



Land - an Issue for an Enlarged Europe. Open Letter from the Bruges Group to European Parliamentarians

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There are several possible ways of looking at the integration of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe into the European Union. Integration may be viewed, for example, as a concession made to former communist bloc countries who are seeking admission to membership of one of the more prosperous regions of the world. From this point of view, it would seem legitimate to underline the differences between the two Europes, and to impose conditions of entry upon applicant countries. It seems fair to require from them that they conform to the 'achievements of the Community', that is to say to the main principles which underpin the European project. This point of view is not without some foundation: the European Union has evolved as a result of a patient process of political, legal and institutional development. And the EU is still prey to centrifugal forces. It is natural therefore to conserve the basic elements, and to see to it that inadequately controlled expansion does not destabilise it. EU enlargement may also be viewed as a mutual reconciliation of the two Europes - hitherto separated over half a century, and now keen to work in unison as they are united by common interests. From this point of view, it becomes legitimate to seek to exploit the complementarities between member countries and applicant countries, and to define new criteria for the functioning of an enlarged Europe. That was the approach taken to the accession to the EU of Greece, Portugal and Spain and more recently of Sweden, Austria and Finland. As with the preceding point of view, this approach has solid arguments in its favour. If one considers the political, social and demographic weight of these current candidate countries, it is evident that it is less a matter of an enlargement of the EU than of the construction of a new European entity.

The European authorities oscillate regularly between these two positions. But if the second position remains the basis for discussions, the first informs de facto the essence of the procedures of rapprochement and the mechanisms for gaining admission.

Enlargement must be based upon a shared project. There can be no European project, however, without the "willingness to live together" of which Hannah Arendt spoke with such conviction. Placed in the humiliating position of simple postulants, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe feel obliged to conform to complex European standards. It is true that, following the fall of the soviet system and a process of economic transition which is yet to come to maturity, changes are indeed needed. In the course of the last few years these countries have experienced to varying degrees unprecedented economic recession, the appearance of unemployment, a fall in income for most of the population, and growing social disparities. Certain sectors, particularly small-scale agriculture, remain especially fragile and a sense of nostalgia for the communist past has followed disillusionment.

Changes are therefore indispensable: the question is to determine in what direction and at what speed they should be made. In principle, these countries may discuss the conditions of their accession to the EU, but in reality their margin for negotiation is narrow. The enthusiasm of the early years has been succeeded by anxieties about the obligations which membership entails.

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The "negotiated imposition" of European standards, which would be efficient in some degree if it gave issue to thoroughgoing change, can however generate a certain superficial administrative formalism and embroil us in an infernal mess of suspicions, controls and dissimulations which would benefit no-one. It can also encourage among applicant countries a desire to conform to what is expected of them, which would obscure the originality of their contribution to the destiny of Europe.

What sort of Europe do we want? There can be no shared project without a clear appreciation of our common interests and without the acknowledgement of the contributions which each can make to this project.

The Europe that we want is a Europe of peace. The primary objective of the European project was to have done with the conflicts which were ignited there and which embroiled the whole world, and instead to engender a dynamic of consensus and of growth. Negotiation has taken the place of conflict between the warring parties of the two World Wars. And still today, keeping the peace in Europe remains an objective of the utmost importance. The Balkans crisis has shown us how powerless we are in such situations. The only effective long-term strategy is to avoid such tensions. The cost of EU enlargement must be viewed in the context of the price which we must pay to control political tensions and areas of instability were the latter to persist.

The Europe that we want is a Europe of self-determination in touch with the rest of the world. Ten years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world is undergoing globalisation and is tending to shape itself around one single pole of influence. It is clearly neither in the interests of Europe, nor of other regions of the world, that this situation should continue to develop in this way. On the contrary, we need to see the emergence of a multi-polar world around structured regional entities in different continents. Such a balance is, in the long term, a condition for more widely shared growth. It is indispensable that such entities be linked through trade relations and political considerations, but they must also constitute structures in themselves within which forms of commerce and public policy may be arrived at through negotiation on an equal footing to the benefit of all parties concerned.

In a world which is globalising, the establishment of a strong European entity is a guarantee of autonomy and stability. From this point of view, the enlargement of the European Union presents a major opportunity to strengthen the European project and to contribute to the emergence of a multi-polar world. Consequently, in admitting new applicants to join the EU it is no longer a question of granting them a concession, but of fully recognising their contribution to the consolidation of a shared project.

Agriculture and territory: factors in the integration of regions and of peoples Europe was conceived in the aftermath of the Second World War for economies still largely agricultural, and for whom food self-sufficiency represented a central concern. It is for that reason that the Common Agricultural Policy has become the cornerstone of the Community project, to the point that today it still accounts for almost half of the EU budget. But the context has evolved, and there is a need to revisit the foundations of the European project. It is not by chance that enlargement toward the East, and the agricultural sector, represent two of the main points of discussion concerning the future of the EU. These two issues, intimately connected, are at the heart of changes in prospect over the next few years.

The question of territory in Europe is an essential building block for the future European project. Land use, population dynamics, and relations between town and country form as much a part of our heritage as the countryside itself, the natural environment and our rural traditions. Land, our day to day environment, is a vital ingredient of European identity. In the past land was managed according to the needs of farming and forestry. These grand architects of the landscape fashioned its physical appearance just as they defined its usage. Nowadays, land uses have diversified and new issues must be considered: tourism, the service sector, environmental protection, food security, population equilibrium in the regions... The sharing out of the agricultural budget and the conditions for granting European subsidies, which have been bones of contention between EU member countries and applicant countries, obscure what constitutes one of the major issues for an enlarged Europe: the management of a land area which will increase by one third, and the

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questions associated with that increase: solidarity between regions, control of flows of migrants, links between urban centres and the rural areas, and the creation of new activities in areas which are undergoing transition.

As with agriculture in the past, the joint management of the European land mass and the setting up of a rural development policy can contribute to a genuine debate on the European project. A debate in which the partners will find themselves on an equal footing because, in this context, the contributions of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can be of major importance. While there are certain differences from one country to the next, there are many rural regions in the applicant countries which are showing signs of dynamism. How may we stimulate support for local initiatives and embrace processes of sustainable rural development? While there are wide differences on the level of production, some farming practices display desirable characteristics in terms of their limited impact upon the environment, or are part of multifunctional farming enterprises. How may we bring about a form of technical development which might enable them to retain their environmentally-friendly features?

On these questions at least, both Eastern and Western Europe need to reflect thoroughly. Everyone knows that market unification will not provide adequate responses to the challenging issue of the land question. Such unification must be accompanied by far-sighted public policy to which we must all give a great deal of thought. Furthermore, the European Union has begun the reform of structural funds, of the 1992 CAP and Agenda 2000, a process of thoroughgoing redefinition of its policies and of its role which is far from complete.

Building a Europe of partners. One cannot overstate the importance of the debate about society in mobilising and bringing together local actors. Today, negotiations on the admission of applicant countries too often boil down to technical discussions between politicians and Brussels functionaries. The active involvement of elected citizens and of the organised sectors of society (e.g. trades unions, local authorities, NGOs, etc) must be encouraged, and we propose to do this in a distinct manner: we must launch a debate about the transitions which need to take place within the major policies of the European Union - agricultural policy and regional policy.

This debate must be conducted on an equal footing with the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe, with the goal not being that the latter conditionally adopt our way of doing things, but rather that they contribute - in the light of their recent histories and their current priorities - to some original thinking about the dynamics of land use and development. We must find a way of moving on from a situation of competing for a share of a limited budget to a situation of partnership in the definition of shared projects.

It is by multiplying these exchanges and by calling into question current policy instruments that we may look to the gradual definition of a possible future. Our "desire to live together", inspired by commendable tactical considerations, will only take root on a sustainable basis if it is grounded in mutual respect and consensus.