

THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS: SHAPING A NEW EUROPE

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For Europe, enlargement is a political imperative and part of our European vocation. Just ten years ago, the Berlin wall came down and Communist regimes collapsed shortly after. The division of Europe has always been artificial. The failure of the liberal revolutions in the nineteenth century, the devastating wars Europe has witnessed in the twentieth century and the Communist regimes created two separate Europes, which we must now unite.

The next enlargement will be different from any of the earlier accession rounds - and unprecedented in scope: it will increase the population of the Union from 375 million to 550 million people and nearly double the number of member states from 15 to 28 or more. Unlike former accession rounds, negotiations include complex new policy areas like the monetary union, justice and home affairs and security and defence policy. And, never before was there such a huge economic gap between the Union and accession candidates.

This endeavour can only be successful if enlargement is based on a sound and valid economic foundation and if the integrity of the internal market system is properly maintained. If not, the machinery that brings growth and prosperity to Europe will break down and spread disintegration.

This enlargement process is based on a set of criteria established at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993:

- The political dimension - stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities;
- The economic dimension - which requires the existence of a functioning market economy, and the capacity to cope with competitive pressure within the internal market;
- The full adoption of Community legislation. In other words: new members must take on all obligations of membership.

The Helsinki European Council, last December, has reaffirmed the inclusive nature of the accession process, which now comprises 13 candidate countries within a single framework. And it has stated that the Union should be ready for enlargement from the end of 2002.

On-going negotiations with Cyprus, Hungary, Poland, Estonia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia - launched in March 1998 - will continue with the same, even with increased momentum. Only recently, on 15 February 2000, the Union began accession negotiations with six more candidate countries, namely Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Malta.

The enlargement strategy, decided at the Helsinki Summit as proposed by the European Commission, sets up a flexible, multi-speed accession process. The objective is to ensure that the pace of the negotiations will reflect each candidate country's programme in preparing for membership.

This includes the opportunity, for the most advanced of the 'newcomers' to catch up with the others within a reasonable period.

When the first accessions will take place will depend entirely on the speed with which applicant countries can make progress on meeting the criteria. It would be premature to make any predictions about who would come when to the finishing line. None the less, we expect that the first wave of the next enlargement will take place before the term of this Commission ends.

The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Malta, Cyprus and Turkey have already shown their determination and their capacity for change. Their economies are increasingly integrated with that of the Union and huge efforts are being made by all actors, parliaments, governments and the public and private sectors to prepare for EU membership.

The EU is actively supporting these efforts through the pre-accession strategies with the candidates and it has set in motion the steps needed to make its own financial and institutional preparation for the accession of new members.

But, at the same time, the Union itself has to take the necessary measures - inside the Union - to prepare for enlargement.

Institutions that were designed for six members, and which are already reaching their limits now with 15, will certainly not be able to manage a Union of 28 or more countries. The Union must seriously address now the indispensable institutional reforms needed to create an enlarged Union that will work.

In particular the following issues need to be addressed:

- There is the issue of the passage from unanimity to qualified majority voting. Qualified majority voting should become the general rule, with some exceptions of course, where fundamental decisions are at stake.
- Then the question has to be decided what weight bigger and smaller member states should have in the Council. The current weighting system is deliberately tilted against bigger countries, but if it continues as it is, the lack of balance between population and voting power will become unsustainable. This issue is of particular importance in the perspective of new Members consisting mostly of small or medium-sized countries - only three out of the thirteen candidates have a larger population than the average of the existing Member States.
- Finally, the Commission must be reformed so that it can operate effectively in a larger Union.

What is the precise implication for Turkey of the decisions taken at the Helsinki Summit?

The European Council stated, "Turkey is a candidate state destined to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate states".

The European Union and Turkey are linked in a strategic partnership. The Union wants to further integrate Turkey into European structures.

We need Turkey as a reliable partner in foreign and security policy. We want Turkey to be a stable democracy, respecting the rule of law and human rights. Our interest is that Turkey plays a constructive role in our common efforts to contribute to peace and stability in the region.

In other words, it is the Union's intention to accelerate Turkey's integration into the European family and to support and encourage the ongoing reform process in Turkey.

The visible improvement of relations between the two neighbouring countries, Turkey and Greece, has been widely welcomed and I sincerely hope that this has created a solid basis for further positive developments.

Turkey will benefit from a pre-accession strategy to stimulate and support reforms in the fields covered by the Copenhagen criteria. This goes well beyond the European strategy for Turkey, which the Union decided upon in 1998.

In fact, the pre-accession strategy for Turkey is built on the experience with Central and East European countries. It includes an enhanced political dialogue, participation in Community

programmes and agencies, as well as meetings between candidate states and the Union in the context of the accession process.

The centre-piece of the pre-accession strategy is a document the Commission will prepare before end of 2000, the 'Accession Partnership'. It will describe, as is the case for the other candidates, the reforms the Commission deems necessary in the short-term - in fact the year 2001 - and in the medium-term, in the political field, the economic field, and as regards the adoption of European legislation.

On the economic front, Turkey could make fast progress now with its clear strategy on structural reforms, backed by the IMF and the World Bank. We do hope that Turkey can further develop social dialogue and active labour market policies to assist the adjustment process. Turkey has a resilient economy and an entrepreneurial people who will all gain from a more balanced and more transparent model of growth based on EU experience.

Regarding political reforms, we expect a firm commitment to continue the process, which was successfully launched, and to proceed now on issues like the revised penal code, the new civil code and enhanced independence of the judiciary. We understand that there is a great willingness to address also sensitive issues like, for instance, freedom of expression.

The Union will support Turkey on her way to accession. We will contribute to make effective progress. And we will need close co-operation between the Commission services and Turkey; not only with the authorities but also civil society, NGOs and universities.

The successful integration of new members into the Union should provide new dynamism and strengthen stability throughout Europe. I, therefore, hope that close co-operation will result in serious progress on all fronts on Turkey's road to EU accession. And I am sure that Turkey considers the Union to be an attractive partner to shape a common future.