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Enlargement Weekly

19 December 2001

Welcome to Enlargement Weekly. This weekly bulletin provides an overview of where European Union enlargement has got to, who's doing what in the EU, in the institutions and candidate countries, and how the main challenges are being met.

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LAEKEN CONCLUSIONS REAFFIRM ENLARGEMENT

European Union leaders meeting at their summit at Laeken on December 14-15 agreed strongly positive conclusions on EU enlargement. They said it was now an "irreversible" process, and they were "determined to bring the accession negotiations with the candidate countries that are ready to a successful conclusion by the end of 2002", so they can take part in the European Parliament elections in 2004 as members.

EU leaders reinforced their message by naming the countries concerned. "The European Council agrees with the report of the Commission, which considers that, if the present rate of progress of the negotiations and reforms in the candidate States is maintained, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic, the Czech Republic and Slovenia could be ready", they said.

They also offered appreciation of "the efforts made by Bulgaria and Romania" and

encouraged them to continue. And they made clear that any specific support for them requires "a precise framework with a timetable and an appropriate roadmap".

The basis to make it work is already established, according to the summit: there is "a solid framework for the success of the accession process", with the Commission strategy paper, the regular reports and the revised partnerships for accession which were agreed in November. And the financial framework that would allow enlargement has already been put in place by the 1999 Berlin European Council, the conclusions noted.

The rhythm has been sustained, according to EU leaders. "In recent months considerable progress has been made in the negotiations and certain delays have been made good." The summit offered a reminder of the need for candidates to focus particularly on bringing their administrative and judicial capabilities "up to the required level" - and looked forward to a European Commission report on the implementation of the plan of action for strengthening institutions at the Seville European Council in June 2002.

On the EU side, the Commission will propose common positions on the agriculture, regional policy and budgetary chapters at the beginning of 2002, and work on the drafting of the accession treaties will begin in the first half of the year.

On Cyprus, the European Council welcomed and encouraged the recent meetings between the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities. And on Turkey, EU leaders noted "progress towards complying with the political criteria established for accession, in particular through the recent amendment of its constitution", and stated that "this has brought forward the prospect of the opening of accession negotiations". Further progress was "encouraged" on the economic and political criteria, "notably with regard to human rights".

THE CANDIDATES AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE DEBATE

The EU summit also agreed the "Laeken declaration on the future of the European Union - Europe at a crossroads", which sets out the challenges for the enlarged EU, and the role of the candidates in discussing it.

"The Union stands at a crossroads, a defining moment in its existence", it says. "The unification of Europe is near. The Union is about to expand to bring in more than ten new member states, predominantly Central and Eastern European, thereby finally closing one of the darkest chapters in European history: the Second World War and the ensuing artificial division of Europe. At long last, Europe is on its way to becoming one big family, without bloodshed, a real transformation clearly calling for a different approach from fifty years ago, when six countries first took the lead."

"The debilitating effects of two bloody wars and the weakening of Europe's position in the world brought a growing realisation that only peace and concerted action could make the dream of a strong, unified Europe come true", the declaration remarks. "The European Union is a success story. For over half a century now, Europe has been at peace. Along with North America and Japan, the Union forms one of the three most prosperous parts of the world. As a result of mutual solidarity and fair distribution of the benefits of economic development, moreover, the standard of living in the Union's weaker regions has increased enormously and they have made good much of the disadvantage they were at."

Now Europe "has to resolve three basic challenges", the declaration says:

- how to bring citizens, and primarily the young, closer to the European design and the European institutions;

- how to organise politics and the European political area in an enlarged Union; and
- how to develop the Union into a stabilising factor and a model in the new, multi-polar world.

For the upcoming discussion of how to do this, the declaration gives a clear role to the candidate countries. They will have their place in the Convention that the EU is setting up of the main parties involved in the debate on the future of the Union, which will pave the way for the 2004 Intergovernmental Conference. With Valéry Giscard d'Estaing as chairman, and Giorgio Amato and Jean-Luc Dehaene as vice-chairmen, the Convention will contain 15 representatives of the Heads of State or Government of the member states (one from each member state), 30 members of national parliaments (two from each member state), 16 members of the European Parliament and two Commission representatives. And the candidate countries "will be fully involved in the Convention's proceedings. They will be represented in the same way as the current member states (one government representative and two national parliament members) and will be able to take part in the proceedings". They will not, however, be able "to prevent any consensus which may emerge among the member states."

MORE PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR ENLARGEMENT

Two new Eurobarometer surveys show how the public views enlargement. One, covering the EU member states, shows marked growth in support for enlargement. 51% of EU citizens support the arrival of new member states (up 8 points since the last survey six months ago), while 30% (-5 points) oppose it. The level of support has increased particularly in Denmark and Sweden (+19 points), but also in the Netherlands (+16), Austria (+13) and Germany (+12). France is now the only country where those opposed to enlargement outnumber those in favour (summary results on http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/epo/eb/eb56/eb56highlights_en.pdf).

And another survey - the first the EU has undertaken in the candidate countries themselves (see <http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg10/epo/polls.html>) - shows:

- On average, nearly 6 people in 10 (59%) in the candidate countries feel that EU membership would be a 'good thing' for their country, with support ranging from 33% in Estonia and Latvia to 80% in Romania. Support levels tend to be significantly higher in the candidate countries than they are in the EU. There is an even clearer difference between the candidates and the EU in the proportion of people who view membership as a bad thing: only 10% of respondents in the candidates thought this, while three times as many EU citizens did.
- Two thirds (65%) of the respondents of voting age in the candidate countries say they would support their country's membership to the EU in a referendum. Further analyses show that at the time of the survey the majority of eligible respondents in all 13 countries would have voted in favour of joining the EU (79%). The only country without a large majority in favour of accession is Malta, where only 53 percent of eligible respondents indicate that they would have voted in favour of EU membership.
- More than half the citizens of the candidate countries have a positive image of the European Union (52%) with only 18% saying that it conjures up a negative image. This is a higher level than what Eurobarometer has found among EU citizens, where on average 42% have a positive image and 18% have a negative image. At 70%, people in Bulgaria and Romania are most likely to have a positive image of the European Union. The Maltese are most likely to have a negative image (34%). It is the only country where more than 3 in 10 people have a negative image of the European Union.

- While the EU is the most widely known international institution in the candidate countries, with nearly all respondents having heard of its existence, its institutions remain much less known: The European Parliament is known by 72%, and the European Commission by 60%. In the EU, awareness for these two institutions is 89% and 77%, respectively.
- More than 6 in 10 citizens of the candidate countries trust the European Union (62%). This is higher than the level of trust found among EU citizens (41%). Trust is most widespread in Romania (74%) and Bulgaria (72%). People in Turkey (34%) and Malta (35%) are most likely to lack trust in the European Union. Trust in the Union's institutions is much less widespread, mainly because fewer people know them. 41% of candidate country citizens trust the European Parliament, 35% trust the European Commission and 29% trust the Council of Ministers.
- Nine in ten people living in the candidate countries have heard of their country's bid to become a member of the European Union. Awareness levels range from 82% in Turkey to 98% in Cyprus and Malta. However, most people do not feel well informed either about their country's accession process or about EU enlargement as a whole. Only 28% say they are well informed about enlargement and only 29% feel well informed about their own country's accession process. The proportion of people that feels informed about EU enlargement ranges from 17 percent in Estonia and Turkey to 54 percent in Slovenia. For the accession process, levels of feeling informed range from 20% in Turkey to 57% in Slovenia.
- Large differences were found when respondents were asked to evaluate the current speed of their countries' application process. In Turkey 39 percent characterise the process as 'standing still', while 22 percent of the Maltese feel that the accession process is 'running as fast as possible'. Residents of Estonia and of Malta think that the process is going faster than they would like it to, while respondents in Turkey and Romania perceive the process to be much slower than what they would like it to be.

Enlargement news in brief

Spanish Presidency views on enlargement

The Spanish Presidency of the EU - which starts on January 1 - will make enlargement one of its key priorities said Spanish foreign minister Josep Piqué, announcing his government's plans in Brussels on December 17. He recognised that "difficulties exist" in the "qualitative change" the process would bring to the EU, but insisted the project, now "in its decisive phase", provided "opportunities for all". "We will do everything we can so that negotiations can be closed with as many candidates as possible" under the Danish Presidency in the second half of 2002. He also envisaged special attention to Bulgaria and Romania, and efforts "to give Turkey a perspective for accession". But the principal task of the Presidency will be to obtain common positions among the member states on the three big chapters: agriculture, regional policy and budgetary matters and finance (which together represent 80% of EU spending, he pointed out). He said that despite possible "complications" from the fact that elections would be taking place during 2002 in several member states, "I'm sure we can reach agreements... We fully assume our responsibility".

Fontaine urges the case for candidates

In her remarks to the European Council in Laeken, European Parliament President Nicole Fontaine made two specific pleas for the candidate countries. She passed on the wish "that the presidents of the national parliaments of several applicant countries have expressed to me" for adequate representation in the discussions on

the future of Europe – and particularly for representation in the Bureau of the Convention to be established. "Any step taken to demonstrate that the applicant countries are fully involved in this major reform process, which will affect them just as much as it does us, can only help to consolidate public support for membership of the Union, support which, in some countries, is weakening as the wait prior to accession drags on", she said.

The Parliament President also urged special attention to Bulgaria and Romania: "The Commission, followed by the General Affairs Council, has sent out a clear signal by stating that at least ten countries will be in a position to join the Union before 2004 and thus take part in the next European elections. May I draw your attention, however, to the adverse impact that such a statement might have on public opinion in Romania and Bulgaria, left on the sidelines without a fixed date for accession to the Union? I hope that they will be given an opportunity to catch up. Should it ultimately emerge that the countries in question do not meet the accession criteria, our responsibility would be to lay down with them a clear timetable demonstrating that they are already part of the European family", she argued.

Latvia wins encouragement on language law change

Latvia has won praise for a further step towards easing the tensions over its language regime that have arisen because much of the population is Russian- rather than Latvian-speaking. The European Union Presidency issued a declaration on December 13 on what it called "important" initiatives taken by the President of Latvia to amend the electoral law.

The EU said the move to amend the electoral law by abolishing language requirements as a condition of the right to stand as a candidate at general and local elections "would indeed be a step in the direction of democracy and respect for human rights". The EU "has no doubt that the Latvian authorities will be anxious to endorse it as soon as possible", the declaration concluded.

New head of Lithuanian mission to EU

Oskaras Jusys has taken over as Head of the Mission of Lithuania to the European Union. He presented his credentials to Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, in early December. He was appointed in November, and has already presented his credentials to Ms. Annemie Neyts, State Secretary for Foreign Affairs of Belgium, representing the Presidency of the European Union.

Agenda

Date	Event
January	
Tuesday 1 st	Start of Spanish Presidency of the EU: during the first half of the year, work will take place on the drafting of the accession treaty and on the remaining chapters of the accession negotiations, in accordance with the "road-map".
	At the beginning of 2002 the Commission will propose common positions on the agriculture, regional policy and budgetary chapters.

Monday 28 th	General Affairs Council, Brussels
February	
Friday 8 th	Informal foreign affairs ministers meeting, Caceres
March	
	Negotiating session at the level of deputies (EU ambassadors and candidates' negotiators), Brussels.
Friday 1 st	Seminar of political directors from the EU Political and Security Committee and from the candidate countries, Budapest.
Friday 15 th , Saturday 16 th	Barcelona European Council
May	
	Second negotiating session at the level of deputies (EU ambassadors and candidates' negotiators), Brussels.
June	
Monday 10 th	Ministerial negotiating session with foreign ministers of the EU and of the candidate countries, Brussels.
Friday 21 st , Saturday 22 nd	Seville European Council: European Commission report on the implementation of the plan of action for strengthening the candidates' institutions.
Monday 24 th	Informal meeting of education ministers from the EU and the candidate countries, Bratislava
July	
Monday 1 st	Start of Danish Presidency of the EU: the aim is to close negotiations before the end of the year with those countries that are ready. The Laeken summit noted that, if progress is maintained in the negotiations and in the reforms, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Slovenia could be ready.
October	
24 th and 25 th	Brussels European Council: enlargement will be on the agenda and the Commission's regular reports on the candidate countries may be available.
December	
Thursday 12 th , Friday 13 th	Copenhagen European Council - enlargement will be on the agenda again - with a view to resolving any remaining problems in the negotiations?

Archives

ENLARGEMENT WEEKLY is prepared for the Information Unit of the Enlargement Directorate General of the European Commission. As part of its communication strategy on enlargement, the Commission makes this bulletin publicly available. Comments are welcome and should be addressed by email to enlargement@cec.eu.int

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