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***“Remembering Poland’s Accession to the EU: Lessons for Ukraine”***

**Jean Monnet Dialogue for Peace and Democracy - European Parliament And**

**Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine**

**28 April 2023, Lublin**

After last night news about Putin’s new atrocities, it is hard to go back to our discussion, to think where to start, what to say. The stories of Lithuania and of my home country come from a similar moment we live together with you now. We were preparing for joining the European family of democracies, just like Ukraine is doing right now. Both the story you have been writing for a while and our stories have been about building for our nations a peaceful and prosperous future.

And both, Lithuania and Poland then and Ukraine now, we have signaled to Putin what is our preferred option for the international order in Europe. In Lithuania and Poland preparing for accession took place in the context of grand transition to democracy and market economy, that had begun in case of Poland in 1989.

I will start with some dates. In December 1991 we signed our Association Agreement. Its trade and political part entered into effect in March next year and two years later, in March 1994, the whole Agreement came to fruition. Unilaterally, we put into its preamble our final goal - membership. And then, on the 8 of April 1994 we applied for membership. In parallel to this journey to democracy, successive governments, regardless of their political colors, spared no efforts to anchor Poland in the NATO and European Union.

Back in the 1990s, new democracies in central and Eastern Europe used the chance that every generation has, to change the course of their history. They had made their choice - return to Europe. It did not happen overnight, it was a lengthy process, with its ups and downs, steered and coordinated by politicians, but engaging all levels of governance, all economic and social stakeholders, and massively Polish civil society.

That was the time when politics in Poland appeared as Aristotle's common public good rather than a technique of manipulating society by populist nationalistic forces as we see it now.

I think that Ukrainians have such a chance now - to change the course of your history.

Like today, in 1990s there was a divided world around us, with a lot of uncertainties. There were people that fell in love with democracy and started practicing it, but there were as well assertive regimes of autocrats and dictators of all sorts.

For all of us in Europe, sovereignty - back then and today - means the ability to achieve our strategic goals and we know only too well that outside the EU and NATO such ability is not conceivable. We knew then and we know now that in this deeply polarized world even the biggest countries cannot effectively cope with global risks and threats that do not respect borders.

Poland's accession to the European Union was first of all a political process of huge strategic importance. Economically, it was both a challenge and unprecedented opportunity, like it is today for Ukraine. But it was as well a never experienced administrative effort for a country with no tradition of civil service, of coordination and sharing, with dominant vertical structures, low salaries and low social position of those employed in public administration. When we applied for membership in 1994, my first task, therefore, was to establish a fit for purpose institutional architecture at the government level. We built an administrative machinery based on the inspiration from the French system of inter institutional coordination (SGCI). We established as well a National School of Administration (KSAP) based on the model of ENA.

What we built in 1996 became for years a fundamental structure for coordinating the entire process, with all hands across all levels of public administration on the deck. But I can tell you that even the best administrative structures would not have worked so well if we failed to wake up among all those involved a sense of public mission and emotional engagement, the feeling of ownership and responsibility for this epochal public good of joining the European family of democratic states.

The Committee on European Integration (KIE) was chaired by the Prime Minister and included nearly all Ministers and the Office of the Committee (UKIE), under my

chairmanship as Secretary of State, was our administrative capacity, a fundamental factor, both during the accession process and during the first years of membership. But let me underline that the beginning of the whole process was political will. I think that also in Ukraine the political will is the beginning, but the outcome of this political process depends heavily on civil servants' contribution to it. So, yes, the second step on this road is the administration, fit for purpose and committed.

Then came the adoption of National Integration Strategy. This was a very useful bible for many years. A document endorsed by the government and shared with the Parliament. The Strategy had a political chapter, followed by institutional tasks, program of economic adjustment, harmonization of law, external actions plan, required human resources, communication strategy, costs and benefits of accession. There was also a program of the implementation of the Strategy, system of reporting. Interministerial team embracing more than 50 deputy ministers was organized to conduct the whole process of coordination, later it was the core of our negotiating team. negotiation team. I think that at central administration level there were around 800 civil servants, a unit was established in every ministry and central institution. In parallel we were working on preparing Poland to benefit from structural funding. Our option from the beginning was to prepare regions to take responsibility for regional programs. NIS - political challenges - institutional, economic adjustments, harmony of law, external action, human resources, communication, costs and benefits of accession. We established regular reporting on implementation.

Teams of lawyers, translators and interpreters were set up, centers of information and documentation were established, research centers were mobilized, training for experts on European policies had to be launched, media were involved in a huge scale communication campaign, teachers started to voluntarily provide European education, civil society organizations were massively engaged. Everything government adopted was shared with Parliament. Reporting to the Parliament on progress in the process, briefings offered to many parliamentary committees, there was close cooperation in the area of adopting European legislation, system of providing opinions on the alignment with European law for every piece of legislation to be considered by the Parliament was established. Political parties were encouraged to establish relations with the parties belonging to the same political

families. Relations with the formal structure in the European Parliament played an important role.

Working in close partnership with European Commission proved fundamentally useful. They offered help basically on everything related to both association and accession. Also, establishing cooperation with administrations of other member states was of key importance. Commission was a friend while not all EU member states kept their arms open for that big bank enlargement of 2004.

In short, I would say that preparing for accession meant leaving no stone unturned. I must admit that in Ukraine, the aggression increased the number and the size of the stones. Your challenge is bigger, and you need more assistance.

In this maze of challenges and opportunities, finding a common good, the interest of Poland, was not only a political, economic and social effort. It was as well an intellectual and emotional one. And there were sectorial and partisan interests. For some circles, these vested interests took even precedence over national interest.

In Poland, unlike in other candidate countries there was in the Parliament an anti-European opposition, two political parties that have disappeared later from the political space. In this context, meeting and talking about Europe with local communities, village leaders, teachers, students was a pleasure. Confidence and hope prevailed there. My experience tells me that reaching down to local and regional level early enough increases chances for good outcome on the road to accession. In Poland, the reform of 1991, decentralising the state, establishing local communities and empowering them politically and financially, was very helpful in the accession process. It also led to emergence of non-governmental organizations, strengthening the pivot to democracy.

At that time, we did not talk about fake news, but one could hear a lot of lies about Europe and its integration. One should never leave such issues unanswered. In Poland, as you can imagine, I also had to have long conversations with church hierarchy, a catholic one. We took bishops and cardinal to Brussels. Finally, we had the church on the pro-European side. That included the Pope.

And we had a referendum. There was of course a special communication effort before the public vote that took place on the 7-8 of June in 2003. Here, the smartest

thing we did was to invite people to vote during a two-day referendum. It brought a nearly 80% support for the accession.

Throughout the process, the double consensus of politicians and the public was incredibly important. Yes, it is true, that the political level and technical level negotiations were done by the experts, we had many of those at political level, which was very important, but we also had very broad consultations with stakeholders. You have to convince fishermen that you cannot catch baby fish in the Baltic Sea.

I would venture to say that winning the referendum was helped by the fact that, during the whole negotiation process, we were meeting, talking, discussing, cajoling, convincing, with local communities and leaders, including of small villages, teachers, students, local opinion leaders, the churches. There were no social media then. This is a whole new challenge and opportunity for you. Don't assume that it's obvious that all Ukrainians are with you on accession. You have to repeat measuring the temperature of public opinion rather often.

We involved journalists, actors, artists, all the segments of the public opinion in the effort to make Poles feel close to the process. But there will be moments of doubts in difficult moments in negotiations, unintended or intended nasty comments in EU media. Your fight for hearts and minds of the population will be permanent. Rada will be blaming government. Political parties will criticise other political parties. People will be confused. I can tell you that feeling of ownership of the process makes miracles in difficult moments.

Now it is all history.

Since the aggression, sharing my experience and memories with Ukrainians I've seen as my duty. I had been doing it even before we joined the Union, we even had a joint task force back twenty years ago. I was working with the Ukraine as Commissioner for regional policy, as chair of the EP constitutional affairs committee and recently meeting officials from different Ukrainian institutions, including Rada, on details regarding UKIE and coordination system.

Learning from others or sharing experience with others is a difficult art. It is not about copy pasting. It is not even about adapting the experience of others to our own reality

and specificity. It is about seeing somebody's experience, especially from long ago, as a source of good practice.

And I have been so impressed by the level of your engagement, understanding, commitment, by enormous progress made by Ukraine since 1994, when the first partnership agreement was concluded between the EU and Ukraine, and within the Association Agreement framework. Of course, the Putin's aggression has generated a powerful destruction of many elements of Ukraine's existence. It slowed down and interrupted reforms. And it is heartbreaking to see in this context, on Ukrainians' side, enormous determination, political readiness and enthusiasm about the EU accession.

When you will be negotiating, you will hear comments in media on EU side, voices of national parliaments. Of different governments. You know that today, a lot remains to be done on the Ukrainian side. You also understand that and, the Union must get itself politically and institutionally prepared. It was also a relevant and legitimate issue back then in our case.

I personally believe that EU Treaty changes would facilitate the enlargement, like it was with the Nice Treaty in the context of 2004 enlargement. That is why for the last year the European Parliament has been pushing in this direction.

Ukraine will be the fifth largest country in the EU. You will not join unnoticed. Take it as obvious, legitimate that there will be worries and concerns on EU side – sometimes more visible. We must look anew at decision making process in the Union. We must strengthen the EU rule of law competences and mechanisms of its enforcement. We must look at the budgetary system and the way we finance our expenditures. A lot has happened in this field in recent years. The composition of the Commission must be put back on the table for discussion. The same refers to the veto power, misuse, abuse of it. The discussion on Treaty changes have always been and will be difficult. However, after the Conference on the future of Europe politicians cannot use any more the famous excuse that citizens do not want Treaty changes.

You know that there are parts of the *acquis* cast in stone. That in principle, accession means you incorporate the entire legal framework of EU. But it is worth mentioning that accession to the EU does normally imply transition periods, derogations or

limited access to certain policy instruments. What you negotiate is basically the transition periods and your participation in the EU budget. Poland had transition periods in areas of competition, transport, employment, services, free movement of capital, energy, environment, taxation. In total we had special solutions on 43 matters in 12 out of 31 negotiation chapters some demanded on our side, some by the EU implying. Still, we became a fully-fledged member state, committed to implement the whole framework. But let me also say, that transition periods and exceptions reduce the benefits from memberships. As Parliament you will be assessing how government negotiates. Try to understand well the choices made. But of course, accession is not only about closing negotiation chapters, crucial as it is. Implementation and enforcement are what matters most. Ensuring the political and institutional capability to enforce reforms, commitments, being reliable, accountable, credible when it comes to preparation and membership is crucial. When you promise something - do it. It increases confidence. Trust matters strongly. It takes time to build trust. Once lost, it takes time to rebuild it. Preparing for accession is also a trust building process. Trust is built also through engagement of members of parliament, your contacts with EP, national parliaments.

All my meetings so far have convinced me that Ukrainians know very well that they must be well prepared to be capable to benefit from the accession. And, I think, those comments are well taken by the Ukrainians.

The role the Rada plays in this process of making accession successful is on many accounts crucial.

One of the best news is that we see Ukraine's leaders who understand the need for a deep transformation of the country into a democratic, participatory place, with viable, working institutions of the state and open, competitive, pluralistic political space. Stick to it!

I don't know how the Ukrainians see their Rada. Is it a place where their elected representatives negotiate, find consensus and approve the law that provides a shared framework for the functioning of the state? A place where public goods are created. Or would people rather expect from those elected to defend their interests and do not look for a fair compromise? It is probably both.

For accession, we need both Rada speaking one voice to support it. But I can imagine your voters need to feel you care about their interests. You need to achieve a good balance. Are you ready to convince your voters that accession is a superior public good? There will be a moment when you will need to face your voters and tell them that you didn't get everything for them.

Politicization of the process, vested political interests, can interfere in both preparation and negotiations. In Poland, as I mentioned to you, we had anti-European opposition. But we also had a firewall of mainstream political parties that were able to stand together against the demagogues in critical moments.

Thus, you must be very vigilant in order to avoid intra-Ukrainian arguments that would lead to nowhere. Final goal will be what matters, what must not be lost. And it would be necessary to remember that any such dispute can be instigated from outside, from Russia – but I think you know it very well.

Few more words on cooperation between the executive power and the parliament, government and Rada. This cooperation lies at the heart of your successful democracy, and it plays a fundamental role during the accession process. Rada is the best platform for building political compromises and protecting the sustainability of the process. Of course, in a modern political system the Constitution defines institutions and their competences, but much is left to the political process. Successful accession requires not only an efficient political system, but also political will to deliver political stability and continuity of the process.

In Poland we reached out to specific forms of cooperation between the Office of European Integration, and the Sejm, based on legal acts but initially it was based mostly on pragmatic solution. Pragmatism goes well when there is consolidated political will.

You probably know that Lisbon Treaty strengthened the parliament's legitimacy at EU and national level. There are now more tools at the disposal of national parliaments. You should prepare for it. That implies as well a greater responsibility of Rada now in the context of Ukraine's accession and its future role after accession.

In Poland we have currently an Act (2010) on cooperation between the government, Sejm and Senate on matters related to membership. Since 1991 we had in the

parliament a specialized committee which was the main platform for cooperation before the accession.

From our experience I can say that the kind of sectoral Commission for European Affairs is not the best solution. A better solution for Rada is the Scandinavian model of Grand Committee – for it involves all the aspects of the process and treats it as a whole, and not as a collection of separate parts, where sectoral interests can get their particular advantages to the detriment of the whole.

There was no appetite for a Scandinavian style grand committee and our choice implied more coordination effort on the government side.

It seems fully justified to ask why this cooperation between the government and Parliament is needed during accession process. First of all, because on these issues there is a potential for inter institutional conflict due to competition for power, different interests and representation roles and the need of coherent outcome in joint policy making. Cacophony risk.

Through the good inter institutional cooperation we can avoid the danger of a gridlock between the government and the parliament. We can also foster mutual trust between Executive and Rada.

In this context in Poland, it was important that the parliamentarians were not left in the dark and that they were not treated as just a “voting machine”. For harmonization of laws, it is key. Therefore we had an extensive policy of sharing the knowledge, briefings also for the sectoral Committees, especially agriculture which will be also in Ukraine a very sensitive topic.

Cooperation between government and the parliament allowed to ensure continuity of the policy and establishing a feeling of joint ownership, and awareness of common responsibility. We needed a “modernized check and balances system”, not based only on stiff rules, but also on the desire to reach common goal.

I often hear from Ukrainian leaders who come to the European Parliament that Verkhovna Rada is working day and night adopting a lot of European laws. Of course, we all know that the challenge is not only about alignment with European legal framework, important as it is.

It is also about capability to implement and to enforce the law. You can have the best law in your statute book, but the problems with implementation and enforcement can still occur, for various reasons. Ensuring the political and institutional capability to enforce reforms, commitments, being reliable, accountable, credible when it comes to preparation and membership is crucial. For this cooperation between government and Rada will be necessary.

Also, many reforms which have to be accomplished are often going beyond the current electoral cycle, that is why endorsement by majority is in the citizens interest. I think it is useful to have cooperation between Rada and government. on practical modalities for transmitting documents, participating in debates, exchanging information, consultations, etc.

But let me say that you cannot take it for granted that this pragmatic mechanism, you have in place, would lead automatically to an efficient decision making process and coherent and effective outcome. There must be a continuous strong political effort behind it, interventions of President, his role of bringing political party leaders together to build consensus.

You know it very well that jointly developed rules on cooperation can ensure that those involved are more willing to proceed according to those rules. You have to figure out how to avoid its potentially damaging effect. When they become shared rules, citizens can only benefit. That is why it is important to develop such rules.

Ministers and members of parliament will differ in their preferences and representative roles. So certain centralization of the system is needed.

Ukraine has the support of around 80 or 90% of citizens for the membership in the EU. I hope the level of support will stay that high, but it will require a lot of effort from those who should guarantee the access to information and provide the understanding of what is happening.

You have to be very vigilant as to the possible undermining of your efforts from inside or outside, but also from the very fact that people, exhausted by the war, may simply be tired and overwhelmed by the coping with new challenges. This could make them more susceptible to some anti-European sentiment. Thus, there would be a need for a constant monitoring of the „pulse of the nation”, so this speak.

The path for Ukraine is clear. It is Europe. Irrevocably. And it is a bad news, actually a geopolitical and geostrategic nightmare, for Mr. Putin.

Many things will have to be done, and there is a lot of work to be done, but in the deepest, moral sense, Ukraine is already in Europe. European values we all fight for have also their pragmatic dimension. Accession process is a self-standing public good policy, that cannot become a victim of factional or sectoral disputes. It should be taken out from the area of interparty competition. It should be treated as a common good of the Ukrainian nation.