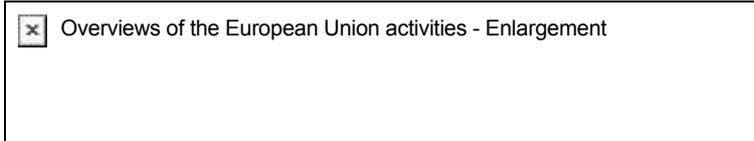
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The entry of eight central and eastern European countries together with Cyprus and Malta into the European Union on 1 May 2004 was a historic achievement, ending centuries of division. Europe reunited means a stronger, democratic and more stable continent, with a single market providing economic benefits for all its 450 million citizens.

Open doors

The European Union has come a long way since the original six member states joined forces to create the European Coal and Steel Community in 1951 and the European Economic Community in 1957, calling upon the peoples of Europe “who share their ideas to join their efforts.”

The six became nine in 1973, and had grown to 15 by 1985. In the meantime, the European Union (as it had become by then) had created a single market and a single currency and had expanded its economic and social agenda to foreign and security policy as well.

The latest enlargement, from 15 to 25, is the biggest in Union history. It has its roots in the collapse of communism, symbolised in the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, which offered an unexpected and unprecedented opportunity to extend European integration into central and eastern Europe. One of the Union’s first post-enlargement priorities is to raise the newcomers’ living standards, which are all below the EU average.

Benefits for all

The ten newcomers, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia, joined formally on 1 May 2004, the culmination of a long process of preparation and negotiation.

The economic impact of enlargement will be significant as a bigger and more integrated market boosts economic growth for new and old members alike. The newcomers stand to benefit from investments from firms based in western Europe and from access to EU funding for their regional and social development. Integration of their economies with the rest of the EU is already under way, as trade agreements, negotiated and applied in advance of membership, have already removed virtually all tariff and quota barriers on their exports to current member states.

Membership conditions

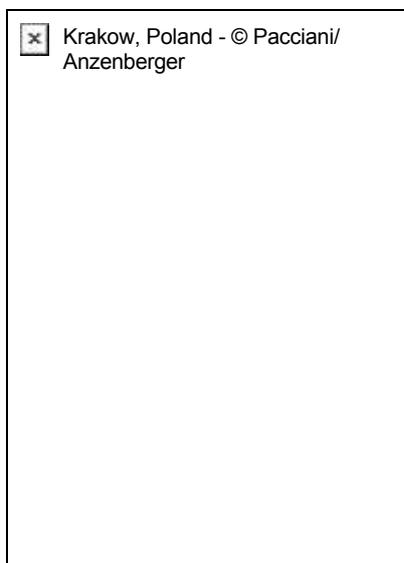
The Maastricht Treaty which came into force in 1993, says (in Article 49) that any European

state which respects the principles of liberty, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law may apply to join the Union.

Further clarification came from EU government heads at a meeting in Copenhagen in December 1993 which laid down the basic conditions for membership:

- existence of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy;
- rule of law, respect for and protection of human rights and minorities;
- existence of a functioning market economy;
- capacity to cope with market forces and competitive pressures within the Union;
- ability to take on the obligations of membership, including economic and monetary union.

The road to membership



Enlargement puts Krakow at the heart of Europe.

Long before the entry negotiations began in 1998, the Union had been helping the candidates prepare for membership by helping them to switch to market-based economies and by introducing the institutional structure of pluralist democracies.

Prior to joining, the new members had to adopt the so-called *acquis communautaire* which meant applying 80,000 pages of EU law, making their bureaucratic and administrative structures more efficient, strengthening judicial systems and tightening security at their eastern borders. These now become the external borders of the 25-nation Union. Secure external frontiers are a necessary precondition for maintaining open internal frontiers within the EU. The Union is providing considerable assistance, both material and in terms of technical support and advice, to bring border controls up to EU standards.

Although they also opened entry negotiations in 1998, two other candidate countries, Bulgaria and Romania, were not ready for membership in 2004.

Smoothing the integration process

The experience of previous EU enlargements has shown how well the EU integration process works. But major change is often a cause for concern and this enlargement is no exception. Its

sheer size has raised questions among citizens in the old and new member states about its impact on their lives and jobs.

There have been fears in the old 15 EU countries about more immigration, an influx of cheap labour and the impact of lower environmental standards. People in the new members have worried as to whether their economies can compete with those in the rest of the EU or whether their farmers can stand up to those who have benefited for years from EU subsidies.

Each of these issues was addressed and, in fact, answered in the entry negotiations. As with earlier enlargements, safeguard mechanisms are in place to cope with any unforeseen consequences. Other issues have been dealt with via transitional measures, which spread over a period of years the impact of sensitive items like the free movement of workers (a concern among older members) or the acquisition of property (a concern of newcomers).

Early indications post-enlargement are of a so far trouble-free adjustment process. In addition, the new members have taken up their places in the decision-making institutions of the European Union with no disruption of ongoing business.

The next enlargement

As the EU begins the task of assimilating 10 new members, the deadline for the next enlargement is already approaching. Bulgaria and Romania have now completed their entry negotiations and will join the Union in 2007.

Two other candidate countries, Turkey and Croatia, are due to open their membership negotiations in 2005, but the opening date for entry talks with Croatia was put back from March 2005, because it had not cooperated fully with the international war crimes tribunal for former Yugoslavia in the Hague as requested by the EU.

An application for membership, submitted by the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in March 2004, is being examined by the European Commission which will decide whether it is ready to begin entry negotiations.

Last updated: March 2005

