

SHOULD THE EU BE ENLARGED?

Günther Verheugen, the EU Enlargement Commissioner, lists three reasons why the current 15 Member States are keen on pursuing enlargement:

1. Stability and democracy
2. A moral obligation to help the victims of Nazism and communism
3. The economic opportunity offered by the new markets of the east.

The experience of integrating Spain, Greece and Portugal has encouraged the present generation of EU leaders to believe that Union membership can cement the transition from autocracy to democracy. The implications of eastern enlargement are complex and sometimes double-edged, however. As noted in the Economist (May 17th 2001), there is a risk that as well as exporting stability, the European Union might import instability. Such instability could arise in one of four ways: in the borderlands of the new European Union; within the new members; within the current 15 members; and through the as yet unpredictable effects of

enlargement on the balance of power within the Union itself.

Although new members have to accept the *Acquis Communautaire*, there must be confidence among all members that the laws and regulations contained therein will be monitored and enforced across the Union. This confidence is frequently tested between “Northern” and “Southern” members within the present EU. It may run even lower between the old and the new members. This may be reflected in the present Member States’ view of enlargement as presented in the chart below. Anxiety about the effects of eastern enlargement is especially pronounced in Germany and Austria, countries that have common borders with the Central Eastern European countries and therefore fear immigration or wage competition most. France is cautious about enlargement for another reason. Here the fear is that Germany, at the heart of an enlarged European Union, will emerge as the dominant economic and political force.

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