

Chapter 2

The Enlargement of the European Union: Challenges and Consequences

António Monteiro

The fifth enlargement of the European Union, which culminated in the accession of ten new members on May 1, 2004, was a long process that began in 1993 at the Copenhagen European Council. This Council opened the prospect of accession to states in East and Central Europe that respected certain conditions of a political and economic nature, which have become known as the “Copenhagen Criteria.”

Between 1993 and 2004 the Union grew to 25 member states and to over 450 million inhabitants, increasing its territory by more than a quarter of its original size. During the same period of time, the Union gained a single currency, constructed a common foreign and security policy, consolidated and prioritized its action in the area of justice and internal affairs, and established an agenda for the development and competitiveness of its economy. Internally, it devised new institutional balances, namely by increasing the power of the European Parliament. All of this has enhanced Europe’s position in the world.

Enlargement is also a continuing process. Bulgaria and Romania are slated to join in 2007. Accession negotiations with Croatia will begin in 2005. And the EU has decided to launch accession talks with Turkey.

At the same time, the European Union is faced with new and important challenges. It must ensure that the new Constitutional Treaty comes into force with the approval of its citizens, which means bridging the gap between public opinion and European construction. A new financial framework must also be established, one that is well-balanced and endowed with the appropriate means to support the EU’s ambition to become more competitive and to advance a global role.

Europe's old equation, which was framed as "widening *versus* deepening," must be seen in the light of these new realities.

For almost five decades the European construction process has developed both qualitatively and quantitatively in ways that have continuously tested its underlying political, institutional, economic and social model. Changes have occurred inside and outside the Union. We are faced with an international context marked by globalization, instability and the outbreak of new crises that the European Union cannot ignore.

Never before has the Union had to face so many crises in such a short period of time. But neither has the Union ever faced so many factors bearing hope and new opportunities for the future.

In this context there is one obvious question: how should a member state such as Portugal—a state of average size, situated on the western edge of a Europe which is moving east; with an open market economy but one still vulnerable to the competition of new member states; and with a tradition of openness to the world—position itself vis-à-vis the foreseeable evolution of the European Union?

The answer to this question may be traced along into two inter-linked vectors.

First, is it essential to guarantee that the European Union remains united in its diversity and able to preserve and enhance the founding principles of the contract upon which it was built and which are the foundation of its undeniable success over five decades: equality, cohesion and solidarity, institutional equilibrium and the enhancement of the so-called "Community method." This objective guided the positions we defended in the recent negotiations of the Constitutional Treaty, thus guaranteeing its development.

At this time of change, it is necessary to reaffirm and defend the principles and fundamental values which constitute the foundations of the European project and which remain valid to this day. The alternative is disintegration and the disappearance of the European idea.

Second, in this framework of "more and better Europe," Portugal should also be aware that it is increasingly necessary to a) be present at all decision-making levels, b) develop and sustain multiple alliances

and in various directions and c) assert the advantage that is its universal vocation.

The EU is increasingly becoming a more (pardon the expression) “multipolar” Union. In this new enlarged Union Portugal cannot define its objectives and interests only in relation to a policy or a group of allies, be they determined by geography or size. On the contrary:

- i) Portugal should be present and have the ability to influence various decision-making networks so as to overcome the limits of size and to compensate for geographical periphery with political and strategic centrality. The true centers in enlarged Europe are geographic, but defined by circumstances and balances of power. One way to determine the centrality or periphery of a member state is by belonging to and influencing one of these centers. This is not a new option for Portugal. Portugal joined the Schengen space right at the beginning, became part of the founding group of the single currency; and defended positions favorable to Foreign Policy and Common Security. In an enlarged Union it is essential for Portugal to reinforce its presence in European institutions.
- ii) Portugal has to diversify its alliances, trying whenever possible, as it is now doing, to build up contacts with the new member states.
- iii) Portugal has to increasingly enhance its Euro-Atlantic and Mediterranean centrality and its special historic ties with various regions, thus actively contributing to the improvement of the relationships between the European Union and those regions of the globe. This is a unanimously recognised added value that Portugal has brought to the Union and that it should continue to favor in the future. It was with this in mind that Portugal promoted a recent meeting in Lisbon between European negotiators and Mercosul, which helped place the negotiation process of the association agreement once again on a platform leading to its conclusion.

Portugal supported the enlargement process right from the onset. It did so from a conviction that it was the right way forward to expand peace and prosperity in Europe, but also because it was consistent with Portugal’s own way forward. Our history places us in a privileged position to understand the aspirations of the new member states.

In the European Council of December 2004, Portugal supported the onset of negotiations for the accession of Turkey. It did so for political, strategic and cultural reasons. Portugal agrees with the Commission's proposals and believes that the onset of talks will contribute to the consolidation of the ongoing reforms in Turkey and will help bring it closer to the values which govern our own societies.

And we are also aware of the evolution in the Balkans and the aspirations of these States to share the space of peace and prosperity which is the European Union.

But if Europe wants to be seen as a space of peace and prosperity it cannot only look inside its own borders. It must also look out to the space around it. That is why relationships with its neighbors are fundamental for the European Union.

From this viewpoint, Portugal has actively contributed to the drafting of a new neighborhood policy which includes the southern Mediterranean region, which could run the risk of being somewhat forgotten given the geostrategic situation of the enlarged Union. In the same spirit, Portugal actively participates in the creation and development of a number of complementary dialogue processes with this region, which are the concrete expression of a dialogue of civilizations.

As we build Europe's future in this new century, it is important to commemorate—and celebrate—the extraordinary nature of Europe's past half-century. Would these years of peace, prosperity, security and democracy have been possible without the European Union? It is a question we should always have in mind, because the future of European construction is not a given. It requires our repeated daily commitment.