

The Annual Baltic Forum Conference  
**Global Crisis – National Responses**

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**ABSTRACTS**

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Thank you for that introduction, though of course Estonian president Ilves might say that we're a Nordic country – that's just a joke, of course. I'm very honoured to be speaking on this distinguished panel as the symbolic northern Balt. I'm not an economist, so I will focus on the second part of the title; the first few presentations have given us a more global view; I will focus on the regional security aspect, in particular from an EU perspective.

I will take as my starting point two summits which have taken place in the last few weeks during the month of May: the Eastern Partnership Summit in Prague and then two weeks later the EU-Russia summit.

Now, starting with the first, a remark which our host Mr. Jurgens made in the previous session was that Russia wasn't invited to the Eastern Partnership, to become a part of the Eastern Partnership. Well, Russia has never aspired to the Eastern Partnership, because Eastern Partnership in its essence is, of course, bringing these six countries up to the level of relationship which Russia enjoys with the EU already. In other words, Russia has a more privileged relationship with the EU than these six new countries which will be a part of the Eastern Partnership. So it's not about ignoring Russia, it's simply about bringing the others up to that level. Russia, of course, has its four common spaces, Russia has its two annual summits with the EU; it's a very special relationship. You could think also that one of the main aspects of the Eastern Partnership, one of the tangibles, one of the concrete results, hopefully, in the mid-term could be visa facilitation for some of these countries: just to think of a situation which Russia already enjoys, you could imagine, how, well, a Russian passport-holder in South Ossetia today enjoys easier access to the EU than a citizen of Georgia, for instance. So it's not something, I would say, aimed at excluding Russia, but it's bringing others up to the level which Russia already enjoys. Of course, Russia emphasises its sovereignty, its traditional sovereignty; it doesn't want to be bound and tied by the obligations and requirements of any kind of contractual relationship which the Eastern Partnership and its action plans might impose on these six states of EU-Russia shared neighbourhood. But I think Mr. Jurgens was definitely right in saying earlier that the EU's influence in fact is very minimal in this region; Russia has indeed put much more money and has much more influence and traditional connections and networks in the region, so Russia obviously is a bigger player; Europe is only coming into this region now quite reluctantly, I would say.

And here I think it would be useful to remind ourselves how this Eastern Partnership began: it's really only an evolution of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The European Neighbourhood Policy, of course, is naturally about spreading the zone of stability and prosperity, and rule of law in the neighbourhood of Europe. But it doesn't differentiate between the South and the East; the North-African countries and those countries, those neighbours which are European countries and thus should have naturally a better, closer relationship with the EU – these countries in fact do have European perspective. But also when we think about the European Neighbourhood Policy, then one of its rationales was to draw a very clear line between those who would be potential candidates for any future enlargement of the EU and those who were simply neighbours, that is, these countries in the common EU-Russian neighbourhood are not considered candidates for the EU any time in the near future whatsoever, and this is one of the reasons why the ENP, the Neighbourhood Policy has been successful: because it's a way of demarcating very clearly where the boundary of the EU as such is. Of course, I would say my country and a country like Poland would like to see the policy developed step by step in, perhaps, preparing these countries for closer integration to Europe, but that's I don't think a view shared by the major players in the capitals of the larger, more influential member states. And, of course, the Eastern Partnership, as I said, was really

about differentiating the ENP, which was a “one size fits all” policy for all the geographical neighbours of the EU. And it was really, I would say, the French president Sarkozy, who got the ball rolling with his Union for the Mediterranean process, which fed more attention, more money, and already the Barcelona process of course earlier was pumping a lot of money into the neighbourhood in the Mediterranean, and the Eastern Partnership was simply a way of focusing some attention to Europe's eastern neighbours, countries which are in Europe and which certainly aren't getting an equivalent amount of attention and certainly not funding or monetary support. So it's very much about an internal EU debate or EU development what this Eastern Partnership has come about and it's also a question for the EU: do we treat these neighbours, do we simply have bilateral relationships with them or we develop a multi-lateral framework, and that is the essence of putting well, these six rather diverse countries into one grouping, but it simply makes it easier for EU bureaucracy and the politicians to handle or conceptualize this group rather than try to focus on every country individually, which would mean that they would receive very little attention or some of these countries would be forgotten altogether.

Now coming to the second summit which I took as a starting point: the EU-Russia summit just last week. The main headline news from that summit, at least in the Western press (I'm taking for instance the BBC World Service internet headline) for that was “Russia fears new EU pact”, which was a mystifying headline for me, but it came from a quote in the press conference following the summit, where the Russian president warned that “the Eastern Partnership shouldn't be developed against anyone”, that is, against Russia. And this to my mind seems to be an interesting, but not entirely logical response to what the EU is actually doing. It follows that same rhetoric and discourse which we can follow in the media and diplomatic circles; that somehow the EU, and this also applies perhaps even more to NATO, that these organizations are dragging these countries of the neighbourhood forcefully into Euro-Atlantic structures even against their will, or quicker than they would like. But if you follow the developments in the EU, that's entirely nonsense. If we look at our own experience, of course, the Baltic States coming into the EU and NATO; no-one was awaiting us there, it was only due to our own, as Bob Nurick said, our own efforts of reform. Meeting the tough criteria and requirements and no-one in the EU is awaiting these countries either if they don't fulfil these requirements. And if we talk about going from the neighbourhood policy to enlargement, the slogan which is making the round in Europe for the last two years is “enlargement fatigue”, that is, the prospects of any further expansion of the EU are very, very remote. Croatia will to my mind probably be- (of course there's the exception of Iceland – rich countries in the West, I think, are a different case), Croatia will certainly be the last country to join the EU for the foreseeable future. Unfortunately I'm afraid we can write off Turkey; I would like to see Turkey myself in the EU, but that's not going to happen in this decade, and leaving aside any other potential new candidates. And I mean you could say the same about the NATO process as well; I think the Bucharest summit made a bogeyman out of this membership action plan – that it doesn't automatically give anyone a free ride into the Alliance. Again, from our own experience: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania were part of the membership action plan for five years before they finally met those requirements, so the fear that countries that are given this opportunity would move in a direction quickly is unfounded. And the political will simply is not there, as I think I have outlined on the part of the major actors within the EU who are worried with their own institutional dilemmas: they've been preoccupied with the Lisbon treaty and the Constitutional treaty; before that we still don't know what will happen with the potential Irish referendum in the fall, so I don't see any quick movement there. But it seems to me that the statement that somehow the Eastern Partnership could be seen as against Russia betrays a sphere of influence or a sphere of interest thinking or a zero-sum game approach to this region, whereas the EU and Russia should both have a common interest in promoting stability, prosperity and the rule of law and would both greatly benefit from having this in their neighbourhood and it's a mystery to me why this should be portrayed by anyone as being conflicting or contradictory for those. And lastly, I would say of course, part of this whole discourse ignores the countries in this question themselves, that they are more the objects rather than the subjects who are making their own free choice of how they ally themselves, who their partners are; and I don't think any of this is necessarily mutually-exclusive. So I'm not overly-optimistic about the prospects for the Eastern Partnership at the moment; I think it's a very small step in the right direction and the documents on Eastern Partnership, of course, leave open the possibility of cooperation with Russia in this neighbourhood as well and I hope that that does happen, to end on a slightly positive note.