

TOWARDS A LARGE AREA OF SOLIDARITY AND COOPERATION

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WHAT MAY NEW MEMBERS BRING TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Adding as many as 12 new members to the European Union in a near future will significantly change both the fabric and the structure of the EU. The 12 candidate countries have very diverse cultures and histories. Some of them will be readily compatible with those of a majority of current members; some will strengthen influences that have so far been only marginal in the EU.

The twelve countries that may in a foreseeable future become new EU members can be divided into four regional groups.

1. The Central European group consists of the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia. Traditions and cultures of these five countries are predominantly Western. Each of them was for shorter or longer periods of time part of what could be called the German cultural and geographical space. Politically, all of them (in case of Poland, only parts of what Poland is today) were associated with the Hapsburg Empire. All of these countries will culturally and politically gravitate mainly toward Austria and Germany. Their membership in the EU is likely to significantly strengthen the Central European influence in the EU. In fact, Central Europe is likely to become the most important regional subgroup in the EU.

As far as Poland and Slovenia are concerned, the above applies with some qualifications. Poland's identity is not entirely Central European in that it is also a Baltic country, whose northern parts have natural ties with Scandinavia. Poland is also the only new prospective member that can be considered "a big country", or a country aspiring to the status of an European power. Therefore, Poland is likely to pursue much more than other Central European countries its own "European agenda."

Slovenia, although a very small country of only two million people, has three different identities that are going to play a role in its contributions to the EU. First, as has been mentioned, it is a Central European country with long historical ties to Austria and the German-speaking space in general. Second, some regions in Slovenia were in the past parts of Italy. Slovenia's presence in the EU thus may

also strengthen the "southern wing" of the EU. Third, Slovenia is also partly a Balkan country—although the Slovenes do not like to be described as such. However, Slovenia will be an important bridge to the rest of the former Yugoslavia, whose various descendent states will soon also strive to become members of the EU.

2. The Baltic group consists of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, all of whom will pursue close relationships with the Scandinavian countries. As mentioned above, Poland, too, is likely, at least partly, to look to the north. The EU membership of these states will strengthen the influence of the Scandinavian countries in the EU.

At the same time, each of three Baltic states has also historical ties with Russia, if only through their extensive Russian minorities. Just like Slovenia may open the door to the Balkans, the Baltic states will be useful in expanding the EU's relations with Russia.

3. The Balkan group consists of Romania, Bulgaria, and Cyprus. The history, religious traditions, and cultures of these three countries differ significantly from those of most current members. As a result, a full integration of these three countries may be somewhat more difficult than is the case with the Central European and the Baltic countries.

In case of Romania and Bulgaria, it may also be difficult to raise their economic standards to those of the EU as quickly as is going to be the case with Central European countries, for example.

The main differences between these prospective new members and the rest are as follows:

- First, all three have Christian Orthodox traditions. Greece is the only current member of the EU that has compatible traditions. Their membership in the EU will significantly strengthen Greece's role, as a most developed member of this regional group. So far, Greece, with its unique culture and political history, has been to some extent a rarity in the EU. This will change.
 - Second, they are all Balkan countries, with natural ties to not only Greece but also to the countries of former Yugoslavia. In this respect, they may be useful in serving as bridges to the states of former Yugoslavia.
 - Third, their membership will geographically connect the EU with Turkey. Bulgaria, in particular, is a country with a relatively large Turkish minority. Turkey's European ambitions will be strengthened by adding these three particular countries to the EU.
 - Fourth, the Christian Orthodox traditions of these prospective new members may also serve as a cultural bridge to Russia.
4. Malta is a special case in many respects. It will slightly strengthen the Southern wing of the EU. Its cultural traditions and history may also serve as an important bridge between the united Europe and northern Africa.

The Communist past of a majority of the twelve new members will play some role in their contributions to the EU. On the one hand, a certain lack of experience with democracy may mean that the new members may need more time to develop vibrant civil societies that give real life to the institutions of democracy. On the other hand (and this may be a slightly provocative thesis), the identification of intellectual and political élites in these post-communist countries with traditional Western values may, paradoxically, be stronger than in Western countries themselves, as emphasis on traditional Western values is part of integration efforts. In other words, the new post-communist members may suffer much less than traditional Western countries from value relativism with regard to universality of human rights, freedom, and democracy.

Romanies (or Gypsies) living in the candidate countries may represent a specific dimension. There are several millions Romanies living in eastern Europe. Although they belong to different tribes, and although various countries have adopted different policies toward minorities, the situation of the Roma people overall is bad in Eastern Europe. The EU needs to be prepared for possible large migrations of Romanies, unless their living standards in their current home countries can be improved rapidly.

According to some estimates, up to ten million Romanians live in Europe. The inclusion of the East European countries in the next enlargement wave will create a unified space, in which a free movement of people is allowed, for a large ethnic group whose members have so far been separated by political boundaries and administrative barriers. In some ways, we could argue that a new nation will emerge in Europe, and that in some ways the next wave of enlargement includes not 12 but 13 nations.