

# NATO AND THE EUROPEAN UNION, THEIR DEVELOPMENTS WITHIN THE LAST 20 YEARS

## *Introductory thoughts on the current situation<sup>1</sup>*

### Introduction

European Union (EU) as an economic and political union of countries, and NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) as a military and political alliance of countries, are strategic partners with each other and their existence and activities have nowadays very topical importance.

The aim of this article is to provide a brief overview of both organisations in which the Republic of Estonia has been a member for 20 years.

Accession of Estonia to the European Union was a process, which lasted for about ten years.<sup>2</sup> Estonia became a member of NATO on 29 March 2004.

In the course of the last 20 years, both the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)<sup>3</sup> and the European Union (EU)<sup>4</sup> have considerably developed and expanded. Estonia was also one of the countries accepted in 2004 as a member state of both NATO and the European Union. At the beginning of April this year 75 years passed from the establishment of NATO.

### 1. Briefly about NATO

NATO was established on 4 April 1949. The founder members (12 countries) were: Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, United Kingdom, USA. In **2004, seven countries became NATO members**: Estonia, Bulgaria, Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia. Finland and Sweden signed their accession protocols on 5 July 2022, after which the parliaments of the remaining 30 countries had to ratify their accession.<sup>5</sup> Finland joined in 2023 and Sweden in 2024.

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<sup>1</sup> The article has been written mainly on the basis of web sources referred to.

<sup>2</sup> Eesti astumine Euroopa Liitu. [[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eesti\\_astumine\\_Euroopa\\_Liitu](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eesti_astumine_Euroopa_Liitu)] 24/04/2024

<sup>3</sup> **The 31 NATO Member States (as of 04.04.2023) in the alphabetical order are the following:** Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Türkiye, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, United States of America. NATO Member States [<https://www.eata.ee/nato/nato-liikmesriigid/>] 26.01.2024.

<sup>4</sup> The European Union has currently 27 Member States. These countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden. Kergesti loetav – Euroopa Liit [[https://european-union.europa.eu/easy-read\\_et](https://european-union.europa.eu/easy-read_et)] 27.01.2024.

<sup>5</sup> NATO liikmesriigid. [[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO\\_liikmesriigid](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_liikmesriigid)] 27.01.2024, referred through: NATO nations sign accession protocols for Sweden, Finland.

NATO was created with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article 5 of which provides that an armed attack against one Member State shall be considered an attack against all Member States and that the other states shall have to assist the state attacked in the form of collective defence, and provide military support, if necessary.<sup>6</sup>

Ireland, Austria, Malta and Cyprus are the last Member States of the European Union (EU) who do not intend to join NATO. In addition, Switzerland is a European country, which is not a NATO member. The reason why these countries do not intend to join NATO is evident when looking at the map: many countries have the advantage of being surrounded by NATO Member States and not being burdened by the closeness of Russia.

## 2. Briefly about the European Union

The **European Union** with its 27 Member States is an economic and political union situated for the most part in Europe. The European Union has the characteristics of both an intergovernmental and supranational alliance.

In 2004, 10 countries joined the **European Union**: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Czechia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus.

Some countries (eight countries) are holding negotiations to become EU Member States. These countries are: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, Ukraine.

The **European Union** is currently (in 2024) a union consisting of 27 European countries (until 30.01.2020 the EU had 28 Member States). We have also lost one member of the European Union – namely, the United Kingdom is not an EU Member State as it left the EU in 2020 as a result of a referendum.<sup>7</sup>

The European Union set up the **Schengen area** in 1985.<sup>8</sup> There are no border controls within the Schengen area. People can freely and easily travel between countries in this area. They do not have to pass border controls when going from one country to another. The Schengen area now allows people to go on holidays or business trips more easily. 23 of the current 27 EU Member States have now joined the Schengen area.

People of each EU Member State speak their own language. The European Union protects the right of people to speak their own language. Therefore, all important documents and information of the European Union are available in the languages of its Member States.

In March 1979, the **European Monetary System (EMS)** came into operation. On 1 January 1999, euro was taken into use in 11 countries and became the common currency of Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal and Spain. (Greece joined on 1 January 2001.) The European Central

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<sup>6</sup> NATO liikmesriigid. [[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO\\_liikmesriigid](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/NATO_liikmesriigid)] 27.01.2024, referred through: “The North Atlantic Treaty”. *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*. 04.04.1949. *Archival copy of the original as of 20.03.2004*.

<sup>7</sup> The United Kingdom decided in June 2016 that it no longer wanted to be in the European Union. Thus, the United Kingdom is no longer an EU Member State since 31 January 2020.

<sup>8</sup> Kergesti loetav – Euroopa Liit [[https://european-union.europa.eu/easy-read\\_et](https://european-union.europa.eu/easy-read_et)] 27.01.2024.

Bank then took over the tasks of the EMI and became responsible for the monetary policy defined and implemented in euros.

On 1 January 2002, the above-mentioned 12 countries put euro banknotes and coins into circulation. The national currencies were removed from circulation two months later. Since that time, euro is the only legal currency for making transactions in cash and bank transfers in the euro zone countries where two-thirds of the EU population live.<sup>9</sup>

**Euro is the common currency of the European Union.** In 1999, 12 the 15 Member States of that time introduced euro in non-cash transactions and in 2002 when euro banknotes and coins were put into circulation also in making all payments.

Three countries (Denmark, Sweden and the United Kingdom) were not members of the monetary union concerned.

The new Member States are preparing for joining the euro zone, which will happen as soon as they have fulfilled the required conditions.<sup>10</sup>

Most EU countries use the same currency, euro. Euro is currently used in 20 of the 27 EU Member States.

### 3. Final steps of Finland and Sweden in joining NATO

The Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland Pekka Haavisto delivered the document of accession to NATO to the U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken in Brussels at the beginning of April 2023. Finland is a NATO Member State since the moment of delivery of the document. Also the Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg participated in the brief ceremony. The delivery of the document was followed by the flag raising ceremony.<sup>11</sup> Thus, NATO became a defence organisation with 31 members.

In 2022, Finland and Sweden ended their neutrality policy, which had lasted for decades, and applied for membership of the alliance in May. Their applications were approved in June 2022 at the NATO summit in Madrid but their applications had to be ratified by all members of the alliance before their becoming full members. Türkiye and Hungary blocked the process, however.

Sweden applied for NATO membership already in May 2022, at the same time with Finland. Both membership applications were motivated by the Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Sweden applied for NATO membership in 2022. Türkiye set conditions to accepting Sweden to the alliance and Stockholm had to fulfil them before Ankara ratified the accession.

On 25 January, the Turkish government completed the process of ratification of the NATO membership application of Sweden. The Parliament ratified the document and then it was signed by the President of Türkiye Recep Tayyip Erdoğan.

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<sup>9</sup> Euroopa Liit. [[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroopa\\_Liit](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroopa_Liit)] 27.01.2024.

<sup>10</sup> Euroopa Liit. [[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroopa\\_Liit](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Euroopa_Liit)] 27.01.2024.

<sup>11</sup> Soome ametlikult NATO liige. ERR, Välismaa, 04.04.2023 15:53. [<https://www.err.ee/1608937190/soome-on-ametlikult-nato-liige>] 27.01.2024.

This left Hungary as the only member of the alliance who had not ratified the membership of Sweden yet. But Budapest repeatedly assured that they were ready to ratify the accession of Sweden to NATO as soon as Türkiye would do that.<sup>12</sup> The situation changed at the end of February.

The Fidesz Party which is in power in Hungary with the majority of two-thirds of votes in the Parliament did not want to ratify the NATO membership of Sweden for several months but the breakthrough was achieved when the Prime Minister of Hungary Viktor Orbán had a meeting with the Prime Minister of Sweden Ulf Kristersson in Budapest. The heads of government agreed on mutual defence cooperation in the course of the meeting.

When the decision of the Parliament of Hungary was made known, Kristersson announced that it was a historic day and that Sweden was ready to take the responsibility as a new NATO member. In his speech before the Parliament of Hungary before the voting, Orbán said that the defence cooperation between Sweden and Hungary and the accession of Sweden to NATO would strengthen the security of Hungary.<sup>13</sup>

The Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg welcomed the decision of the Hungarian Parliament to ratify the accession of Sweden to NATO: "Now that all Allies have approved, Sweden will become the 32nd NATO Ally. Sweden's membership will make us all stronger and safer," wrote Stoltenberg in social media X (earlier Twitter).

Today Sweden deposited its NATO accession documents in Washington, after which Sweden became the 32nd NATO Member State. Estonia welcomes the accession of Sweden to NATO (Stenbock House, 7 March 2024)<sup>14</sup>:

The White House announced today that Sweden will officially become the 32nd NATO Member State on 7 March (MR: 07.03.2024). Confirmation to Sweden's NATO membership together with the name of the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden are in the guest list of the State of the Union address of the U.S. President Joe Biden. Prime Minister of Sweden Ulf Kristersson who is visiting Washington has been invited to listen to the State of the Union address of Biden in the viewing box of First Lady Jill Biden.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Laugen, L. Ungari parlamendis on esmaspäeval päevakorras hääletus Rootsi NATO-liikmesuse üle, aga valitsev erakond ei kavatse kohale ilmuda. Delfi. Maailm. 29.07.2024. [<https://www.delfi.ee/artikkel/120220185/ungari-parlamendis-on-esmaspaeval-paevakorras-haaletus-rootsi-nato-liikmesuse-ule-aga-valitsev-erakond-ei-kavatse-kohale-ilmuda>] 6.02.2024.

<sup>13</sup> ERR, Uudised. Välismaa. 26/02/2024 17:47. Ungari parlament kiitis heaks Rootsi NATO-ga liitumise. Reuters. [<https://www.err.ee/1609264869/ungari-parlament-kiitis-heaks-rootsi-nato-ga-liitumise>] 30.03.2024.

<sup>14</sup> Valitsuse kommunikatsioonibüroo. 07.03.2024 | 18:17. Eesti tervitab Rootsi liitumist NATO-ga. [<https://valitsus.ee/uudised/eesti-tervitaab-rootsi-liitumist-nato-ga>] 30.03.2024.

<sup>15</sup> Inna-Katrin Hein. Valge Maja kinnitas, et Rootsist saab neljapäeval NATO liige. [<https://elu24.postimees.ee/7974981/valge-maja-kinnitas-et-rootsist-saab-neljapaeval-nato-liige>] 30.03.2024.

## For conclusion

This year, 2024 was the **104th anniversary** of signing the **Tartu Peace Treaty**.<sup>16</sup>

The **Tartu Peace Treaty** is an international treaty signed in Tartu on 02 February 1920 between Estonia and the Soviet Russia to end the War of Independence, it established the eastern border of Estonia and the Soviet Russia recognised the independence of the Republic of Estonia.

According to this Treaty, Russia recognised the independence of Estonia in perpetuity *de jure*, renouncing “for ever all rights of sovereignty formerly held by Russia over Estonia and its territory”. According to this Treaty, Estonia was not obliged to pay the debts of the former Russian Empire. The border between Estonia and Russia was established at the place which remained in force until 1940 and according to which also the local communities behind Narva and the Pechory area belonged to Estonia.

The Soviet Russia did not fully follow the peace treaty: it blocked the right of Estonians to choose their citizenship, a large part of assets evacuated during the war, including the assets of the University of Tartu that were evacuated to Voronezh, were not returned, the concessions promised (e.g. for forests) remained on paper, so the committees did not settle any contentions.

The Tartu Peace Treaty was the first international treaty for the Republic of Estonia, Soviet Russia became the first country to recognise the independence of the Republic of Estonia. Tartu Peace Treaty paved the way to international politics for both countries.

As Ukraine was formally an independent socialist soviet republic at the time of signing the Tartu Peace Treaty, before the Soviet Union was formed, the respective contract on settling the issues related to the right of choosing the citizenship had to be signed also with Ukraine.

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On the basis of the events discussed here, it would be very complicated to consider Russia a reliable partner. For instance,

- The Tartu Peace Treaty has not been followed: the area behind Narva and the Pechory area are no longer parts of Estonia, the new border has not been confirmed by Russia either, etc.
- According to the processes since the completion of the natural gas pipeline system (both Nord Stream 1 and 2), the pipeline system has been built by Russia for a clearly political purpose.
- Looking at the Russian aggression in Ukraine there is no doubt that Russia cannot currently be regarded as the winner of World War II (the intention to destroy the people, culture and state of Ukraine, earlier taking of Karelia from Finnish people and relocation of the Karelia population to Finland, taking the Kuril Islands from Japan, etc.).

This list can surely be continued but this is not the aim of this article. It is just important to point out some aspects of the behaviour of Russia (and the former Soviet Union)

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<sup>16</sup> The following source has been used for the text of the Tartu Peace Treaty: [[https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartu\\_rahul](https://et.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tartu_rahul)] 3.02.2024.

which directly or indirectly concern Estonia (and other Baltic States and even more broadly).

Considering the events that have taken place in Ukraine after Russia started the war, the course of the war (bombing and destruction of civilian objects (dwelling houses, schools, kindergartens, churches, etc.)), transport junctions and bridges and power generation objects, savage acts among the population, marauding, large-scale thefts and robberies, stealing and cheating of Ukrainian children and taking them to Russia by force and many other acts, in addition, disrupting the supply of the population with electricity, water and gas, and behaviour with respect to grain, we can state that the undersigned was right in the discussions with both German colleagues. Unfortunately, we cannot continue the discussions as both of them have passed away already several years ago ...!

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In Tallinn, home office at Pirita-Kose

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