

UKRAINE'S NATO PERSPECTIVE

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The EPP Group has taken up leadership in supporting Ukraine since the beginning of the war. Now we need to go a step further and spearhead support for Ukraine's future NATO Membership. The upcoming NATO Vilnius Summit in July will have to address the question how to follow up on the 2008 Bucharest membership perspective for Ukraine, taking into account the ongoing Russian aggression and how after the end of the war best to prevent a repetition of such aggression.

In this respect and without prejudice to the basic principles of the North Atlantic Treaty and the commitments of the NATO Strategic Concept, the EPP Group calls on all NATO members to formally endorse both the Ukrainian Peace Formula and the Kyiv Security Compact recommendations and to actively contribute to their implementation as a first important step.

Every NATO enlargement followed the principle that it should add security to existing allies. Till now the Russian threat of a military response discouraged a serious discussion about Ukraine in NATO. The Charter of Paris, the Budapest Memorandum, the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship Treaty from 1997, and the non-decision on membership of the Bucharest NATO Summit in 2008 did not prevent a Russian aggression on Ukraine. Leaving Ukraine continuously in a security grey zone would perpetuate this state of affairs, inviting Russia to resume hostilities in the future.

Why Ukraine's NATO membership is necessary

Justified concerns about the future of Ukraine are directly linked to concerns about the future of the Union's and NATO's relations with the Russian Federation, which means that

the European continent needs an adequate political security architecture.

A continued grey security zone of the size of Ukraine between Russia and the West would pose a permanent temptation for an unreformed revisionist Russia, similar to a united neutral Germany between NATO and the Warsaw Pact offered by Stalin in 1952. A future NATO membership of Ukraine, however, would not only avoid such security vacuum, but offer several opportunities: First to strengthen NATO's military capabilities. Ukrainian battle-tested and Western-equipped armed forces would provide significant military added value to NATO. Second, to unite the collective West around a broader agenda to guarantee sustainable peace on the European continent, as the zone of stable non-aggressive democracies would be further extended eastward. Third, by having Ukraine as a NATO-member to be in a position to prevent any future possible aggressive revenge. Fourth to stop Russian neo-imperial expansionism and thereby facilitate a discussion about fundamental change of Russian policy inside the country.

Ukraine's membership in NATO will assist post-Putin Russia's transformation into a democracy

The EPP Group always stood by the Ukrainians who are fighting to defend their freedom and democracy against Putin's aggression. Ukraine is bravely standing up for European values against authoritarianism.

An invitation for Ukraine to become a member of NATO would send the most powerful signal to Putin and the most hardcore imperial hawks in Russia to finally realise that Ukraine

is no longer within their reach. Long-term stability through a restored democracy in a post-Putin Russia is crucial for sustainable peace and prevention of future aggressions in Europe. That requires Putin's imperial dream to be defeated on the battlefield and prevented from recovering in the future. Ukraine's future NATO membership is not only about increasing and ensuring Ukraine's security but also about helping Russians not to succumb to imperial nostalgia again and for this very reason the Russian opposition is not opposed to Ukraine choosing its own path.

Ukraine in NATO as an anchor of strengthened European security

A strong and credible perspective of NATO membership for Ukraine can affect Russia's calculus and persuade the Russian authorities to withdraw from Ukraine, creating the conditions for lasting peace on the European continent. This is why it is in the West's interest to grant NATO membership to Ukraine in the nearest possible future.

We believe that NATO should renew and redouble its commitment to sustain Ukraine's military effort against Russia's illegal and brutal aggression. NATO should also reaffirm its steadfast support for a membership perspective for Ukraine and send a very clear signal that the Alliance sticks to its 'Open Door' policy. Taking this into account, the upcoming NATO Vilnius Summit in July should therefore have to address the question of how to follow up on the 2008 Bucharest membership perspective for Ukraine. The EPP Group expects that the upcoming Vilnius and Washington summits pave the way to extend an invitation to Ukraine to join NATO and that the accession process will start after the war is over and be finalised as soon as possible. This will strengthen our Alliance and be a further step towards sustainable peace in Europe.