



Liberal Democrat

European Group

EU ENLARGEMENT

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What's the good in taking in all these new countries?

The countries freed from Communism face huge challenges. If we fail to act to help them stabilise their democracies and consolidate the market economy they risk sliding back into totalitarianism. Look at Ukraine or Turkmenistan, for example. Organised crime is rampant, like in Russia, and must be brought under control. Small, unstable countries on the EU's borders are prone to the horrors of ethnic conflict, as in the former Yugoslavia.

Inside the EU and well governed, the former soviet bloc countries offer us new allies in the fight against international crime and terrorism, in meeting the challenge of climate change and new markets for economic growth.

Can the EU take on such an enlargement without collapsing?

The EU has grown throughout its history. In the 1970s the original six countries welcomed Britain, Denmark and Ireland into membership. Greece, Spain and Portugal joined the following decade. The 1990s saw Sweden, Finland and Austria swell the ranks of EU members: and the eastern half of Germany. Enlargement is in Europe's DNA. Moreover, the steps taken by the candidate countries to allow them to join - such as fighting corruption, for example - have created the conditions for successful membership

But this is a far bigger expansion than ever before: how can we take in ten new countries at once?

In relative terms, this enlargement is no bigger than when the UK, Denmark and Eire joined. Although there are ten new countries, Poland has more people than the other nine combined, so it's equivalent to taking in two new countries each the size of Poland. The EU's land area will grow by 35%, but its population will grow by just over a quarter, from 372m to 477m.

The EU's GDP will grow by only 8% however. Is it not going to cost us an awful lot of money?

The EU set a cap on the budget for enlargement at the Berlin European Council (summit) in 1999. The financing package agreed at the Copenhagen summit in December 2002 respected that agreement. The new countries will not be eligible for the same agricultural subsidies as current member states for many years.

But isn't that unfair?

The capacity of these countries to absorb large amounts of new money is limited. Indeed, one of the dangers of enlargement is that some new members could soon become net payers into the EU budget because of their inability to take up their full entitlement to the EU grants on offer.

What about free movement of people? Won't we be swamped with immigrants prepared to work for lower wages?

EU countries have the right to impose restrictions on the number of people moving for up to five years. But experience shows that in fact the new countries have net immigration as former leavers return to take advantage of the new opportunities at home. This is happening in Poland, for example.

But if they don't come here, won't our companies transfer production there to take advantage of their lower wage costs?

We live in a global market. Many UK companies are investing in China, where labour costs are far lower than in central and eastern Europe. But freedom to make investment decisions and increase profits helps us all, not least because the public purse collects more corporation tax.

Can you name the ten new countries?

Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Cyprus.

What about Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey?

All three are recognised candidate countries. Romania and Bulgaria are already negotiating accession and have a target date of 1 Jan 2008 for EU entry. Turkey has not yet opened negotiations but might join the EU around 2013 if the current reform programme continues successfully.

How can you integrate an Islamic country into Christian Europe?

Although most Turkish citizens are moslems, Turkey has been a secular state since Ataturk. Moreover, around 6% of the EU's population is non Christian: Germany, France and the UK have significant islamic populations. The new draft EU Constitution embodies Montesqieu's concept of the clear separation of powers between church and state: largely thanks to Liberal Democrat members of the Convention which drafted it resisting catholic attempts to insert clauses about the EU's christian

What role have Liberal Democrats played in the enlargement process?

A very important one. It was Germany's Liberal foreign minister Hans Dietrich Genscher who welcomed east German citizens, leading to the fall of the Berlin Wall. Former general secretary of the German FDP Gunter Verheugen is the EU commissioner who has led the accession negotiations. The agreement to allow ten new countries to join in 2004 was made at the Copenhagen summit in 1992 under a Liberal Democrat president of the EU Council (Danish PM Anders Fogh Rasmussen), a Liberal Democrat president of the European Commission (Romano Prodi) and a Liberal Democrat President of the European Parliament (Irishman Pat Cox). The ELDF Group in the European Parliament was the only political group from which all members voted to allow each of the ten new countries to join.

Are there Liberals in the new member countries?

Slovenia and Bulgaria have purely Liberal governments. Liberals are also in governing coalitions in Hungary, Slovakia, Estonia and Lithuania. The ELDR Group in the EP has sixteen observer MEPs from the ten countries due to join in May 2004.

What criteria do applicant countries have to fulfil?

The EU laid down criteria in 1993 at the European Council in Copenhagen, hence they are commonly referred to as 'the Copenhagen criteria'. They include democracy, political pluralism, an independent judiciary, the rule of law, properly functioning local government, respect for human and civil rights, care for the environment and the existence of a stable market economy capable of withstanding the pressures of trading within the EU's single market.