

“EUROPE” AND ITS “ENLARGEMENTS”: ENOUGH... OR DO WE WANT MORE?

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Croatia’s membership of the EU and Latvia’s imminent membership of the euro zone provide us an opportunity to recall that “Europe” continues to wield a power of attraction and that enlargement policy is one of the main tools of the EU’s foreign policy despite the need for some adjustments. This is the objective of this Viewpoint co-signed by Sami Andoura and Yves Bertoncini.

Croatia’s membership of the European Union (EU) and Latvia’s imminent membership of the euro zone, which have added a little fresh vigour to the European debate on “enlargement”, provide us with an opportunity to issue a few civic, diplomatic and political reminders.

1. “Enlargements” confirm that “Europe” continues to wield a power of attraction despite the crisis

The membership bids of countries such as Croatia and Latvia confirm first and foremost that, while the current European crisis has unquestionably weakened the EU’s image both with its own citizens and outside the EU, “Europe” continues to act as a genuine magnet.

The European authorities currently consider five countries to be “candidates” to EU membership: Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Iceland and Turkey, negotiations being under way only with the latter two at this time, while three more countries are considered to be “potential candidates”: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo. As far as these countries are concerned, the EU continues to exercise an enormous power of attraction in its capacity first and foremost as a forum for reconciliation and stability, but also as an area for trade, and finally as a historical and geographical entity which personifies the “European family” in the eyes of the world and of which it is thus logical to become a member. Only countries as peripheral as Iceland and Turkey now appear to hold somewhat greater reservations regarding the prospect of ending up as fully paid-up members of the EU, while the EU continues to be a particularly mobilising force for the countries of south-eastern Europe.

Latvia’s aspiration to join the “euro zone” reveals a political reality of a similar nature: in the face of a financial crisis on a global scale and of investment strategies and speculative attacks that are equally

as global, membership of a monetary union provides a welcome anchor in economic and political terms. Of course, all the tension over the handling of the euro zone crisis is going to have abate yet further for other countries to be able to pursue the same path as Latvia - Lithuania, for instance, being in the wings for 2015. Thus it is conceivable that the citizens of these countries may make a calculation comparable to that made by those Europeans who are already members of the euro zone, all of whom are extremely aware of the benefits of membership of a monetary union and a large majority of whom oppose the hypothetical prospect of a return to their national currencies.

2. Enlargement policy is one of the main tools of the EU’s foreign policy

Croatia’s membership of the EU also reminds us that enlargement policy is one of the main tools of Europe’s nowhere to be found “foreign and security policy” which is *so difficult to beat out of the bush over other issues*. This policy has allowed the EU, at this juncture, to contribute to the stability and economic development of a fair number of its neighbours, especially in Eastern Europe. Its primary goal is to bring Europe to its neighbours before the opposite happens, and in that connection it is a key vehicle of influence for the EU.

Thus Croatia has had to make a huge effort throughout its membership negotiations to ensure that it met the legal, economic and political terms required of it and to thus be in a position to join the EU almost ten years after its neighbour Slovenia. Serbia has also been making a comparable effort which has led, for instance, to the recent signing of an agreement with Kosovo in the hope of obtaining the start of membership negotiations. Similarly, it is the prospect of EU membership that has prompted the countries of the

former Yugoslavia to hand over almost all of their presumed war criminals to the International Criminal Court in The Hague and thus to lay the groundwork for lasting reconciliation in the region.

The EU's influence with Turkey, on the other hand, seems to have waned in proportion to the difficulties and the procrastination surrounding the negotiations under way with the country - hence the recent decision to re-launch them. While the prospect of membership could of course never be the sole tool of the "good neighbour" policy that Europe needs to develop throughout the continent, it is then very much worth highlighting that it has not yet exhausted all of its political virtues.

3. The EU's enlargement strategy requires rekeying in several areas

The better Europe's enlargement strategy is adjusted in legal, social and political terms, the more effective and legitimate it will be.

Legal adjustment comes first, given that, for a variety of reasons, the situation of such countries as Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece, Hungary and Romania has fuelled intense controversies and has led to criticise the "veil of recklessness" that sometimes accompanied the previous wave of new members. Thus at this juncture it is a matter of accompanying the enlargement strategy with extremely stringent monitoring of the membership terms both when negotiations open and after they are concluded. This requirement applies to membership of the EU, of the euro zone and of the Schengen area alike. It may seem a little unfair for new candidate countries, but it is the price to pay to ensure the cohesion and solidity of the "clubs" they seek to join.

Enlargement strategy must also be adjusted from a social standpoint, given that Europe is not only a forum for reconciliation but also an area of business relocation which, while maybe limited in its magnitude nevertheless comes at a cost both for its victims and for

the EU's image. Thus it is worth setting up a system whereby Europe can take clear and explicit responsibility for those citizens who may suffer from the next wave of new memberships, even if their impact is likely to be low (Croatia's GDP, after all, accounts for only 0.3 percent of the EU's overall GDP). A series of Integrated Mediterranean Programmes were put in place when Spain and Portugal joined, yet nothing of the kind was devised to mark the major enlargement in 2004. It is thus of the utmost importance, in both symbolic and concrete terms, for such "spending adjustment" to be planned ahead of membership on the part of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, and it is imperative that a narrow implementation of the principle of subsidiarity in the social sphere not hinder that accompaniment.

And lastly, enlargement strategy needs to be adjusted from a political standpoint, which demands a clear stance on Europe's "new frontiers" in order to prevent giving the impression of unbridled expansion. For the EU, that means rapidly clarifying the status of all our neighbours, not all of whom have a calling to join the Union, particularly in Eastern Europe. While for the euro zone, which in principle is designed to include the virtual totality of the EU's member states (aside from the two that have negotiated opt-out clauses), we need to specify on what terms and at what rates new membership may be countenanced in light of the lessons imparted by the current crisis.

It is on these political bases that the European authorities will be able the more easily to manage the internal and external dynamics in the enlargement sphere both in terms of the EU and of the euro zone. By the same token, it is in envisaging these enlargements on a dual scale that they will be able the better to reconcile enlargement with a deepening of European integration in the short and medium term.

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