

EU: integration with a difference

Europe
Dawn

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WHEN in 1982, the council of ministers of the European Community (as the European Union was then called) failed to approve of necessary funds for celebrating the twenty-fifth anniversary of the European Community (established in 1957), Peter Dankert, the Dutch President of the European parliament compared the EC to "a cardiac patient, too demoralized to celebrate even his own birthday."

But within three years, in 1985, not only was the patient sitting up in bed but was fit enough to be up and about. The decision to have a single EC market by 1992 and to conclude the Single European Act proved a significant milestone on the road to European integration.

even before the recent decision of the Copenhagen summit to admit ten more states into the European Union, the EU was the world's largest economic bloc. With a single market comprising 375 million people with free movement of goods, services, capital and (to a great extent) labour, throughout the community, and a common currency already adopted by twelve of the existing fifteen states, the EU is a role model for regional cooperation.

By virtue of its two permanent seats on the UN Security Council, its close relations with the US, its role in Nato and its extensive links with Third World states, the European Union plays an influential role in shaping the political and economic contours of the emerging new world.

through referendum.

It has been a cliché for European representatives to say that "the EC (now EU) was built on France-German reconciliation." In the SAARC, regrettably, the France-German (substitute Indo-Pakistan) reconciliation is yet to take place!

The EU's positive image was seriously dented by its failure to reach a political consensus in time to pre-empt the tragedy of Yugoslavia / Bosnia in its midst. This reflected the inability of the EU's common foreign and security policy to establish an effective coordinating mechanism to handle serious political and human crises, including dismemberment and civil wars. The Treaty of Amsterdam of 1997 has only partially rectified the situation by providing for limited majority voting in given situations, instead of the previously required consensus, thus enabling willing member states to adopt a proactive role in certain circumstances, even when other member states preferred to stay out.

This points to the existing dichotomy whereby economic integration within the Union represents the community's supra-national character while the 'Common Foreign and Security Policy' (CFSP) still rests on a mode of inter-governmental cooperation prompted by the reluctance to subvert national sovereignty in sensitive diplomatic and defence areas to a common EU stance on a given issue.

On Turkey, the EU summit failed to set a firm date for opening accession negotiations. The question of when to commence negotiations with Turkey, either in July 2005 as proposed by German Chancellor Schroeder and President Jacques Chirac of France or earlier as demanded by Ankara

The just concluded EU summit in Copenhagen and the recent Nato summit in Prague, which have been instrumental in bringing within their fold formerly communist East Europe states, represent the successful culmination of a decade of East European foreign policy-making. The Nato summit extended the defence alliance to the Baltic and the Black sea while the EU summit advanced the European Union to the gates of St. Petersburg and the Balkans.

At the Copenhagen summit, which concluded on December 13, ten member states were given the green light for accession to the Union in 2004. These include Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Slovakia, and Slovenia in Eastern Europe, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania in the Baltics, and Malta and Cyprus. This enlargement and eastward expansion of the EU to accommodate ten more states, bringing the total membership to 25 is a giant step towards closer integration and unification of the European continent.

European Commission President Romano Prodi, hailing the decision, declared that "for the first time in history, Europe will become one because unification is the free will of its people." He further said, "Our aim is one Europe and to make our continent a bastion of democracy and peace."

With more than two dozen states in the expanded Union competing for attention and with the new entrants weighing in with their own priorities, the decision-making format of the European Commission and the council of ministers would have to be suitably adjusted if the enlarged Union is to function effectively. The 'Convention on the future of Europe' is in the process of drafting a new treaty which is expected to address some of the problems of integration.

Public opinion in a number of member states will also have to be further mobilized in support of the enlargement of the Union since the accession treaty pertaining to additional membership will have to be ratified by the parliaments of the fifteen existing members, the parliaments of the ten new entrants as well as by the European parliament and in some cases,

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was shelved till December 2004. This too was made conditional on Turkey "addressing swiftly remaining shortcomings in political reforms, particularly relating to human rights and protection of minorities."

Although opinion in the EU member states on Turkey's membership had been adversely affected in the wake of the anti-Islamic fallout of the 9/11 events, a number of factors provided Ankara with a certain leverage in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit.

These included US lobbying with the EU in view of Turkey's strategic importance to Washington, especially in the context of the Iraq situation, the EU's keenness for Turkish assent to unification of Cyprus to enable the divided island to enter the Union as a unified state and the need for Turkish assent to outstanding proposals for a grant of certain NATO facilities to the European Rapid Reaction Force.

The summit's decision to postpone negotiations till December 2004 and its reiteration of the conditionalities demanded of Turkey came as a big blow to the Turks whose Prime Minister Abdullah Gul described the decision "as impossible to accept."