

The frontiers of Europe in the light of the Wider Europe's strategy

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Abstract

The article analyses the nowadays advancement of the European Union to the East of the continent through the prism of the gradual shift of its geopolitical, geoeconomic and institutional frontiers that includes four fundamental components: basic stabilization and democratization, economic association and, eventually, institutional accession of the former "socialist countries" to the EU. We suggest the Wider Europe's strategy to be the prolongation of the EU policy of "deliberate uncertainty" carried out regarding the CIS European countries.

Keywords: *Neighbourhood, Borders, Frontiers, European Union, EU*

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“The delimitation of Europe requires studying geography, taking into account history and adopting a political decision”
Hubert Védrine, French Foreign Minister¹

1. Introduction

The consistent geopolitical transformation of the Old continent is not reduced to the EU's absorbing its closest Eastern and North Eastern periphery. The outsiders of the present enlargement process Bulgaria and Romania are to join the EU in 2007. The rest of the Balkan countries will be granted the possibility to join the European Union within the Stabilization and Association process initiated in 1999. Without taking into consideration the vague future prospects of Turkey, the final EU territorial configuration will depend on the probable membership of seven European CIS states (Moldavia, Ukraine, Belarus, the Russian Federation, Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan), which meet the basic geographical criterion.

Where is the final point of the European Union's enlargement to the East? Is it possible to determine this boundary? Showing no desire to find the final answer the European Commission put forward the Wider Europe strategy in March 2003. This policy covers new Eastern neighbour states of the enlarged Union (Belarus, Moldavia and Ukraine), the Russian Federation as well as the South Mediterranean countries. Brussels finds it workable to turn the existing “arc of instability” on the EU Southern and Eastern borders into a “ring of friends” through gradual applying the tools of close association with every neighbour state in accordance with its meeting the determined criteria of rapprochement. Thus, the delimitation between the Wider Union and Wider Europe will coincide with the borderline of the transient Commonwealth of Independent States turning Ukraine, Moldavia and Belarus into common “close neighbourhood” of Russia and the European Union.

¹ On the eve of the European Council Meeting in Helsinki, December 1999.

The author of this article suggests viewing the nowadays advancement of the European West to the East of the continent through the prism of the gradual shift of its geopolitical, geoeconomic, institutional and political frontiers. We believe that the process of “coming back to Europe” for the former hostages of the “socialist camp” includes four fundamental components: basic stabilization and democratization, economic association and, eventually, institutional accession to the EU. The European Union enlargement itself goes through a number of particular stages conditioned by the procedural rules in force, the degree of readiness of the applicant states along with the requirements for the “deepening” of the integration process and the accommodation of interests of the member states.

This paper is structured as follows. The first section analyses the bases and stages of the current unification of the Continent. The second examines a new proximity policy of the EU towards its neighbours (creation of the Wider Europe).

2. Stages and bases of the current unification process on the continent

Contemporary move to unite Europe within a single political and economic community is often regarded as the latest geopolitical “expansion of the West” or, vice versa, a civilizational “European homecoming”. We believe that it is worthwhile defining the current advancement of the European Union to the East of the continent as the process of voluntarily assuming all the Western norms and values by the countries of the former Eastern Europe, which facilitates their economic integration as well as further accession to the European Community. Regarding all this approaching the EU contains four interconnected stages: stabilization, democratization, the establishment of association and the acquiring of membership.

2.1 Stabilization

Internal territorial integrity and friendly relations with country neighbours form the reliable basis for democratic and market transformations in each post-communist state. However, the stabilization

is not reduced to eliminating military conflict threat or hedging particular regions (“hard” threats). It presupposes efficient state management which provides for effective combating organized crime and corruption inside the country, reliable border controlling and preventing illegal emigration of its citizens to other countries (“weak” threats). The upsurge of national conflicts in Yugoslavia and the USSR, the considerable number of national minorities in Central European countries, overall threat of “weak” risks assigned the stabilization with the prominent role in Western Europe. In practice, the EU initiated concluding the Stability Pact for Central Eastern (1995) and South Eastern Europe (1999).

Nowadays basic stabilization tasks are pressing for solution in the Transcaucasian states (undetermined status for Abkhazia, Nagorny Karabakh and Southern Osetia), in the Russian Federation (the war in Chechnya), in Serbia and Montenegro (the future for Kosovo and Montenegro), in Moldova (the problem of the Transdnestr region), whereas Bosnia and Herzegovina have succeeded in stabilization under the protectorate of the international community.

2.2 Democratization

The establishment of the sustainable democracy and the rule of law throughout the former communist regimes can be analysed within three stages: 1) liberalization; 2) transition; 3) democratic consolidation (Kubicek 2003: 21). In other words, democratization is the process of shifting geopolitical boundaries of the European political area². According to the report “Nations in Transit 2003” produced by American non-governmental organization “Freedom House”, all Central and South East European states (except Bosnia and Herzegovina) have already reached the level of consolidated or partially consolidated democracy, while the CIS European countries remain transitional or autocratic regimes (see Table 1)³. From its own part,

² If proceed from the statement that any geopolitical community is the space for implementing some political project, then geopolitical Europe can be drawn as a space for market economy and law-governed state actual functioning. See Foucher (1993: 15).

³ A Democratization score (DEM) is an average of an electoral process, development of civil society, independent media and governance ratings. A

the EU introduced regional financial aid programmes (PHARE, TACIS, CARDS), which aim at promoting faster stabilization and democratization of post-communist states.

Table 1: Steps of democratization

Level of democratization	Post-communist States	DEM	ROL
Consolidated democracies	Poland	1,63	2,00
	Slovenia	1,75	1,88
	Hungary	1,81	2,25
	Slovakia	1,81	2,63
	Lithuania	1,88	2,63
	Estonia	1,94	2,13
	Latvia	1,94	2,88
	Czech republic	2,00	3,00
Democracies (some consolidation)	Bulgaria	3,13	3,88
	Romania	3,25	4,38
	Croatia	3,44	4,50
	Serbia and Montenegro	3,50	4,63
	Albania	3,94	4,63
	Macedonia	3,94	5,00
Transitional (hybrid) re- gimes	Bosnia	4,31	5,00
	Moldova	4,38	5,38
	Ukraine	4,50	5,13
	Armenia	4,69	5,38
	Georgia	4,69	5,13
	Russia	4,88	5,13
Autocracies	Azerbaijan	5,31	5,75
	Belarus	6,63	6,13

Rule of law score (ROL) bases on average of constitutional, legislative, judicial framework and corruption ratings. "Freedom House" determines the figures for countries at a 7-point scale, where 1 corresponds to "consolidated democracies", 3 to "democracies with some consolidation", 4 to "transitional governments or hybrid regimes", 5 to autocracies, 7 to "consolidated autocracies". The abovementioned rankings reflect the state of democratic development of post-communist countries for 2002. See www.freedomhouse.org

2.3. Association partnership

The association status based on article 310 of the Treaty establishing the European Community (TEC) embraces various forms of associated partnership which are carried out through specially established bodies (Councils, committees associations/partnerships) and mainly deal with promoting various forms of economic integration: joining the Single Market, setting up the Customs Union or a free trade zone with the EU (see Table 2). Given all this, Partnership and Cooperation agreements (PCA) with the CIS states should be considered the lowest level of association, which points out only the possibility to set up a free trade zone with the Russian Federation, Moldova and Ukraine in future (depending on the realization of economic reforms in these countries). On the whole the Association agreements concluded by the EU can be fairly related to the shift of its geoeconomic borders. Nowadays, as is the case with geopolitical Europe, the Eastern geoeconomic boundary of the European Community coincides with the Western border of the CIS.

Table 2. Steps of economic integration of the European periphery

Level of economic integration	State-participants (beyond EU-25)	Date of signing the association agreement	Date of application	Characteristic features and commentaries
New member states (Since 1.05.2004)	Malta	05.12.1970	16.07.1990	Malta, Cyprus: Concluding Association agreements, which envisage a probable two-stage establishment of the Customs Union (in both cases pending the negotiations on accession, with the Customs Union on manufactured goods being not realized)
	Cyprus	19.12.1972	03.07.1990	
	Poland	16.12.1991	05.04.1994	CCEE: Concluding "European agreements", which stipulate an asymmetrical transition to free manufactured goods trade zones, partial liberalization of three other freedoms
	Hungary	16.12.1991	31.03.1994	
	Czech rep.	06.10.1993	17.01.1996	
	Slovakia	06.10.1993	27.06.1995	
	Estonia	12.06.1995	24.11.1995	
	Lithuania	12.06.1995	08.12.1995	
Latvia	12.06.1995	03.10.1995	Other spheres: political dialogue, introduction of a visa-free regime	
Slovenia	10.06.1996	10.06.1996		

Level of economic integration	State-participants (beyond EU-25)	Date of signing the association agreement	Date of application	Characteristic features and commentaries
European Economic Area	Norway Iceland Liechtenstein	02.05.1992		Access to the EU common market through free movement of manufactured goods, people, services and capitals (without expansion to agriculture and Customs regime of the third world countries). Other spheres: joining the EU foreign policy declarations, Norway and Iceland's joining the Shengen area
Customs Union	Turkey	12.09.1963	14.04.1987	Customs Union introduction since 1.01.1996 regarding manufactured goods Other spheres: political dialogue, maintaining the visa regime
Free trade zone	Switzerland	22.07.1972		Switzerland: the 1972 fundamental agreement on free exchange of goods was supplemented by a number of other sector agreements, in particular, by the 1999 agreement on free movement of people
	Romania Bulgaria	08.02.1993 01.03.1993	22.06.1995 14.12.1995	Romania, Bulgaria: European associated partnership like for other CCEE, delayed transition to a visa-free regime
Free trade zone in the making	Croatia Macedonia Albania Serbia-Montenegro Bosnia-Herzegovina	29.10.2001 09.04.2001	21.02.2003	Progressive conclusion of Stabilization and Association agreements, which stipulate an asymmetrical transition to free trade zones; The EU's implementation of substantial trade preferences for the countries of the region starting with late 2000 Other spheres: arranging political dialogue, maintaining the visa regime (excluding Croatia)

2.4. Institutional accession

Given the complexity and significance of the EU accession procedure, it may take from 3-4 years (as did for example Finland and Sweden) up to 10 years and more (for the countries involved in the current enlargement). The EU Council adopts all decisions on enlargement under the unanimity rule, which grants every member-state the right to veto the candidature of this or that country or, at least, to efficiently block various stages of the accession procedure. In this respect one should be aware of the importance of the EU Council's acknowledgement of the prospective membership for an applicant country, though it is not institutionally required. As is known, the accession procedure grounds, first of all, on current article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union (former article 237 of the TEC), which stipulates three basic requirements established for applicant-state

To be a European state geographically

Despite lengthy debates on borders on the European continent, political geography clearly defines the essence of "a European state" with particular reservations as to only two Eurasian states such as Turkey, 3 % of whose territory is in Europe and the rest in Asia, and the Russian Federation, which can arbitrarily be divided into European and Asian parts. The South Mediterranean states are unconditionally referred to as African and Asian countries, while fifteen former republics of the Soviet Union split into new European (Baltic states, Transcaucasian states, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus) and Asian (Central Asian states) states⁴.

⁴ As was impartially stated by Spanish politologist Débora Miralles (2002), the Southern Mediterranean could aspire to join the EU only on condition of removing the requirement of geographical belonging to Europe from Article 49 of the EU Treaty. These fundamental realia of political geography, however, do not prevent some West European politicians from putting the European countries of the CIS in the same line as some countries of Maghreb or the Middle East. For instance, one of the leaders of the German Christian Democrats Michael Gloss claimed in Bundestag that "Turkey's joining the EU will set a precedent for such states as Morocco and Ukraine", "Handelsblatt" of December 4, 2002. In his turn, former Minister and Deputy of the European

Following the inconsistency with the basic geographic criterion, the EEC Council of Ministers rejected Morocco's application (1987). In its Communication "Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours" the European Commission confirmed the impossibility of accession to the EU for all its "non-European Mediterranean partners" along with the probable accession prospects for such "European states" on the East of Europe that "have clearly expressed their wish to join the Union".

To strive for the EU membership

The obvious character of the statement covers the fundamental principle of voluntary and democratic structure of the European Community, which neither poses any threats to its neighbours nor plots any territorial expansion. The European Union respects the sovereign right of such states as Iceland, Switzerland or Russia to remain aloof from the European integration process. Thus, the EU membership prerequisite is a clearly shaped national strategy of integration to the EU as well as an institutionally required application of a European state.

To be a sustainable democracy

General Franco's authoritative regime was the first to make certain that the European Community is not only a project of economic integration but also a union of democratic nations when it applied for association with the EEC in 1962. Lengthy negotiations resulted only in Spain's signing a trade preferential agreement in 1970. Its further approaching the Community was distinctly conditioned by its transition to democracy. At the same time, the establishment of military dictatorship in Greece in 1967 made the European Com-

Parliament from France Alain Lamassoure (2003: 39) believes that incompliance with the geographical criterion brought about the recognition of the candidature of Turkey and puts the issue of probable EU membership for Ukrainem Moldova, Morocco, Russia and Israel on the agenda.

mission suspend the Association Agreement with this country. However, democratic reforms in Greece, Portugal and Spain in 1974-1975 assisted their further integration to the EEC. In the context of the EU enlargement of Central and East European states the 1993 Copenhagen Council confirmed the existence of stable democratic institutions as the basic accession criterion. The 1996-1997 Amsterdam Intergovernmental Conference amended article 49 of the Treaty on the EU that now envisages that “any European state, which respects the principles set out in Article 6 (1) (principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law), may apply to become a member of the Union”. Within the frameworks of meeting the political criteria, the EU obliged the applicant states from the East of Europe to guarantee the rights of their national minorities and maintain neighbourly relations in the region.

The Copenhagen European Council of June 1993 consolidated two more important accession criteria: efficient market economy ready to compete at the EU domestic market; the ability to acquire the *acquis* in corpora.

To be an efficient market economy

Conformity with the basic principles of market economy automatically arose from the necessity of profound convergence of the member states’ economies within the “Common market”. Meanwhile, as was proved by the accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal, given the current enlargement of the EU on Central European countries and preplanned absorbing the Balkan states even considerable recess in social and economic development cannot obstruct the EU membership, it can only postpone it. In other words, the efficiency of national market mechanisms rather than current economic wealth is taken into account while considering the economic state of an applicant-country (a healthy rather than wealthy criteria). The pre-accession level of economic integration to the European Union is not specified either, which, at least theoretically, obviates the necessity to conclude a preliminary Association agreement with the EU for a potential applicant-state.

To be concordant with and able to adopt the acquis

The Community put forward the requirement of introducing the aggregate *acquis* into national legislation of an applicant-country during the first enlargement on Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark (1973). It would not be an exaggeration to view the general accession procedure as the process of adopting the *acquis* by an applicant-state that sets the subject for accession negotiations and that all is fixed in an Accession treaty in detail. The approaching of legislation of post-communist countries to the EU legislation actually started at the stages of stabilization and democratization, continued at the stage of implementing Association agreements and will continue after the official accession date till the full completion of transition periods envisaged by the Accession treaty. Thus, satisfying this criterion goes far beyond initial “applicant” attempts of a country and can be assessed by its juridical and administrative capability to meet the commitments made. Observing this prerequisite does not cover, however, an applicant-state’s probable “euro sceptical” view of goals and final political structure of the Union, which means the consent to share the contemporary *acquis*, and not necessarily still indeterminate *finalité politique*. To claim the opposite would mean to deny the accession of Great Britain and the Scandinavian countries.

Nonetheless, institutional approval of these five prerequisites together with principles of their implementation (general non-discrimination and differentiation of applicant states corresponding to their progress) does not eliminate certain political and juridical vagueness of the accession procedure. The thing is that the effective accession criteria are only some kind of operational “rules of game” that do not impose certain legal obligations on member states (that is to say, the decisions in this sphere are beyond the European Court jurisdiction) relevant to the way of interpreting appeals for membership from other European countries. The issue of the EU membership provides the European candidate states with an opportunity, but not with a right to join the European Union (Torreblanca, 2003). Hence, it seems reasonable to add the abovementioned five-accession criteria with one more significant requirement to a candidate country:

To have the Community's consent to accession

In addition to readiness criteria to be met by a candidate country it is essential to consider the Union's overall capacity to enlarge as well as the positions and interests of particular member states. Every enlargement of six basic countries' core brought about some discord between the Community members splitting them into "euro-optimists" and "euro-sceptics", into investors and users of European funds, into liberalists and governmentalsists, into small and great states, into "the Mediterranean and East European lobbies", etc. However, it will be a mistake to view the enlargement process as the one posing threats to the integrity and effectiveness of the European integration project because starting with the initial absorption of Great Britain, Ireland and Denmark and finishing with the recent accession of ten countries the enlargement prospect has always been "a necessary catalyst for long-overdue reforms"⁵ within the Community. This statement proved to be the most striking in the current process of the EU enlargement that enhanced the realisation of the long-standing idea of establishing a political union.

Positioning the member states with regard to the enlargement process is not reduced only to the preservation of the *acquis* but is also illustrated by a number of other factors, namely: geographical and historical proximity of a candidate country, loss of some financial advantages, disturbance of the Union's internal political balance as well as traditional strategic and foreign policy considerations. Germany's consistent support of issuing the EU membership for Central and East European countries arises from viewing the enlargement process as a chance to set up a new European federation (Joschka Fischer's approach), special close relations with the countries of the region and substantial economic advantages. Great Britain and Denmark backed up rapid expansion to Central and East European countries mainly reckoning that the achieved differentiation level inside the Union could put an end to political projects of its further federalisation. Meanwhile, France expressed the greatest number of apprehensions and doubts related to the accession of

⁵ According to the exact expression of British researcher Heather Grabbe. International Herald Tribune, June 13, 2003.

Central and East European countries under the pressure of a range of factors, namely: estimation of enlargement as potential threat to the idea of “Europe-puissance”; fear of losing its considerable political position in a wider Europe; traditional care for the Southern Mediterranean. From this point of view such small and relatively prosperous countries as Slovenia, Hungary and Estonia (which could also expect some member states to lobby their candidacy) *a priori* find it much easier to join the EU than, for instance, Turkey or Ukraine the accession of which could brought about substantial redirection of European budget money.

It is also worth mentioning the impact the traditional regional links and geographical realia have on the EU enlargement process. It would have been problematic to carry out, for instance, the 1997 first “Luxembourg” project of enlargement to the East, which drew the demarcation line of the Community separating Czech Republic from Slovakia as well as upsetting political and economic integrity of the Baltic countries. Issuing membership to Romania brings Moldova closer to the European Union and probable accession of Turkey will attract the Union’s attention to the Transcaucasian region. Taking into account the EU new neighbours (countries of “joint periphery”) it is also worth considering the Russian Federation factor both at level of the EU-Russia relations and at the level of relations and commitments within the former Soviet Union space.

3. Wider Europe or how to enlarge the European Union without shifting its institutional borders

The Wider Europe strategy (the WES) was confirmed by the Council of the EU in June 2003 on the basis of the March Communication from the European Commission “Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A New Framework for Relations with our Eastern and Southern Neighbours”⁶. In practice the formula “everything except institutions” grants the chances for reinforced economic integration (gradual access to the Union’s domestic market); for enhanced political dialogue; wider application of visa-free regime; close coop-

⁶ COM (2003) 104 final, 11.3.2003,
http://europa.eu.int/comm/world/enp/pdf/com03_104_en.pdf

eration on preventing and combating conflicts and crises; on judicial, domestic policy and legal assistance; on trans-boundary and regional cooperation; transport; energy; telecommunications networks; culture; research area; education and environmental protection; implementation of a new financial instrument of neighbourhood.

By its juridical and practical aspects the WES fits the frames of the operating association institution and according to the intentions of its founders it is to guarantee the integrity and consistency of the Wider EU policy regarding its neighbour countries while being “an acceptable alternative for membership” for the countries (Wallace, 2003). Strategically, the neighbourhood initiative puts an “extremely ambitious” task for itself to bring the EU relations with its Southern and Eastern peripheries to the level of relations in the European economic area. In other words, the EU neighbour countries can join the European geoeconomic space in exchange for adopting the basic values of geopolitical Europe and a considerable share of the *acquis*.

Along with this the WES grounds on a differential and step-by-step approach following which every neighbour country will be offered an individual Action Plan, and in compliance with this the integration to the EU domestic market will be carried out taking into account the fulfilment of the Action Plan and the established general accession criteria. The suggested scheme follows the three-componential rapprochement formula that the EU successfully applied to the Central European countries (annual monitoring carried out by the Commission, the EU Action Plans and national Programmes of their realisation adopted by neighbour countries) with the significant distinction that the aim is profound association rather than membership. Taking into account those difficulties and mutual frustration that characterise the EU current relations with Ukraine, Moldova and the majority of the Southern Mediterranean the neighbourhood concept makes an important step forward because it fills the relations with actual and binding sense for both sides.

At the same time the WES calls for deeper analysis in the context of global postcommunist evolution of the continent. Following the collapse of communist regimes some European politicians and

experts supported either the establishment of a pan-european confederation (F. Mitterrand, Jacques Delors, the 1998 Report of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) or the establishment of a special membership status on the basis of flexible and partial implementation of the *acquis* (Jacques Attali, Charles Grant). Instead of the current and long-term enlargement process such a scenario would foster institutional and geopolitical adjustment of new East European democracies to the European Union. The associated membership formula could embrace all European countries that meet the democracy criterion but either temporarily fail to meet other criteria or do not strive for full membership (the CIS European countries, the Balkan countries, the Common Economic Area, Switzerland, Turkey).

The suggested neighbourhood concept grounds on opposite fundamental, i.e. gradual economic integration that not only remains within the frames of the existing institution of association, but also spreads over non-european neighbour countries of the EU. The WES contradicts, therefore, the proclaimed paradigm of a One Europe because it regards East European countries not as potential candidates for membership that can join the EU on condition of meeting the accession criteria, but as close foreign-policy partners of the Union. For lack of new institutional mechanisms it would be appropriate to spread the integration strategy, which is gradual, full-fledged and conditioned by actual integration results, over those East European countries that expressed their strive for membership following the pattern of the stabilisation and association process carried out by Brussels in the West Balkan countries. In consequence, the concept of Wider Europe can be accounted in Ukraine and Moldova as a strategy of constraining the integration intentions of these countries rather than an effective way of their approaching the European Union.

It seems the most appropriate to consider the WES to be the prolongation of the EU policy of “deliberate uncertainty” carried out regarding the CIS European countries. Despite the fact that some present leaders of the European Commission and some member states repeatedly expressed the vision of an “ideal Europe” without its Eastern part, the neighbourhood concept never excludes the possibility for East European countries to be issued the prospective

membership. As Prodi admitted “so whatever our proximity policy is or will be no European state that complies with the Copenhagen criteria ... will be denied this prospect” (Prodi, 2002). On the contrary, the WES and probable neighbourhood agreements can become an effective means of reaching the aim because they offer even more (full access to the EU domestic market) than Association agreements with the CEECs that envisaged only setting up free trade zones with the EU.

In practice the WES includes two groups of neighbour European countries of the EU:

- Countries of “common periphery” striving for EU membership;
- Russian Federation and countries striving for the close union with Russia

3.1 Countries of “common periphery”

The wait-and-see attitude the European Union demonstrates to the East European countries that since now on constitute “common close neighbourhood” for the Wider Union and the Russian Federation dooms the current East European policy of the EU to a conceptual failure. In other words, the European economic area model, to which the WES orients, does not strategically correspond to the new Eastern periphery of the Community. It is obvious that these East European countries have only two possible scenarios for development, i.e. actual democratic and market reforms and gradual institutional integration to the EU resulting from democratic forces’ coming to power; further “declarative europeanisation” (Wolczuk, 2003) and rapprochement between them and Russia in case the current authorities in the countries do not qualitatively transform.

At the same time, we regard as unlikely the scenario by which non candidate East European countries acquire the main part of the *acquis* and shape together with the EU the “area of welfare and common values” retaining the status of “neighbours” or “friends” rather than wishing to become full-fledged members of the European family. According to the EEA functioning experience, this form of profound economic integration puts the Union’s partners into an unfavourable

avourable position since it compels them to acquire more and more elements of the *acquis* having no possibility to influence their adoption. It is not surprising that under such conditions the majority of potential candidates to join the EEA found it much better to be issued full EU membership (Austria, Finland, Sweden) or, at least, make an attempt in this respect (national referendum failures in Norway and Switzerland). After Norway joins the European Union, which is most probable, the EEA can reduce to tiny Iceland and Liechtenstein besides the EU countries.

At present Moldova and Ukraine have stated their intention to join the European Union. A new leadership of Georgia stresses the European future for his country. Yet the authoritative regime of Lukashenko together with Armenia impaired by the fight for Nagorny Karabakh are attracted by Russia, while Azerbaijan is close to establishing the Aliev dynasty regime under the patterns of despotisms set up in Central Asia. Thus, taking into account compliance with the first two basic criteria of membership the number of potential members of EU increases only by 2-3 countries (from pre-planned 33 to 35-36 countries). Moreover, Moldova, Ukraine and Georgia have not solved the main tasks of basic stabilisation and democratisation yet, though these countries' (or, at least, some of the countries') way to sustainable democracy, law-governed state and efficient market economy can be overcome much faster than during "several decades of years".

3.2 "Wider" Russia

As distinct from Ukraine and Moldova, "the most important neighbour" (Pelczynska-Nalecz in Kowal, 2002) of the European Union, which is the Russian Federation, would seem to "fit" the doctrine of Wider Europe perfectly. "As a world power situated on two continents"⁷, Russia considers itself to be an equal strategic partner (of one of the poles of a bipolar world) rather than a potential EU member. Strategic partnership between the European Union and Russia anticipates gradual establishment of four common

⁷ See "The Russian Federation Middle Term Strategy Towards the European Union (2000-2010 гг.)". <http://www.eur.ru/>

spaces (Common European Economic Space (CEES); Common Space of Freedom, Security and Justice; the Common Space of External Security; The Common Space of Research and Education), launching the work of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council, profound energy dialogue as well as cooperation in environmental realm. Though it is interesting to note that the EU-Russia relations actually exceed the neighbourhood initiative and, therefore, are subject to neither regular monitoring carried out by the European Commission nor strict compliance with the adopted progress criteria. According to the joint Declaration of the Sankt-Peterburg EU-Russia Summit of May 31, 2003 the process of rapprochement between the Community and Russia will be carried out on the “equal basis” as well as on the basis of determined “specific tasks and mutual agreement”.

One can forecast that the relations between the EU and Russia will develop through complex and sometimes uncompromising dialogue on mutual trade concessions, wider application of visa-free regime and foreign policy issues. There also exist serious hidden dangers threatening the EU-Russia strategic partnership. In contradiction with declared commonness of values the EU and Russia have rather different views on the tasks, priorities and prospects of mutual partnership. Despite certain achievements in economic sphere Putin’s Russia is far from meeting the Copenhagen criteria and pursues the classical foreign policy doctrine based on the priority protection of national interests and traditional geopolitical approach (Lynch, 2003). In addition to considering the “internal” problem of Chechnya the European Union should coordinate its strategic partnership with Russia and the proclaimed tasks of “europeanisation” of the East European periphery. The matter is that Russia is definitely not fascinated with profound democratic and market transformation of new East European countries and close rapprochement between them and the European Union⁸. Russian leadership believe that the former Soviet republics can move to the European Union only to-

⁸ The abovementioned Strategy contains the following curious provision (Point 1.6): “Efforts will continue to be made for ... protection of Russia’s legitimate interests while further expanding the European Union, opposing possible attempts to hamper economic integration in the CIS, in partucular, through maintaining “special relations” with individuel countries of the Commonwealth to the detriment of Russia’s interests”.

gether with Russia, i.e. within the regional association set up and controlled by the Kremlin. It is remarkable that along with negotiating the establishment of the CEES with the EU Russia is simultaneously making attempts to establish the Common Economic Space with Belarus, Kazakhstan and Ukraine. Avoiding the penetration into obvious discrepancies of such a dual profound economic integration, it is worth emphasizing that the post-Soviet Russia severely hampers internal democratisation and stabilisation in the East of Europe (backing up authoritative regimes of Lukashenko and Kuchma, resisting Moldova and Georgia in their attempts to find solutions for the Trans-Dniester and Abkhasian conflicts). Yet Belarus is the only country out of 6 belonging to “common periphery” that actually belongs to the Russian geopolitical and geoeconomic space.

4. Conclusions – Europe as a dream for unity

In his well-known lecture course delivered in 1944-1945 French historian Lucien Febvre characterised the European idea as “a dream for unity”. At dawn of the XXI century the dream that seemed unattainable for many generations of the Europeans is close to becoming a reality. The ideal model of a united Europe could include two or, probably, three concentric circles. The main circle (One Europe⁹) would include 25 member states of the present enlarged Union, Bulgaria, Romania, the West Balkan countries, Moldova, Ukraine, Turkey and the Transcaucasian countries. The outer circle (Wider Europe) would include European countries that do not strive for joining the EU institutionally as well as non-European neighbours from the Northern Africa and Middle East. The Wider Europe countries would shape the Common European Economic Space founded on the Pan-European and Mediterranean free trade zone. In the course of time the probable inner circle (deeper Europe) would be founded on the mechanisms of enhanced cooperation shaped by those EU countries that would strive for deeper integration forms than the *acquis* accepted by everyone, with

⁹ See the Copenhagen Declaration “One Europe” of December 13, 2002 on the occasion of concluding the accession negotiations by eight CCEE, Cyprus and Malta, SN 369/02.

any European state having the right to join any of the three circles under the conditional openness principle provided it met the set criteria.

As has been mentioned before, the present concept of the Wider Europe makes it possible for any European democracy to seek the EU membership. A possible rejection can be conditioned by two fundamental postulates: the inability of a candidate country to satisfy the accession criteria; the inability of the Union itself for such enlargement.

The application of periodic monitoring and Action plans in relations with the East European countries enables an integral and objective assessment of their progressive movement towards the EU. Along with this, it is much more difficult to estimate the readiness of the Union itself, because such an analysis bases largely on subjective views of some member states rather than on clearly distinguished criteria. Nowadays some West European leaders and the European Commission leadership deny *a-priori* the possibility of the further enlargement of the European Community to the East European countries, justifying it with the necessity “to preserve the internal balance and cohesion of the Union” (Prodi, 2002).

Such reasoning, however, brings about some questions. First, as the President of the European Commission stated concerning the current enlargement, the efficient structure of the Community “completely depends on the clear division of powers between European institutions and current procedures. It is hundreds of times as easy to work within the 27-member Union according to the majority vote principle as within the EU-15 that adopt decisions according to the unanimity principle” (Prodi, 2001). Granted the successful adoption of the draft Constitutional Treaty, the institutional and political structure of the European Union will become qualitatively renewed, which means: transition to a dual-majority system of adopting decisions by qualified majority in the EU Council of Ministers¹⁰; further narrowing the sphere of

¹⁰ As the calculations of Richard Baldwin and Mika Widgren (2003) show, the suggested voting scheme provides for as easy adoption of a decision by the EU consisting of 27 member states (from technical point of view) as it used to be

application of the unanimous voting procedure etc. One can assume that, granted the implementation of the new Constitutional Treaty (approximately in 2009) and its most likely further reform, the European Union will be capable of expanding farther beyond the currently coordinated Eastern land border. Moreover, the probable EU enlargement to Turkey will require further reforms in common agricultural and structural policies, which, in turn, could facilitate the integration of underdeveloped East European countries.

Second, the idea of “internal inability of the Community to enlarge” cannot at all be applied to Moldova and the Transcaucasian countries that are small by both size and population number. The European Union, which from the present 15 members (377 million people) is planning to enlarge to 32 (500 million people) or 33 (570 million people together with Turkey) members, is quite capable of absorbing Ukraine with less than 50 million population. Actually the real threat to the integrity and domestic political balance of the European Union can be posed by the probable enlargement to biggest country of the continent – the Russian Federation – and, to a less extent, to Turkey (taking into account its stable demographic growth). The issue of the EU prospective membership for Russia is not to be on the agenda of the Union until the Russian leadership files the application for accession. However, such a scenario seems to be unlikely even supposing that Russian currently weak democratic forces and civil society will manage to transform the present model of Putin’s “guided democracy” into a sustainable democratic government. The matter is that even European and democratic Russia will logically strive for remaining one of the world’s poles of influence and, accordingly, will not express desire to lose its independence in adopting decisions and to concede a significant part of its sovereignty in favour of the European Union.

done in the European Community consisting of 6 founding States. In general the new voting system increases the political weight of four biggest countries of the Union, first of all, Germany, and, on the contrary, weakens the position of those member states the population of which vary between 3 and 40 million people (first of all, Spain and Poland). Independently of the results of the ongoing IGC, the shift to the system of double majority seems inevitable, perhaps with some modification of population-membership thresholds.

Naturally, the European Union is not obliged to admit the countries of the “common periphery”. Yet the leaders of the One Europe should be aware of the consequences of such a political decision. As was the case with the Western Balkans, the strengthening of stability, democracy and prosperity in East European countries is possible only in view of their prospective full institutional integration to the EU. Thus, the Wider Union faces the following alternative: either purposeful support of internal democratic and economic transformations on Ukraine, Moldova and the Transcaucasian countries with their further institutional and budget adjustment to “absorption” or consent to border on weak authoritative regimes that can pose the danger of potential or existing conflicts and constant “weak threats” for the EU.

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