



IP(92)157

**INFORMACION A LA PRENSA • PRESSE-MEDDELELSE • MITTEILUNG AN DIE PRESSE
ΑΝΑΚΟΙΝΩΣΗ ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΤΥΠΟ • PRESS-RELEASE • INFORMATION A LA PRESSE
INFORMAZIONE ALLA STAMPA • MEDEDELING AAN DE PERS • COMUNICADO DE IMPRENSA**

EMBARGO: 6.3.1992. 20H00

Brussels, 6 March 1992

ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITY

441.214

Extract from a speech by Sir Leon Brittan,
Vice President of the European Commission,
at St. Anne's School, Windermere
on Friday 6 March 1992

The Maastricht Treaty sets us a formidable agenda, from the establishment of the single currency, to the operation of the many new institutions and the use of the many new possibilities created by the new European Union.

The signing of the Treaty also enables the Community to turn its full attention to the crucial question of its future enlargement. The Commission has been invited to submit a paper on this question to the European Council in Lisbon in June, and work is already in hand both on that paper and on the remaining Opinions which the Commission must provide on the applications for membership which have already been received.

The Commission as a body has not yet taken a position on this subject - except in the Opinions it has already produced on the Turkish and Austrian applications. What I say therefore represents only a personal view at this stage.

My approach can be quite simply stated :

First, I firmly believe that the Community must accept those European states which wish to join and which are ready and able to do so. We have no right to regard ourselves as an exclusive and cosy club, ready to pull up the drawbridge whenever we feel that admitting more members would make life less comfortable for those snugly inside. That is not the vision of Europe enshrined in the founding Treaty. The vision there is a broad and generous one of a Community ready to receive other European countries into its midst when they for their part are ready for membership. The Community must certainly be allowed to expand in the years ahead, and I welcome that prospect.

Second, we must consider applications on their merits as they arise. I reject the notion that we should negotiate with a group of the most obviously suitable candidates at a first sitting, and then go through a period of institutional digestion before returning to the table some years on.

Third, although I am all for a measure of flexibility, I do not think that those who wish to join us should be allowed exemptions from the normal rules, except for strictly limited transitional periods. It is reasonable for us to satisfy ourselves with some degree of rigour that new applicants are genuinely prepared to accept the obligations, as well as the benefits of membership, and that their state of development and administrative structure enables them to do so. Transitional periods, on the other hand, have always been accepted, to phase in Community obligations where such obligations would be likely to cause real disruption if they were applied too abruptly to new members.

The flexibility involved in agreeing to transitional periods cannot extend to the core obligations of membership. We should only accept new members which are willing and able to accept the full legal and political implications of the new Union as it is, and as it is pledged to become. This includes, for example, the common foreign and security policy and the commitments taken on in Maastricht relating to future defence policy. It is reasonable to ask those who wish to join us if they are prepared to go down the path that we have already sketched out, even if we have not yet formally committed ourselves to go very far down that path.

Fourth, we must accept that enlargement will have complex institutional ramifications. The entry of very small states, for example, could complicate the process of decision-making unless special provisions are agreed. This, however, is something which the countries concerned fully appreciate and accept, and they are ready to agree to such provisions.

Equally, the acceptance of more than a few new members will require major institutional reforms if we are to maintain the Community's dynamism. Such reforms are already due to be considered in 1996, and their consideration could easily be accelerated by a year or so were that to be necessary. But this should not affect the pace of negotiation with those who apply to join us. The process of enlargement must be driven by the merits and intentions of each applicant, not by the institutional consequences of accepting them. The existing institutional arrangements cannot be allowed to dictate our policy on new membership. If we wish to admit new members, on the broadest political grounds, it is the institutions that must be changed. They are the tools that the Community uses and not a straitjacket into which its fundamental policies must be fitted.

Fifth, although it is neither possible nor desirable to lay down broad general characteristics which applicant states must meet, it is reasonable to make it clear that new members must at least be European in a geographical sense. I recognise that this criterion does not solve all the problems, as at the margin there may be difficult and important disagreements as to where Europe's limits end.

Finally, we must continue the existing policy of forging special relationships with countries which either have not yet joined the Community, or which do not aspire to membership. The European Economic Area comprising the Community and the countries of EFTA is one ambitious example of this.

The Europe Agreements which we have concluded with Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia are another. In their case, the key objective is to consolidate democratic structures and to accelerate the development of full market economies. On the economic side we can offer aid and technical assistance, but the highest priority is to furnish these

countries with markets for their products. On the political side, we must give substance to our conviction that these countries belong with us, in the family of Western European democracies. They would be the first to accept that their economies are far too fragile to accept the obligations of Community membership at this stage, but that does not diminish the political imperative to demonstrate that we recognise their place amongst us.

The European Union is a unique creation. Twelve sovereign, democratic states have freely chosen to integrate their economic structures and combine their political forces to an extent which has never been attempted by any other group of nations throughout history. The Union's structures and possibilities have grown, and continue to grow, in an organic way. We must welcome that growth, but we must ensure - as I have no doubt we can ensure - that as it grows, the Community becomes stronger, and fitter to assume its international responsibilities.

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