

NEW AND FUTURE MEMBER STATES - WHAT COULD BE THEIR ASSUMED ROLE IN A 27-MEMBER EUROPEAN UNION?*

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The topic chosen for our discussion today is indeed one of great interest. I would start by welcoming our hosts' intuition, one that challenges us to analytically assess who we are and where we are heading to, in a certain context in which Europe, after the French and Dutch referenda on the European Constitution, is concerned with the present and future of its architecture. We are passing, for sure, through an introspection momentum, a time to evaluate the European role and targets, a time to ask for constructive approaches from all European leaders and for vision necessary for solving this intricate puzzle we name European Union.

The remarkable dynamics of the last weeks proved that the European citizens are concerned with one question: "Quo vadis Europa?", and try to find answers and to influence all political leaders' steps. We saw how important it is that, in order to enjoy peoples' support, the European project has to be presented in a convincing manner and explained properly while answering, at the same time, in a flexible and responsible way, to the signals of the public opinion. It is also extremely important for such a project not to be perceived as a far too distant one, which highly complicates the European scenery, but, on the contrary, as a project bringing the Union closer to all its citizens.

A vote on the European Union constitutional project was bound to unleash, as reflexes for every citizen, not only introspections on the political future of the Union, but also verdicts on the manner in which the European construction responds, nowadays, through national governments' actions, to the legitimate security, prosperity, and identity expectations. Thus, the French and Dutch referenda stressed the relevance of initiating a substantive debate, which could transcend the institutional framework of the Constitutional Treaty. This is exactly what some European leaders expect from the European Council of 16th and 17th of June.

At this point of the European construction, the Union has to find answers for the challenges represented by the need for improvement of its internal mechanisms and the future performance of its institutions, as well as by the delineation of its politics, in order to create a more democratic, more powerful Europe, closer to its citizens and able to assert its role on the global arena.

This is certainly an important time also for Romania, who's getting into the final phase of the accession to the European Union, after the signing of the Treaty. Our country is concentrating all its strengths to successfully finalize the process of

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accession and to promote the Treaty ratification by all Member States. We will join on January 1st, 2007, and we are highly interested in Europe's future, in our role and added value to a 27-member Union, in the manner in which we will promote our national interests and contribute to strengthening the European Union.

It is time, right now, to stress that, from a political and judicial point of view, there is no conditioning between Romania and Bulgaria joining the European Union and the European Constitution endorsement. We are talking about two separate processes, with a well-formalized dynamics. Obviously, we are very interested by the institutional structure and the functional mechanisms of 2007 Europe.

Through this perspective, we are directly involved, as candidate country and observer to the Union institutional activities, in accomplishing the European Union goal of building powerful, representative, and more democratic institutions, able to facilitate cooperation in a broader framework. The European Constitution (and Romania contributed, as an active observer, to its completion and adoption) fully suits the EU objectives and we certainly hope that the necessary solutions are found, so that the European Union fulfills its designed role, following the decision of the other member states.

The contribution of the 10, soon to be 12 new Member States, to the communitarian construction is thus placed among the challenges of redefining the European identity in an enlarged Europe.

The new and future Member States bring to the Union, first and foremost, a profoundly symbolical message, the message of peace, of creating a European

climate auspicious to a genuine fulfillment of the European unity. Given the background of the traumas left behind by the communist era, corroborated with the war period which preceded them, the new Member States are looking to reach a certain solidarity based not on an abstract notion of the importance of peace, but on a new kind of solidarity, a real one, based on the efficiency of democratic institutions and on the consolidation of the free market.

This message represents also the main catalyst of the Union enlargement and the new Member States desire to play a decisive role into further taking this process, so that the European perspective, as a stability and development generator, will be extended beyond the new European Union borders.

In order to face future challenges, such as terrorism, poverty, economic and social discrepancies, the European Union has none but one simple solution: strengthening the European construction. Only a single-voiced Union could represent a real example at global level, and this is exactly the way in which Romania understands and is willing to contribute.

The new and future Member States must play a special role in revitalizing the Laeken Declaration objectives, and in strengthening the solidarity among EU Member States, through a contribution to grand political initiatives, such as The Lisbon Strategy or The Hague Program on consolidating freedom, security and justice in the European Union.

One of the Laeken objectives is to substantiate, through different means, the communication between the European institutions and citizens. This objective became one of the *sine qua non*

prerequisites for advancing the European construction, taking into consideration the fact that the most important EU actions and aims were not, lately, properly explained to its citizens. Lacking efficient communication, people will only see in further EU construction an obstruction to their interest as individuals.

Thus, EU proximity to its people, as well as the sense of solidarity developing among all European citizens, constitute major tasks at the Union level and some of the most important objectives of the new Member States. We have to build a common understanding climate and a true partnership among Member States citizens, and also a climate favorable to the communication between citizens and EU institutions, functioning in the interest of creating the European common good.

As future member of the EU, Romania is interested in transferring democratic values to the near-by areas (the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighborhood), thus contributing to ensuring stability and

security on the entire continent. In this way, we are working in all regional or international organizations that we are part of (such as UN, NATO, SEECP, Stability Pact, BSEC) to encourage the efforts of the states in the Western Balkans and in our Eastern Neighborhood to get closer and to integrate the European and Euro-Atlantic community.

Out of our own experience, we believe that the European perspective represents the proper catalyst for accelerating all required reforms and consolidating the democratic processes.

Therefore, our integration goal is a double-ended one: we want to spread our solidarity towards regional states with European aspiration, as well as to generate positive developments in the European Union, beneficent to all 27 actual and future Member States' citizens. Romania wants to become a fully functional and efficient country in a more functional and more efficient European Union.