

**Professor Danuta Hübner**

***“Enlargement is not any more business as usual”***

**Moldova study visit on EU accession process “MEPs experience in the accession negotiations”**

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It is not at all easy to learn from others. Still there have been some similarities between all cases of eastern enlargement. What is true for all of them is that they have never been a walk in the park. In particular, when you compare them to all previous enlargements, before 2004.

Accession of my home country was a strategic choice, pursued by several governments irrespective of their political colors. For all governments after the transition to the democracy and market economy the accession to the EU was a political process of great strategic importance.

Economically, it was both a humongous challenge but also an unprecedented opportunity. And, I also think that you have already discovered yourselves that it is that accession is a huge administrative effort.

For us, in Poland it was a guarantee that our transition to democracy and market economy will be irreversible. It meant also freedom and security. It was a light in the tunnel pointing to the direction of reforms.

Your preparation for accession takes place in time of a very powerful geopolitical transformation. And I think that the EU decision to endorse quickly the candidate status for Ukraine and Moldova was the only available political choice to make. You would probably agree with me that it has been deferred for years. After Croatia's accession in 2013, there was clearly no appetite for further enlargements. In my view the relevance of the candidate status was reduced. We failed as the Union in our neighbourhood policy if you look at Ukraine and Belarus and in our enlargement policy if you give a hard look at the western Balkans.

We rebooted the policy only now in reaction to the cruel, unjustified aggression of Russia on Ukraine. Some people see this openness to the new wave of accessions as a geostrategic enlargement, while candidate countries with European aspirations are geopolitically vulnerable.

Eastern enlargements have always expanded the space of democracy, making the EU more relevant globally. Russian aggression provides a new context to the European security. Enlargement is not any more business as usual.

In my view, we cannot afford an open ended lengthy accession process with growing disappointment of people. We have to bring back the value to the candidate status. We need to keep momentum, identify all areas of concerns, cope in advance with risks, and move forward.

Having said that I would not ignore the issue of preparedness of the Union for this enlargement. That was also the case back in 2004, when the Treaty of Nice was fundamental for making the 2004 enlargement feasible. We need political will to reform the EU to enable this enlargement. We don't have to talk about treaty change now, but we have to be ready to introduce the necessary changes at the latest with the accession treaties, remembering, however, that not all the problems can be solved through Accession Treaty.

Reforms needed for this enlargement are those the EU has identified long ago but never had political will to push them through. Actually your enlargement is an opportunity not to be missed on that matter.

In previous eastern enlargements there have been areas of tensions and conflicting interests. And I can tell you that they all can be solved if there is political will and trust.

What was important in our accession was a strong political leadership on the EU side, in addition to a very committed European Commission. You would benefit if there were a visible commitment of a dedicated coalition of friends of this enlargement in the European Council. There will be more elections at national level, there will be also European elections which might result in a not necessarily pro enlargement majority in the EP. So sparing no effort to build a coalition backing your efforts would be important.

We had Chancellor Kohl's strong commitment, also the UK, though for different reasons. I do not see it yet clearly who in the European Council will be the effective political driver for this enlargement. For enlargement we need a unified EU, as decisions at many stages are taken by unanimity.

Every candidate becomes a member on its own merits. You know it only too well. Poland faced as well a double anchoring in the western structures, first we joined NATO and five years later the EU.

We have been through the same path of the Association Agreement, and free trade agreement, though less generous compared to Ukraine and Moldova. Association Agreement signed in 1991, entered into effect in March 1994, with political and trade part effective since March 1992.

We all faced the Copenhagen criteria which were introduced in view of our accession. As you know, even if those criteria were for a group of poor countries, they did not include the development level, nor internal political system of the future member as a pre condition. Compared to accession of Austria, Sweden or Finland our accession process was very lengthy. Poland applied for membership on April 8, 1994 and we joined on May 1, 2004.

Now you already know very well that negotiations, the beginning of which you would like to see before the need of this year, is only one element of the accession process. Beyond that there is a lengthy process of preparing your economy, reforms and structures, and your legal order for accession.

In Poland the process of negotiations lasted between March 1998, so started four years after applying for membership and finished on December 13, 2002. And we joined May 1, 2004. So a lengthy process.

You already know that accession is not only about closing negotiating chapters. The real challenge is to prepare to be ready to pass the test of membership, enforce a complex reform process, practically in all areas of your political, institutional, economic and social reality.

The European Union of today, its single market, its new policies in the areas of green and digital transitions, financial markets which were hardly comunitarized in our

times, is a more complex political construct, still based on the same set in stone values and principles.

You roughly know everything you have to change in Moldova and deliver, ensuring political and institutional capability to enforce reforms, a long list of commitments, prove that you are a reliable partner, accountable and credible as potential member. Implementation and enforcement of accession commitments is what matters most. Ensuring political and institutional capability to enforce reforms matters. Trust is fundamental.

And I know that you know that you must be well prepared to benefit from accession, and that the better prepared you are, the stronger the Union will be once you join which will benefit you.

I think it is very important that in the accession process you see and respect the links and synergies between all its elements- questionnaire, screening, filling legislative gaps, opinions, alignment of law, structural adjustments and reforms, negotiations, etc

We had in every ministry teams chaired by deputy ministers who were responsible for all these issues, acquiring gradually knowledge of everything related to accession and at the end being the best to formulate negotiating positions and negotiate. Appreciate your human capital. Invest in the quality of administration. This is important not only for the preparation for accession but also once you are a member, your effectiveness will also depend on the quality and swift action of your administration.

I am mentioning this because there are tendencies in countries with weak civil service tradition to replace after elections all those who have already acquired knowledge and expertise. On European issues it takes time to possess the knowledge and understanding, and to invest in building contacts. So use every program, every euro available for this to build expertise, train people, invest in young Moldovans.

Let me say a few words on how we were organized for the accession. I know that you already have structures both in the government and in the parliament. We had a very strong coordination center with the prime minister on the top and a powerful

coordination office. I am talking here about KIE and UKIE. I built it on the basis of the French experience of SGCI.

In every ministry we had sectorial coordinators, deputy ministers and directorates, responsible for all the stages of the accession process. These teams included civil servants, experts, also stakeholders. They coped with alignment of the law, reforms, public consultations, negotiating positions, negotiations.

We did not lose the expertise and we built full knowledge, we kept institutional memory of the process, also after accession.

We adopted a National Integration Strategy, endorsed by the government and shared with the parliament. It covered the entire system, organization, structures, tasks. There was a regular reporting on its implementation. There were tasks allocated and coordinated, there were deadlines, monitored and assessed, there were efficient structures, and what mattered was implementation with often strong enforcement incentives.

We also worked in parallel on preparing Poland to the European cohesion policy, we planned from the very beginning to decentralise regional programming and funds. In the Parliament, we did not copy the Nordic grand committee system. We had European affairs committee, and in the most challenging time for legislative work, we had additional committee coping with this.

We also were using the option to transpose more than one directive into one Polish legal act. We had a very good supportive legal service in the Parliament, and a supportive research division.

As much as we could, we also provided impact assessments of what we were transposing into the Polish law. This was normally done in the government framework. That helped to see the impact of new legislative framework on the competitiveness of our businesses in the single market.

Behind every piece of legislation there are citizens and businesses, there are reforms needed, changes to economic policies, institutions, structural transformations. These impact assessments helped us to identify needs of transition periods. It was in particular important for SMEs that could not afford employing legal experts

to support them to adjust. The relation between the European affairs committee and sectorial committees has been very important. There can be a more centralised or decentralized model.

We had in the Parliament a special legislative procedure for European law, fast track, for example with three days for first reading instead of seven. The translation was usually provided by the government.

Then of course the Parliament oversaw the government. It also had a close relation with other national parliaments and the European Parliament.

You have a choice, and I don't know how you have been coping so far with the relations with the government.

You can go for a minimum involvement and influence on the European integration of Moldova and leave most of it to the government. Or you can be an active partner and full player, using to maximum your constitutional control power over the government, ensure efficient legislation and engage in international diplomacy.

We had a rather generous interaction, information sharing, pre briefing, post briefings, etc. But we also had two parties who were against the accession. In everything you will be doing at home which proved to be fundamental in our case is the engagement of the civil society in the process.

When we look at your key reforms, when we see the judicial system, corruption, working democracy it seems clear that you could use the accession to strengthen the potential of civil society, to enable their role in monitoring actions of administrative and political structures, profound reforms, making it clear that there is a strong societal force behind all that you will be doing for accession.

Your accession process has to empower citizens to prepare Moldova to join the EU, offer them the feeling of co-ownership of this process, show confidence in their engagement, avoid losing their support, which you might need if you have referendum. There will be difficult frustrating moments during negotiations, there will be unhappy sectors, vested interests of some politicians, you need for such moments a wall of support from citizens.

I must say that in Poland we would not have made it if we did not succeed to wake up a massive involvement of civil society in the accession process and if the political forces and administration were not emotionally engaged with deep faith in the success of the accession process. So yes a big work with the society is there to be done.

People cannot see the accession as something distant from their life, but as something that is part of their and their families life and of future generations life.

For years you have been coping with aligning your laws with the European law. It is a fundamental precondition. Like European values, the entire acquis is not for negotiation. Except for transition periods.

Poland had transition periods demanded by the EU, for example regarding the free movement of people and even more asked for by us. For example in the area of land acquisition or environment where we needed many years to get the clean air, soil and water and we needed for that the EU financial support. In total, we had transition periods in 12 out of 31 negotiation chapters.

You should use the law alignment process to improve also your law making, so do as many as you manage impact assessments of the law incorporated into your system. You can help this way your businesses to better prepare to the new reality and build their competitiveness.

Use this process to develop your legislative potential. You will need hundreds of good legislators now and then, once you are already a member. Use every opportunity created by the Commission and member states to grow your legislators' potential.

Take seriously preparation of your courts to ask the ECJ pre judiciary questions. Your courts will be EU courts. And European law will have supremacy over the Moldovan law. And I know that you are working with the Venice Commission.

I mentioned several times how important people were for the accession process. Teams of lawyers, legislators, translators , interpreters were set up, centers of information and documentation were established, research centers were mobilized for example to prepare costs and benefits analyses, training for experts on European

affairs were launched, media were involved in a huge scale information campaign, teachers started to voluntarily provide European education, civil society got massively engaged.

Political parties were encouraged to establish relations with the parties belonging to the same political families across the EU. Relations with European Parliament were important. The Commission was crucial partner, helpful on everything related to both association and accession.

Cooperation with member state played a very important role regarding building the support. Not all member states were enthusiastic about the Big Bang enlargement. You see it now as well.

We did not hear at that time about fake news, still a lot of lies about European integration could be heard daily. React, explain, do not ignore I mentioned referendum we had. That required a special communication effort. The best thing we did in this context, was to decide on a two days lasting referendum. It took place a year before the accession, on 7-8.06.2003. So finally, behind the decision to join there was a double consensus, politicians and the public.

For you it is also important that during the whole process you support Ukraine. So much depends on the end of the war.

And then once the war is over and Ukraine gets security guarantees, it is for you also challenging to attract investment. I can imagine you are working on it. You will need a lot of partners. And I can imagine you are working not only on accession but also on strategy of your growth and innovation.

I think it is clear that there is a lot of efforts ahead of you, and not everything depends on you. The Union has made its choice. It means that we will be with you every step of that difficult path. And the European Parliament will not allow the procrastination that would reduce the level of societal support for the membership. Enlargement is the best weapon at our disposal to win peace and democracy. Non enlarging would mean a very high security cost today and tomorrow. But what we cannot afford is the humongous strategic cost of non enlargement.



We look for solution ensuring that Russia is no longer in a position to destabilize the European continent again.

We have to inform Putin as soon as possible about our preferred option of European international order.