

Where Does Europe End Now?

Expanding Europe's Frontiers and the Dilemmas of Enlargement and Identity

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IN EARLY 2001, WHILE I was collecting data for a monograph on European enlargement, the question of how far to the east and south Europe's borders would go was still uncertain and often hotly debated.¹ By the time of the big bang enlargement of 1 May 2004, the borders of Europe seemed to have solidified. All the newly admitted countries had a Western feel to them—an unstated membership criterion.² All of them were Christian countries—another unstated criterion. Although none of them had come close to fulfilling all of the 80,000 requirements of the EU *acquis communautaire* and of the Military Action Program (MAP) for NATO,³ they were deemed to be moving in that direction. Europe's borders now seemed firmly established and its outer limits decided: the Baltics, but not Russia; Poland, but not Belarus; Slovakia and Hungary, but not the Ukraine; Bulgaria and Romania, but not Turkey, Georgia, Moldova, or the former Yugoslavia. Enlargement now seemed complete, the issue settled. But even as those boundaries solidified, with euphoria over enlargement widespread, it became clear that this was not the end of the matter. Many issues remained unresolved.

NEW ENLARGEMENTS AND THEIR *PROBLEMATIQUE*

When the EU and NATO completed their big bang enlargements in 2004, encompassing all the candidate countries and drawing a new Golden Curtain all the way from the Arctic Ocean to the Black Sea, that seemed to be the end of it.

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convenience.⁵ To the west lie wealth, affluence, a large middle class, democracy, hope, progress, the Enlightenment, Christianity, human rights, and "civilization." To the east, in Belarus, the Ukraine, Russia, Moldova, Georgia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, lie poverty, backwardness, authoritarianism, stagnation, grayness, lack of hope, Orthodoxy, an often dismal human rights record, and lack of "civilization."

During the planning phase of the 2004 enlargement, EU leaders had already been apprehensive that their own domestic populations might not support the new

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accession. NATO military leaders were even more negative, arguing in a set of interviews conducted at the time that none of the candidate countries had met the qualifications for admission, and that the decisions were all made on purely political grounds by a small cabal around then Secretary of State

Madeleine Albright.⁴ The line separating Europe from the rest seemed fixed. Any further enlargement to the east was out of the question.

CULTURE

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The interview data revealed that the real criteria for accession often had little to do with the publicly stated criteria. One EU administrator who was influential in the accession process said that the Ukraine would never be an EU candidate. "Too backward," he said. Then he relocated to Vilnius, Lithuania, and he said that from the first moment he landed at the airport he knew he was back in a Western, Christian country. In other words, many Europeans, even those in decision-making positions, framed their decisions not on the basis of stated objective criteria, but on gut reactions and their own personal senses of European history and the ancient borders of Europe.

Another unstated criterion was religion. Even though much of Europe is now secular, it still often uses religious criteria—and prejudices—informally as a shorthand guide of culture and civilization. For example, in one of the interviews held at EU Headquarters in Brussels, it was made clear to me that the required criteria for accession were superseded by the following shorthand formula: Christian countries, yes; Orthodox countries, maybe; Islamic countries, no. And, if one looks at the countries actually admitted to the EU and NATO, this formula holds true. But if this was the unspoken criterion, it is ironic that the EU more recently rejected the proposal to identify Christianity as part of its legacy and history in the new European constitution.

Still other criteria, again unstated, include prejudices and ethnic stereotypes. In many of the interviews in Brussels, the countries to the east seemed to be associated with all manner of evil and vice: crime, corruption, prostitution, AIDS, disease, car-snatchings, mafias, illegal immigration, trafficking in children, etc. In addition, stereotypes included all kinds of ethnic jokes about the easterners, mainly centering on their stupidity. Of course this involves unacceptable ethnic stereotyping, but to the degree that these attitudes are widespread—and they certainly are, especially among the general European public—they have a major bearing on how today's enlargement issues are decided. This is part of the reason why EU bureaucrats in Brussels are always reluctant to allow popular votes on accession candidates.

ECONOMICS

A fourth issue was the low level of economic development of the east—and again, in general, the farther east you go, the worse it gets. EU officialdom preferred not to talk about this very much for fear the enormous costs involved in bringing the new members up to Western living standards would discourage their publics from voting for enlargement. They much preferred a positive spin to emphasize economic reforms and not to dwell on the long way Eastern Europe still had to go. But anyone who has traveled in Eastern Europe knows there are still large areas characterized by abysmal living standards, high illiteracy rates, substandard housing, malnutrition, disease, low life expectancy, and other conditions associated with the Third World. Even today, the per capita income of Eastern and Central Europe, despite massive amounts of Western aid and investment over the last decade, is only 15–30 percent of the EU average. Countries farther east, beyond the Golden Curtain, are poorer still.

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SECURITY

Finally, let us review the strategic criteria. Here again there are many, usually unstated, issues. Public discussion tends to emphasize the political and economic aspects of enlargement, but strategic considerations are often just below the surface. Initially, both the United States and Europe saw enlargement into Eastern and Central Europe as a way of stabilizing a historically volatile area, keeping the recently disintegrated Russian bear at bay by surrounding it with new Western-oriented allies, and of expanding Europe's security perimeter to the east.

The United States wanted to go faster and farther than Europe on security grounds. Though geographically closer and responsible for a larger portion of the costs, Europe wanted to proceed at a slower pace on economic and political grounds. The United

States preferred that EU enlargement take place before NATO enlargement so that the eastern countries would already be prepared for and on their way to reform by the time they were considered for admission to NATO. Europe, on the other hand, wanted NATO enlargement to proceed first to make the aspirant nations ready for the EU. The United States, largely indifferent to the cultural, religious, and civilizational issues that worried the Europeans, pressured the EU on security and stability grounds to bring in such Orthodox countries as Bulgaria and Serbia. It further pressured Europe to begin the process with Islamic Turkey, whose admission would extend the EU's borders to Iraq and Iran, where the United States believes European support would be extremely valuable.

All these considerations, most of them unstated during debates about the earlier enlargements, are coming to the fore as Europe now contemplates, for the most part unexpectedly, a new round of enlargements.

NEW CANDIDATES

These are complicated issues, and we must avoid over-simplification. Nevertheless, let us review some of the potential new candidates for EU and NATO enlargement, keeping in mind how the subtle, often unstated issues above complicate the prospects of the new members.

The Former Yugoslavia

In the 1990s, it seemed almost inconceivable that the countries of the former Yugoslavia, torn by war, revolution, civil strife, conflict, and genocide, to say nothing of poverty, misery, and underdevelopment, could be candidates for admission to the EU or to NATO. Indeed, NATO and the EU were operating as occupying armies to keep the peace in these strife-ridden societies. That Yugoslavia could ever turn around and be able to join the very organizations that were occupying it seemed ludicrous.

But now some of the chief instigators and trouble makers, such as Slobodan Milosevic, Franjo Tudjman, and Alija Izetbegovic, are gone. Slovenia has already joined the EU and NATO, Croatia is not far behind, and Serbia and Montenegro have had democratic elections. Bosnia and Kosovo are still violent and troubled, but the severity and depth of the problems may not be as large as they once seemed. Albania is the least developed country in Europe, but as a small Muslim country, it is preferred for EU admission over the bigger kind. Europe is already revising the one-at-a-time "regatta" metaphor for admission of the states of the former Yugoslavia. But if the past is any guide, once the process starts and momentum builds, when some new crisis erupts either in South East Europe—Kosovo could explode again at any time—or elsewhere,

the pressure for a new Balkan expansion will likely be irresistible.

Ukraine

In early 2001, the idea that the Ukraine—with the exception, conceivably, of its western provinces⁶—might become a candidate seemed preposterous. Then, even the admission of Slovakia, the Baltics, and certainly Romania and Bulgaria seemed like a stretch. As late as a year ago, no one believed the reform movement in the Ukraine could survive, let alone triumph. The Ukraine was a big, poor, underdeveloped, unreformed, Orthodox, authoritarian country, seemingly more oriented toward Moscow than toward the West.

Now, in the wake of the Orange Revolution, all this has changed. The newly elected Prime Minister Viktor Yushenko, even while admitting it could take “some years,” has expressed a desire to join NATO and has requested an “action plan” or MAP, the same kind of plan used in earlier accessions, to go with it. Similarly, with respect to the EU, Yushenko has said his country wants to take its “rightful place” in Europe, has agreed to make the reforms necessary to join the EU, and has proposed that formal accession talks begin in 2008. But he lamented that the EU has not, thus far, presented the “new horizon” that he wanted, i.e., assurance of eventual admission. Europe is reluctant to offer this because of the Ukraine’s size, population, and laggard economy and because of the sensitivities emanating from Moscow. But that is precisely what the EU said in earlier years about Poland, the Baltics, and other recently minted EU members. If these earlier admissions serve as precedent, and barring any unforeseen reversals on the part of the Ukraine, it is almost certain that once the accession dynamic starts, Ukraine will be admitted to both NATO and the EU.

While it is possible to applaud the Ukraine’s recent exercise of democracy, can the EU afford another big, populous, poor, underdeveloped, partly Western, possibly dysfunctional country on its far eastern frontier—a country that, like Turkey, borders on dangerous territory and whose membership is certain to antagonize Russia? And if the Ukraine is admitted, what possible arguments could then be used to keep out a presumably reformed Belarus, Moldova, or Georgia in the future? And then why not Azerbaijan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and Central Asia—even Russia?

That would certainly complete Europe’s enlargement. It would, as former Secretary of State James Baker once hyperbolically remarked in reference to NATO, stretch “from Vancouver to Vladivostok.” But whether that would still be “Europe” in any concrete sense, and whether such an entity could conceivably be viable either economically or politically, is quite another matter.

Cyprus

The government of Greek Cyprus, representing, at least in its own eyes, the whole island, joined the EU in the big bang of 1 May 2004. The EU (and the United States) had hoped that the carrot of membership would serve to induce the Greek and Turkish parts of the island to negotiate a settlement that would lead to a unified government and a unified bid to the EU, but that did not happen. Instead, only the Greek part joined the EU while the Turkish Cypriot enclave rejected the plan and remained in isolation, recognized only by Turkey.

But in April 2004, Turkish Cypriots voted in a referendum to support a UN-sponsored plan to unify the island and bring both the Greek and Turkish areas into the EU. A pro-unity Republican Turkish party won enough votes in general elections on 20 February 2004 to form a government that favors the UN plan, and Turkish Cypriots want to end their current isolation. However, there are still 40,000 Turkish troops on the island. The government of Greek Cyprus has blocked all EU aid and trade measures targeted at the Turkish sector. It opposes Turkey's plans to join the EU unless Turkey removes its troops. Meanwhile, the economy of Cyprus remains precarious with a per capita income only one-fifth the European average, and it is even lower in the Turkish part. There is likely to be little movement toward resolution on the island until Turkey itself begins its EU membership talks, at which point the UN settlement plan will likely merit a new look and some new initiatives.

Turkey

Turkey is a big country of almost 80 million people, and by the time it completes its scheduled EU membership negotiations in 2015, it will be the largest country in Europe. It is also a poor and underdeveloped country with a per capita income only half that of the Eastern European countries, themselves poor by Western standards. In addition, Turkey, while officially secular, is a country with an Islamic majority—a no-no in the eyes of the European public. Plus, it borders on Georgia, Iran, Iraq, and Syria, lies close to the Caucasus, Azerbaijan, and Armenia, and exists in a dangerous neighborhood that Europeans fear will suck them into the vortex of Middle Eastern issues. Also, if Turkey is admitted, can Israel be denied? In addition to all this, Europeans worry about massive Turkish immigration into the heart of the continent if the country is admitted. As one German foreign ministry official said, in all candor, during an interview, "Berlin is already the second largest Turkish city in the world. We do not want it to become the largest."

The EU would love to find a small, non-threatening, non-populous, non-contiguous-to-Middle-Eastern-troubles, but still Islamic state to bring into the club—like Albania, which is also ethnically European. That way Europe could say exclusion has

nothing to do with anti-Islamic sentiment while avoiding the added problems that Turkish membership is certain to bring. But now it is too late. The door is already open. Turkey's accession negotiations began in October 2004. If the previous enlargement process offers any guidelines, once this momentum builds, once the EU sends one of its teams to Turkey to be in residence and proffer advice on required reforms and the negotiations actually begin, the process can no longer be aborted.

IDENTITY ISSUES

There are two main difficulties with further enlargement which are, in a sense, mirror images of each other. The first is the problem of ever-farther eastern and southern enlargement of the EU and NATO and the host of political, cultural, economic, diplomatic, and strategic problems which this would cause. The second is the impact of immigration from these eastern countries on the domestic societies, cultures, politics, economies, and identities of the countries that are already EU and NATO members.

Contrary to some European fears, the enlargement to the east has not yet opened the floodgates of massive Eastern European immigration to the affluent West. Most people, it seems, prefer to stay where they are, in their home communities. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of those who do migrate westward are happy, peaceful, hard-working, tax-paying people. But what of those who are not?

The interviews in Brussels showed that different racial, religious, and ethnic prejudices are at work toward the new immigrants in Western Europe, reflecting fears about eastern expansion of the EU, similar to those prejudices expressed during the earlier enlargement debate. Given the shortage of workers, especially in construction and other menial jobs, Western Europeans tend, in general, to welcome Poles, Lithuanians, Slovaks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Hungarians, and Czechs as "good workers," "honest," who "fit in." In contrast, Roma are saddled with all the familiar stereotypical loathing and fear and are widely regarded as "thieves," "prostitutes," and "traffickers" in drugs, children, women, and disease. In the wake of the attacks of 11 September 2001 and the Madrid train bombings, Muslims of all kinds are seen as worrisome and often potentially dangerous. One of those interviewed in Brussels said simply that, "Wherever there are Muslims, there is trouble."

Within the Western European countries, the model of immigrant assimilation is increasingly questioned and may be breaking down. The following are only two of many possible examples. In Sweden, whose citizens often like to tout their social democracy as a model for the world, the assimilation model does not seem to be working. Swedish politics are now filled with talk that all "those people" in the immigrant enclaves no longer want to learn Swedish, do not work, and instead sit around all day

smoking their water pipes, live off the Swedish welfare system, prefer their own customs and culture, and do not want to be assimilated as “little Swedes.” For many Swedes, the idea that someone would not want to be like them is incomprehensible. The assimilation model seems no longer to be working—if it ever was—and yet Sweden, like most other countries of Western Europe, has no present alternative.

The second example comes from the Netherlands, which prides itself on its tolerance and peaceful multiculturalism. In the wake of the brutal assassination of filmmaker Theo Van Gogh, who was critical of Muslims, there is now a national debate about both assimilation and pluralism. Neither seems to be working. The assassination of Van Gogh was not carried out by a recent immigrant, unassimilated to Dutch and Western ways, but rather an educated, thoroughly assimilated, Dutch-speaking Muslim

who was so offended by Van Gogh’s anti-Muslim message that he determined to kill him. Obviously assimilation and pluralism failed in this case. Dutch tolerance and commitment to peace, diversity, and multiculturalism are now the subject of nationwide debate and soul searching.

In all of Western Europe, new questions are being raised—in both native and immigrant communities—about national identity, degrees of tolerance, and commitment to diversity, pluralism, and multiculturalism. Also debated is whether assimilation is a failure or if it can still be made to work. These tensions will only be exacerbated as Europe continues to move farther east and south. The expected further enlargement of NATO and the EU will also increase tensions between the United States and Europe. The United States steadfastly favors



Courtesy of Suzanne Smith

Europeans of the world, unite! Soviet statues in Poland unwittingly hail revolutionary reforms.

enlargement on security grounds but does not have to deal with the economic and immigration consequences of all these new members, whereas Europe feels the full brunt of these burdens.

CONCLUSION

In 2004, Europe’s enlargement seemed complete. Ten members had been accepted into

the EU and seven had been accepted into NATO. It was the culmination of a long process that had begun after the collapse of the Soviet Union. All of the countries admitted were more or less democratic and on the road to economic reform. This transformation, including the tearing down of the Berlin Wall and the uprooting and erasure of the Iron Curtain, was accomplished peacefully, without overly antagonizing the Russians. The plan obviously had security dimensions to it as well as large economic and political ramifications. To use the phrase of the time, Europe was now "whole and free." East and West were now unified. In addition, the boundaries of Europe now corresponded closely with the historic national, cultural, religious, and geographic reach of "Europe."

But it now turns out that that boundary, which seemed quite definitive at the time, marked only the temporary limits of Europe. Europe's appeal in terms of its wealth, democratic tradition, and human rights has turned out to have far greater reach. South East Europe (the former Yugoslavia), the Balkans, Turkey, the Ukraine, and other countries all want in. Moreover, once the enlargement process has begun and gathered momentum, and once a new aspirant country transitions to democracy, a process of economic and governmental reform and membership preparation begins. It becomes very difficult then to turn down a nation for membership. In short, enlargement acquires a dynamic of its own.

While applauding the advances made, it is also important to be aware of the problems and dangers involved. This is especially true in the United States, which has been consistently in favor of enlargement, likely because it is largely immune to the burdens that the Europeans must bear. Enormous costs are involved. There are political, economic, and strategic dangers. Reform in the new countries is not just costly, but potentially destabilizing with enormous consequences. The effects on domestic cultures, economies, societies, and racial and ethnic relations are likely to be at least as costly.

The only way for Americans to fully comprehend this is to conceive of a massive foreign aid program, larger than the Marshall Plan, by which we would bring the living standards of Mexico, Central America, and the small, poor countries of the Caribbean up to U.S. standards. Such a program would also have to include the free movement of labor as well as a common United States–Caribbean Basin–Mexico foreign policy. That would probably solve the historic problems of instability, illegal immigration, poverty, and maybe even drugs in the area. But would the American public stand for such a costly program? Would taxpayers pay? Would we subordinate our foreign policy to some multilateral-multicultural set of goals? Would we want all those immigrants? Not likely. So it should not be too surprising that as Europe expands to the south and east, similar questions are raised there. 

Notes

1. Howard J. Wiarda, *Where does Europe End? The Politics of NATO and EU Enlargement* (Vienna: Austrian Institute of International Affairs, 2002). An American version was published as a special issue of the journal *World Affairs* 164 (Spring, 2002).

2. The analysis here is based on interviews conducted by the author in 2001, 2002, and 2004.

3. The best sources are Jeffrey Simon, *NATO Enlargement* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1995); and Simon, *NATO Enlargement and Central Europe* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1996).

4. James M. Goldgeier, *Not Whether but When: The U.S. Decision to Enlarge NATO* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1999); George W. Grayson, *Strange Bedfellows: NATO Marches East* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999).

5. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

6. I once lectured in the western Ukraine in Uzhgerod. They wanted me to lecture on "local foreign policy," that growing body of literature in the United States on how U.S. mayors, town councils, counties, states, and regions often carry out their own foreign policies, independent of the State Department, on such issues as trade, drugs, immigration, etc. Obviously Uzhgerod wanted to hear about that theme because it would have loved, even at that early time, to carry out its own, pro-Western foreign policy independent of Kiev.

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