

Ardo Hansson: Celebrating the tenth anniversary of Estonia's accession to NATO and EU

Opening speech for Europe Day by Mr Ardo Hansson, Governor of the Bank of Estonia (Eesti Pank), at the Seminar on the impact of the European Union on Estonia, Eesti Pank, Tallinn, 9 May 2014.

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Today we are celebrating Europe Day. We have just passed the tenth anniversary of Estonia's accession to the European Union, though the move towards Europe had started when the country regained its independence and linked the Estonian kroon to the German mark.

To people in Estonia, being part of Europe means democracy, freedom, security and well-being. Closer integration with the European Union has been driven by the desire to ensure that these benefits are maintained. These core European values remain more in the background in our everyday life as we take them for granted, but events in Ukraine have given a sharp reminder of their importance.

Accession to the EU has increased Estonia's influence on the world. Estonia's voice is heard better in Europe than ever before and Estonia is involved in setting the joint economic policy of Europe and the euro area. This gives us the power to affect processes ourselves, and the responsibility to do our work as well as possible and to answer for the results.

As the central bank of the Republic of Estonia and a member of the Eurosystem, Eesti Pank has also contributed to the sustainable development and increased prosperity of the Estonian economy. It is our job to ensure that companies and households can make transactions and calculations using a currency with stable purchasing power.

During the time Estonia has been a member of the European Union, the well-being of the people of Estonia has improved. EU membership has meant our economic environment has been more stable and deserving of confidence. In the past ten years, economic growth in Estonia has surpassed average economic growth rates in the European Union, so that Estonian GDP in purchasing power terms has advanced from 55% of the EU average in 2003 to 71% in 2012. The incomes of residents of Estonia have also increased, with real wages up more than 40% in the past decade.

EU membership has brought both opportunities and risks. It is the job of those setting national policy to make sure that risks are minimised and that we are best able to profit from opportunities and I am sure that the analysis provided here today by my colleagues will help in guiding the decisions behind that policy.

The presentations we will hear today have been prepared thanks largely to the initiative of the European Commission Representation in Estonia to celebrate the tenth anniversary of Estonia's accession to NATO and the European Union.

In summary we can say that in ten years we have made Estonia and the space where Estonian people operate much larger.