

“THE GREAT ENLARGEMENT ELEPHANT”

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Enlargement of the European Union could have been the subject of the old Indian story about the blind wise men, who each thought they understood the elephant. One held the tail, another the trunk, the third the foot and each came to radically different conclusions. Enlargement is constantly pressed into service by those wanting to make specific points. There are those who see enlargement as a way to “widen to weaken” the Union. In the other camp there are those who seek to “deepen to delay”. Yet others insist on regarding enlargement purely in its financial aspect. It becomes part of the war of the budget between Council and Parliament. The regional and structural funds are the battlefield for this debate. Most obviously of all, enlargement is used as a heavy weapon in the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy.

It is perhaps better to regard enlargement as if it were an extended version of the Countryside March. It involves multitudes of people, heading in roughly the same direction and appears to go on for ever. It is the very longevity of the enlargement elephant which gives it its importance. While it is true that the first five countries in the Great Eastern Enlargement may well be members by 1st January 2003, their places in the enlargement process will be immediately filled by new applicants joining the end of the queue - Croatia, Malta, Macedonia, Switzerland etc.

Enlargement needs to be seen for what it is, the re-unification of the whole continent. As such it is central to the evolution of a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Europe’s most pressing foreign policy challenges are on its periphery. In the north there is the nuclear pollution of the Kola Peninsular and the Barents Sea. Then there is the arc of impoverishment and political angst which sweeps down the Danube, across the Black Sea and the Caucasus and on into Central Asia. To the south there is the troubled relationship with North Africa, the Islamic world and the complexities of the Middle East peace process and Iraq. In the long run a successful CFSP depends on establishing mutually beneficial relations with the populous states in our ‘near abroad’: Russia, Ukraine, Turkey, Egypt and Algeria. Within this outer circle all our relationships need to be seen in the context of an enlargement process which may take thirty years.

Undoubtedly the greatest immediate challenge for Europe is the stability of the Balkans. The Luxembourg Summit in December declared our willingness to admit Slovenia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. As such we declared our commitment to becoming a power in the Balkans. We are intimately and irreversibly involved in South East Europe, even if we have not yet mustered the political and intellectual courage to look directly at the ‘great wen’ represented by the disastrous state of the fragments of former Yugoslavia. With 250,000 dead and the potential for many more casualties, this is not a situation from which Europeans can avert their eyes. It is literally too close for comfort. It is understandable that the rhetoric-assisted disasters of the Union’s involvement in the early stages of the Yugoslav crisis should give us pause for thought. It is not however politically possible for the stability of the rest of Europe to co-exist in close proximity with an area of bloodstained turmoil that produces regular waves of distraught refugees and a fertile culture for organised crime. While the International Community in Bosnia Herzegovina, including the Americans, can dream of an “exit strategy”, Europe can only think in terms of an entrance strategy for the successor states of Yugoslavia. After all those things which former Yugoslavia most desperately needs - free trade, a market system, an end to the regional arms race and a restoration of infra-structure links - are all within the experience and competence of the Union. The Union claims to have learned how former enemies can live in peace. Lessons learned on the Rhine now need to be learned on the Danube and the Sava. Eventual membership is the strongest single weapon that the Union can deploy in the Balkans. Leading a recent delegation from the European Parliament to Bosnia Herzegovina, I was told by an American that “the State of Bosnia Herzegovina must be made to work as the world could not cope with an Islamic Gaza Strip in the heart of Europe”. Bosnian Muslims repeatedly stressed to us their historic membership of

the European family. The tensions between Serb, Croat, Bosnian and Albanian can in the long run only be resolved in the context of European unification. I have little sympathy for those who express a fear of the world of Orthodox Christianity. Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and the rest do not deserve to be banished from the European family on account of their unwanted Ottoman experience.

The Long March of enlargement challenges us all. The political majorities of the Union in the next century will be decided between the Baltic and the Aegean. Our claim to have found a way of living in peace in a crowded continent will be regularly tested in the same area. At the moment we have only the shadow of a short-term policy towards the Balkans. We urgently need both a long-term perspective and a medium-term route map. We need urgently to build on that peace which we have achieved, and to extend it to those areas of current tension in Kosovo, Macedonia and Albania. We must stop regarding enlargement as a political plaything and instead recognise that it is a Wagnerian drama in which we cannot afford to fail. To do so we will need an elephant's wisdom and sense of time.



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