**The enlargement of the European Union**

## ****Europe at the service of peace and democracy****

Community Europe has celebrated its 50th anniversary.

On 9 May 1950, Robert Schuman made history by putting to the Federal Republic of Germany, and to the other European countries, the idea of creating a Community of pacific interests. He began a completely new process in international relations by proposing to old nations to together recover, by exercising jointly their sovereignty, the influence which each of them was incapable of exercising alone.

The construction of Europe has since then moved forward every day. It represents the most significant undertaking of the 20th century and a new hope at the dawn of the new century. It derives its momentum from the far-sighted and ambitious project of the founding fathers who emerged from the second world war driven by the resolve to establish between the peoples of Europe the conditions for a lasting peace.

## ****A historic success****

As Europe approaches the dawn of the third millennium, a look back over the 50 years of progress towards European integration shows that the European Union is a historic success. Countries which were hitherto enemies, today share a common currency, the euro, and manage their economic and commercial interests within the framework of joint institutions.

Europeans now settle their differences through peaceful means, applying the rule of law and seeking conciliation. The spirit of superiority and discrimination has been banished from relationships between the Member States, which have entrusted to the four Community institutions, the Council, the Parliament, Commission and the Court of Justice, the responsibility for mediating their conflicts, for defining the general interest of Europeans and for pursuing common policies.

Economic integration every day highlights the need for and takes people closer to political union. At international level, the European Union is wielding increasing influence commensurate with its economic importance, the standard of living of its citizens, its place in diplomatic, commercial and monetary forums.

The European Community derives its strength from common values of democracy and human rights, which rally its peoples, and it has preserved the diversity of cultures and languages and the traditions which make it what it is. Its transatlantic solidarity and the attractiveness of its model has enabled a united Europe to withstand the pressure of totalitarianism and to consolidate the rule of law.

The European Community stands as a beacon for the expectations of countries near and far which watch the Union’s progress with interest as they seek to consolidate their re-emerging democracies or rebuild a ruined economy.

Today, the Union of the 15 Member States is negotiating the next wave of membership with 10 countries of central and eastern Europe, and with Malta and Cyprus. At a later stage, other countries of former Yugoslavia or which belong to the European sphere will in turn ask to join. The taking on board by the applicant countries of the acquis communautaire, and more generally of the major objectives of the European Union, is central to enlargement negotiations. For the first time in its long history, the continent is preparing to become reunified in peace and freedom.

Such developments are momentous in terms of world balance and will have a huge impact on Europe’s relations with the United States, Russia, Asia and Latin America.

## The key dates of the European Enlargement

1945 – After the Second World War Europe was destroyed. The main problems facing european states were security and economic reconsrtruction. That’s where the discussion on any integration of Europe started. The ideas of Kudenhove-Calergi were recollected.

1950 – R. Schuman proposed to pool coal and steel resources of France and FRG.

**1951** – The Paris treaty was signed: **France, the Federal Republic of Germany, Italy, Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg** established the European Coal and Steel Community. This organization could regulate the European market. It was the first step of European integration and ***in terms of the enlargement – it was the original platform to enlarge****.*

1961 – Ten years later, after the EEC and the Euroatom were created (1957), the UK – the leader of EFTA (1960) – applied to enter the EEC.

1963, 1965 – the situation was not that favourable for the UK. On the initiative of De Gaulle, the French leader at that moment, France twice vetoed the UK’s accession to the Community.

1967 – A new application for Community membership from the UK (the fourth attempt), Denmark and Ireland.

**1972** – Here we have the first enlargement: The Treaty on the accession of Denmark, Ireland, Norway, the UK was signed in Brussels. In Denmark and Norway the referendums were hold and Norwegian people decided not to join the Community (they will change their mind only in 1996). So, in 1973 the agreement on accession entered in force only for three applicants: **the UK, Denmark and Ireland**.

1973 – Greece applied to enter the Community. During the 70-ties the EC was discussing the situation with Mediterranean states. Greece, spain and Portugal were not able to join the Community because of dictatural governments ruling there.

**1981** – Finally, after the dictature collapsed, **Greece** entered the EC.

**1986** – Five years later **Spain and Portugal** joined the Community.

1993 – After a long pause the enlargement was continued – the negotiations on Austria, Sweden and Finland accession were opened.

Soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the European Community quickly established diplomatic relations with the countries of central Europe. During the 1990s, the European Community and its Member States progressively concluded Association Agreements, so called '**Europe Agreements**', with ten countries of central Europe. The Europe Agreements provide the legal basis for bilateral relations between these countries and the EU. The European Community had already established similar Association Agreements with Turkey (1963), Malta (1970) and Cyprus (1972). In the case of Turkey, a Customs Union entered into force in December 1995.

**1995** – **Sweden, Finland and Austria** joined the European Union.

1996 – Malta applied to enter the EU. This application was soon frozen till 1998.

1997 – At its summit in Luxembourg in December 1997, the European Council decided that the enlargement process should encompass:

* the European Conference, a multilateral framework bringing together ten central European countries, Cyprus and Turkey, which was launched on 12 March 1998;
* the accession process, covering ten central European countries and Cyprus, which was launched on 30 March 1998;
* the accession negotiations, which the European Council decided to open on 31 March 1998 with six countries, as recommended by the European Commission: Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia.

1998 – Malta reactivated its application for Community membership made in 1996.

1998 – The EU formally launched the process that will make enlargement possible. It embraces the following **thirteen applicant countries**: Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Turkey.

1999 – The Commission adopted its reports and a general composite paper on the progress made by each of the candidate countries (ten central European countries, Cyprus, Malta and Turkey) towards accession. They show that all countries except Turkey fulfil the political criteria for accession and that only Cyprus and Malta fully meet the economic criteria. Based on these regular reports, the Commission has recommended to open negotiations with Malta, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia and also with Bulgaria and Romania but subject to certain conditions for the latter two. The Commission has also recommended to conduct accession negotiations through a differentiated approach taking account of the progress made by each candidate.

1999 – A new institutional process was put in train by the decision taken by the European Council meeting in Helsinki to convene an intergovernmental conference with the aim inter alia of adapting the treaties to the conditions whereby a Union enlarged to over 20 members can function smoothly.

2000 – Negotiations with Romania, Slovakia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Malta on the conditions for their entry into the Union and the ensuing Treaty adjustments started. As for Turkey - The European Council welcomed recent positive developments in Turkey, as well as its intention to continue its reforms towards complying with the Copenhagen criteria. In doing so, Turkey is considered as a candidate State to join the Union on the basis of the same criteria as applied to the other candidate States.

***December, 2000*** – By agreeing - on a Treaty of Nice, the EU member states also removed the last formal obstacle to moving ahead with the EU enlargement process. The conclusions go on to say that "the time has now come to lend fresh impetus to the process". The summit broadly endorsed the enlargement strategy proposed by the Commission, and emphasised "the principle of differentiation, based on each candidate country's own merits", and "allowance of scope for catching up". The road map for the next 18 months will ease the way for further negotiations, bearing in mind that those countries which are the best prepared will continue to be able to progress more quickly, the summit concluded.

Meanwhile, the summit expressed appreciation for the efforts made by the candidates, and requested them "to continue and speed up the necessary reforms to prepare themselves for accession, particularly as regards strengthening their administrative capacity, so as to be able to join the Union as soon as possible". And it welcomed the establishment of economic and financial dialogue with the candidate countries.

**2003** – The Union has declared that it will be ready to welcome new countries from the start of 2003.

## The weighting of votes in the future council

The Treaty of Nice signed at the summit decided not only on voting rights for the current fifteen member states, but also on the votes that the candidates will have as they become member states. The full list is as follows:

Germany, United Kingdom, France and Italy – **29**

Spain and Poland – **27**

Romania – **14**

Netherlands – **13**

Greece, Czech Republic, Belgium, Hungary, Portugal – **12**

Sweden, Bulgaria, Austria – **10**

Slovakia, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania – **7**

Latvia, Slovenia, Estonia, Cyprus, Luxembourg – **4**

Malta – **3**

**Total – 342**

A qualified majority in the new voting system will be 255 (74.56%).

The enlargement facing the EU today poses a unique challenge, since it is without precedent in terms of scope and diversity: the number of candidates, the area (increase of 34%) and population (increase of 105 million), the wealth of different histories and cultures. Third countries will significantly benefit from an enlarged Union.

## ****The challenges of the future****

After a half century of Community history, Europeans still have a lot of soul-searching to do: How far could and should the Union be taken in order to maximise the strength which derives from unity, without at the same time eroding identity and destroying the individual ethos which makes the richness of our nations, regions and cultures? Can they move forward in step, thanks to the natural harmony which favours consensus between 15 countries, or should they recognise divergences of approach and differentiate their pace of integration? What are the limits of Community Europe, at a time when so many nations, starting with the new democracies of central and eastern Europe and the Balkans, along with Turkey, are asking to join the process of unification in progress? How can the people of Europe get everyone involved in the Community undertaking and give them the feeling of a European identity which complements and goes beyond fundamental solidarity?

All these are questions of principle, fundamental questions the answers to which will themselves determine the specific and technical matters addressed daily by those who have the task of taking this Community undertaking forward.