

Does a stronger Europe mean a larger Europe? (radio broadcast)

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Nowadays, when all politicians and citizens of Europe are discussing how to plan its development for a decade ahead, two contradicting voices are more and more clearly heard in the European public space.

One of the voices explicitly demands: "Enough with enlargement! We no longer want to cover the expenses of poorer nations because we ourselves are hit by the economic crisis and feel insecure about our future!" Quite on the contrary, the other voice is strongly in favour of an enlarged and more powerful Europe. The proponents of enlargement claim that each new member of the European family enriches the union with its own unique culture and traditions, adding a novel touch that has a positive impact on European economy.

What are the pros and cons of enlargement?

Radio Bulgaria's programme today comes straight from Paris, the capital of one of the founding members of the EU, and goes under the motto ["Europe 2020 – civic vision"](#) implemented within the framework of the campaign "Interacting with the EP". Radio Bulgaria has been a media partner throughout the campaign that has been carried out by the European Institute, Europe Gateway and the Centre for Policy Modernization.

Our common European home. How do we imagine it in ten years' time? Do we picture it as a mighty union of European nations with a decisive role in world politics or simply as an arbitrary group of countries with common borders? Which countries should be admitted to the EU and which not? This topic and a number of related issues were discussed during the round-table held in Paris in which Bulgarian and French experts took part.

"So far, each phase of the Union's enlargement has been the result of certain compromises and concessions. Or at least, this is how it is perceived by people", says Mrs. **Elvire Fabry**, **expert on European institutions from Notre Europe** organization:

"This explains, to some extent, the attitude of citizens because no one really tells them what the benefits each new membership brings. The same thing happened in 2004. French citizens at that time felt that no one asked for their opinion and for this reason they underestimated the benefits of enlargement. And we know that the new member states that joined the Union in 2004 and 2007, including Bulgaria and Romania, put a great deal of effort in carrying out efficient reforms and meeting EU requirements. Meanwhile, within the EU itself, the process of preliminary preparation for accepting these new member states did not take place", Mrs. Elvire Fabry said.

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Is Europe ready to accept the new applicant countries from the Western Balkans?

According to Mrs. **Lyubov Panayotova, director of the European Institute Foundation**, these countries have achieved a considerable progress in meeting the membership criteria.

“By 2020, we expect to have another wave of enlargement, including not only Croatia. Macedonia is also ready. Serbia is making a fast progress and shows readiness to implement certain legislative measures. All this is clearly seen from the latest liberalized regulations related to the lifting of the visa regime for entering these countries. But still, the nations in this relatively small union of but 27 members still do not know each other well enough. I myself can say how little Bulgaria is known outside its borders. Negative messages spread faster and this hinders good communication between European countries”.

Mrs. **Laura Dagg, editor-in-chief of the French Internet media for European policies**

Touteurope.fr, shares the same views. In her opinion, the people from the so-called “Old Europe” are still unable to comprehend the benefits of the accession of the new 12 member countries. The reason is the insufficient information they get but also other aspects:

“I think that enlargement is a very good idea. But at the same time, we should allow some more time to get to know each other better before we accept new members. We could start an Eastern partnership with some Balkan countries and with countries such as Moldova and Ukraine. We have a lot of joint work with these countries but this does not mean that we should necessarily aim at enlargement. As far as Turkey is concerned, it will have to make a real progress in the fields of women’s rights, the justice system, and freedom of religious beliefs, etc. And if there is a positive tendency in these fields, Turkey might take its due place in the EU”, Mrs. Laura Dagg says.

When the enlargement of the EU is discussed, debates always start focusing upon the most controversial application – that of Turkey that has been in the queue of applicants for full membership since many years. Meanwhile, the debates on the pros and cons of a future accession of this Muslim country, which has a very well-developed economy, stirs heated debates not only among politicians but also among ordinary EU citizens.

Why is this so?

“There is a problem and it is that, historically, Turkey has been considered to be an enemy of Europe. And it has been quite reasonable an argument for several decades”, Mr. **Guillaume Jobin, director of Ecole superieure de journalisme de Paris** (ESJ - the College for Journalism in Paris) says.

“These memories from the past are still alive today. On the other hand, European citizens are probably afraid of a Muslim invasion on the continent as they know that some 40-50 million Muslims currently reside in the EU. However, despite being a Muslim state, Turkey is a country situated relatively close. Moreover, the presence of a Turkish population in former Yugoslavian states and also in Bulgaria,

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Austria and other EU members resulted in a successful cooperation between our cultures.”

Should Europe be larger in 2020 in order to be stronger and more efficient? Listen to **the opinions of students** from the High Institute for Journalism in Paris:

“I am in favour of EU enlargement, but my position is still not certain, as far as Turkey is concerned, since there are arguments both for and against. However, considering the efforts that this country is making to meet membership criteria, I will probably vote for its accession into the EU”; Mr. Tristan Michel says.

“An open and multicultural Europe will be much more interesting to see, his colleague adds. But I would also like to see it stronger, with a more communicative policy towards its citizens. Since the problem of Europe is that its institutions are still too far away from people’s everyday life.”

Europe will most likely expand and incorporate several more Balkan states till 2020, but Turkey will hardly be one of them, says Mr. **Alain Dauvergne, former editor-in-chief of the influential French daily Le Figaro.**

“I don’t think that this is a European country, he says. Only a small piece of its territory, some 5-10 %, is situated in Europe, while the rest of the state spreads in Asia. If we decide to accept Turkey, the boundaries of the EU will be stretched too far away, all the way to Asia. Then why should we stop there, why shouldn’t we continue further? In my opinion, it will not be beneficial for the EU to share common borders with countries such as Iran, Iraq and Syria. So, as far as the Turkish EU membership debate is concerned, the trends are not positive. Yes, this is a very important state, very close to us in certain aspects and we should negotiate with it in various areas, including the expansion of the economic cooperation. But I don’t think that it should become an EU member-state!”

According to Mr. **Alain Barrau, head of the EP’s Information bureau in Paris**, the subject of the European expansion is closely related to another essential topic – the one of world security.

“It will be really difficult to develop a successful European defense policy if we do not take into account the third-largest army in Europe – the Turkish one. Furthermore, the EU is a secular institutional structure. However, it won’t be so bad if a big Muslim country, such as Turkey, joins us, since Europe shouldn’t turn into some sort of a Christian club – this is not its goal! Moreover, we are talking of a country where Islam has been preached, at least so far, in a more secular way. This form of social development should be supported!”

“However, the building of United Europe would cause a convergence of values and the ways people think”;, says Mr. **Pierre Moscovici, former French minister of European affairs and current MP from the Socialist party.** According to him, it will be a shame if the EU expansion leads to dissociation of the community, as we see in the case with the debate on Turkey’s possible membership.

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“The public opinion was not favorable for Bulgaria’s and Romania’s accession, too – Moscovici says. – But I think that the joining of Turkey is necessary from a strategic point of view. Moreover, the Turkish candidature was approved at the same time as the ones of Bulgaria and Romania. So Turkey should join if it meets the criteria. But if it fails to do so, this country would simply not join the EU. The negotiations should be really objective! However, from a political point of view, I support the joining of Turkey in the same way that I supported Bulgaria and Romania.”

You can find more photos, videos and comments from the round table in Paris on the website of the project <http://parliament.europe.bg>. There, you can also see the book “Europe 2020 – civic vision” written by experts from the European Institute within the framework of the campaign “Interacting with the European Parliament”.

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