

WHAT BORDERS FOR EUROPE ?

The author discusses two opposing visions within the Union regarding the borders of the European Union. The first vision makes the case based on a geographical and historical identity for Europe. The second vision, however, looks to the future. He is defending the latter by claiming that the definition of the EU's borders can neither be based on historical nor geographic and even less on religious factors. As such, Turkey has a rightful place within Europe. Europe can only continue to be a major actor by rejecting a narrow vision which would limit it to its historical core. Furthermore, the author argues that enlargement and deepening are complementary. He sees the former as part of political deepening: to be able to influence the future of the international system one has to have a critical size.

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The enlargement of the European Union (EU) to ten new member states marks a unique stage of the European construction. Even though it is of an unprecedented scale on the demographic, political and geographic front, enlargement towards the East which transformed the visage of the European Union was seen to be a natural development in view of European history and geography. The Berlin wall fell down and Europe had to be reunited. This reunification was not achieved without difficulties both for member states and for candidate countries. It has taken ten years of negotiations to fulfill the commitment undertaken by the EU at the time of the dismantling of the iron curtain. It has also taken the same length of time for the candidate countries to adopt the EU acquis. Nevertheless, finally, enlargement was realized.

The election of a new European Parliament last June and the new Commission which will take office in November this year crown the advent of a Europe of 25. That does not mean however that enlargement is finished. Since the genesis of the European Economic Community (EEC) at the end of the fifties, the EU always had the vocation to admit new members.¹ This ambition remains. But it begs the question of the limits of the enlargement of the Union. What are the borders of the Union?

What seems certain to me is that a Union of 25 is only a phase.

The next milestones of enlargement are already set. Romania and Bulgaria should enter the Union in 2007. These two countries which have initiated the full membership negotiations in the beginning of the nineties are nearing the conclusion of these negotiations. The accession of the Western Balkans (Croatia, Bosnia, Serbia and Macedonia) has been agreed on in principle on the basis of the decision of the Feira European Council in June 2000. In fact, Croatia should start the accession negotiations in the near future. Nobody challenges the European vocation of these countries. There is no question that in time, once they are ready, both economically and politically, these states will become members of the Union.

The question is different as regards Turkey. Heads of state and government will decide in December on the opening of the full membership with Turkey. It is high time for Europeans to give an answer to Turkey: it has been more than 40 years, since 1963 that Turkey showed its willingness to enter the Union; even though it was only in December 1999 at the European Council in Helsinki that this candidature was officially recognized.

The question of Turkey's membership was the subject of numerous debates during European elections. It continues to be a controversial topic in national public opinions as well as within political parties. This controversy is testimony to the crisis of territorial identity that affects the EU. For the first time, the question of the European vocation of the candidate country is being posed. For the first time, Europeans question the limits of their territory: what should be the borders of Europe? It is for this reason that the response to the Turkish candidacy gives rise to so many difficulties in Europe: the answer would not only be a reply to Turkey but also an answer on the frontiers of Europe- and even beyond that- an answer to the nature of the European project. It is a choice and decision on the future that has been procrastinated since the Treaty of Rome in 1957 that we need to address now.

There are two opposing visions within the Union.

¹ The EU witnessed five enlargements: 1973: the UK, Ireland and Denmark; 1980: Greece; 1986: Spain and Portugal; 1995: Finland, Austria and Sweden; 2004: Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Cyprus and Malta.

According to the first vision, which relies on the past, there is a geographical and historical identity for Europe. The Union has the vocation to unify all the countries that have shared this identity. According to this vision, although it is a privileged partner, Turkey does not have the vocation to become a member since it does not belong geographically and historically to Europe. The most often quoted argument is that only a small part (5 percent) of Turkey's territory and population around Istanbul is geographically in Europe. This argument tends to ignore that modern Turkey is the heir to the Byzantine Empire, which like the Roman Empire it succeeded, and that it belongs to European culture and history. In fact, geography just like history does not bring satisfactory answers to the definition of the ultimate borders of Europe. These borders have been in such a state of flux in the past and are so vague in geographic terms that it appears to be impossible to make it a relevant criteria to define the limits of Europe's territory.

In fact, another argument is concealed behind the geographic and historical argument. Some make use of this false claim to mask their refusal to accept a country with a predominantly Muslim population within Europe that they consider to be a "Christian club." I categorically refuse this vision. It is not politically acceptable : the Union is a political entity that cannot rest on religious criteria. It is also challenged by reality: countries such as France, the United Kingdom and Germany have very important Muslim minorities that are part of their identity. The case of the Western Balkans is even clearer: Bosnia is a country with a majority of Muslim population. Should we claim therefore that Bosnia cannot become a member of the Union?

The second vision looks to the future. It is that one that I defend. The definition of the Union's borders can neither be based on historical nor geographic and even less on religious factors : it is of a political nature. The definition of Europe's borders cannot be disassociated from the thinking on Europe's political project. It is by determining a common ambition for the Europe of tomorrow that we can define its limits.

What is this ambition ? We have dealt with this question with the committee of wise men that Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission asked me to chair. The report of this committee entitled "Towards a political Europe : 50 suggestions for the Europe of tomorrow" has been published last June. The main idea is that the Union possesses a political identity. This identity is reflected in a specific model of society with strong characteristics: the inviolability of human rights; a model of sustainable development that does not sacrifice social justice and the environment on the altar of economy; the refusal to use force; the promotion of the law and of multilateralism in international diplomacy. Everyone wishing to share this universalist model has the vocation to enter the EU.

Which borders, then, should the Union have? I think it is likely that, in fifty years, there will be zones of influence in the world, defining the political equilibrium in the international system. In the west we can already clearly perceive a zone of influence, with the United States at its center, including Canada, Mexico and some of the Central American countries. In the east two great "empires" are emerging rapidly, China and India, each with more than a billion inhabitants. These two giants will, no doubt, play a major political and economic role on the international scene. In the South, Latin America could, under certain conditions, constitute another center of power.

Europe can only continue to be a major actor influencing the nature of this new global balance of power if it rejects a narrow vision of itself limiting it to its historical core. To continue to exist in the sense mentioned above, Europe must be able to embrace and, to a certain extent, unify all the various territories and cultures which are at the foundation of the European civilization. Europe's capacity to conduct dialogue with China, India and America depends on the extent to which it can be a union of all territories from the icebergs of the Arctic north to the sand dunes of the Sahara, with the Mediterranean in their midst. The challenge is indeed to make the Mediterranean an "internal" European sea. It is this geographical area that constitutes Europe's natural sphere of influence. It is necessary, therefore, that after the opening to the East, Europe now turns toward the South so that it can again become the link between the Western world and the Orient. This is the only way can avoid marginalization and decline, it is the only realistic option that will allow Europe to have a sufficient weight in the geopolitics of the future.

That is why, personally, I have no doubt at all about the European future of Turkey. And, at a later stage, beyond Turkey, we will have to think about how to make it possible for countries from the ex-Soviet Union and countries from the Mediterranean basin, such as those in the Maghreb, to join our political area.

Many supporters of our European project – be they on the political left or right – see in this vision of Europe extending to the Mediterranean basin the end of Europe as a political union. They see enlargement and deepening of the Union as two projects which cannot be reconciled and between which, sooner or later, Europe has to choose. They believe that the enlargement to the east was premature and it weakened European institutions. In their view, Turkey's accession, and the accession of other countries, would necessarily transform Europe into a vast free-trade zone without prospects for political union.

I believe quite the contrary is true. Enlargement and deepening are complementary. Enlargement can be seen as part of political deepening : to be able to influence the future of the international system one has to have a critical size.

It is true that successive enlargements have made institutional reforms increasingly difficult. The last round of intergovernmental conferences has underlined the inability of the European countries to deepen political integration whilst simultaneously enlarging the Union's membership. The Nice summit has in this regard been one of the most spectacular failures. The elaboration of the European constitution, first during the convention and then during the intergovernmental conference, as the first act of the enlarged Union, has illustrated the extent of the difficulties. The new member states showed that they need time before they can accept the sharing of sovereignty implied by Europe as a political union. This is understandable in the case of nations that just regained their independence after more than forty years of Soviet domination. Indeed it is even more understandable if one remembers that other and much older members of the Union share these misgivings. The United Kingdom, for example, wants to preserve its veto right over fiscal and social policies.

That is why a Union of 25 or 30 members or more, will have to foresee varying speeds of integration. It should be possible to have a vision of Europe where a group of countries is able and willing to proceed with an advanced degree of political integration, which would be the core of a much larger European and Mediterranean Union, constituting an area of strategic peace and economic integration. This core need not be small, and it would not necessarily be formed by the founding members of the Union. It should allow all those who want to and can

go further in the direction of political integration. The Economic and Monetary Union constituted by the Eurozone is the best example of such enhanced cooperation based on the will and the capacity of a group of countries. In similar vein, forms of association should be defined, much strongly than what exists today, for countries which cannot or do not yet want to be too rapidly integrated into the Union.

The perspective of Europe enlarged to include the Mediterranean basin still is part of a long term-vision, hence a lot of time and patience will be needed to achieve it. The current decision on beginning the process leading to Turkish accession can be seen, however, as a decision within the framework of such a vision. I would like to see the European Council meeting in December clearly accept the principle of Turkey's accession into the Union. Such a decision could be the first short-term step in a very long, no doubt secular process, the foundations of which are still being laid today. A negative decision would constitute a message that Europe wants to retreat into a narrow geography. This abandonment would lead, in time, to the decline of Europe's influence in the world.

All this does not imply that negotiations would start without conditions. The start of negotiations with Turkey is linked, as has been the case for all other countries, to the fulfillment of a set of criteria agreed in Copenhagen in 1993. These include some broad economic criteria relating to the capacity to function as a competitive market economy. But the criteria relating to the start of negotiations are primarily political and require stable democratic institutions, the rule of law and the respect of individual human rights and the rights of minorities. The reforms adopted by Turkey over the last years have moved the country in this direction. There may still be some distance to cover and it is up to the European Commission to provide a full evaluation in the report due in October. If this evaluation is positive, the European Council must decide to open negotiations without delay.

I cannot conceive that Europe can deviate from the objective set in Helsinki in 1999. In the medium or the long-term Turkey will be a member of the European Union. The exact timing of membership will depend both on the Europeans and on the Turkish political authorities. It will also depend, more broadly, on Turkish society as a whole, which must realize that the Union brings with it for all its members at least as many tasks and duties as it brings rights and entitlements.