European Stability Initiative
BERLIN - BRUSSELS - ISTANBUL

Newsletter 2/2026
9 May 2026

Great Europeans

Vision and interests – Jean Monnet in Ukraine

Dear friends of ESI,

On 9 May 1950, French foreign minister Robert Schuman warned in Paris: “A united Europe was not achieved and we had war.” He then offered a way out and proposed the first European Community, a brain child of the former Cognac-salesman and international statesman Jean Monnet.

NEW VIDEO: Europe Day presentation

www.esiweb.org

Today another warning should be heeded: “the European integration of Ukraine was not achieved and we had war.” After the Orange revolution in Kyiv in 2004 and the Revolution of dignity in Ukraine in 2014 the EU ruled out Ukrainian accession. The historic challenge today is to ensure that this time things are different. But how? In a new presentation on Europe Day (in English) we discuss a looming crisis between Kyiv and key EU members over enlargement. We look at national interests and pressures, expectations and illusions, and at recent concrete stories of European successes that point to a way out that would be a win-win for all: the Finnish road to EU membership.

For a new member to join, EU leaders in 27 democracies must bring on board their parliaments and publics and make a strong case that Ukrainian accession is good for Poland, France, Germany, the Netherlands or Sweden. This case can be made. Today, the European Union and Ukraine are more dependent on each other than ever before. Leaders across the continent are aware of this. Publics are catching up, media report on Ukraine as a pillar of European democratic security.

For Ukrainians, joining the EU is existential. To put it off, or to suggest that Ukraine might become a member only “symbolically”, would be a very bad blow. “Symbolic membership”, as recently offered, is never going to be enough. “Fast-track accession” of Ukraine, on the other hand, is also not going to happen. So what can be done? Where might a solution be found? What would Jean Monnet suggest today?

Eight basic truths and a way forward

I

Ukraine needs the EU, which is today its most important ally. The EU needs Ukraine, with its democracy, strong military and innovative defence industry. Ukraine is a vital democratic ally, but this is not yet reflected in EU enlargement policy.

II

Ukraine receives substantial EU financial support. This will have to continue in order to deter Russia. However, Ukraine will need a strong economy and a credible vision of prosperity for this to be sustainable. It must deter an enemy, inspire its citizens *and* attract investors.

III

A credible vision of a secure and prosperous Ukraine requires a breakthrough on EU integration. This cannot wait another decade. 2026 matters.

IV

Ukraine submitted its membership application in early 2022. In the past, 22 successful accessions of new members have on average taken eight years. For Ukraine to define 2030 as a target date for full accession is not to ask for special treatment or a “fast-track”. It is based on history.

V

Accession requires any candidate to meet conditions. Regular assessments by the European Commission show where Ukraine stands. In late 2025 it was “prepared for accession” in four of 33 chapters of the acquis. Historic experience tells us that with focus and mobilisation it might take another three to five years to be fully ready.

VI

EU states should do what they can to encourage Ukraine to be fully prepared as soon as possible. The best way to do so, encourage reforms and send a strong signal would be for members states to offer Ukraine full access to the EU internal market and the four freedoms by the time the conditions for that are met. An ambitious realistic target date – assuming a tsunami of Ukrainian reforms in response – for this is 2028.

VII

This would not require a French referendum. It would not lower any of the EU’s standards for accession. It would not have to include agriculture. Ukraine joining the internal market would not make decision making in the EU more complicated. Importantly, this has been done before, eight times: with Austria, Finland and Sweden, with Norway, Iceland and Liechtenstein, and recently with Andorra and San Marino. It could also be offered to Moldova and the Western Balkans. **There is not one good argument against making this offer now.**

VIII

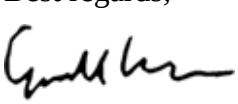
The fastest ever accession processes (Finland and Sweden) passed via joining the internal market. This offers a target date now to motivate reforms, which in turn make reaching full membership soon realistic. It is not “symbolic” and it has been done before. Being in the internal market goes far beyond the current Association Agreement. It is a win-win in the spirit of Jean Monnet. **There is not one good argument not to ask for such an offer to be on the table.**

More here, and soon in our upcoming reports:

VIDEO: Ukraine and EU accession – what now?

www.esiweb.org

Best regards,



Gerald Knaus

PS: Parts of this research and meetings in Ukraine were supported through a fellowship from a new European (Swedish-Ukrainian) think tank in Kyiv, EPIK. Many thanks to the great EPIK team!

In Ukraine with EPIK in April 2026

A win-win at a moment of great danger

An article in the Financial Times on 1 May 2026. What will not work.

"France and Germany in recent weeks have suggested a staged process … Ukraine would get "symbolic" benefits and incremental access to EU mechanisms … Officials said that would mean at least a decade before gaining full membership."

Le Pen (February 2026):

"We are firmly opposed to Ukraine joining the European Union, because that would spell the **immediate demise of French agriculture**."

Challenges in France, Poland, Germany and beyond

Joining the internal market accelerates EU accession
It has been done eighth times before.

Getting to Green

This took previous successful applicants **3-6 years**

It is hugely helped by a target date

Chapter		2022/23	2023	2024	2025
1	Free movement of goods	2	2	2	2
2	Freedom of movement for workers	0	0	0	0
3	Establishment and service provision	1	1	1	1
4	Free movement of capital	1	1.5	1.5	1.5
5	Public procurement	1	1	1	1
6	Company law	1	1	1	1
7	Intellectual property law	0	1	1	1
8	Competition policy	1	1	1	1
9	Financial services	1	1	1	1
10	Digital transformation and media	2	2.5	2.5	2.5
11	Agriculture and rural development	0	0	0	0.5
12	Food safety, veterinary, phytosanitary	2	2	2	2
13	Fisheries	0	1	1	1
14	Transport policy	1	1	1	1
15	Energy	3	3	3	3
16	Taxation	1	1	1	1
17	Economic and monetary policy	2	2	2	2
18	Statistics	1	1	1	1
19	Social Policy and employment	0	0	0	0
20	Enterprise and industrial policy	1	1	1.5	1.5
21	Trans-European networks	1	1	1	1
22	Regional policy, structural instruments	1	1	1	1
23	Judiciary and fundamental rights		1	1	1
24	Justice, freedom and security	1	1	1	1
25	Science and research	2	2	2	2
26	Education and culture	1	1	1	1.5
27	Environment and climate change	0	1	1	1
28	Consumer and health protection	1	1	1	1.5
29	Customs union	3	3	3	3
30	External relations	3	3	3	3
31	Foreign, security and defence policy	3	3	3	3
32	Financial control	0	0	0	1
33	Financial and budgetary provisions	0	0	0	0
	Total (out of 128)	**37**	**42**	**42.5**	**45**
	Average chapter rating (out of 4.0)	**1.2**	**1.3**	**1.3**	**1.4**

Source: European Commission country reports February and November 2023, 2024 and 2025.

Rating: early stage (0), some level of preparation (1), moderately prepared (2), good level of preparation (3), well advanced (4).