

Warsaw 2007 - Background papers

EIN Summer University and European Ideas Fair

20 - 22 September 2007

EIN POLICY ROUNDTABLE ON

GEOGRAPHIC LIMITS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Background

The question of what constitutes the limits of the European Union is central to the debate about the future of Europe. There is a need for objective criteria when defining the borders of the European Union. The requirement of being a country on the continent of Europe is vague and in many cases requires a subjective judgement. None of the traditional criteria used - geography, history, shared values - are sufficiently clear-cut to be definitive, but each has something to offer. Deciding the future limits of the Union will need to be based not on theoretical abstract concepts but on concrete, case by case studies, which focus in part on the 'absorption capacity' of the EU. The ability of EU economies to compete globally will play a key part in shaping public perceptions and preventing protectionist forces.

Frontiers create a feeling of belonging and identity, marking out possessions while offering protection. No society and no economy are possible without frontiers - they are an essential part of the political process. In the case of the European Union and its definition of Europe's borders, the member states have a common interest that rests on shared European values based on common history and traditions. These create a feeling of belonging together. It is possible that the power of a shared vision can actually determine where Europe starts and ends in geographical terms.

In 1993, the European Council (of EU heads of government) in Copenhagen defined the operational criteria for future admission to the Union, highlighting "the Union's capacity to absorb new members" as an important consideration. At the EIN Summer University in Lyon in 2006, the policy roundtable felt that future enlargements should be judged in the light of their likely impact on the EU's internal cohesion. There seemed to be a certain 'enlargement fatigue' in member states and a feeling that priority should be given to internal consolidation, leading participants to suggest that the term might better be replaced by the notion of 'integration capacity'.

The policy roundtable took the view that, in future, the European Union should insist that candidate countries fulfil completely and without derogation the 'classical' political and economic Copenhagen criteria before accession could enter into force. To pursue enlargement beyond a certain point could risk reducing the effectiveness of the Union's institutions by undermining its ability to maintain the original objectives and principles of the EU. Participants stressed that Europe's businesses need EU rules that are stable and predictable.

Over the coming decade and beyond, the Union's capacity to provide security, stability and sustainable development to its citizens will no longer be distinguishable from its interest in close cooperation with the neighbours. Projecting stability among Europe's neighbours helps to generate prosperity and peace, and illustrates the strength and attractiveness of Europe's soft power. This was a key finding of the 2003 European Security Strategy. The development of the European Union is inevitably influenced by the success or failure of neighbouring countries. The European Commission is trying to improve the current European Neighbourhood Policy, which represents a privileged partnership with sixteen nations ringing the EU.

At the April 2007 joint seminar in Budapest with the Hungarian Századvég Foundation, the working group examined EU limits and integration capacity. There was general agreement that the enlargements have been major successes, but it was noted that Europe's institutional structure needs to be reformed if the EU is to avoid paralysis. Reference was made to Carl Bildt's speech in Lyon, where he cautioned against the EU drawing a geographical line indicating that countries which were on the wrong side could never become members of the EU, since this would remove the incentive for reform and weaken the EU's soft power. EU citizens should also be involved more in deciding Europe's future direction.

Five points have emerged for possible further discussion at the Warsaw summer university:

- ? Which are the key European values and what type of Europe should one aim to create?
- ? In what ways could the current European Neighbourhood Policy be improved?
- ? Does 'enlargement fatigue' exist in the EU27, and what are the main reasons for this?
- ? Should the EU consider creating a privileged partnership that stops short of EU membership?
- ? Will the proposed Reform Treaty enable the EU institutions to work more efficiently?