

The widening of Europe: Accession of central and east Europe

Ieva Mikelston
University of Latvia

Abstracts: The importance and extent of the measures taken clearly shows us that enlargement will take place sooner or later. Although some Member States have some quantitative benefits for the accession of the candidates, the need for this fifth enlargement is not strictly due to economic criteria but rather to political and stability aspects (3). This should not surprise us too much since the European Communities (EC) were born in the 50s with the clear political objective: to avoid a new war between Europeans through the creation of a genuine community of interests and security. The accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal in the 80s (second and third enlargements) was also intended to contribute to the stability of the incipient democracies of the Mediterranean basin in the context of the Cold War.

The peace, security and progress of Europe, as well as the strengthening of the continent's identity and independence, are the main goals of the EU's foreign policy. The Member States are aware that if they do not "export" stability they will sooner or later receive the fruits of instability that they have not been able or able to avoid in time, for example through the refugee phenomenon (an issue that promises to be of great importance in the forthcoming German elections in 2002).

It was the dramatic events in Yugoslavia, the change of government in Russia and the disintegration of Czechoslovakia in 1993 that led the Copenhagen European Council in June of the same year to make a clear political gesture showing its unquestionable desire to enlarge and which was reflected in the presentation of the three conditions which form the basis for accession to the Union.

Keywords: European Union, international politics, EU-USA relations

Introduction

(The so-called Copenhagen criteria):

1. Political criteria: institutional stability, respect for human rights and protection of minorities (prerequisites for the opening of negotiations);
2. Economic criteria: efficient market economy and adequate conditions for competition in the single market;
3. Criteria on the *acquis communautaire*: ability to adopt all Community rules and acceptance of EU targets.

Similarly, after the start of formal negotiations in March 1998 with the six States that most met these requirements (Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovenia, Latvia and Cyprus), the escalation of the conflict in Kosovo re-accelerated the process and led to the advancement of the opening of negotiations with the remaining five candidates from Central and Eastern Europe, as well as with Malta, whose accession process had been altered since 1996 by the change of government on the island (4).

But in addition, eastward enlargement is seen by the Union as a unique opportunity to strengthen its international position and thus become a leading political player in the multipolar world of the twenty-first century, overcoming the role of economic giant and political dwarf that it has played so far. After the wars in the Balkans during the nineties, which have revealed the EU's deficient capacity to respond to external challenges and that the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) designed in Maastricht urgently needs strengthening, this possible international reinforcement that enlargement would imply does not seem negligible.

However, this alleged increase in the EU's influence could be somewhat truncated by the great importance that certain Member States such as Great Britain attach to their relations with the United States and the Atlantic Alliance (Article 17 TEU). In addition, an increase in membership is very likely to create further problems in coordinating the CFSP (this lack of coordination manifested itself again in October 2000 with the opening of diplomatic relations between some Member States and North Korea).

Unavoidable reforms

Breaking with a well-established practice in the European Union, neither the Commission nor the Council wanted to pronounce themselves or set a specific timetable for setting the milestones for enlargement, as was the case, for example, with the introduction of the single market or the current situation with monetary union. If there are, as seems to have been demonstrated, political benefits for the Union and an unequivocal

determination by the Member States to proceed with the enlargement process, why does the EU refuse to set specific dates, as demanded by the candidate states (5)?

The usual answer given from Brussels is that each State will be judged according to its merits and that a more or less close accession depends on the progress of each one. However, and despite this official position, it is difficult to think that a first wave of accessions could take place without the presence of Poland (whose agricultural sector needs major reforms) and it is expected that integration will take place in groups (predictably two).

Behind Brussels' refusal, therefore, lie deeper reasons: European leaders are aware of the technical, political and financial difficulties that enlargement poses, not only for the candidate states but also for the EU itself. It is for this reason that they do not wish to risk specifying a timetable. If they did so and were forced to accept several candidate states on a specific date without first having settled essential reforms, they would run the risk of bankruptcy or an "institutional heart attack".

The accession of twelve or even more States to the European Union (6) will mean not only a quantitative but also a qualitative change in the supranational organisation. This process will mean the end of the European Union as we know it today. Concepts such as the "multi-speed Europe" (7), "tailor-made integration" or "flexibility", and proposals such as that of former Commission President Jacques Delors, who proposes the creation of a *Fédération des Etats-Nations* with its own institutions and *avant-garde* character, are increasingly sounding with increasing insistence. It is intended that States that want to be able to move faster without being hampered by others that want a slower pace and a lower level of integration.

Many do not want the costly progress made in the field of integration to be diluted and give way to a simple economic area of continental dimensions. If this is not to happen, the EU needs to reform itself to ensure that enlargement will not jeopardise the gains made so far (8).

It is not, however, an easy task. After 16 months of discussions at an Intergovernmental Conference (9), the reform of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) in Amsterdam (October 1997) did not fulfil the main task originally entrusted to it: reforming the composition of the Community institutions and the decision-making process to make it more effective (10). The lack of consensus is a true reflection of the many difficulties involved in reforming an already very complex system, and of the key role played by individual national interests.

On 14 February 2000, at the request of the Helsinki Council, the Intergovernmental Conference was launched to amend the Treaty of Amsterdam and finally provide an appropriate solution to the pending reforms. The Commission's opinion of 26th January recommends keeping the maximum number of MEPs at 700 and limiting the number of members of the Economic and Social Council, the Committee of the Regions and the Court of Auditors. It is also proposed to establish in general qualified majority voting instead of unanimity (11) and a new weighting of votes in the voting system in the Council. The Commission also considers it necessary to review the composition of the College of Commissioners (12) and the Treaty provisions on forms of enhanced cooperation.

The proposals have two fundamental objectives: on the one hand, to avoid the institutional paralysis and the loss of effectiveness that would occur if the unanimity rule were maintained in a Union of 30 Members as before, and institutions such as Parliament or the Commission had an excessive number of members. Although states seem to be gradually resigning themselves to this, the renunciation of the possibility of a veto is something that governments view with displeasure, and especially British, Austrian and Scandinavian governments are reluctant to abandon what they consider a key vestige of their sovereignty.

On the other hand, it is intended to modify the relationship of forces between "small" and "large". The five Member States with the largest populations (Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy and Spain) want to change the proportionality in the number of votes in the Council to make it harder for a minority of "small" states to block decisions backed by states with a larger number of citizens. Although the imbalance in favour of "small" states has always existed (13), this reform is now considered very important because all the candidate states except Poland and Turkey are "small" or "medium" in terms of population and territory.

Romano Prodi's Commission neglects to mention in its opinion a simple issue but with great practical repercussions: the official status of languages. Enlargement will introduce up to ten new languages into the EU, thereby enriching its cultural diversity, but at the same time complicating its work. Pragmatic solutions are therefore needed to ensure effective communication within each institution (14).

As for almost everything at Community level, there is a deadline for the completion of the Intergovernmental Conference: December 2000. If this ambitious deadline is met, the new Treaty emerging from the reforms could be named after the city of Nice, where the European Council of Heads of State and Government under the French presidency is scheduled to meet at the end of the year. It is not ruled out, however, that if agreement on comprehensive reform is not reached, the treaties will have to be amended once again over the next few years.

Once the European Council has reached an agreement unanimously and before it can enter into force, the new Treaty must be ratified by each of the parliaments of the Member States in accordance with the constitutional procedures provided for in each case (Article 49 TEU), which includes in some States popular consultation through referendum. The Helsinki Council estimated that this ratification process will not be completed before the end of 2002 and it is thereafter that the EU will be ready to admit new members.

If we recall the difficulties that existed in ratifying the last Treaty which proposed important reforms within the Union, the Maastricht Treaty (15), it can be ventured that the adoption of this new reform will not be easy either, given the sensitivity of the aspects that are intended to be modified, aspects that concern the basic interests of the Member States. Anti-European movements will surely not miss the opportunity to encourage the nationalist feelings of their public opinion in the face of what can be considered a loss of the weight of States in Community decision-making. The democratic deficit suffered by the organization and the recent cases of waste and corruption only strengthen its thesis.

Günter Verheugen, the Commissioner for Enlargement, pointed out that this second ratification process could in no way be started before the ratification process of the institutional reforms had been completed, as proposed by some candidate states, including the Czech Republic through its State Secretary for European Affairs Pavel Telicka. For Telicka there are no legal reasons that prevent two parallel ratification processes from taking place, but Verheugen and most EU officials reject this idea outright. A compromise solution could be for the Member States that had ratified the reform of the Treaty of Amsterdam to start ratifying the Accession Treaties immediately.

The two opposing positions are easily understandable: Member States want to ensure that accessions will only take place once the Union's institutions are able to function properly with a larger number of members. The governments of the candidate states, for their part, want to prevent possible internal problems within the Union from delaying their accession beyond what Milos Zeman described in November last year as the magic date: the year 2003. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán was more optimistic, pointing to 2002 as the optimal year for his country's integration. Optimism perhaps disproportionate to his Foreign Minister Martonyi, who has often stressed that negotiations on the most sensitive chapters (agriculture and free movement of persons) have yet to be concluded (16).

In any case, it does not seem that the statements of Zeman and Orbán were taken into special consideration by the EU, taking into account the deadlines given by the Helsinki Council, which point to 2004 as the earliest date on which the first wave of accessions could take place. And this if all goes well.

Economic consequences

Among the Copenhagen criteria, it is compliance with economic aspects that receives the most detailed attention in the Commission's annual reports to the Council. It could not be otherwise.

Although, as we have pointed out before, political issues are of vital importance in order to understand why, the pace of enlargement and the benefits it entails for the Union, the consequences of this process, and above all its costs, will have a clear economic and financial aspect. With the current functioning of Community policies, the further removed the candidate States are from the standards of the Fifteen, the more economic costs enlargement will entail. It is therefore logical that the EU has placed particular emphasis since the early nineties on improving the economic situation of the candidates (17).

The accession of the Central and Eastern European States will have particular consequences for the single market, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the EU's solidarity policies.

Freedom of movement for workers

The single market (fully operational since January 1993) is one of the EU's greatest achievements. This is a goal set by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. The basic pillars of this market of 375 million consumers are the free movement of people, goods, capital and services. One of the 31 chapters of the accession negotiations is devoted to each of these freedoms. The negotiation on the free movement of persons, which implies the possibility for EU citizens to move freely and work in any Member State, is one of the most sensitive issues.

In particular, there are fears that the new accessions will lead to a massive influx of workers to the richest border Member States, aggravating, on the one hand, the problem of unemployment in their labour markets, but at the same time reducing the productivity of the new Member States, if the population with a higher level of education chooses to emigrate. In addition, the most catastrophic predict an increase in crime in the EU.

Experience shows us that mass economic migration only takes place if it is not possible to find employment in the State of origin. Therefore, two solutions are proposed. The first would be to delay the accession of the candidate states to the EU until their socio-economic situation improves and emigration does not become so desirable. The other possible solution would be rapid accession, accompanied by long transitional periods (we have even spoken of 18 years) during which the free movement of persons would not apply in the

new Member States. Verheugen has already pointed out the possibility of financial assistance to the current border regions of the Union to compensate for possible damage. If this is not done, it is quite possible that Member States such as Germany or Austria will slow down the process.

The common agricultural policy

Just under 50% of the Community budget is devoted to the CAP. Considering that only 6% of the EU's population is engaged in the primary sector and that this constitutes only 2.5% of the Union's gross domestic product, it is logical that the Commission proposed in its Agenda 2000 a deepening of the reform undertaken in 1992 to change this disproportion.

Enlargement, for its part, will add new problems to existing ones. Agriculture accounts on average for 8% of the GDP of the candidate countries (in the Czech Republic 4.5% in 1998) and about 9.5 million people live in the primary sector in these countries. If the direct aid currently received by Community farmers were also applied to those in the future Member States, the bill would increase dramatically. The Commission is therefore reluctant for new members to receive direct aid under the CAP without long transitional periods because it argues that such aid would only contribute to preserving existing structures in need of reform.

The excessive agricultural orientation of most of the applicant countries is also accompanied by the need for urgent structural reform and diversification of rural economies. If this situation continues, the accession of the CEECs would mean for the EU an increase in surpluses (in particular milk, sugar and meat) which would lead to an increase in support prices, thus jeopardising compliance with international agreements within the framework of the World Trade Organisation.

We should therefore not be surprised that the Commission warns of the danger of implementing the CAP instruments in the CEECs if the necessary reforms are not undertaken first. To help support these agricultural reforms, the Berlin Council of March 1999 approved the creation of a new financial instrument called SAPARD, which has EUR 520 million per year. Another structural instrument for pre-accession, ISPO, is also responsible for subsidising reforms in the fields of the environment and transport.

Hygienic standards in products such as milk and meat also present problems. The adoption of the *acquis communautaire* by the candidate States will entail an increase in the prices that consumers in these countries will have to pay, and which should not have an impact on an increase in the standard of living of farmers if they do not benefit from CAP aid as proposed by the Commission. The candidate countries are not giving up on obtaining such aid, so the negotiations about to start are expected to be long and difficult.

The negotiations about to start between the EU and the candidate states are therefore expected to be long and difficult.

Solidarity policies

Articles 158-161 of the EC Treaty establish structural, regional and cohesion policies, which currently represent around 40% of the Community budget(18). These policies are a fundamental element in the EU because they give the organisation a "solidarity" component and promote the economic and social cohesion necessary for true integration.

The enlargement of the Union to include the CEECs, Cyprus and Malta will pose very important problems for this cohesion, given the considerable differences in the development of the regions of these States in relation to the current fifteen Member States. The applicant States will be net recipients of aid for many years(19). The enormous financial cost of German reunification and the complicated restructuring of the somewhat advanced economy of the former GDR is an example that leaves no illusions, and again the question arises as to whether massive aid to the transition economies will not create dependent structures and discourage local initiative. The enormous financial cost of German reunification and the complicated restructuring of the somewhat advanced economy of the former GDR is an example that leaves no illusions, and again the question arises as to whether massive aid to the transition economies will not create dependent structures and discourage local initiative. The Commission therefore proposes that the future Member States should gradually benefit from structural policies according to their absorption capacity.

For their part, the current beneficiaries of structural fund aid (Spain, Portugal, Greece and Ireland in particular) have been assured that they will be able to continue to benefit from it, to practically the same extent as hitherto.

All this leads us to ask a key question...

How is enlargement to be financed?

The Berlin European Council of March 1999 reached an overall agreement on Agenda 2000, which presents the Union's financial perspective for the period 2000-2006 and starts from the very unlikely assumption that the accession of new States will start in 2002.

Agenda 2000 differentiates between pre-accession expenditure, accession-related expenditure and total enlargement costs. The first concerns the three pre-accession instruments (the PHARE programme, the agricultural instrument and the structural instrument) which will have an annual ceiling of EUR 3120 million over the entire period. Secondly, from 2002 onwards, an amount is set aside (which increases each year) to cover the costs of new accessions. Finally, reference is made to the maximum amounts of appropriations for agriculture, structural interventions, internal policies and administration that the total annual cost of enlargement between 2002 and 2006 may require.

Where will these resources come from? The governments of the Member States did not want to increase expenditure, which is still set at 1.27% of Community GDP, as in the Edinburgh compromise of 1992. An expansion of the common budget was at stake by the extraordinary efforts made by most Member States to reduce internal expenditure and comply with the convergence criteria.

Enlargement must therefore be financed by two-thirds thanks to the economic growth of the Fifteen, estimated at around 2.5%. The remainder will be financed through the increase in GDP that will result from the accession of the candidate States, which must also contribute, although they will ultimately be net recipients.

The calculation has been done the other way around: the Member States have not considered how much money is needed for enlargement, but how it should be done in order not to pay more. There is neither an increase in the budget nor a decrease in expenditure (agricultural protection will still account for around 2006% of the budget in 45) but it seems that everything can still be financed. Economic growth should be a panacea, although it is difficult for everyone to win.

The fruit of necessity

Verheugen recently admitted that "there should be no illusions: the reception of candidates in community society is not only enthusiastic." For his part, Romano Prodi has been more cautious lately, having assured at the beginning of his mandate that his goal was to integrate at least one of the candidate states during his five-year term.

There is also no shortage of criticism, discouragement and distrust among many of the leaders of the candidate states, who complain that their efforts do not seem to be adequately recognised. However, the official position of the Union is to show optimism regarding the direction and current pace of the process.

Are we really facing a "loss of enthusiasm" from the EU, as prominent spokesmen for the candidates have sometimes pointed out? Could it be that the steps towards enlargement taken by the supranational organization have been more the fruit of necessity than of joyful conviction?

At the beginning of the 90s, when Central and Eastern Europe regained its political and economic freedoms and began to knock on the doors of the Union, few were those who warned of the difficulties that would have to be faced to achieve the long-awaited union of Europe for so many decades. The initial euphoria would later give way to caution and the promises of rapid integration were diluted when the financial costs to be borne were realized. The Europe Agreements signed with the majority of the CEECs(20) left the door open to future accession, but neither promised nor guaranteed it.

Conclusions

Germany, the EU's economic engine and main beneficiary of possible enlargement, was embarked on the difficult and costly task of transforming its new *Länder*. France, the other great cornerstone of the Union, viewed with suspicion the possible increase in influence of the reunified neighbour and together with the other Mediterranean states tried to prevent the geographical axis of the EU from moving too far east.

The negotiations on the Maastricht Treaty and the difficult road to economic and monetary union put enlargement projects on the back burner. However, the new democracies continued to look with increasing impatience towards the Union, a Union that has always been described as "European", without further qualifications. Only the dramatic situation in the Balkans, widely reported by the media and which revived the specter of war in Europe, together with the danger that excessive "fatigue"(21) due to the economic reforms undertaken would produce instability has really accelerated the process in recent years.

It is true that there is no longer the possibility of a reversal, but that does not mean that the first accessions will take place in the very short term, nor does it prevent the process from being slowed down in the future. The fact is that the enlargement process depends on the political will of the Member States (which is greatly influenced by their internal policy) and on the progress of the economy, so talking about specific dates and the terms in which integration will take place belongs to the field of speculation. Past experiences, such as the second and third enlargements, force us to be cautious. Greece's accession followed an initial negative opinion by the Commission and negotiations with Spain and Portugal took much longer than anticipated, despite clear political will and sufficient funds.

Therefore, the usual declarations for internal "consumption" by the leaders of the candidate states must be taken with caution. It is logical that they defend the idea that their governments are taking the right steps and that accession is a matter of short time. On the other hand, the EU is also in the interests of establishing a positive climate that encourages the candidates and strengthens their hopes, thus avoiding a possible increase in anti-European positions.

Popular wisdom has, as many other times, an adequate answer: Trpelivostruzeprínásí (patience is what brings the roses), say the Czechs ...

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