggression, an initiative now endorsed by many EU and NATO members, including the US.

While Russia's international isolation remains an ongoing task, even relatively small steps toward that goal are necessary. For instance, Russia's removal from the board of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons—a position it had always taken for granted—highlights who flagrantly violates international law and who stands firmly with values. Additionally, issuing international arrest warrants for more individuals increases the isolation of these aggressors, effectively confining them to their own bunkers.



Lithuania's size and geography indicate that there are no alternatives for guaranteeing its security other than nurturing an effective, powerful, and ready-to-act NATO alliance. To keep the alliance strong, it must be continually reinforced and supported. The 'security dividend' is realized through consistent investment, as there are no free security guarantees—our security is only as robust as the efforts we make to build

it. With this understanding, Lithuania recognized the necessity of enhancing its own defensive capabilities and successfully increased its defence budget from 1.97% of GDP in 2021 to 3.03% in 2023, aiming to reach 3.5% as early as next year. Additionally, a firm stand, an internal political consensus to allocate additional investments, and tireless diplomatic efforts secured Germany's commitment to station a brigade-sized military unit in Lithuania, with boots on the ground rather than a ten-day readiness to deploy only in the event of a direct threat. I consider these achievements significant milestones in Lithuania's foreign policy. They demonstrate that we can truly be not just consumers of security but also donors, which is crucial when hoping for our partners' support on day X.

Ultimately, Lithuania's focused efforts and hard work this year secured the position of European Defence Commissioner for a Lithuanian candidate. I wish the new commissioner success and trust that they will make a significant contribution to enhancing Europe's role in strengthening the defence and deterrence capabilities of the entire Euro-Atlantic security community.



Lithuania's commitment to defending democratic values extends beyond military and economic measures. This is why we continue to promote democracy and the rule of law beyond our borders. Vilnius has established itself as a beacon of hope for those fleeing authoritarian regimes,

demonstrating that our values-based foreign policy has both moral and practical dimensions. Lithuania has become a symbol of hope for Russian and Belarusian exiles who dream of their countries becoming liberal, democratic states rather than oppressive dictatorships. We granted accreditation to the Democratic Representation of Belarus, led by Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, and we provide refuge to Belarusian and Russian opposition leaders and independent media. This year, Vilnius hosted the fourth annual Future of Democracy Forum, consolidating our position as a hub for the expansion of freedom and democracy. We have also confronted dictatorships worldwide—beyond Russia and Belarus, we have firmly condemned China's genocidal actions in Xinjiang, supported restrictive measures against Iran in response to the transfer of its missiles to Russia, and the Lithuanian Parliament has listed the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran as a terrorist organization.



And I will say it once more—the survival of Lithuania and other smaller states in a turbulent international environment, especially in the face of war, directly depends on preserving and maintaining an open world order based on dialogue, cooperation, and clear, transparent rules. If such an order is not defended, we risk a system where the strong do whatever they want, and the weak suffer what they must. The consequences of such a system would be dire.



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To be strong, prepared to deliver a full and effective response to an aggressor, and to consistently promote the principles of democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law—this is the winning strategy that has emerged from Lithuania's experiences over the past four years.

We have consistently shown that a values-based foreign policy is both morally right and pragmatically sound. Lithuania's foreign policy must have continuity that earns us influence on the international stage and, consequently, respect. This is the Lithuanian way: speak the truth boldly, rally like-minded allies, and take every necessary action so that the answer to the question, 'What have you done to ensure your security?' is clear and unmistakable. Our role in this changing world is clear: to remain at the forefront in confronting aggression, supporting Ukraine to victory, and standing against autocratic regimes while upholding democratic values. ●

Strength in Unity: Foreign Minister Thórdís Kolbrún Reykjörd Gylfadóttir on Iceland's Role in Nordic-Baltic Cooperation and Global Challenges



Linas Kojala, Editor-in-Chief of *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, sits down with Iceland's Foreign Minister, Thórdís Kolbrún Reykjörd Gylfadóttir, to talk about Iceland's take on regional and global issues. The conversation dives into Iceland's partnership with Lithuania and the shared goals that bring the two countries together.

Minister Gylfadóttir highlighted Iceland's historic recognition of Lithuania's independence in 1991 as a foundation of the strong ties between the two countries. She described the relationship as rooted in "shared values and mutual respect."

On Nordic-Baltic cooperation, she emphasized its importance in addressing current challenges, stating, "In an era marked by geopolitical uncertainty... the NB8 format provides a unified, resilient framework." She also welcomed Finland and Sweden's NATO membership, calling it a major boost to regional security.

The Minister reaffirmed Iceland's firm support for Ukraine despite concerns

about waning international resolve. "Our support for Ukraine is unwavering... even small nations can play a vital role in supporting those who fight for their right to exist freely," she said.

– How would you define the bilateral relationship with Lithuania?

The bilateral relationship between Iceland and Lithuania is a testament to the power of shared values and mutual respect in international relations. It is built on a foundation of historical solidarity and a shared commitment to democracy, human rights, multilateralism and international law.

I am always proud to hear that Iceland holds a special place in Lithuania's history as the first country to recognize Lithuania's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, which marked the beginning of a close and enduring friendship. Today, the bond between Iceland and Lithuania extends far beyond that historical milestone.

Recently, we have stood united in our full support for Ukraine's fight against Russia's



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brutal, illegal aggression. Based on their recent historical experiences and their proximity to Russia, Lithuania and the Baltic states have been at the forefront of garnering support and solidarity with Ukraine. We all stand to gain from understanding each other's realities and historical perspectives.

Our two countries work together in many other



Foreign Ministers Landsbergis and Gylfadóttir in Vilnius
 (☒ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania)

important areas. We share a strong commitment to environmental sustainability and climate action, reflecting our common understanding of the urgent need to address global challenges. Economic and cultural ties between Iceland and Lithuania are also growing. Trade and investment opportunities have expanded, particularly in sectors such as renewable energy, tourism, and technology. Moreover, cultural exchanges, such as art and music collaborations, have deepened mutual understanding and fostered goodwill between the people of both nations.

– How would you describe the essence of Nordic-Baltic cooperation? Why is this

format particularly relevant today, amidst geopolitical turmoil and uncertainty? What are the main areas where this cooperation could realistically be strengthened in the coming years?

Nordic-Baltic cooperation is rooted in shared values, geographic proximity, and a deep commitment to democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The collaboration between the Nordic and Baltic states stems from a shared vision of regional and global stability, resilience, and prosperity. Together, the Nordic-Baltic Eight (NB8) exemplify how small and medium-sized nations can amplify their voices on the international stage by working in unity.



Nordic-Baltic cooperation is a powerful model of how nations with shared values and complementary strengths can navigate the complexities of the modern world together.

This partnership operates across various dimensions—political dialogue, economic integration, environmental stewardship, security collaboration, and cultural exchange. It is characterized by flexibility, inclusivity, and pragmatism, allowing member states to adapt their cooperation to evolving regional and global challenges.

Today, Nordic-Baltic cooperation is more important than ever. In an era marked by geopolitical uncertainty, the war in Ukraine, shifting global power dynamics, and the growing need to address complex transnational issues such as energy security and climate change, the NB8 format provides a unified, resilient framework.

Nordic-Baltic cooperation is a powerful model of how nations with shared values and complementary strengths can navigate the complexities of the modern world together. By continuing to work as a unified and forward-thinking bloc, the NB8 can enhance the region's resilience, support global stability, and set an example



Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland alongside General Charles Q. Brown Jr., Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of the US (☒ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iceland)



Nordic-Baltic cooperation is a powerful model of how nations with shared values and complementary strengths can navigate the complexities of the modern world together.

for effective multilateralism. Amidst uncertainty, the Nordic-Baltic region is a beacon of solidarity and innovation, ready to face the challenges of today and tomorrow.

– Finland and Sweden are the newest NATO allies. How does their membership change the security calculus in the North and Baltic Sea region?

The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO marks a historic shift in the security

dynamics of the North and Baltic Sea region. Their membership significantly strengthens NATO's collective defense posture, enhances regional stability, and complicates adversarial calculations, particularly for Russia. This increases NATO's capacity to deter aggression in the region, particularly through heightened surveillance and rapid response capabilities.

It is no secret that Finland and Sweden's decisions to join NATO came as a direct response to Russia's illegal war in Ukraine and the consequent shift in the European security architecture. Their membership has significantly strengthened the Alliance and bolstered its deterrence against Russia.

– Iceland is a strong supporter of Ukraine, and a Bilateral Security Cooperation Agreement was signed this year. However, there is talk of 'fatigue' in the West, which might lead to a decline in

financial and military support in the future. Is that an issue from your perspective?

Iceland remains steadfast in its support for Ukraine as it defends its sovereignty, freedom, and democratic values against aggression. The Bilateral Security Cooperation Agreement signed this year underscores Iceland's commitment to Ukraine's resilience and reconstruction, as well as to ensuring accountability for violations of international law.

While there are discussions about "fatigue" in some Western circles, Iceland's position remains clear: our support for Ukraine is unwavering. This commitment is rooted in a shared belief that defending Ukraine's independence is not just about one nation—it is about upholding the principles of international law, human rights, and the rules-based order that are fundamental to global peace and security.



While there are discussions about “fatigue” in some Western circles, Iceland’s position remains clear: our support for Ukraine is unwavering. This commitment is rooted in a shared belief that defending Ukraine’s independence is not just about one nation—it is about upholding the principles of international law, human rights, and the rules-based order that are fundamental to global peace and security.

In Iceland, this resolve transcends political divides. Support for Ukraine has strong backing across the political spectrum and among the Icelandic people. Maintaining this strong support remains vital as the Ukrainians are paying the highest price to uphold international law with the ultimate goal of achieving a just and lasting peace. The human and financial costs of this conflict are significant, and the strain on international donors and societies is real but we must also not discount the immense cost of inaction or hesitation. The people of Ukraine continue to endure immense suffering, and their courage and determination inspire us to stand firm in their defense.

As Icelanders, we understand that our contributions, while modest, carry symbolic and practical importance. It is a reminder that even small nations can play a vital role in supporting those who fight for their right to exist freely and independently. By staying the course, we ensure not only Ukraine’s victory but also the protection of the values that bind us as free nations. Together, we must remain resolute, for the future of Ukraine and for the stability of the international order we all depend on.

– There is a growing number of hybrid attacks on NATO member states, both at sea and on land. While it is often difficult to attribute these incidents precisely, such tactics are widely recognized as part of Russia’s playbook. Does NATO have an adequate response to this challenge?

Russia’s intensifying hybrid campaign in Europe and beyond is deeply worrying. These acts of sabotage and violence, cyber and electronic interference, disinformation campaigns, and other hybrid operations are a threat to our collective security and should not be tolerated. It is clear that one of the main goals of these campaigns is to undermine our steadfast support for Ukraine. In this, Russia will not succeed.

Allies are working hard to strengthen the Alliance’s approach to countering hybrid threats and more effectively deter hostile actors from employing them against us. NATO has established Counter Hybrid Support Teams to provide expert assistance to Allies upon their request, new

structures have been formed in recent years to enhance the security of critical underwater infrastructure, cyber defences have come a long way and response options have been developed, just to name a few. Nevertheless, we must step up our resilience, defence and deterrence against hybrid threats by further strengthening information sharing and coordination among allies and partners and ensure situational awareness and understanding so that we are positioned to make informed and timely decisions in times of crisis.

Cooperation with Partners, including the EU, is also an important part of NATO’s approach to countering hybrid threats as well as collaboration with academia and the private sector to ensure that Allies maintain their advantage in the field of innovation, science and technology.

– Trump’s election has caused some unease within NATO and among its partners, including Ukraine. How do you foresee the transatlantic relationship evolving in the coming years?

Iceland is a founding member of NATO and enjoys a strong relationship with the US. This year we celebrated the 75th Anniversary of the strongest and most successful Alliance in history and I firmly believe that the transatlantic relationship will remain fundamental in tackling the growing geopolitical challenges that we are confronted with today.

The Alliance has undergone transformative changes to meet increasing challenges. In



Traditionally, in mid-June, Lithuania celebrates its relationship with Iceland, the first country to recognize Lithuania's independence (✉ D. Umbrasas, LRT)

the past decade, the Alliance has undertaken the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence in generations. Europe has stepped up and delivered on the promise to shoulder its share of the burden, with the majority of Allies now meet the target of investing at least 2% of the GDP in defence. We have two new Allies, equipped to make the Alliance stronger and the Euro-Atlantic Area more secure.

The transatlantic relationship will continue to evolve, but the transatlantic ties between the world's great democracies are fundamentally strong. It is our shared interest that they remain so. The security challenges are such that none of us want to face them alone, including the US.

– There is renewed discussion about the need for European strategic autonomy. How should relatively small countries like Iceland and Lithuania view this trend?



The transatlantic relationship will continue to evolve, but the transatlantic ties between the world's great democracies are fundamentally strong. It is our shared interest that they remain so. The security challenges are such that none of us want to face them alone, including the US.

As small countries, our core interest lies in maintaining a strong multilateral order where international law, territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries is respected. This can no longer be taken for granted and it is our common responsibility to defend this order and the values of human rights and democracy that underpin our system. As a small

country, we understand that we must do our share, we must defend our interests because if we don't no one else will. And European strategic autonomy is just that, on a larger scale.

All over Europe, NATO countries have stepped up their defense and all of us are looking at how we can best defend our economic security. We learned a hard lesson from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, that security is not only about defense capabilities – we cannot be reliant on malign forces for our economic well-being.

So European strategic autonomy is the right answer to global developments. A strategically autonomous Europe will still form alliances and nurture partnerships around the globe – with Iceland and the EEA countries being perhaps the closest partners of the European Union – but Europe must shape its own future. ●

NATO's Next Chapter: Boris Ruge on Deterrence, Ukraine, and Unity



In a time of unprecedented geopolitical challenges, NATO stands at a juncture. With the Washington D.C. Summit behind us and the 2025 Hague Summit on the horizon, the Alliance faces a list of tasks: bolstering deterrence, supporting Ukraine, and building global partnerships. To shed light on these pressing priorities, Linas Kojala, Editor-in-Chief of the Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review (LFRP), sits down with Boris Ruge, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy.

Ruge emphasizes the weight of NATO's responsibilities in the coming years. "Deterrence and defense remain critical, which means resourcing the defense plans we have adopted—a challenging but essential task," he notes. The war in Ukraine remains a central focus: "Russia is losing staggering amounts of equipment and personnel daily... We are determined to continue our support to Ukraine," he asserts, underscoring the Alliance's resolve against Russian aggression.

The conversation also highlights NATO's ambitious goals for defense spending,

with Ruge acknowledging, "There's no time to waste. Allies already at 2% or higher must evaluate what is required to meet capability targets," while pointing to success stories like Poland and Lithuania as examples of robust commitments.

From addressing hybrid threats, such as sabotage and disinformation, to preparing for evolving transatlantic dynamics under potential political changes, Ruge is unequivocal about NATO's resilience.

– What are NATO's core priorities between the Washington D.C. summit and the 2025 Hague Summit? What is at the top of your agenda during this period?

We have three priorities from Washington that we will carry into 2025 for The Hague summit. First, deterrence and defense remain critical, which means resourcing the defense plans we have adopted—a challenging but essential task.

Supporting Ukraine is the second priority. This involves fulfilling the commitments made in Washington, monitoring the situation on

When the time comes, Ukraine will determine whether to engage in negotiations with Russia, should Russia show any willingness.

the ground, and providing the necessary support for Ukraine to stay in the fight. When the time comes, Ukraine will determine whether to engage in negotiations with Russia, should Russia show any willingness.

Finally, partnerships are a priority. This means collaborating with partners around the world and recognizing, as both our former and current Secretary Generals constantly remind us, that security is a global issue. With countries like North Korea, Iran, and China increasingly supporting Russia's war in Europe against Ukraine, it is vital to strengthen ties with Indo-Pacific partners, the European Union, and nations in the southern neighborhood.



Rutte's first official visit as NATO Secretary General was to Ukraine (☒ Office of the President of Ukraine)

– What are your expectations for the next summit? There's always discussion about whether it will be historic or just a routine one—how do you see it shaping up?

Historic? I'm not sure—it depends on what we can decide on together. But routine? Definitely not. We are facing the largest land war in Europe since 1945, and our priority is ensuring that Ukraine prevails as a sovereign and independent nation. Ukraine must also continue its irreversible progress toward NATO membership. This situation is far from routine.

Of course, implementing our defense plans will be incredibly challenging. We are at a critical stage in NATO's defense planning process where nations must begin mobilizing resources to meet the agreed requirements.



Historic? I'm not sure—it depends on what we can decide on together. But routine? Definitely not. We are facing the largest land war in Europe since 1945, and our priority is ensuring that Ukraine prevails as a sovereign and independent nation.

There is significant variation across the alliance in terms of defense spending. The defense investment pledge from the Vilnius Summit in 2023 set a minimum benchmark of 2% of GDP for defense spending. However, in many cases, 2%

is insufficient. Based on the defense plans and targets for individual allies, it's clear that spending will need to go well beyond 2%.

Currently, nine of the 32 NATO allies remain below the 2% benchmark, which they need to reach as quickly as possible—there's no time to waste. Allies already at 2% or higher must also evaluate what is required to meet capability targets. Poland, for example, is already spending more than 4%, and Lithuania is at around 3%.

Meeting these spending targets will require strong leadership and determined efforts to persuade parliaments and voters. Increasing defense budgets often means cutting spending in other areas. However, there is no viable alternative to ramping up defense spending.



During the 2019 NATO summit, President Donald Trump invited leaders of countries that spend at least 2% of their GDP on defense to a special breakfast session, with Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda also participating (☒ R.Dačkus, Lithuania's President Office)

– NATO has taken significant steps to strengthen deterrence and defense, especially since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. However, these measures still need to be fully implemented. How do you assess the progress made so far in this regard?

I think we're on a good path overall, but we are now entering a phase where we must address the need to increase defense spending to develop and sustain the necessary capabilities over time.

To repeat myself, moving forward, we will need to push spending well beyond the 2% threshold to meet these demands effectively.

– Do you sense any of that fatigue among NATO allies when it comes to practical support for Ukraine, or is the commitment still strong?

Russia aims to convince us that it is winning, that Ukraine has no choice but to submit in some form, and that the West is either incapable or unwilling to continue supporting Ukraine. This narrative is false.

Russia is losing staggering amounts of equipment and personnel daily, with estimated casualties exceeding 1,000 per day. The strain on the Russian economy is also becoming increasingly evident.

Meanwhile, we are determined to continue our support to Ukraine.

Public support across NATO countries for sustaining Ukraine's fight remains strong. Still, we face tough decisions. Balancing the need to support Ukraine with the necessity of maintaining readiness for our own armed forces is a challenge. For some allies,

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Russia aims to convince us that it is winning, that Ukraine has no choice but to submit in some form, and that the West is either incapable or unwilling to continue supporting Ukraine. This narrative is false.

this also involves weighing investments in European security against strengthening their presence in other regions, such as the Indo-Pacific.

These decisions are difficult, particularly given the current constraints on defense industrial capacity and stockpiles. Nevertheless, NATO retains the ability to keep Ukraine supplied and in the fight. Russia's weaknesses are evident, and our continued support for Ukraine will eventually force Russia to recognize that it cannot achieve a military victory or dictate terms.

– Given the challenges NATO European allies face with shortages in ammunition, equipment, and troops, there seems to be a prevailing sense of pessimism about whether this situation can be turned around. Do you see any light at the end of the tunnel, and what steps can be taken to address these issues?

The reality is that we are playing catch-up, which is not an ideal position, but we are making significant progress.



Balancing the need to support Ukraine with the necessity of maintaining readiness for our own armed forces is a challenge. For some allies, this also involves weighing investments in European security against strengthening their presence in other regions, such as the Indo-Pacific.

For example, the production capacity for 155mm artillery ammunition in Europe and North America has increased substantially. Initiatives such as the Czech effort to procure ammunition from various sources for Ukraine have been highly effective and demonstrate how we are addressing immediate needs.

As long as Russia is engaged in this fight with Ukraine, losing so many troops and burning through so much equipment, it is not nearly as powerful as Putin would like us to believe.

We must not allow Russia's narrative—that NATO is weak and Ukraine cannot be sustained—to undermine our resolve. Instead, we should embrace greater self-confidence, understanding that NATO has the resources and capacity to support Ukraine effectively. Moreover, NATO remains fully capable of deterring and, if necessary, defending against Russia.

– In terms of NATO's eastern flank, do you believe we are more secure today compared to a few years ago? What changes or improvements do you think have contributed to this enhanced security?

It's a vastly different situation from just a few years ago. In terms of forward land forces, our presence on the eastern flank is now well above and beyond what it was. Up until 2014, we had virtually nothing in terms of multinational allied forces on the eastern flank. But now, with the enhanced forward presence and with the addition of larger units and greater numbers, the situation has changed significantly. For example, we will soon have a full German brigade in Lithuania. Lithuanians are investing in infrastructure, and the Germans are building their presence.

We also have air policing and the rotational integrated air and missile defense model, which is useful. The Russians certainly know that we have very capable air assets.

– Regarding the growing prominence of hybrid threats, such as attacks on critical infrastructure and sabotage like undersea cable disruptions, how does NATO assess these risks, and what measures or responses are in place to address them?

If you look at the Washington Declaration, there's a whole paragraph on Russia's hybrid campaign against NATO allies, listing all the tactics we've seen over the past 12 months, from cyberattacks and disinformation to sabotage. This is serious.



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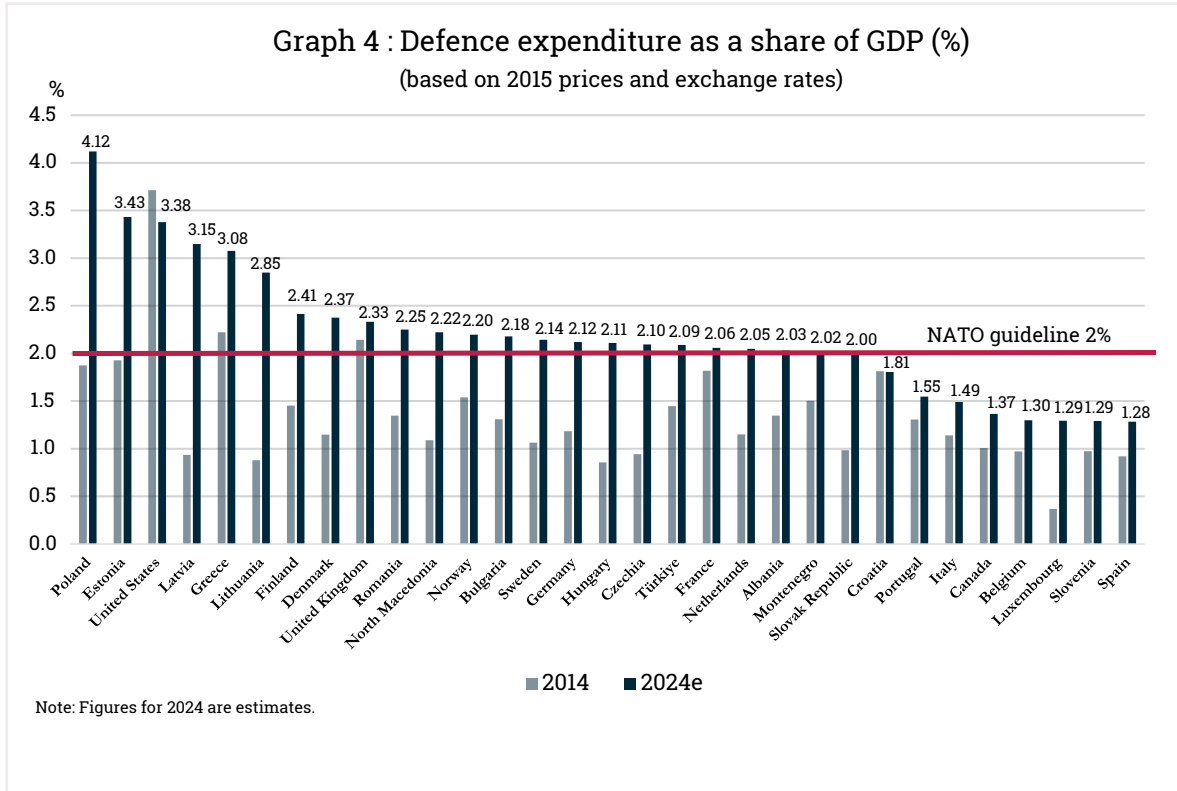
However, it's important to view this more broadly. It is part of Russia's overall strategy to undermine NATO and to weaken our resolve to support Ukraine.

On the one hand, we must respond to Russia's hybrid actions. For example, we've expelled a number of Russian agents masquerading as diplomats.

We are also improving in countering Russian disinformation. Dealing with that is not easy. The Russians have various channels for spreading their narrative into our systems, and since we are open societies, we'll never be able to shut this down entirely.

Yet, at the end of the day, the most important response to Russia's hybrid campaign is to foil Russia's key objective and to continue to support Ukraine. Keeping Ukraine in the fight is the single most important thing we can do.

– We haven't discussed Donald Trump yet, but I'll ask a broader question. How do you foresee the transatlantic relationship evolving in the near future? What steps can be taken to ensure that it strengthens rather than weakens?



NATO defense spending is increasing, but not all member states have met the minimum 2% threshold yet (🇳🇦 NATO)

Two or three days after the election, Secretary General Mark Rutte had his first phone call with President-elect Trump. Days later, he met President Trump in person at Mar-a-Lago, becoming one of the first international leaders to do so. From the beginning, we established contacts with the incoming administration. Of course, we are doing this in close coordination with the Biden administration, which is still in office.

Secretary General Rutte knows President Trump from his first term, when Rutte was the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. They have



Secretary General Rutte knows President Trump from his first term, when Rutte was the Prime Minister of the Netherlands. They have a good personal relationship.

a good personal relationship. We understand that President Trump and many around him focus on insufficient burden sharing. This is a legitimate point of view, and not exclusive to the Republican Party—Democratic administrations

have said the same thing. The reality is that many allies need to go further. We can expect President Trump, once in office, to push very hard on this issue.

From the first day in office, Rutte made it clear that we need to get our act together and do more. Again, the incoming administration will certainly push very strongly on this, and we should be ready for it.

The direction of travel is clear: European allies and Canada have to take up more responsibility—both in deterrence and defence, as well as in supporting Ukraine. This is clear. It is also doable and I am convinced that NATO will remain strong. ●

China's Economic Coercion Against Lithuania: Lessons Learned



Dr. Melanie Hart

In 2021, Lithuania joined the growing club of nations facing Chinese economic coercion. Chinese leaders routinely force Chinese companies—even private companies—to halt commerce with other nations as a pressure tactic. They did so against Japan and Norway in 2010, the Philippines in 2012, South Korea in 2016, Canada in 2018, and Australia in 2020, among others. In 2023, Beijing began laying the legal groundwork to cut off critical mineral exports to any nation that annoys the Chinese Communist Party, effectively shifting from bilateral coercion to a blanket multi-nation approach. Lithuania was neither the first nor the last to face these tactics. But Lithuania's fierce, principled reaction marked a global shift. At a moment when other nations were all grappling with how to respond to Chinese economic bullying, Lithuania stepped forward and set the gold standard, winning hearts and minds and gaining immeasurable soft power.

Beijing deploys economic coercion to pressure other nations on a wide variety of issues. With Canada,

At a moment when other nations were all grappling with how to respond to Chinese economic bullying, Lithuania stepped forward and set the gold standard, winning hearts and minds and gaining immeasurable soft power.

Beijing was protesting the potential extradition of Huawei's Meng Wanzhou. With Australia, Beijing was protesting Canberra's call for an independent investigation into the origins of the COVID-19 pandemic. In Lithuania's case, Beijing objected to the opening of a new Taiwan representative office in Vilnius, which used "Taiwan" in the name. Neither the office nor its nomenclature violated Europe's one China policy. But Beijing objected anyway and decided to ramp up a massive pressure campaign, likely aimed at deterring other European nations from following suit.

Dr. Melanie Hart

Senior Director, Global China Hub, Atlantic Council of the United States

Dr. Melanie Hart, an expert with two decades of experience on Chinese domestic and foreign policy, currently serves as Senior Director of the Atlantic Council Global China Hub. Hart joined the Council from the U.S. Department of State, where she served as senior advisor for China and the Indo-Pacific in the Office of the Undersecretary for Economic Growth, Energy, and the Environment. In that role, Hart was instrumental in crafting innovative strategies to reduce nation-state vulnerabilities to Chinese pressure. She developed the Department of State's playbook for responding to Chinese economic coercion and led an internal unit that provided coercion-response support to multiple nations. Before joining the State Department, Hart served as director of China policy at the Center for American Progress, where her work shaped domestic and global approaches to China on issues such as 5G policy, economic competition, energy and climate policy, and global governance. Hart has a Ph.D. in political science from the University of California, San Diego and a B.A. from Texas A&M University.



Lithuania was not trade-dependent on China before Beijing employed coercive measures
 (✉ Blondinrikard Fröberg)

Now, three years later, all major economies have woken up to the risks associated with economic dependence on authoritarian regimes, including both China and Russia. Many economies are scrambling to de-risk, to find secure and resilient supply chains that will be insulated from authoritarian coercion. Lithuania's experience—and where it is now—offers great lessons for others to follow.

First, reducing direct economic vulnerabilities to authoritarian regimes is critical. Going into 2021, Lithuania's direct exposure to and dependence on the Chinese market was among the lowest in Europe. China was Lithuania's 13th largest trading partner and absorbed just 1 percent of Lithuania exports. In contrast, Germany, for example, is much more dependent. As of last year, China was still Germany's main trading partner, and German companies accounted for over 60 percent of all new European FDI in China.¹

¹ Agatha Kratz, Danielle Goh, Gregor Sebastian and Noah Barkin, "Don't Stop Believin': The Inexorable Rise of German FDI in China," Rhodium Group, October 31, 2024, <https://rhg.com/research/dont-stop-believin-the-inexorable-rise-of-german-fdi-in-china/>.

Lithuania's low dependence made it difficult for Beijing to apply real pressure. Chinese leaders had to go through Brussels to do so: Beijing issued a ban on all European products with Lithuanian components. That immediately pulled multiple countries—and the European Commission—into the coercion circle, eventually leading the Commission to file a WTO case and fast-track the Anti-Coercion Instrument. Due to Lithuania's relatively low dependence on China, Beijing could not target Vilnius without targeting others as well, giving Vilnius potential allies and raising the downside cost for Beijing.

Second, although the Anti-Coercion Instrument is good to have, the Lithuania case illustrated that positive support is most needed to help nations fast-track de-risking to deal with economic coercion. Private companies are the main actors in a market economy. In any coercion incident, there is always a possibility that companies will de-risk by fleeing to other markets instead of finding new, more resilient supply chains. Positive incentives can help companies identify new, more diverse and

resilient market opportunities quickly. For example, in the initial months of China's coercion campaign against Lithuania, the United States expedited regulatory approval for Lithuanian agricultural products, provided a \$600 million U.S. EXIM Bank credit agreement, and signed a bilateral defense procurement agreement with Lithuania (enabling Lithuanian companies to sell to the U.S. Department of Defense on par with American firms). Private companies will flock to good opportunities. Governments can help to fast-track that process.

Third, smart diplomacy can be a major catalyst for de-risking. In 2022 Vilnius launched a multi-year diplomatic campaign aimed at building new partnerships across the Asia Pacific. Foreign Minister Landsbergis visited Japan, Australia, India, Singapore, South Korea, and the Philippines. Minister of Economy and Innovation Armonaitė conducted similar outreach across the region. Lithuania opened—for the first time—embassies in Australia, South Korea, and Singapore, and a trade representative office in Taipei. Commerce followed diplomacy. As



As Lithuania's trade with China trended down, its trade with other Indo-Pacific nations trended sharply upward.

Lithuania's trade with China trended down, its trade with other Indo-Pacific nations trended sharply upward. Lithuania's laser exports to South Korea doubled.² Lithuania's service exports to an Indo-Pacific group including Australia, Japan, India, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Thailand were up 36 percent last year.³ This approach provides a good model for other nations to follow.

Finally, standing up to bullying wins friends and allies. The soft power dividend that Lithuania gained from standing firm in the face of economic coercion is hard to quantify, but it is real and could be long-lasting. In the end, that may be the biggest long-term benefit to emerge from Lithuania's response. Soft power matters. It moves commerce, people, and militaries. When Russia invaded Ukraine, the style and spirit of Ukraine's response

2 Wendy Cutler and Shay Wester, "Resilience & Resolve: Lessons from Lithuania's Experience with Chinese Economic Coercion," The Asia Society, April 17, 2024, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/resilience-resolve-lessons-lithuanias-experience-chinese-economic-coercion>.

3 "Lithuania's Services Export to the Indo-Pacific Grew by 36 Percent Last Year," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Lithuania, May 27, 2024, <https://www.urm.lt/en/news/928/lithuanias-services-export-to-the-indo-pacific-grew-by-36-last-year:42637>.



The Biden administration supported Lithuania as it faced pressure from China (🇺🇸 NATO)

galvanized a massive global reaction. When individual people in countries around the world saw President Volodymyr Zelensky standing on the street in the dark on February 25, 2022, speaking directly into the camera, saying "We're all here defending our independence, our country, and it will stay this way," they wanted to be like him, to be on his side, even if they knew nothing about Ukraine before.

Lithuania's response to Beijing had a similar effect. Nations around the world are tired of being pushed around by Beijing. They are increasingly ready to push back. They are looking for heroes. There is pride in standing firm and shame in bowing down to a bully. Lithuania demonstrated what standing firm looks like, and gained a soft power

dividend that even a decade of targeted diplomacy could not begin to replicate. That is why, when Lithuania held a conference on "resisting economic coercion" in May of this year, representatives from over 30 countries attended, including cabinet-level officials and vice-ministers from across Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

Around the world, leaders are working to de-risk their economies, to reduce their economic dependence on single points of failure and authoritarian regimes. In 2021, Vilnius initially appeared to be facing a narrow, Lithuania-specific economic security challenge. Now, in 2024, we know this challenge is global. It impacts everyone. And Lithuania had a major head start in addressing it. ●

Navigating Geopolitical Shifts: Vidmantas Janulevičius on Lithuania-Taiwan Relations



In this interview, Vidmantas Janulevičius, President of the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists, discusses Lithuania's decision to strengthen ties with Taiwan despite pressure from China. Speaking with *LFPR* Editor-in-Chief Linas Kojala, Janulevičius examines the economic and political effects of this decision.

He highlights key developments, including collaborations with Taiwan in semiconductors, and addresses challenges such as reduced trade with China. The conversation also explores lessons for the future, focusing on how Lithuania is working to diversify supply chains and adapt to shifting global dynamics.

– What positive outcomes can you highlight from Lithuania's relations with Taiwan, also considering China's pressure over recent years?

Lithuania's decision to open a Taiwanese representative office has yielded significant benefits, placing the country prominently on the geopolitical map between the U.S., the EU, and China. This move garnered

widespread attention for both Lithuanian politicians and business leaders.

A major advantage has been the development of trade ties with Taiwan, which has delivered economic benefits. Notable among these is Teltonika's collaboration with Taiwan's Industrial Technology Research Institute (ITRI), which supports Lithuania's efforts to establish a semiconductor chip industry. Additionally, access to Taiwanese patents has reduced costs, and Taiwanese investments in Lithuanian startups, along with assistance in exporting Taiwanese goods to Lithuania, have positively impacted the economy.

Lithuanian exports to Taiwan have grown, reaching €26.5 million in 2023, with €20.8 million comprising Lithuanian-origin goods. Imports from Taiwan stood at €84.6 million. This growth has partially offset losses in trade with China, where Lithuanian exports plummeted from €316 million in 2021 to €146 million following political tensions, with no full recovery in sight.

Another benefit is access to higher-quality mechanical and

Another benefit is access to higher-quality mechanical and electronic goods from Taiwan, which often surpass their Chinese counterparts.

electronic goods from Taiwan, which often surpass their Chinese counterparts. However, large-scale investments, such as those anticipated through Central and Eastern European funds, have yet to materialize. To enhance collaboration with Taiwan's manufacturing sector, there is a need to establish better financing mechanisms for Taiwanese products, as Chinese goods remain 20-30% cheaper.

There remains considerable untapped potential for Lithuania-Taiwan relations. A recent meeting between drone manufacturers from Taiwan, Lithuania, and Ukraine highlighted opportunities for enhanced collaboration. Such partnerships could help reduce reliance on



In 2024, Vidmantas Janulevičius was re-elected for a second four-year term as the president of the Lithuanian Confederation of Industrialists (☒ Joana Suslavičiūtė, LPK)

Chinese components, including batteries, as global dependence on Chinese raw materials remains substantial and alternatives are limited.

Lithuania is well-positioned to serve as a gateway for Taiwan into Europe, leveraging its expertise in navigating EU frameworks like the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism and the Net Zero Industry Act. These tools are vital for addressing China's practices of subsidizing exports and undercutting competitors through dumping. Notably, China has acknowledged its export subsidies and has pledged to reduce them gradually—for example, from 13% to 9% in general, and to 3–5% in the solar energy sector.

Despite these opportunities, a major hurdle is the EU's lack of cohesion in countering China's economic influence, as member states often prioritize differing



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national interests. Strengthening trade ties with Taiwan could provide a practical and mutually advantageous strategy for diversifying supply chains and fostering economic resilience.

– What were the costs and challenges?

Given Beijing's predictable reaction, more thorough preparation was essential. Similar incidents with other

countries provided valuable lessons that could have been leveraged to anticipate the consequences. While some warnings were issued, businesses were largely uninformed about the government's plans.

Lithuanian exports began declining in late 2021 and plunged nearly tenfold in 2022. Months before the opening of the Taiwanese Representative Office, I emphasized the need for financial cushions to help businesses mitigate the impact. However, as the office opened, the situation reached a critical point: container shipments were halted, and many Lithuanian manufacturers lost their credit ratings with Sinosure, China's Export & Credit Insurance Corporation. This increased costs and strained cash flows, highlighting the need to better balance national and business interests beforehand.

Efforts to expand trade with Taiwan also moved too slowly. While Asian nations are eager exporters, selling to them is more challenging. Broader trade relations took time to materialize, with gradual progress seen in sectors like lasers and electronic components. Imports from Taiwan are approaching €100 million, reducing dependence on China, but the pace has been slower than hoped.

Additionally, expectations of stronger support from the U.S. were not fully met. Discussions about boosting Lithuanian exports to the U.S. and securing financial support resulted in only modest outcomes, with just a fraction of the publicly announced funds being utilized. Within the EU, Lithuania's stance divided opinion—some countries criticized the decision, while others supported it, having faced similar challenges with China. However, Lithuania's actions contributed to

advancing EU legislation aimed at reducing Europe's vulnerability to coercive practices in the future.

– What are the lessons learned for the future?

First, preparation is crucial: Hasty decisions impose significant costs on both political and business stakeholders. For example, in late 2021, German automotive component manufacturers in Lithuania faced direct pressure and threats from China, urging the Lithuanian government to revise its approach. This crisis was mitigated only through high-level negotiations with international partners and support from the U.S.

Second, risk mitigation in trade with China is essential. A critical takeaway is the need for diversified and certified supply chains. Companies maintaining dual supply chains—one European and one Chinese—were significantly less impacted by Beijing's

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Risk mitigation in trade with China is essential. A critical takeaway is the need for diversified and certified supply chains.

pressure, even if these arrangements were costlier. This demonstrated that China's influence is targeted based on vulnerabilities.

Building resilient alternatives is a third aspect. Maintaining ties with China while minimizing dependency requires alternatives from EU or NATO countries. For instance, Lithuania contributed to strengthening the EU's Net Zero Industry Act, mandating that 40% of components in certain products come from the EU, thereby limiting reliance on external suppliers to 60%. Such measures create a buffer against external pressures.

Lithuania has made strides toward greater resilience, though more progress is needed. The foundation laid acts as an "insurance policy" for future challenges. Expanding the Net Zero Industry Act to additional sectors like pharmaceuticals, food, and energy could further enhance both economic security and strategic independence. These steps will be critical for balancing pragmatic trade relations with China while safeguarding Lithuania's and Europe's broader economic and political interests. ●



Several Lithuanian delegations, including one headed by Janulevičius, visited Taiwan to explore potential areas of cooperation (✉ LPK)

Solidly Brittle: James Sherr on the Fragility of Putin's Regime



In this thought-provoking interview, James Sherr, a senior fellow at the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute and a leading analyst of Russian domestic and foreign policy, delves into the dynamics of the Russian regime, the sustainability of its war in Ukraine, and the challenges facing Western responses.

Speaking with Linas Kojala, editor-in-chief of the *Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review*, Sherr explores the fragility of the Kremlin's social contract, the elite's tenuous loyalty to Vladimir Putin, and the limits of sanctions as a tool for ending the war. With insights into the shifting geopolitical landscape and the uncertain future of Western support, the interview proposes ways for Western countries to confront Russia's aggression and secure Ukraine's independence.

– *How do you assess the current state of the Russian regime?*

Solidly brittle. By which I mean two things. The social contract—which, of course, has never been written down—that Putin established when he came to power is still in

place. It demands of society a renunciation of its civic and political rights in exchange for the freedom to be left alone and make money. That bargain, by and large, has been honored and still is. But the threat comes from fresh mobilizations that seriously affect those who benefited from the social contract: ethnic Russians. The pressure to implement another mobilization is considerable. If they go through with it, then you can start to raise questions about the regime's stability.

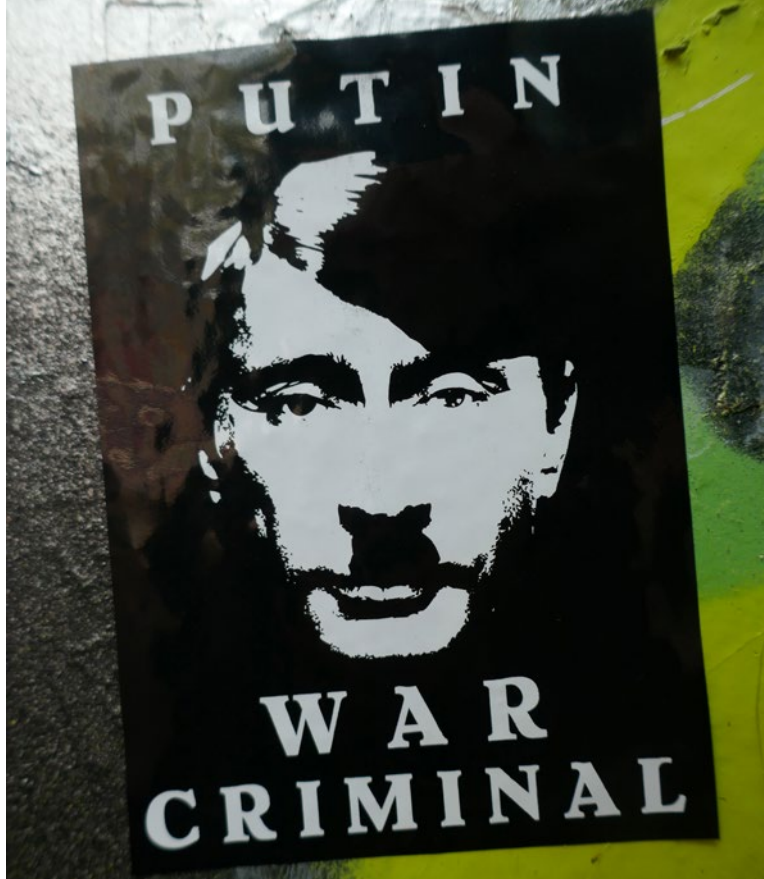
The second reason is the elites. However you define them, they make a rational calculation. It is a binary choice: where is the greater risk—in supporting or opposing Putin? So far, the answer has been that supporting him is safer. But if that calculation changes, it will do so without warning and dramatically. This is a highly atomized system made up of self-interested individuals who do not trust one another or their leaders. There is no loyalty, there is just an equilibrium—unless the army breaks.

Thus, there is a direct relationship between the war in Ukraine and regime stability:



There is a direct relationship between the war in Ukraine and regime stability: if the Russian army breaks and is forced into retreat, then everything turns over. Just look at what happened with the Prigozhin mutiny. It arose because he and his officers believed Russia was losing the war and had a losing strategy.

if the Russian army breaks and is forced into retreat, then everything turns over. Just look at what happened with the Prigozhin mutiny. It arose because he and his officers believed Russia was losing the war and had a losing strategy. That believe produces 'great pretenders'—as in the 17th century—who suddenly turn up in Moscow with an army behind them. That is the Russian tradition. Victorious armies do not produce Prigozhins.



Putin shows no concern for the losses incurred on either side of the war (🇺🇸 Duncan Cummings)

– How has the regime managed to survive Western sanctions? Is the war sustainable for Russia?

Leaving the nuances aside, sanctions do not win wars, particularly against aggressive regimes like that in Russia.

In fact, Western sanctions have been detrimental even to Russia's defense industry, which is now entirely dependent on China. China supplies the Russian defense industry with 70% of its machine tools and 90% of its microprocessors—or at least, these are the best available estimates, the general consensus.

When sanctions are in place, a war-making regime finds ways to circumvent them. Desperate people are often very ingenious. So, while the Kremlin does not want sanctions—

they are not trivial—the war is not going to be lost because of them. Sanctions are not forcing the Kremlin to change its calculations about national interests in this war.

There's also another factor: the absolute conviction in Russia—which might be half nonsense—that after they win, there will be no more sanctions. The belief is that the West will be begging to do business with them again, and all these problems and inconveniences will vanish, allowing the economy to boom.

The reason I say that this is possibly at least half nonsense is that it's akin to saying if you starve someone when they're young, you can make up for it by overfeeding them when they're old. That logic doesn't hold.

This is not an argument for dispensing with sanctions. Doing so would make the



if you want to win the war, you must win it militarily. As the police inspector said in 'The Untouchables', you don't bring a knife to a gunfight. Or, as I often put it, if someone is advancing on you with a gun, you don't try to disarm him by robbing his bank account.

Kremlin extremely happy. But if you want to win the war, you must win it militarily. As the police inspector said in 'The Untouchables', you don't bring a knife to a gunfight. Or, as I often put it, if someone is advancing on you with a gun, you don't try to disarm him by robbing his bank account.

Liberal Western countries love to believe that everything boils down to economics, that their sophisticated and superior economic tools can make it impossible for someone else to wage war. It doesn't work.

– Do you see any chinks in Russian armour?

The vulnerabilities in the defense industry I mentioned, along with the terrible labor shortages in the country, reveal a brittleness that is one chink in the armor.



Zelenskyy was cautious and strategic in cultivating a relationship with Trump during his first term (☒ Office of the President of Ukraine)

It's like a futures market: if you can create conditions that make any rational person in Russia believe they are losing, believe the future looks grim and things start to fall apart; in fact, things can fall apart rapidly.

But I will add something else. We must force the Russian regime to choose between a new, much more painful and risky mobilization, or losing the war. That is what we have to do. This is more important than how much territory Ukraine regains—or whether it regains any territory at all, or even loses some more. If you can impose that choice, you strike at the regime's core vulnerability. Look at what they are afraid of doing, and force them into a Hobson's choice: they either risk internal stability, or lose the war.

– What is Russia's strategy – to wait out the West and Ukraine?

If Kamala Harris had won the election, that would still be

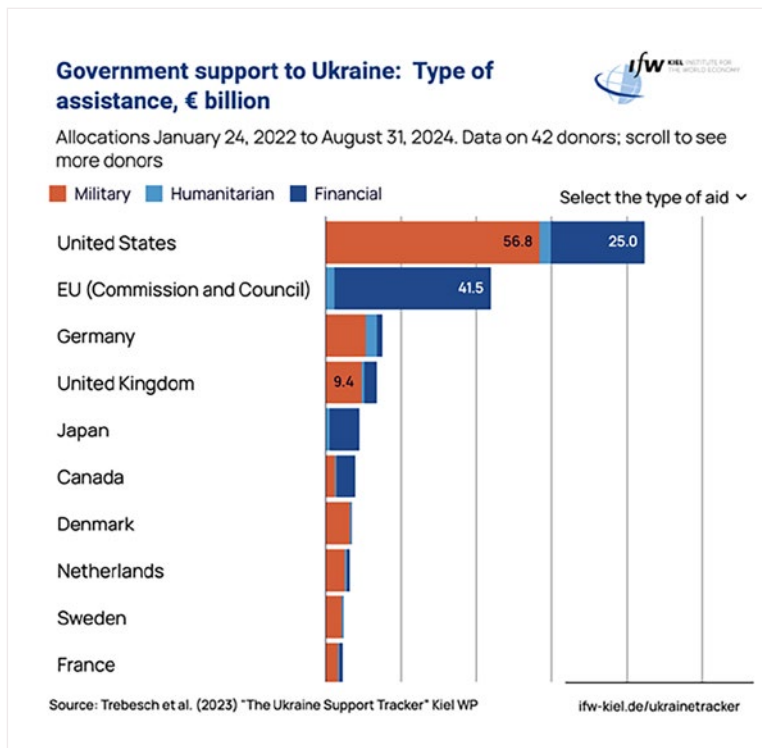
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the strategy. The Kremlin began this war believing that no matter what the West does, it lacks the tenacity, cohesiveness, willpower, and backbone to prosecute the war effectively in the long term. That calculation has been about 60% correct—and that's enough.

But everything has changed because Donald Trump is set to be sworn in on January 20th. Trump's priority is to end the war almost immediately, and he insists he has a plan to do so. Of course, no plan of his can do that, but that's his stated priority, so outwaiting him doesn't make sense. He isn't going to sit around.

What is the strategy now? It's hard to say. Within the Kremlin leadership, it's likely discussed and revised daily. But the basic elements are clear: achieve as much as possible militarily before Trump takes office. Create ramparts and



The US remains, by far, the largest provider of military support to Ukraine (🇺🇸) (IfW Kiel)

salients that are irreversible before he assumes power, regardless of the casualties, cost, or inconvenience.

Polish Foreign Minister Radek Sikorski recently remarked that to achieve his aims, Putin is willing to lose a million men. And we are talking about a million Russians, not Ukrainians. Putin would be willing to liquidate all Ukrainians if he thought he could get away with it. For the Kremlin, costs do not matter. It will do everything within its power to secure gains before Trump comes to power. And it's not just about territory—it's about creating conditions like frozen corpses in the streets during winter because there's no heating.

In this, Putin has an advantage over Zelenskyy. Because Zelenskyy's message to Trump is: "I will be as flexible as you want me to be, and I'll make as many concessions as you want, except I will not give up Ukraine's independence and sovereignty." That doesn't sound like a quick end to the war. In contrast, Putin can simply say, "Give me what I want, and I'll stop fighting tomorrow." That appeals to Trump.

The key question then becomes: who is in the Oval Office with Trump when he hears that? Are there advisers with the knowledge, intellectual capacity, and credibility to tell him, "I'm sorry, Mr. President, but that won't work. That's not an end to the war at all—it will produce

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a bigger disaster, not just for Ukraine, which you might not care about, or for Europe, which you certainly don't love, but for the United States, which is what you do care about."

– As of late November, Trump has already selected some individuals for key national security and foreign policy positions. What signal does this send to Ukraine?

Most of them still need Senate confirmation. Additionally, Trump's preferred Republican Senate leader came in third in the leadership election. Instead, the new Republican majority leader, John Thune, is a solid, non-Trumpian Republican.

I remain sceptical that Trump will get everything he wants, even with Republican majorities in Congress. I also doubt that establishment Republicans are entirely dead. Weakened, yes, but not dead.

The reality is that we're entering a period of profound uncertainty. This period doesn't begin when Trump is sworn in; it begins now and will continue until his new administration is fully settled and bedded down, likely sometime in the spring. This could be a very disturbing and possibly frightening time, as there are no fixed expectations, just pervasive uncertainty.

I'm fairly confident that Russia's ally, Kim Jong Un, sees this

as an opportune moment to shift the goalposts and attempt something significant on the Korean Peninsula or in the Far East. Additionally, I'm not sure the conventional wisdom about China and Xi Jinping is correct—that they fear instability and always prefer caution. If they perceive the ground shifting beneath them and sense that their foes are in disarray, they might act.

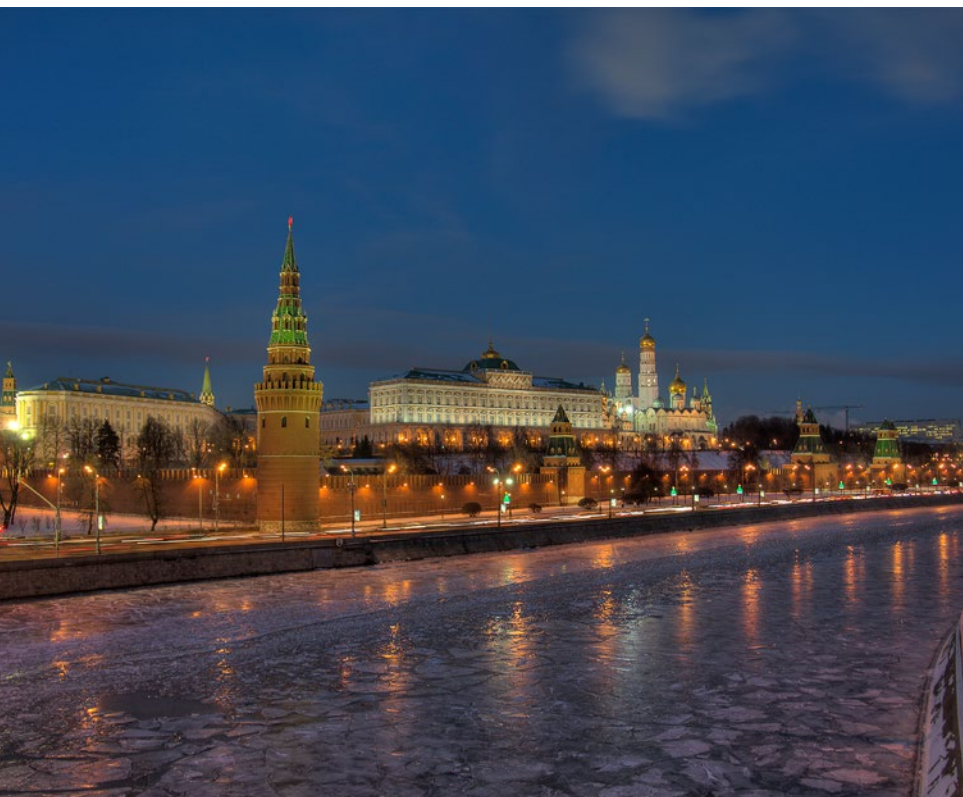
We must take all of this seriously. It's not just Trump—it's the period of maximum uncertainty and instability we face. Trump views his unpredictability as an asset, but it's also a liability. Others can exploit it to advance their agendas quickly and without warning.

– In terms of the Western support for Ukraine, do you think there's enough of it in terms of military support? That's the first aspect. And the second guarantees whatever they might be for the future security of Ukraine.

Of course, it hasn't been sufficient. If it had been, the Russian army's back would have been broken long ago. We had an opportunity to achieve this in 2022, particularly after the Ukrainian counteroffensive in Kharkiv. But then, suddenly, we temporized. We fell into a cycle of hesitancy, incrementalism, nail-biting, and self-detering behavior. That gave the Russians time to construct the largest system of territorial defenses they have erected since the Battle of Moscow in the winter of 1941.

The problem lies in our lack of a proper strategy. We failed to define our aims clearly, failed to define the means clearly, and we were afraid of doing so. As a result, we couldn't align ends with means, which is the essence of strategy. Because of this failure, if one wanted to be devastatingly cruel—as some Trump supporters are—you might say we've done an enormous amount, wasted a lot of money and resources for no real purpose. We've been afraid to ask the most fundamental questions: What exactly do we aim to achieve, and how will we achieve it?

We've also been reluctant to draw the obvious conclusion: if you're dealing with very dangerous people, and you're not willing to accept the risk of being hurt, you shouldn't



Sherr argues that the Russian elite is highly atomized, with individuals primarily focused on pursuing narrow self-interests (✉ Pavel Kazachkov)



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fight them at all. Many tougher individuals than I have said this, and they certainly didn't vote for Kamala Harris.

An anchor for Ukraine's security would have to be either NATO membership or, failing that, firm defense and security guarantees—not mere assurances, but binding treaties. Nothing less will suffice. We can't keep repeating the mistakes of the past. Neville Chamberlain's mother might have told him, "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again," but repeating failed strategies is folly. The Minsk agreements couldn't work—and didn't. The Budapest Memorandum couldn't restrain an aggressive Russia. There is no argument for revisiting such approaches. Yet far more credentialed and prestigious people than I am continue to call for exactly that.

There is no strategy worthy of the name that does not end with NATO membership or its equivalent for Ukraine.

– *Do you agree that Ukraine may not be able to push Russia back to its 1991 borders and might need to reconsider its short-term goals? What could those be?*

Military and political realities might constrain Ukraine to *accept* the loss of territory in the short term, but that's very different from *agreeing* to it. You, sitting in Lithuania, understand this distinction well. You know that if someone had said in 1960, "We're going to free the Baltics from the Soviet Union," they wouldn't have been taken seriously. Yet it would have been neither sensible nor wise to say, "All right, we *recognize* these states as part of the USSR." The same distinction must apply here.

Even in 2022, when I wrote my first major article on the war, I argued for achieving victory by stages. The first stage was



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to drive the Russian army back to the February 2022 borders. I still believe that if the West had played its cards correctly, this goal would have been achievable. Much of that aim could have been accomplished in 2022.

Stage 2 would involve recovering the lands taken since 2014. Even back in 2022, when we were so optimistic, this could not have been a purely military task. It would have required a combination of military, political, and economic efforts over a much longer period of time.

Finally, the ultimate aim, as originally articulated by US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin at the launch of the Rammstein format, is to leave Russia in such a condition that it can never wage this kind of war again. When Austin said this, President Biden immediately pushed back, saying, "You've gone too far." But what Austin said has to be our ultimate aim.

Achieving this requires changing how Russia views its national interests—a deep transformation. This is what my colleague, Andrew Wood, a former British ambassador to Russia, called a "revolution of the mind" within Russia itself. Such changes are possible, but they require not only time, they entail setbacks, defeats, and possibly even upheavals.

In the absence of that revolution of the mind, the default state of relations between Russia and its western neighbors will remain one of tension. Russia will remain a threat until it redefines its national interests. ●

European Troops Have to be Deployed to Ukraine: Nicolas Tenzer on Strategic Autonomy and France's Role



As the war in Ukraine continues into its third year, France remains one of the most vocal supporters of Ukraine's resistance against Russia. Despite this strong diplomatic stance, France's practical support, as measured by contributions to Ukraine's defense, ranks only 16th globally.

In this interview, Nicolas Tenzer, a distinguished international affairs scholar and author of *Our War: Crime and Oblivion (Notre Guerre. Le crime et l'oubli pour une pensée stratégique, 2024)*, which won the Nathalie Pasternak Prize, examines the discussion about France's strong political support for Ukraine and its relatively modest military contributions. He discusses the broader implications of European strategic autonomy, the complexities surrounding Ukraine's potential NATO membership, and the evolving political landscape within France, grappling with budget deficits, political fragmentation, and the challenge of sustaining support for Ukraine in Europe that is increasingly weary of conflict.

Tenzer offers insights into how France's position may evolve in 2025 and the critical role it must play in securing Ukraine's future.

– How do you evaluate the developments in Ukraine in 2024? Do you sense that the Ukrainian position is shifting and becoming more open to some form of negotiation?

No one can deny that the situation in Ukraine is dire, not only for the soldiers fighting in conditions of often unbearable hardship, largely due to lack of our support. But also for the civilians, who are frequently mowed down by Russian missiles and drones and face severe shortages, especially of electricity. On the two occasions I visited Ukraine this year, I felt the exhaustion — moral, psychological, and physical — of a large part of the population. Not without reason, they feel largely abandoned by us Westerners.

However, I have seen little, if any, defeatism, and the latest polls clearly show that 80% of the population wants to keep fighting. Only a tiny minority accept the prospect of territorial negotiations. They are well aware of two things, and it is essential to point them out. Firstly, as long as part of Ukrainian territory remains occupied, this will mean torture, executions,



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mass rape, and the deportation of children. Agreeing to cede territory means giving the Russians a license to kill.

On the other hand, everyone knows that the slightest concession to Putin will be perceived as a sign of weakness: a so-called “peace agreement” would pave the way for an even more brutal war in a matter of months or years.

– We often discuss war fatigue in the West. Do you sense this sentiment in France?

I don't see the phenomenon of war fatigue in France as being any more marked than in other



UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer hosted the European Political Community Summit at Blenheim Palace, meeting with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, and French President Emmanuel Macron (✉ UK Prime Minister's Office)

European Union countries. But the term itself seems to me to require a more detailed understanding.

The majority of French people support Ukraine and see Russia as a danger, which was not the case before 2022. The opinion has certainly shifted. Nor do I have the impression that the Russian propaganda narrative, which blames the war for inflation and economic hardship for ordinary citizens, is gaining traction outside of limited extremist circles.

Do people want the war to stop? I'm not sure the question is entirely relevant, as the majority of French people, along with many in Western and Southern Europe, do not view the war as their primary concern. Certainly, there are pacifists on both the far right and the far left who are sympathetic to Russia, and

some media outlets echo Moscow's narratives — suggesting that Ukraine cannot win, that concessions should be made, and that peace is needed now. However, these views are not widely accepted, and, unlike in countries such as Slovakia, Romania, or Bulgaria, they are unlikely to have significant electoral impact.

When President Emmanuel Macron suggested the possibility of deploying ground troops in February 2024, public opinion became concerned, according to polls at the time. This was due to the ambiguity of the President's statement and the deliberate misrepresentation of his words by the far right, which led some to mistakenly interpret it as a signal of impending general mobilization — a scenario that was not actually being proposed.

Therefore, I don't see any significant war fatigue in France, though I am concerned that the majority of French people are not making Russia's war on Ukraine and its broader implications for Europe the central political issue. It is the responsibility of the political class to emphasize and dramatize the gravity of the situation.



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– *Macron is one of Ukraine's most outspoken supporters today. However, France ranks only 16th among countries supporting Ukraine, according to the Kiel Institute. How do you explain this discrepancy?*

I won't go back over the figures again: the French authorities regularly criticize the Kiel Institute's figures, which they claim often mix up promises and achievements, or even weapons of very different quality, and fail to take into account deliveries that some countries, including France, feel should remain secret at the time they are made. But I know that these figures are understandably troubling our partners, and we need to reassure them in the long term.

Now, France could and should do even more, switch to a war economy and accelerate its most decisive productions, missiles in particular. However, I have noticed a remarkable change in the production rates of our manufacturers over the past two years.

The most important task now is for France to convince all its partners of the critical importance of its proposals. In my view, one of the most essential, which I have advocated for since the outset of this total war, is the deployment of European troops to Ukraine.

– *Given the national budget deficit and political fragmentation, what can we expect from France regarding Ukraine in 2025?*

The two subjects are partly linked, but not totally either.

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The first is political instability. No one knows what the outcome will be in the two years and four months between now and the next presidential election. However, it's clear that the parties which are complacent towards Moscow don't have a majority of seats in the National Assembly, so I can't see them blocking essential decisions to support Ukraine or strengthen our armed forces.

Of course, the President does not have sole decision-making power, and the implementation of specific measures to support Ukraine — such as sending forces, weapons, or funds — depends on various officials, including the Prime Minister, the Minister of the Armed

Forces, and the Minister of Finance. However, at present, there is no indication that any of these officials are opposed to the President's position on these matters. The Minister of Foreign Affairs also maintains a clear stance in support of Ukraine. In short, it cannot be said that, at this stage, either the government or parliament would actively oppose support for Kyiv.

The deficit issue is more worrying because it is structural. The problem is all the more serious because France, which has just exceeded 2% of GDP devoted to defense, needs to reach 3% and even 4% quickly. I would remind you that when General de Gaulle launched the nuclear deterrent, France was at 7%.

The equation is simple to state, but politically explosive: we'd have to reduce the deficit by at least 100 billion euros and, at the same time, increase the defense budget by around 60 billion, which would mean making 160 billion in savings. It would be difficult to achieve this without, at the very least, giving a much more solemn and dramatic warning of the reality of war in Europe.

– *Trump's victory has reignited discussions about the need for European strategic autonomy. What would this entail, and is it even theoretically achievable?*

Without re-examining the notion of strategic autonomy in detail here, Trump's return to the White House forces us to consider its central, even vital, dimension: if the US does not want to take action in a conflict of major importance for



French Defence Spending hovers around 2% of GDP (✉ Ingacio Ferre)

Europe's security, how can the Europeans ensure that Europe alone has the capacity to act decisively?

This question was already being asked in 2013: when the Assad regime launched chemical attacks in Ghouta, Barack Obama refused to enforce the red lines he had himself set, and the British House of Commons voted against any intervention. France was ready, but even with a dozen other European countries, could not replace the failing American and British forces. In 2014, marked by the invasion of Crimea and part of the Donbas region, a direct consequence of the Syrian episode, the EU was no more ready, and the US was virtually unresponsive.

If Estonia is attacked tomorrow, will Europe—the European Union members, the UK, and Norway—be able to repel Russian forces on its own,

without relying on American support? If necessary—and I believe from the outset we will have to do so if we are to win the war—will Europe be able to send enough forces to Ukraine to confront and repel the Russian invaders?

Finally, will Europe alone have access to the full range of decisive weapons on the new battlefields—drones, next-generation tanks, short-, medium-, and long-range missiles, advanced fighter jets, howitzers, etc.—to confront the enemy without relying on components from other parts of the world, particularly the US?

The debate is not theoretical; when Washington refused to allow Kyiv to strike Russian territory with French SCALPs and British Storm Shadows due to the presence of American components, Europe's room for maneuver was significantly restricted.



Europe, in the broadest sense, has the capacity to act independently, provided it commits to raising defense spending to 4% of GDP.

So yes, Europe, in the broadest sense, has the capacity to act independently, provided it commits to raising defense spending to 4% of GDP. This is the minimum required to achieve the critical mass needed for conventional defense. But the real question is whether Europe will summon the political will to make this commitment. Will European nations cooperate in a win-win scenario, or will some member states prioritize their individual advantages by seeking to secure deals with Washington?

We are approaching a situation of litmus test.

– Trump emphasizes the need to end the war as quickly as possible. This sentiment seems to resonate with many Europeans, even those who do not support Trump. Is the primary goal really to stop the fighting at any cost?

What some call the end of war is in no way equivalent to peace, or at least a lasting peace. Very often, those who speak out in favor of peace are not only ready to throw Ukraine under the bus and endorse a Russian victory — a semi-victory in which Moscow retains some territory would still be a victory for it — but they are preparing for new wars, even more deadly and extensive tomorrow. I developed these ideas at length in my latest book, *Our War*: the Allies must be careful not to use expressions like “peace agreements,” “negotiations,” or “compromises.” I’m delighted that President Zelenskyy — a recommendation I’d made a long time ago — has changed the term “peace plan” to “plan for victory.” This victory, the only goal we must pursue, and which requires the total defeat of Russia, presupposes in particular the return to the 1991 borders, the trial of all criminals, the return of deported children, and the payment of war damages in full, as well as, of course, security guarantees for Kyiv with NATO membership and the deployment of allied troops on Ukrainian territory.

Beyond the ongoing atrocities committed by Russia, a suspension of fighting would provide Moscow with the opportunity to rearm and pose an even greater security threat to all of Europe. Russia could resume its attacks on Ukraine within a year or two — or sooner — and continue its incursions into European territory. Such a scenario would tarnish NATO’s credibility and undermine its deterrence, as well as its legitimacy, which is inherently tied to upholding international law, including both border and humanitarian law. While Germany, under Olaf Scholz, appears to be swayed by a pacifist approach, which is dangerously naive for Europe’s future, public opinion in Germany does not overwhelmingly support this view. I sense that France, along with most of Central and Eastern Europe, the Baltic States, and the Nordic countries, have a clearer understanding of the dire reality of the war that Putin is waging against us.

– France does not seem to be the main obstacle within NATO regarding Ukraine’s closer integration; instead, the US and Germany appear to be the primary stumbling blocks. What is France’s perspective on Ukraine’s potential accession?

At the NATO summit in Vilnius on July 11, 2023, France affirmed its full support for Ukraine’s accession to NATO. It would like to see a firm commitment, with no additional conditions, and a set date. At this stage, however,

it cannot give a more detailed position, which will have to be discussed with the other Allies.

The major question is whether the Alliance Council will wish to abandon its jurisprudence of not granting full membership to a country at war, in view of the commitments linked to Article 5, to which, incidentally, Article 42-7 of the Treaty on European Union also refers, or whether it will wish to innovate.

In other words, could we imagine Kyiv joining the EU while parts of its territory remain occupied by Russia, with a derogation from the NATO Treaty that would exempt the Allies from being involved in recovering these territories? Such a solution presents both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage would be securing the areas currently under Ukrainian control, with the deployment of troops from certain Alliance countries serving as a deterrent and ensuring the protection of civilian populations. The disadvantage, however, is that this scenario could effectively endorse, even without any formal agreement, Moscow’s occupation of part of Ukraine as a *fait accompli*, while also sanctioning a breach of Alliance rules. This might not encourage NATO to commit more strongly to recovering these territories.

These debates will likely intensify in the coming months, but one thing is clear: any reluctance to grant Ukraine full membership — a position that could be tempting for the Trump administration — would bode ill for Europe’s collective security. ●

EU Accession Talks Are a Light at the End of the Tunnel for Ukraine



Lykke Friis

In this edition of the Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review (LFPR), Linas Kojala, editor-in-chief of the LFPR, interviews Lykke Friis, director of Denmark's Think Tank Europa and co-chair of the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR). Friis has extensive experience in academia, politics, and journalism. She has served as prorector at the University of Copenhagen, Danish Minister of Climate, Energy, and Gender Equality, and as the liberal party's spokesperson for European affairs.

In 2007, she joined the EU Reflection Group on the Future of Europe and worked as a correspondent covering Germany for *Berlingske Tidende*. Additionally, Friis chairs the board of Denmark's House of Energy, serves on the board of Team Denmark, and is president of the Danish Cancer Society.

In this interview, Friis discusses Europe's current challenges and opportunities and the Nordic-Baltic response to them.

– Can you briefly describe the Nordic-Baltic expert group of which you are a member? What do you believe are the primary

objectives and goals of the expert group in this context?

The group was set up by the Nordic-Baltic 8 foreign ministers in April 2024. Our task is to advise the Ukrainian government on EU accession talks. In July, we visited Kyiv and had discussions with Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal and Vice Prime Minister Olha Stefanishyna. Each of us also had bilateral talks with respective ministers. Here, it became clear that there is great interest from the Ukrainian side in receiving advice on the so-called screening process of the EU's various parts of legislation.

In Kyiv, we also conducted a training session with parliamentarians and participated in a conference with civil society. The latter is important since previous accession rounds have shown that accession talks should not happen behind closed doors. After all, joining the EU is a long, drawn-out process where power can shift many times between parties. Moreover, accession is often decided by a national referendum.



Having worked with enlargement for many years, including when Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia joined, there is no doubt that accession talks are an engine for transformation and reforms. However, in the Ukrainian case, it is also about creating hope during times of war.

Having worked with enlargement for many years, including when Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia joined, there is no doubt that accession talks are an engine for transformation and reforms. However, in the Ukrainian case, it is also about creating hope during times of war. After all, joining Europe, and not being seen as a country in the gray zone, is what Ukrainians are fighting for at the frontlines. In that respect, enlargement negotiations are a light at the end of the tunnel that should



Lykke Friis, together with Charles Grant, Director, Centre for European Reform, and Kaja Kallas, former Prime Minister of Estonia and now the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs (☒ Lennart Meri Conference)

not be underestimated. It should be seen as an integral part of the war effort.

Although economic aid and weapon delivery are matters of survival, it is essential that the EU keeps up the momentum after enlargement negotiations were opened in June. Judging from our trip, expectation management is an important task. After all, even the Baltics had to spend quite some time in negotiations before they joined.

– How do you view the current state of Nordic-Baltic cooperation, particularly in light of the ongoing war in Europe? What areas should be prioritized in the coming years?

There is no doubt that the accession of Finland and Sweden has been a true game-changer in Nordic-Baltic cooperation. Suddenly, all

countries around the Baltic Sea are members of the same security institutions—with the exception of Russia, obviously. Although Swedish and Finnish NATO membership was the most significant decision, one should not forget that Denmark actually joined the EU's defense dimension in 2024. Before Vladimir Putin's full-scale invasion in 2024, it was completely unrealistic that the government could win a referendum on our EU defense opt-out, which had been in force since 1992. From that perspective, the Nordic countries have carried out a *Zeitenwende* that is far more extensive than the one in Germany.

In my mind, this common Nordic *Zeitenwende* will make it far easier to cooperate in the region as a whole,

since we now see eye to eye on the threat from Russia. Hence, there will be far more cooperation, not least on security issues such as cyber security and hybrid warfare. Enlargement is also a very good example of where we can cooperate more.

– The Kiel Institute Ukraine Support Tracker shows that Denmark is the biggest funder of Ukraine when looking at the percentage of donor country GDP, alongside Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Finland, Sweden, and Poland—all Nordic-Baltic countries. How do you explain this high level of support?

It's actually pretty surprising, especially if you consider that Ukraine was never high on the agenda in Denmark. This was also the case after the



German elections could be fought over Ukraine policy
 (🗳️ Norbert Nagel)

invasion of Crimea. Indeed, for many Danes, Ukraine was not considered an integral part of the EU. This changed completely on February 22, when Russia tried to change its borders by force. The brutality, for instance in Bucha, shocked the Danish public.

One must also give credit to Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, who very early on made it clear that Ukraine is crucial for our own security. The fear that Putin might later be tempted to attack one of the Baltic countries also played a role.

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 When Denmark decided to donate F-16s to Ukraine, all parties in Parliament, including the far right and left, voted in favor. Unlike in Germany, for instance, no party has argued that our weapon donations could escalate the war or that supporting Ukraine would be too expensive for Denmark.

The government has ensured that Ukraine is a bipartisan issue. When Denmark decided to donate F-16s to Ukraine, all parties in Parliament, including the far right and left, voted in favor. Unlike in Germany, for instance, no party has argued that our weapon donations could escalate the war or that supporting Ukraine would be too expensive for Denmark. It is also striking that Danish voters, according to pan-European opinion polls from ECFR, are among the most supportive of Ukrainian EU membership. This underlines that Ukraine is now seen as a future member of the EU, not a country in the eastern *Niemandsland*.



– We often hear about fatigue in the West regarding support for Ukraine. Additionally, radical right and left parties are on the rise, casting doubt on future support at a time when Ukraine urgently needs help. Moreover, political change is taking place in the US. How might European nations adapt to all of that?

It is very easy to be pessimistic. But we shouldn't forget that the EU has actually managed the most recent crises quite well. Just take the COVID-19 crisis or the energy crisis after the full-scale invasion.



In my mind, we have spent far too much time speculating on who would win the American election and on Trump's various moves, instead of thinking about what we could do ourselves. Italy's Prime Minister Meloni nailed it when she said: "Don't ask what the U.S. can do for you, ask what Europe should do for itself."

We are now seeing important developments in defense, with more focus on the EU defense industry. Who would have imagined that the EU would have a commissioner for defense? So who knows—there may be a Trump factor. But time is of the essence. Europe could step up its weapon deliveries and economic support before Trump enters the Oval Office. In my mind, we have spent far too much time speculating on who would win the American election and on Trump's various moves, instead of thinking about what we could do ourselves. Italy's Prime Minister Meloni nailed it when she said: "Don't ask what the U.S. can do for you, ask what Europe should do for itself."

– What is your assessment of Germany's role and potential for leadership within

Europe during this period of geopolitical challenges? For example, Zeitenwende was launched, and Lithuania is awaiting a historic deployment of the German brigade. On the other hand, the German economy is in recession, and the political landscape appears highly fragmented.

I was impressed when Chancellor Olaf Scholz gave his *Zeitenwende* speech a few days after the full-scale invasion. I still think it was one of the most important speeches in the Bundestag—on par with Konrad Adenauer's and Willy Brandt's speeches on Westpolitik and Ostpolitik, and Helmut Kohl's speech on enlargement. In one speech, Scholz went up against many fundamentals of post-war Germany, such as the decision not to deliver weapons to a country at war. However, at no time has Germany been able to lead. Far too often, Scholz has waited for Joe Biden to act first, thereby undermining the ambition of strategic autonomy. The tendency to draw up red lines has not been helpful either.

Germany is now in the midst of an election campaign. What worries me the most is that the election could be fought over Ukraine policy. You already see examples of politicians presenting Ukraine and welfare policy as a zero-sum game. The accusation of escalating the war is another angle. All of this is compounded by the fact that Germany is suddenly short of money—unless it decides to alter the *Schuldenbremse*. ●

Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova: Denis Cenusa on Trio's Uneven Journey Toward Europe



Linas Kojala, the editor-in-chief of the LFPR, sat down with Denis Cenusa to explore the prospects of European integration in Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova. Cenusa, a leading regional expert, is a Research Fellow and PhD student at the Institute of Political Science at Justus Liebig University in Giessen, Germany, focusing on global governance and the resilience of countries in the EU neighborhood. His extensive work spans topics such as European integration, EU-Russia relations, governance, and energy security in Eastern Europe. He also serves as an Associate Expert at Moldova's Expert-Grup think tank, where he has been coordinating a SIDA-funded project with the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels since 2015.

In this interview, Cenusa paints a nuanced picture of the EU accession process. While he acknowledges moments of progress, he highlights significant challenges, including the domestic political landscapes of the three countries, resource shortages, and the EU's own strategic hurdles. Success, he argues,

will hinge on the ability of political leaders to implement reforms and strengthen institutional capacity, as well as the EU's responsiveness to the unique challenges facing each nation.

– How do you assess the overall progress over the last year of the European Union enlargement process regarding Moldova, Ukraine, and Georgia?

The European integration process has experienced ups and downs. The EU has remained consistent in its efforts to accelerate progress while ensuring that accession criteria, based on meritocracy, are upheld. The domestic realities also influence this process

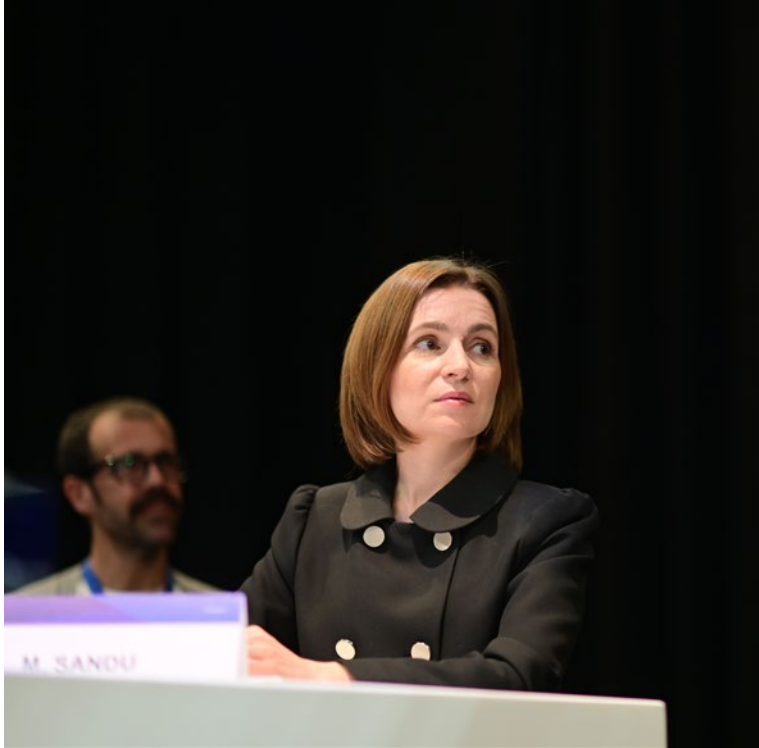
A major issue is human resources, as candidates and aspiring countries lack qualified experts to handle these tasks. Additionally, financial resources are strained, especially in Ukraine, due to the urgent need to focus on the war and defense capabilities.

In Moldova, pro-EU elites hold power, but their views do not fully align with the wider

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population. Some internal reform processes were rushed, and the government struggled to effectively mobilize public support, jeopardizing both the European integration process and the EU's legitimacy. Furthermore, some people are critical of EU processes due to Maia Sandu and her allies being in power, corruption scandals, and other issues. This has led to a portion of society not supporting the government, negatively impacting the EU agenda.

Georgia finds itself in a self-inflicted situation. The government is pro-EU in its rhetoric but behaves more like an autocracy, imitating policies from Russia, Azerbaijan, and possibly even Turkey. The EU cannot offer more support as



Maia Sandu was reelected as President of Moldova
(EPP Congress Rotterdam)

Georgia fails to comply with fundamental principles such as the rule of law, civil society, and the right to self-expression. These factors make the EU view Georgia as unprepared for advancement.

In Ukraine, Russia is clearly the main issue; in Georgia, the reasons are mostly domestic. In Moldova, it is a combination of these factors.

– Recently, there has been considerable optimism about Moldova in the West. The country reelected its pro-Western president, Maia Sandu, and the referendum on amending the Constitution to facilitate Moldova's potential EU accession passed, albeit narrowly.

The key issue now is whether the proportion of Moldovans favouring joining the EU outweighs those skeptical. The figures are mixed. The referendum result was close, and surveys show that about half of those who opposed

Those who favor a closer relationship with Russia are not necessarily pro-Kremlin or opposed to Ukraine; rather, they see potential economic benefits, such as lower energy prices, from such ties. I am not saying that you could expect cheap gas from Russia, but this is an argument used by Russia and its proxies.

the amendment are critical of the EU, which could indicate that roughly a quarter of the population holds such views.

Surveys generally show that around 55% of Moldovans support EU integration, while 30-35% lean toward the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union or a closer relationship with Russia. This is notable considering Moldova has no land connection with other members of the Eurasian Union, making such a union seem impractical. Yet, many Moldovans still believe it is a realistic option.

The economic context is also crucial. Those who favor a closer relationship with Russia are not necessarily pro-Kremlin or opposed to Ukraine; rather, they see potential economic benefits, such as lower energy prices, from such ties. I am not saying that you could expect cheap gas from Russia, but this is an argument used by Russia and its proxies.

Additionally, the performance of Moldova's pro-EU government plays a significant role. If the government fails to deliver visible political, economic, and social progress, it could harm public perception not only of the EU integration process and the EU itself.

The EU must examine the situation closely. While there are reasons to celebrate, the mood in Moldova, especially among pro-EU political forces in opposition, remains mixed. They see the referendum as being used for the government's own political gain, which could jeopardize the broader strategic goal of constitutional reform.

– The role of the Moldovan diaspora in President Maia Sandu's reelection and the referendum's outcome presents



Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda expressed strong support for Moldova's path toward European Union membership (✉ R. Dačkus, Lithuania's President Office)

a significant dilemma for Moldova moving forward. In the second round of the presidential election, more than 330,000 Moldovan citizens abroad voted—a record number. Without their votes, Sandu would not have won. This highlights a deepening social divide, one that goes beyond just East versus West and also between those living in Moldova and the diaspora.

For many in Moldova, the fact that the diaspora has such a powerful influence on the country's political outcomes is a source of discomfort. Moldovans living domestically are the ones

who pay the bills, receive local salaries, and deal directly with the country's economic and social challenges. Yet, a large group of people living outside Moldova, who do not experience these daily hardships, ultimately determine the country's leadership. This creates a sense of disconnect and frustration.

The government, recognizing the political importance of the diaspora, has courted them as a key political force, particularly by spreading the message "save Moldova from Russia." It has effectively mobilized many Moldovans abroad, who are largely better off economically than Moldovans domestically



Moldovans in the country face a different reality. Their primary concerns are survival and day-to-day economic struggles. While they too recognize the threat posed by Russia, their focus is on securing basic needs, which often leads to different priorities and perspectives from those in the diaspora.

and often consume media outlets that are sympathetic to the government's pro-European stance. These media outlets emphasize the threat posed by Russia—an undeniable concern—but they often overlook the domestic political missteps of the current government.

On the other hand, Moldovans in the country face a different reality. Their primary concerns are survival and day-to-day economic struggles. While they too recognize the threat posed by Russia, their focus is on securing basic needs, which often leads to different priorities and perspectives from those in the diaspora. This divergence in lived experiences and priorities creates a divide.

– What reforms will be at the top of the Moldovan President's agenda during the second term?

In general, the house has to be put in order. Good governance is the key priority and issue. This means addressing issues like transparency in government performance, openness to criticism, and ensuring that the media does not self-censor. Media and politics must remain independent—if they become co-opted, optimism bias forms, and the ruling class start living in a bubble. Politicians can become disconnected from reality, leading to dissatisfaction among the public.

It is crucial to foster greater openness in society and ensure that institutions take the criticism into account. If

this is not achieved, external malign actors can exploit these divisions for their own purposes. Russia's influence increases when it can exploit the internal vulnerabilities the local government fails to address. The government needs to focus on tackling the root causes, not just the symptoms.

– The progress of Georgia has noticeably slowed down. The Georgian Dream seems to be in full control, especially after the last parliamentary election, even as the opposition cried foul. Do you see a way forward for Georgia?

Georgia is much more strategically important for the EU than many other countries. It serves as a gateway to Central Asia and plays a crucial role as a strategic intermediary between Azerbaijan and Armenia. All of these countries depend on Georgia in some way.

Beyond the political considerations of democracy and human rights, Georgia is well-positioned for economic growth and can perform effectively in the technical aspects of European integration, such as industrial policy, competition policy, and more. Agriculture may be an exception.

However, this is only one side of the story. There has been little progress at the high political level. Without such progress, Georgia will not be able to attract the EU's enlargement support funds. The government is not keen on pursuing this; they prefer to handle politics domestically

on their own terms without taking guidance from the EU. Many parallels can be drawn with Serbia in this regard. The EU will not have incentives to enhance cooperation with a Eurosceptic government in Tbilisi.

– Most people in Georgia are consistently supportive of accession to the EU and NATO in opinion polls. However, the dominant party is clearly not aligned with this goal and still keeps the power. How do you bridge these aspects?

A large Georgian diaspora in countries like Greece, Italy, and Spain builds connections with the EU and is notably active, organizing protests in Berlin and elsewhere against the government. In this regard, the Georgian diaspora is more active in Europe than Moldovans. Moreover, protests that have occurred since the last election in 2024 were big not only in Tbilisi but also in Batumi and Kutaisi. So, the potential of Georgians should not be underestimated.

But it is hard to see how obstacles can be overcome. The quality of the opposition in Georgia is not good, as it is very fragmented and lacks a common agenda. The opposition's efforts lack focus on pragmatic goals – what can be achieved and how. Protests are not enough to replace the government. You need a smart strategy and alternative proposals.

I tried to look at different scenarios. It is unlikely that the current government could simply be replaced. The



After the parliamentary election in 2024, the Georgian Dream party cast more doubt on the country's integration into the EU (✉ Marco Fieber)



The quality of the opposition in Georgia is not good, as it is very fragmented and lacks a common agenda. The opposition's efforts lack focus on pragmatic goals – what can be achieved and how.

Armenian scenario of regional support for the leading political figure is also unlikely. There is no single leader in Georgia around whom the opposition can unify. So, the government is not concerned and continues to employ the tactic of divide and conquer to split the opposition. Sometimes, the divisions among opposition forces are so wide that the government does not need to do much.

Moreover, small details are being overlooked. The Georgian elections took place

on Saturday, and on Sunday, everybody at the EU is out of office. So, the EU was slow in reaction, while Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán was already in Tbilisi sealing the ruling party's victory. Therefore, the EU lacks a strategy on how to deal with such circumstances. You cannot be late, even by hours.

– Ukraine is fighting a war for its freedom. Is there room for focus on reforms?

Ukraine's needs differ from those of other candidate countries, even without



considering the war. As a major agricultural power with an economy of scale, Ukraine could pose significant competition to some EU businesses.

Ukraine's primary goal is to stay afloat, while also considering the costs of reconstruction. Much depends on the new US administration, but initial signs indicate that Ukrainians and Europeans will bear the largest share of the burden.

Domestic political conditions are also challenging, with the rise of the far right in Germany, France, and elsewhere. The situation is so unstable that it

is difficult to see how the EU will secure sufficient resources for Ukraine.

Moldova is a step ahead, with accession talks likely to start sooner than for Ukraine. Moldova is already providing incentives for government workers and has begun recruiting and training more personnel, despite the shortage of qualified staff.

The EU needs to establish training programs for Ukrainian refugees to help prepare them for reconstruction efforts and EU integration. This would be a significant step forward. Ukraine requires experts with knowledge of EU affairs. Countries like Germany, France, and Italy host



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many Ukrainian refugees who previously worked in government and could begin planning for their return. However, little appears to be happening in this regard.

– So, are you optimistic about what could be achieved in 2025?

I try to remain realistic. We should navigate negative scenarios while hoping for the best, rather than assuming everything will turn out fine. What if Russia succeeds? What if it retains occupied territories in Ukraine? What if Donald Trump strikes a deal with Vladimir Putin? What if Europe's economy worsens? Facing hardships requires less optimism and more realism.

We also need to incorporate more scenario-building exercises into international conferences and seminars. This would allow discussions of even the worst-case outcomes, making us more grounded and prepared rather than merely reactive. ●

Imperfect Sanctions on Russia Are Still Making an Impact



Daniel Fried

For years, Russia's ambitions have centered on restoring its empire—by force if necessary. Ukraine's fight today echoes Lithuania's struggle for independence decades ago, and their victory would symbolize triumph for a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace. Russia remains a clear threat to that vision.

Sanctions are not an end in themselves but a tool to achieve broader foreign policy goals. The first sanctions on Russia, imposed in 2014 after its invasion of Crimea, were significant; they marked the first time such measures targeted an economy as large as Russia's. In hindsight, however, those sanctions were modest. By 2022, the Biden administration had escalated the measures dramatically, freezing nearly \$300 billion in Russian sovereign assets and capping Russian oil prices.

Are these sanctions working? Critics argue that Russia is still waging war, its economy is growing, and sanctions evasion is widespread. These points are valid. Sanctions haven't saved Ukraine—but they were never intended to. What they are



Sanctions haven't saved Ukraine—but they were never intended to. What they are doing is weakening the Russian economy in ways that will intensify over time.

doing is weakening the Russian economy in ways that will intensify over time. For instance, Gazprom faces its first annual loss in over two decades in 2023, and the Russian economy is staying afloat only through massive state spending on its military.

The Challenges Ahead

Let's be clear: we haven't done enough. Enforcing sanctions remains a major hurdle, with goods slipping through third countries like Kazakhstan. Western technology—essential components like microchips—continues to reach Russian hands. This failure stems not

Ambassador Daniel Fried, a diplomat with a distinguished forty-year career, was instrumental in shaping U.S. policy in Europe after the Soviet Union's fall. He played a key role in NATO enlargement, advancing European security, and leading U.S. sanctions policy against Russia in response to its aggression in Ukraine. A recognized expert on Central and Eastern Europe, he also contributed to Poland's democratic transition. Currently, he is a Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council, a professor at Warsaw University, and a Board Director at the National Endowment for Democracy.



Sanctions do have an impact on Russian economy (📧 Goodfon)



History shows that even imperfect sanctions can weaken a regime. In the 1980s, sanctions didn't collapse the Soviet Union overnight, but they drained its ability to sustain itself.

only from enforcement gaps but also from a cultural issue: manufacturers and exporters must take compliance more seriously.

Progress has been made, but there's more to do:

- **Strengthen enforcement:** We must target every entity complicit in sanctions evasion, including applying secondary sanctions on firms dealing in Russian oil.
- **Utilize frozen Russian assets:** The debate over \$280 billion in immobilized Russian reserves is crucial. Personally, I advocate using not just the interest—estimated at \$53 billion—but the full amount to aid Ukraine.
- **Address Chinese involvement:** While China hasn't sent weapons directly to Russia, it provides dual-use technologies that bolster Russia's war effort. Broader sanctions on Chinese companies involved in this supply chain should be on the table.

A Cautious Optimism

Despite the obstacles, I remain cautiously optimistic. History shows that even imperfect sanctions can weaken a regime. In the 1980s, sanctions didn't collapse the Soviet Union overnight, but they drained its ability to sustain itself. The parallels today are striking.

Defeating Putinism in Ukraine isn't just about securing

Ukraine's sovereignty—it could pave the way for a different future for Russia. Regime change isn't U.S. or European policy, nor should it be, but history has a way of surprising us. Few in the Cold War thought Eastern Bloc dissidents would succeed, yet Lithuania is now a success story. Ukraine could follow a similar path.



The Kremlin-owned gas giant Gazprom reported a net loss of \$6.9 billion in 2023 (📧 James Offer)



Donald Trump supporters in Arizona (📷 Gage Skidmore)

Admittedly, Western influence has limits. Countries like China, India, and Turkey don't participate in sanctions, which dilutes their effectiveness. Sanctions are imperfect and partial, but they don't need to be flawless. Even incremental pressure frustrates Russia—and that's the point.

Could change arise from within the Kremlin? Perhaps younger oligarchs, worried about their future, might act. It's an intriguing possibility, but predicting or engineering Russia's political destiny is not our job. Our focus must remain on weakening Putin's capacity to wage war.

Sanctions alone won't save Ukraine. That requires weapons, political support, and unwavering collective resolve. Yet sanctions remain a vital tool—one that can constrain Russia's resources, pressure its leadership, and perhaps open the door to a better future.

Donald Trump's "America First" philosophy, which views Europe as a burden and divides the world into spheres of influence, would be disastrous—playing directly into Russia's hands. However, it's possible Trump might surprise us, perhaps attempting to "save" NATO as a legacy move.



However, it's possible Trump might surprise us, perhaps attempting to "save" NATO as a legacy move.

For now, what matters is that sanctions, however imperfect, continue to pressure Russia, supporting the larger fight for a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

The article is based on a talk Ambassador Daniel Fried gave in Vilnius, Lithuania on June, 2024. ●

