



## **Weekly Briefing**

**Estonia external relations briefing:  
In search for the world's new geo-strategy:  
a societal aspect of foreign policy  
E-MAP Foundation MTÜ**

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## **In search for the world's new geo-strategy: a societal aspect of foreign policy**

An international system being in chaos is always the worst news for any nation, regardless of its size and capabilities to make a difference, because it perpetually brings up a nearly unlimited number of irreversible changes to the every-day life and makes international relations experiencing an unprecedented uncertainty. For example, the fact that Russia's newest Ambassador to Estonia is getting used to the unpleasant routine of being summoned by the host-country's Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'tells' a particular story of increasingly antagonising interactions between the two neighbours. In May 2022, the Russian Ambassador was told off by the Estonian side twice – the first time, it was after the Russian Embassy “attacked [F]oreign [M]inister Eva-Maria Liimets on social media”; during the second time, for instance, Estonia “called on representatives of Russia to refrain from unprofessional personal attacks on Estonian politicians, remain polite, gain some more in-depth knowledge of history, and immediately end its aggression against Ukraine”<sup>1</sup>.

However, this is all residing ‘on the ground’, representing the common practice of conventional diplomacy. The upper-level of the grand-debate is objectively engaged with discussions on very different things, i.e., concepts, effective frameworks, security-associated mechanisms. More specifically, as argued, major “[i]nternational organisations created after World War II, like the UN and OSCE, have begun to lose in significance”<sup>2</sup>. In a significant addition, it became quite evident that, for whatever reasons (primarily associated with political economy), all members of the G20 are not capable of being on ‘the same page’ in regards of their attitude towards the objectively unjustified Russian aggression against Ukraine. In May, this was dramatically coinciding with the EU-wide fierce discussion on whether or not Ukraine could be granted the high-profile status of the entity's candidate.

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Estonia summons Russian ambassador over ‘rude’ Kallas comments’ in *ERR*, 17 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608600262/estonia-summons-russian-ambassador-over-rude-kallas-comments>].

<sup>2</sup> Kalev Stoicescu, ‘Researcher: UN and OSCE losing significance, world polarizing’ in *ERR*, 24 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608606595/researcher-un-and-osce-losing-significance-world-polarizing>].

For Estonia, such a situation that was featured by the unprecedented global geo-strategic ‘retrenchment’, with necessity, meant that the country would need to solidify its Europe-bound principles and values in order to achieve a higher level of cohesiveness across the EU, at least. The main issue for the period was, undeniably, the Ukrainian candidacy for the EU, and, as it was noted by Kristi Raik, “one conclusion [Estonia] need[s] to be drawing right now based on Europe’s geopolitical and security policy changes is that the EU must now clearly promise to Ukraine that it will become a member of the EU, and that the EU will do everything in its power to help Ukraine toward this”<sup>3</sup>. Thus, in the first week of May, the then Estonian Minister of Foreign Affairs Eva-Maria Liimets visited Ukraine, together with her Lithuanian and Latvian colleagues. Remarkably, the same people had already arranged their joint visitation of Kyiv, but it was taking place on 23 February 2022, literally some hours before the Russian Federation launched its brutal attack against the sovereign Ukrainian state – this fact made Edgars Rinkēvičs, Latvian Minister of Foreign Affairs, noting that the trio of Ministers from the Baltics were now “to complete their interrupted visit”<sup>4</sup>.

Having stated that the current visit was to show “unwavering support to the people of Ukraine and discuss more ways we can help Ukraine who is fighting for its freedom and sovereignty, but also for the democratic values”<sup>5</sup>, Minister Liimets heard the Ukrainian President’s reply that the Baltics are treated in Ukraine as the country’s “closest and most reliable friends”, because Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania “were the first to support Ukraine from the very beginning of this war, from the very beginning of the threat from the Russian Federation”<sup>6</sup>. Moreover, as it was confirmed during the visitation, Estonia announced its support in the process of reconstruction of the Zhytomyr Oblast<sup>7</sup>, positively responding to the Ukrainian President’s call to Ukraine’s partners on selecting a focus region for themselves and concentrating on the region of choice in the process of providing “aid for post-war reconstruction”<sup>8</sup>. From his side, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy went on to underline the following:

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<sup>3</sup> Kristi Raik as cited in ‘Expert: Macron’s latest Europe offer a no go for either Ukraine or Estonia’, *ERR*, 10 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608592294/expert-macron-s-latest-europe-offer-a-no-go-for-either-ukraine-or-estonia>].

<sup>4</sup> Edgars Rinkēvičs as cited in ‘Baltic foreign ministers visit Ukraine’, *ERR*, 6 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608589285/baltic-foreign-ministers-visit-ukraine>].

<sup>5</sup> Eva-Maria Liimets as cited in ‘Baltic foreign ministers visit Ukraine’.

<sup>6</sup> Volodymyr Zelenskyy as cited in ‘Baltic foreign ministers visit Ukraine’.

<sup>7</sup> With its population of about 1.2 million, Zhytomyr Oblast is a province of northern Ukraine that borders Belarus.

<sup>8</sup> ‘Estonia to support rebuilding of Ukraine’s Zhytomyr Oblast’ in *ERR*, 9 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608591250/estonia-to-support-rebuilding-of-ukraine-s-zhytomyr-oblast>].

It is extremely important not only to increase sanctions pressure, but also to maintain the integrity of sanctions. They must be as effective as possible. We must not allow the aggressor to circumvent them and continue to finance the criminal war against Ukraine.<sup>9</sup>

These important messages and communicational exchanges confirm that Estonia, together with the other two Baltics, represents one of the main centres of support for Ukraine in regards of its EU-associated perspectives and further developments within the framework of European integration in many years to come. Prospectively, this angle of the Estonian foreign policy will be broadened and enhanced, due to the fact that the Russian aggression in the region is unlikely to disappear any time soon. As a logical continuation of this approach, Minister Liimets, during her participation at the Foreign Affairs Council in Brussels, reflected on the main focus areas where the EU's common efforts are required to 'reside', namely Ukraine's accession to the EU, short- and long-term aid, fight against Russia's disinformation, and effective sanctions on the Russian Federation:

We understand that there are differences in the extent of dependence on Russia's energy carriers, including oil, but this is why we have proposed a transition period as a solution. [...] Ukraine must win this war, and on our part, we can help by stopping all funding of Russia. [...] Russia must be held responsible for the damage it has caused and the crimes it has committed.<sup>10</sup>

The discussion went on, in less than a week, during the General Affairs Council of the EU, when the sixth package of sanctions on Russia was deliberated about. The Estonian position on the issue was strictly along the aforementioned line "to immediately adopt the sixth sanctions package against Russia, which also includes restrictions on oil exports from Russia" and "expect a message from the June Council to Ukraine on [the candidacy], which would be of great political importance to them"<sup>11</sup>. The EU-wide context wise, it appears to be of immense geo-strategic necessity for Estonia that the EU has a more comprehensive understanding of what takes place in the Member States, which are on the frontline of support for Ukraine and thousands of refugees coming from the war zone. In principle, Estonia has always been against the principle of imposing a range of mandatory quotas for refugees, but, as noted by Toomas

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<sup>9</sup> Zelenskyy.

<sup>10</sup> Eva-Maria Liimets as cited in 'Ukraine main focus at Foreign Affairs Council meetings in Brussels', *ERR*, 17 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608600007/ukraine-main-focus-at-foreign-affairs-council-meetings-in-brussels>].

<sup>11</sup> Eva-Maria Liimets as cited in 'Liimets at the General Affairs Council: green energy offers a sustainable alternative to Russian gas', *Välisministeerium*, 23 May 2022. Available from [<https://vm.ee/et/uudised/liimets-uldajade-noukogul-venemaa-gaasile-pakub-kestliku-alternatiivi-roheenergia>].

Kivimägi (Chairperson of the *Riigikogu*'s Constitutional Committee), the country “expect[s] greater support from the EU in compensating the costs incurred in connection with war refugees from Ukraine”<sup>12</sup>. As specified, by the middle of May 2022, the Ukrainian war refugees consist of about 3 per cent of the Estonian population (that would have been about 2 million people had the discussion been about France)<sup>13</sup>.

Even though the societal factor of the perpetually incoming Ukrainian refugees, despite the process-associated operational chaos, can also make a positive effect in terms of halting the country's demographic decline (as reported, “10,000 refugees would maintain Estonia's population at a higher than usual for nine years, 30,000 for 22 years and 60,000 for 40 years”<sup>14</sup>), the financial side of the process is to keep forming a particular set of proposals from Estonia to the main bodies of the EU. Since, arguably, the Ukrainian factor will be associated with the Estonian foreign policy for a long time, if not forever, the EU has got used to the continuous ‘drive’ coming from the entity's eastern fringe on introducing a solid permanent EU-wide policy on including the Ukrainian society into nearly all socio-economic mechanisms of the entire integrational framework. After all, when it comes to a long-term perspective, as argued, “the war refugees [from Ukraine] will manage relatively well in Estonia, as one third of the refugees are children, and the adults' education level is similar to the Estonian average”<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Toomas Kivimägi as cited in ‘Estonian MP: EU role in footing refugee-related costs must increase’ in *ERR*, 16 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608599044/estonian-mp-eu-role-in-footing-refugee-related-costs-must-increase>].

<sup>13</sup> ‘Estonian MP: EU role in footing refugee-related costs must increase’.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Think tank: Ukraine refugees would delay Estonia's demographic challenges’ in *ERR*, 23 May 2022. Available from [<https://news.err.ee/1608605869/think-tank-ukraine-refugees-would-delay-estonia-s-demographic-challenges>].

<sup>15</sup> ‘Think tank: Ukraine refugees would delay Estonia's demographic challenges’.