

A case for EU enlargement

BY AYLEA ZAIDI AND SIRAJUDDIN AZIZ

The War in
20.6.03
Europe

The Iron Curtain rose more than a decade ago but the stage has now finally been set for bringing all European states within the ambit of the European Union. Even the poorer Eastern European relatives can finally look forward to being welcomed into the Western family fold.

The disparity between the Eastern and Western European counterparts has been highlighted on innumerable fronts for years. So convincing has the portrayal been of the 'oppressive police states' of the old Soviet Bloc, that till recently there was general unease and wariness about these countries. But that is now history.

The EU promotes the good old fashioned values of political and economic stability, individual thought, human rights, spirit of enterprise, cultural diversity and protection for minorities as opposed to the repressive policies of the old Soviet Bloc. With the largest round of the EU enlargement ever on May 1, 2004 European nations now have a shot at a second chance for integration with the 'free world' and dissolve the artificial boundaries that have existed between the Eastern and Western Europe. This is history in the making. But historically, phenomenal achievements have been preceded sometimes by seemingly insurmountable obstacles. This is no different.

In 1993 the EU made its significant declaration of welcoming any European state which wished to join it. The gesture was noble, but the process tortuous and lengthy. Fortunately the candidate countries have not lost heart. Rather they have intensified their efforts to spur the process on.

Ten countries of the former Soviet Bloc namely Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Malta, Cyprus, Estonia and Slovenia have EU accession on their cards.

These candidate countries are still groping and trying to get their footing in the post cold war scenario. It is slippery ground and they have years of catching up to do. Prima facie the EU's demand of democracy and a progressive market structure as propounded in the "Copenhagen Criteria" is reasonable enough. But for the candidates it means struggling with a fundamental rethinking of

it is hoped that the scenario will improve under the current AKP regime.

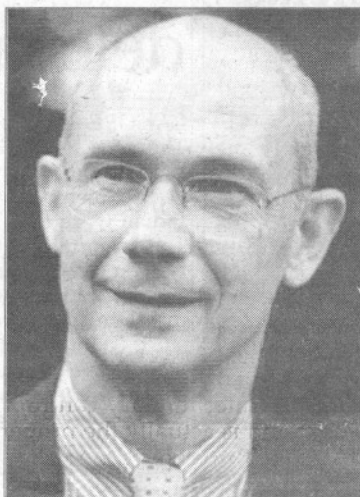
With the Iraq War whatever marginal gains the country has achieved are severely threatened again. Turkey shares a border with Iraq. Also the country should remain poised for more problems in its south eastern region where the Kurdish issue can flare up.

The United States of America has taken on the responsibility of policing the entire world. Surprisingly nobody seemed to have asked them to do so. With the collapse of the USSR, it had emerged victorious without any show of military might. But times have changed. Now their global dominance seems to be seriously threatened. Consequently the US think tanks are clouded by the looming shadows of a united Europe and an equally formidable enemy from the east i.e. Peoples Republic of China. The Americans seem to have convinced themselves that a dis-united Europe will serve their purpose.

Sadly for them NATO seems to have lost its relevance. NATO had been born of security threats to the world during the Cold War. Then is it unreasonable to question its endurance in the wake of the dissolution of the threat that was cause for its birth? The collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989 rendered useless its *raison d' etaire*.

The successful European Union and the even more successful launch of the "Euro" have proven that dedicated leadership can melt away centuries of bitterness. The role of former French President Francois Mitterrand and ex-German Chancellor Helmut Kohl towards this effort will remain a major milestone, in the further unification of Europe.

France has deftly opposed America's war on Iraq. France and President Chirac have continuously conveyed that "war is always the worst solution". The Press has flatteringly and generously compared President Chirac to De Gaulle for standing up to the United States of America. This is a brave stance especially when US Secretary of State Colin Powell has stated specifically that France will pay for opposing the war in Iraq.



Pascal Lamy

tal rethinking of their political and economic ideology.

The EU Commission has noted though, that the candidate countries deserve a pat on the back for having been able to imbibe most of the *acquis communautaire* into their national laws. Though actual implementation is another story, this too is no small achievement. The *acquis communautaire* has nearly 20000 pieces of legislation and has taken years to formulate.

Candidate countries are required to get their accession treaties ratified by their respective parliaments. It becomes essential then to garner public support for this. Referendums are set to be held now amid rising concerns that those against accession are larger than anticipated. Nevertheless Slovenia was pleasantly surprised when nearly 90 percent pollsters gave their resounding yes to accession to the EU.

Statistics show that the general public opinion against accession is the highest in Estonia and Latvia. This can be expected given the years of isolation these countries have endured making them skeptical of "outside influence".

Bulgaria and Romania are geared up for accession in 2007. The Kostov government elected in 1997 had augured well for Bulgaria in the sense that the institution of the currency board in 1997 helped to stabilise the Bulgarian lev. On other fronts the government failed to meet public expectation and lost parliamentary elections in 2001. Fortunately the present leadership under Simeon Sakskoburggotski is supporting the continuation of its predecessor's policies.

Enthusiasm for EU accession in Romania is perhaps the strongest. The Romanians are deeply committed to changing living standards in their country and are expected to support the transition into the EU with zeal. Results are already apparent and the country's ratings have improved to B+ (S&P) and B1 (Moody).

Of the most pressing issues the case for Turkey has been cause for much controversy and heated debate. Opponents to its accession have propounded some forceful arguments. Their stance is simple. Turkey is not a European country. 95 percent of its population lives in Asia. Some have gone as far as to state that inclusion of Turkey in the EU would be the "end of the European Union". Fortunately not all key policymakers subscribe to these extreme reactions. Both Britain and USA are strongly advocating Turkey's case at the risk of being branded the "enemies of the EU".

Turkey is desperately trying not to disappoint the EU but macroeconomic stability has a habit of slipping out of its reach. Inflation has reached dizzying heights and recently the lira fell to 1.76 million to the US dollar. The previous coalition government was hardly conducive to political and economic reform but

The arrogance and the belligerence of the USA calls for even greater unity amongst the European nations. A unipolar world led by the USA will inevitably be a regime of haughty and arrogant politicians who will be held in esteem by un-self respecting and impressionable political fledglings, of the likes of Tony Blair. Since there is immediate recognition of this possibility in Paris, Bonn and Moscow, we are already hearing about United European Defence Arrangements / agreements between EU States.

In March 2003, as a precursor to further military alliance, a modest EU military force replaced NATO led peacekeeping force in Macedonia. The bitter American Press, since the Maastricht Treaty, has hurled many jibes at the EU calling it "an economic giant and a political dwarf." *The Economist* in one of its April 2003 issue stated ".... France has always believed that in the long run, the EU must assert its independence of NATO, an organisation it regards as ultimately an instrument of American Foreign Policy. Without an independent European defence force there can be no independent foreign policy."

The USA's absolute and undisputed hold over the world is increasingly coming under fire. Nations want a change and a right to operate as autonomous and self respecting nations in their best interests. More often than not it has been demonstrated that that national interests are at direct loggerheads with the US's. But might is right. Countries have to submissively bow down to US dictum otherwise basic survival is threatened. With the emergence of a United Europe winds of change are expected to blow in a different direction. A United States of Europe free from any outside influence may be just what the doctor has ordered right now. This process involves not a few people but nations. So the magnitude of the task justifies the obstacles in the achievement of the final goal. However the Europeans must not lose heart. They must realise that their success will make them role models for other nations who must try and emulate their ambitious and brave efforts.

Against the backdrop of bitter and often gruesome history of relations between countries of Europe, die hard skeptics like us, who thought that the EU would remain a utopian concept, have come to terms with the movement of EU from the drawing boards to its present reality. The emerging-geo political scene demands that EU must develop into a formidable United States of Europe to thwart attempts at a unipolar world led by an arrogant US leadership. In this effort Russia and China must lend their unflinching support for the efforts of France and Germany. A balanced bi-polar world will be a safer world to live in, where 'peace' and respect for human rights will be its cornerstones.