
Context, strategies and negotiation methods in the European Union Enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

After almost a decade since the enlargement of the European Union to Central and Eastern Europe, history can be read with the clarity that time offers. The context, strategies and negotiation methods of 1997-2004 can be analysed more carefully now, because the consequences of those negotiations are felt even today. Covering under the mask of enlargement, we notice the fear of the westerners towards the new Member States which brought in a different history and risked disturbing a system that has been painfully set up since the 1950s. But at the same time, we notice the desire for moral revenge of the candidate countries towards the old EU members. In this study, I analyse the merit of Günter Verheugen, the technocrat who found the right language and strategy to reconcile these two perspectives and who adapted to the present interests of the two parties.

Keywords: enlargement, European Union, Günter Verheugen, negotiations, Central and Eastern Europe

The preliminaries of some complicated negotiations

THE BATTLE OF interests among the major actors of the international system at the end of the Second World War generated an essential transformation of the map of the Old Continent. States were being split into two major ideological groups: the old democracies and the “people’s” democracies. Beyond the semantics of these concepts, there was an arbitrary division which did not respect the generous Wilsonian principles of democracy in the international system or the elementary principles of international law. As from 1945, Central and Eastern Europe realized that the centre of its interests had shifted to the East. From now on, it would belong to a different world. W. Churchill’s speech in spring 1946 drew the final conclusions of the war, without leaving a crumb of hope to the former leaders of the newly converted communist states.

In the meantime, time was playing against the countries of Western Europe who were

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searching for resources to recover from the war and to regain the path to democracy. They had learned from the serious errors of the interwar period. Solidarity and welfare were beginning to be considered as common goals by the states that were once champions of discord and warfare. Step by step, the project of European unity took shape more pragmatically and more realistically than ever before.

Almost four decades later, the world seemed to be recovering. The communist regimes of Central and Eastern Europe were brought down and the slogan of the newborn democracies was: “Back to Europe!” Similar to some abandoned brothers, these countries pretended to regain their seats at the same table of history from where they had been cast away. But the world was different now. Europe was functioning according to new and well tested rules. These were created so that past mistakes could not be repeated and that European unity would not be undermined from within once again.

Before the new century, Europe was beginning the end journey of a long transition period. It was a transition from one continent divided by two contrary ideologies to unification around a common project. It might be argued that Europe was never united over the past centuries. It is true. But the iron curtain that Churchill lamented about in 1946, separated the common history of the nations of this continent; a history that Central and Eastern European nations wanted to catch up after the fall of communism.

Forty years of communism left many countries in a transitional period from command to free market economies. In order to prepare these countries for future EU membership, the European Union developed some aid schemes and imposed some conditionality frameworks. The reason of these measures was to make economic transformations possible, to enclose the democratic gains, to reduce the scenarios of national conflicts and cross-border security threats, and to further support the strengthening of democracy in the region. (Grzegorz, 2008: 1-28).

Beyond the geopolitical reasons of this enlargement, what we are pursuing in this article is to identify mechanisms for dialogue and the behaviour of two important actors: the European Commission and the candidate State.

New members, new rules

The European Union enlargement to the East began in 1990, when the European Commission proposed that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), jointly with Malta and Cyprus, sign the so-called Europe Agreements, which represented a special kind of association agreements. The goal was to establish a closer cooperation and a free trade area between the European Union and these countries, but also to prepare the

ground for their full EU membership. However, the main element of the pre-accession strategy is the Accession Partnership. This document establishes the priorities and objectives to be pursued by the candidate country before accession.

After approving the accession of Austria, Sweden and Finland to the European Union, the applications that the European Council considered were those of Cyprus and Malta. The Central and Eastern Europe countries were not on the earliest European Council agenda. In this logic should be read the recommendations from Copenhagen (June 1993), some of which then become true “criteria” or more correctly “conditionalities” to start the accession negotiations. In June 1993, the Heads of State and Government of the EU recognized for the first time the opportunity of a European Union enlarged to the East and “welcomed the courageous efforts undertaken by the associated countries to modernize their economies, which have been weakened by 40 years of central planning, and to ensure a rapid transition to a market economy. The Community and its Member States pledge[d] their support to this reform process. Peace and security in Europe depend[ed] on the success of those efforts.” (Copenhagen 1993). In the same time, the leaders of the EU stated that the “membership presupposes the candidate’s ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.”

A pre-accession strategy set out in the European Council in Essen (1994) when the Heads of State and Government decided to constitute a single group of countries signatories of a Europe agreement with the European Community. As observed by H. Grabbe, this pre-accession strategy required detailed legislative action that the CEE states had to adopt, but in a limited number of policy fields. It started the making process of the accession conditions with regard to specific requirements, but only in a selective manner, putting first only a part of the *acquis communautaire*. The content of the Essen strategy took into account especially the liberalization of foreign economic relations and the creation of a framework for the free movement of industrial goods, services and, to some extent, capital. Nevertheless, it left out the fourth factor of production, labour, and also agricultural policy, the remaining *acquis* governing the single market was given less attention and the calendar for a decision in this regard was left vague, introducing the principle of gradual adoption of EU norms. (Grabbe, 1999: 11).

Applications for membership of the EC were formally presented by the associated states beginning with 1991. Romania presented its application in 1995, along with the Czech Republic, the Slovak Republic, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Bulgaria.

In that year, the Cannes European Council admitted the importance of preparing the EU for a new enlargement. For this reason, the EU needed to adopt “any other measure deemed necessary to facilitate the work of the institutions and guarantee their effective

operation with a view to enlargement.” (Cannes, 1995). In other words, it was time for the EU to start its own preparation for new members and to consider “the lessons which [could] be learnt more than a year and a half after the entry into force of the Treaty on European Union. (Cannes, 1995).

The simple statement of intention to apply for EU membership was not a sufficient condition for starting accession negotiations. The fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria was completed by a new conditionality inserted by the Madrid European Council : “the adjustment of their administrative structures”. (Madrid, 1995).

Due to major differences between the candidate countries, initially, the EU enlargement was seen achievable in two waves: (a) 2003–2006 included Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia; and (b) 2005–2010 for Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Romania and the Slovak Republic.

Finally, the enlargement process was opened at the Luxembourg European Council (12-13 December 1997), and in March 1998 the accession negotiations began with Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia.

Enlargement premises

After the previous failure to join NATO (Madrid Summit, 1997), Romania and other states from Central and Eastern Europe received in the same year from the European Union the same promise that “the door was left open” and that the remaining states had to demonstrate substantial progress in the process of harmonizing their political, economic and legal systems with the EU standards.

The context of the decision of December 1999 to start the accession negotiations with the second wave of the fifth enlargement of the EU was created by the crisis in the Balkans. German Foreign Minister, Joschka Fischer, said at the Bundestag that this decision had been taken as an acknowledgment of the important role played by some states in the stability of the Balkans.

“Just like the Commission, the German government did not come to an essentially more favourable assessment of Romania’s and Bulgaria’s progress in adapting to the *acquis*. However, the government wanted to repay the two countries’ loyalty throughout the NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia and the Kosovo crisis. Moreover, the step towards negotiations – whenever they may be concluded – signals the Union’s concern for stability and that Romania and Bulgaria belong to the *Europe of integration*.” (Institut für Europäische Politik, 1999: 29).

On these grounds, the recommendation of the European Commission, from the 13th of October 1999, became clearer. The European Executive noted among other things that “the negotiations with the candidate countries should follow a differentiated approach, allowing each candidate to progress through the negotiations as quickly as is warranted by its own efforts to prepare accession. This means that, instead of opening an equal number of chapters (total is 31) for all candidates the EU would decide to start negotiating on a particular chapter after an assessment of the progress made by the candidate in the relevant field in accordance with the Copenhagen criteria. One of the advantages of this new procedure will be that each country will be able to proceed on merit, including the possibility for those who join the negotiations from 2000 to catch up with the others.” (European Commission Delegation, Washington, 1999).

This working method of “catching up” proposed by Commissioner for Enlargement, Günter Verheugen, opened the possibility to a particular negotiations map, and the chance to a rapid evolution in the negotiation process, taking into account that “progress in negotiations must go hand in hand with progress in incorporating the *acquis* into legislation and actually implementing and enforcing it” (Helsinki, 1999).

Regarding Member States’ positions on the inclusion of Romania and Bulgaria in the second wave of this enlargement, we notice the Dutch observations arguing that “partial membership should never become a permanent alternative for real accession. It should only be a last solution in order to prevent a division in Europe or to keep the enlargement process going. Transitional periods for candidates in certain policy fields might be necessary, but should be as short and exceptional as possible and should never be introduced in the field of the internal market.” (Institut für Europäische Politik, 1999: 31). This was the most explicit position of a Member State, which announced difficulty of the negotiation process for some states of the second wave.

European and National Frameworks of Accession Negotiations

Regarding the form taken by the new institutional structure to conduct negotiations on behalf of the EU, we retain the guidelines made by Neil Kinnock, commissioner responsible for reform. (Europolitics 1999). The Enlargement DG had a Director-General, four Directors “(one responsible for pre-accession coordination and three responsible for negotiating teams)”, and 15 Units. It is subsumed the Task Force on Accession Negotiations, the Directorate for Central and Eastern Europe in DG IA, and a “strengthened” TAIEX (the Technical Assistance Information Exchange – which channels the practical assistance to candidate countries). The territory covered by the new DG included the

ten candidate countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Malta, Cyprus and Turkey. The European Commission was still planning to publish its regular reports on the candidates in mid-October 1999.

Finally, the new Romano Prodi Commission modified the institutional structure. A new “Directorate General Enlargement” was set up to deal with the overall enlargement process. The former Commission services “Task Force Enlargement” and DG I A thus became part of DG Enlargement. The head of the new DG Enlargement was Eneko Landaburu, former Director-General of DG Regional Policy. The accession negotiations were led at several levels: ministers, officials and informal meetings. In this scheme, DG Enlargement should work as mediator between the parties involved. The Directorate General came under the coordination of a Commissioner, whose portfolio included the enlargement and the European Neighborhood Policy. The new Commissioner appointed was Günter Verheugen, former German deputy foreign minister.

In 1999, one question posed by Institut für Europäische Politik to officials from Member State governments was: “How does your government assess the incoming Commissioner for enlargement G. Verheugen and the new administrative arrangements inside the Commission in the light of the enlargement and the negotiation process?” Many of those asked have described Commissioner G. Verheugen in a favourable light: “has taken a pro-active high-profile approach to enlargement and the negotiation process” (Finland), “more appreciated by French leaders” (France), “a concentration of competencies and management capacity” (Germany), “an able person” (Spain), “a very experienced and strong person who is backed up by a big Member State. [...] is a master of the details and has a strategic view” (Sweden). (Institut für Europäische Politik, 1999: 18-23).

Internally, each candidate country established its own institutional structure designed to prepare the accession negotiations. Most candidate countries and their negotiating teams were under the prime minister’s authority or any other institutions created for this purpose and which belonged to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In some applicant states, the chief negotiator for European Affairs is the vice-prime minister, while in other states it is the vice foreign minister. The candidate states chose between one of these variants. Thus, the Czech Republic, Cyprus, Estonia, Latvia, Malta and Hungary have created bodies subordinated to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, while in Bulgaria, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia the negotiating teams were subordinated directly to the Prime Minister. (Brussis, 2000, p. 12-13). Romania’s case is different from any other candidate country. Within the Romanian government there were a Ministry of European Integration and a National Delegation attached to it. The accession negotiations were led by a deputy minister, chief negotiator with the EU.

The institutional system for preparation of negotiations within each candidate state

reflects certain features that are specific for the national or political environment or are necessary to ensure better preparedness to fulfil the accession criteria. The closest examples we can provide are those of Bulgaria and Romania, two countries remaining in the second wave of EU enlargement.

Bulgaria's Negotiating Delegation was under the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its work was supervised by the Council for European Integration, body acting under the Prime Minister's coordination. Romania created a Ministry of European Integration, which had a subordinated Negotiation Delegation, headed by a deputy minister, chief negotiator. Following a change in the government structure, in March 2004, the government was divided into three main sections, each of them being subordinated to a Minister of State with the rank of the Deputy Prime Minister. Thus, the Ministry of European Integration, the Ministry of Defence and the Ministry of Justice are subordinated each to one of the three deputy prime ministers. The modification of the government structure led to a closer collaboration between the ministries responsible for the remaining negotiation chapters in question.

A notable fact also was the bureaucracy that characterized these institutional structures. For example, the staff of the Government Office for European Integration of Slovenia had about 90 people, while State Secretary for European Integration of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs comprised about 100 people. It was driven by the need to prepare the state's legislative and institutional EU accession.

In preparing the EU accession negotiations, each state had to set up advisory committees made up of politicians, ministers, academics, civil society representatives and employers' representatives. All this shows the importance attached by officials to the negotiating process.

Enlargement logic in the view of the new commissioner

In 1999, Günter Verheugen had some interventions on the future of EU enlargement. For the beginning, I chose here to analyze two speeches of that year. The first is from the period when he was Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office and the second was held two months after his investment as Commissioner for Enlargement.

In the beginning of 1999, Günter Verheugen, Minister of State at the Federal Foreign Office, published an article in which he analyzed the German agenda during the European Council Presidency. According to him, 1999 was not a historic year due to the introduction of the euro, but because of the European Parliament elections at the turn of the century in view of which the main goals were: peace in the outside world, and sta-

bility, security and economic prosperity within, combined with high employment levels. Which were the expectations of European citizens, after the failure of Jacques Santer Commission because of corruption allegations, but also in face of the growing challenges of globalization and global interdependencies?

Günter Verheugen listed some of them:

- “They want a European Union which takes the fight against unemployment seriously.
- They want a European Union which can hold its own in global competition.
- They want an effective and capable European Union which sets about the necessary internal political and institutional reform.
- And they want a European Union which guarantees peace in the whole of Europe and which shows unity and determination in foreign policy matters.” (Verheugen, 1999: 4).

Starting from these expectations, the future commissioner proposed some solutions, such as:

- a European Employment Pact:
 - the extension of the Trans-European Networks and projects to promote growth in the telecommunications and information technology sectors.
- the internal strengthening and development of the EU, focusing on Agenda 2000:
 - adoption of Agenda 2000;
 - implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam.
- enhance and further develop the European Union’s international profile:
 - the need of a strategic vision for the enlargement process, but also a sense of realism (“ability to enlarge and ability to accede must go hand in hand.”);
 - EU-Russia cooperation;
 - New Transatlantic Agenda. (Verheugen, 1999: 4-12).

During this discourse, we can identify the elements of a pragmatic approach that comes from a specific analysis made by a state actor capable of determining the general behaviour of other state actors and, finally, of the organization itself. In the spring of 1999, Günter Verheugen expressed himself on behalf of the German state. The same individual actor will change his discourse while performing a function that represented exclusively the European Union. At the same time, we see now a change of content in his discourse, but also a change of perspective in its implementation.

In his speech at the conference “The Second Decade towards a New and Integrated Europe” in The Hague (4th of November 1999), Verheugen spoke as Commissioner for Enlargement, and the topic of his discourse was “Enlargement: Speed and Quality”. One month before the European Council in Helsinki, the Commissioner for Enlargement

said: “the Commission proposes that negotiations should now be opened with all other candidate countries that meet the political criteria”. (Verheugen, 4th of November 1999). In this respect, the new Commissioner proposed a change of method:

“Opening negotiations with six candidate countries that still differ in their state of preparations demands that the negotiating process be clearly differentiated from the very outset. This clear differentiation is central to what the Commission is proposing. [...] negotiations on a particular area should be opened on a country-by-country basis, taking account of each country’s state of preparation. Negotiations should proceed on the basis of merit, not on the basis of compassion. That is why the monitoring of the preparations by the candidates will be intensified.”

(Verheugen, 4th of November 1999)

It could be observed a new method concerning the dialogue between the Commission and the applicant countries. If beforehand all candidate states began the negotiations for the same chapters simultaneously, in the autumn of 1999, the Commissioner for Enlargement proposed a negotiation “on a country-by-country basis”, allowing each applicant to choose its own speed for preparation.

Arguments, methods and techniques in G. Verheugen’s negotiation strategy

Verheugen’s mandate in charge of Enlargement could be shaped into six phases, some of them with an interchangeable relation: (a) Promoting the new method of negotiation (1999-2000); (b) Preparing the European Environment (2000-2002); (c) Full negotiations (2001-2002) – with all 12 candidate countries; (d) Follow-up negotiations (2003-2004) – with Bulgaria and Romania; (e) Consolidation of results of negotiation (2003-1st half of 2004) – in the 10 newcomers; (f) Finalizing the accession negotiations (2004).

Enlargement had to be justified before the European public. The European Union citizens were confronted with a large-scale process which offered to Eurosceptics a wide expression against this approach. The European Union proposed to enter into a global competition, and this meant strengthening its own position.

Commissioner Verheugen’s arguments brought this approach on political-economic, and moral-historical levels. In his speech from October 2000, Verheugen spoke to the European citizens about the enlargement as a guarantee for the peace between the peoples of Europe, which could provide stability and new opportunities. Faced with the fear of the “new”, the Commissioner assured that “Enlargement is not a shot in the dark. It is being prepared as thoroughly as possible.” (Verheugen, 3rd of October 2000). In the

same speech in Parliament, he emphasized the historical and moral value of this process towards the new democracies of Central, Eastern and South Europe. Hence the belief that “without the prospect of European integration, the countries of Central and Eastern Europe could not have managed the process of transformation so rapidly or so successfully” (Verheugen, 3rd of October 2000). This speech was criticized by Salvatore Engel-Di Mauro, in an article that compares enlargement with a new form of colonialism. For this author “[t]his administrative and institutional transposition is reinforced by capital flows. Settler colonialism is much less brutal than Enlightenment in «safe» Eastern Europe countries (as occurred in Spain, Italy, and Greece earlier) and the migration of EU capital to exploit cheaper labour-power and purchase property in Eastern Europe.” (Engel-Di Mauro, 2001). This critique was a characteristic feature of the first decade of this millennium, when an increasing number of authors expressed anti-globalist views.

However, the Commissioner’s optimism remained high. After the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, arguments became increasingly more pragmatic: “Enlargement is the instrument for preventing political and economic conflicts and tensions before they arise. It is the instrument for ensuring that differences are resolved without violence and by means of consensus. It will therefore serve to make Europe a safer place for its citizens than ever before.” (Verheugen, 27th of November 2001).

On the other side, Verheugen brought into discussion - increasingly often - the two dimensions of the European enlargement process. This is a process that involves two aspects: deepening and widening. The context of this analysis was created by the adoption of the Treaty of Nice, which came to prepare the EU for the integration of 12 new Member States. The complexity of this process and the mosaic of interests of the actors involved prove nothing more but the fact that “living in Europe means to live with compromises.” In fact, as the Commissioner remarked, the European Union enlargement and deepening are processes that must take place at the same time in order to avoid imbalances. (Verheugen, 11th of April 2002).

The innovation of Günter Verheugen in 1999 was the change of the method of negotiation. In April 2000, the new Commissioner laid down the three principles of the negotiations:

- The first of these principles was: each country will be judged according to the actual progress it has made. No country must wait for another;
- The second principle is: each country has its own separate negotiating process in accordance with its needs and abilities;
- The third principle is: the countries which have only been negotiating since the beginning of 2001 should have a fair chance of catching the others up.

“There are no political rebates on accession, so I am against forming any groups of applicant countries for political reasons or devising any purely political accession scenarios. The pace of the negotiations the Commission deems necessary will not impair their quality or the actual membership preparations. So at the moment there is no need to discuss dates. We should stick to the principles which have proved their worth.”

(Verheugen, 2nd of April 2000).

The principle of evaluating the individual performance of each candidate country in the preparedness for accession was triggered by the earlier experience with the countries from the first wave. They were simultaneously engaged in the same negotiation and the chapters were simultaneously closed with all states. This negotiation style, specific to the multilateral GATT rounds, would give little chances for the new applicant states to catch up the frontrunners and to close negotiations simultaneously.

Verheugen often tried to explain this method of negotiation. “Catch up” is an approach that offers an equal framework to candidate countries for progress. The distinction between “Luxembourg Group” and “Helsinki Group” is purely technical, without any geographical or political connotation. Membership is conditioned by the full satisfaction of the Copenhagen and Madrid criteria. The method of “catch up” strengthens the principle that chapters are opened and closed according to the degree of preparedness and actual progress of the negotiation. Verheugen said: “we cannot help them catch up by slowing negotiations with the frontrunners. We can help them, but not by leaving their neighbours in the waiting room.” (Verheugen, 3rd of October 2000).

Arguments have been developed by the Commissioner for Enlargement also in the implementation of the new Reform Treaty of Nice. In mid-January 2001, the European leader considered the “catch up” method as a tool to stimulate the states of the second wave to accelerate domestic reforms and preparation for accession negotiations. (Verheugen, 10th of March 2004).

During the entire preparations for EU accession, Günter Verheugen was Enlargement Professor and Advocate. Professor as a European bureaucrat who has proven professionalism, competence, tenacity, and openness to dialogue with the candidate countries. Advocate as a dialogue partner with the candidate countries. For five years, Verheugen always found relevant arguments to support his own optimism toward increasing the preparation capacity of candidate countries. The European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council recognized Verheugen’s competence, so that his arguments were in the end resonant among European decision makers.

The negotiations had a different dynamic from country to country, but the stipulation of the accession conditions and negotiation principles determined the creation of a clear

framework for dialogue, and the candidate countries could evaluate their progress. If in April 2000, the Commissioner Verheugen stated that it was not yet time to discuss the accession dates, as the negotiations progressed the date became increasingly certain for most candidates. A year later, Verheugen said that the year 2002 had become a realistic goal for the completion of negotiations “with those countries that have met all the conditions by that date, thus enabling them, as first announced in Nice, to take part in the European elections of 2004.” (Verheugen, 3rd of June 2001). In June 2001 the commissioner could not say whether the states will have completed the negotiations by 2002, but he was certain along with the other European leaders that for Bulgaria and Romania a later date for the conclusion of negotiations was more realistic.

The complexity of the negotiating framework involves the participation of many decision makers: the Commission, the European Parliament, Member States, public opinion, the candidate state. In such a puzzle of interests, the pieces were hard to match, the difficulty coming also from the quality of communication. For example, in the case of Romania, the rapporteur of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the European Parliament tried to influence the MEPs decision by always criticizing and giving severe evaluations of the progress achieved by the candidate state in meeting the requirements for membership. In fact, this was the game arena of political interests. In his speech before the EP in Strasbourg on 12th of June 2002, Commissioner Verheugen explained to the MEPs the importance of the signal that they should send to Bulgaria and Romania in the context in which they remained the only members of the group of 12 who were not able to complete the negotiations in late 2002: “Both countries therefore need to receive a clear signal that enlargement train has not left Copenhagen without them. The signals are still at green.” (Verheugen, 12th of June 2002). His quality of negotiation strategist came to light again when he assumed certain proposals for improving and enhancing a pre-negotiation strategy for the two countries and providing additional assistance. In a subsequent intervention before the European Parliament, the Commissioner took into account that Romania and Bulgaria [had] set 2007 as their indicative date for their accession: “The Commission will strongly support the two countries in achieving this objective. In the meantime, we propose a gradual but substantial increase in pre-accession assistance for those countries.” (Verheugen, 9th of October 2002).

However, the completion of the negotiations did not mean for the European Commission the completion of the preparations for membership. First, it was necessary to ratify the Treaty of Nice. Verheugen’s appeal was addressing Irish voters because the future of the new EU Member States depended on their vote. On the other hand, there remained to be solved the “financial package” and “the institutional questions”, especially those

concerning representation in the EP. Finally, the preparation assumed that the candidates had to honour the commitments that made to the EU during the negotiations.

A comprehensive analysis of the state of preparedness of the two countries' accession was made in the debate on the Monitoring Reports and Regular Reports at the EP plenary session on 10th of March 2004. It was reaffirmed the principle that "each country is judged on its own performance." In this respect, both Bulgaria and Romania had to bring their administrative and legal systems up to the EU standards.

Final remarks

We can observe in all public speeches made by Günter Verheugen that he used an optimistic and realistic approach within a framework which became more political. The Commissioner presented always the advantages of enlargement for all the parts involved. It is his genius to feel the sense of the European future.

The arguments of Verheugen for a wider enlargement were historical, geographical, social and political. Had Europe prepared for this process? Absolutely: NO! The desire of the central-eastern European countries to come back in Europe was an idealistic approach. Europe was substantially changed between 1946 and 1991. Economically, the 15 countries were implied in a different logic of development and in a different working system. Psychologically, the old member states were not prepared to open their labour markets to the newcomers. The four freedoms were designed for the old states rather than to these newcomers. The enlargement negotiations were like a puzzle of national interests. The main approach was an intergovernmental one.

During this game, the main player was the European Commission, which has managed to become the vehicle for this extensive process.

In his approach as European Commissioner for Enlargement for a five-year term, Günter Verheugen has helped countries in Central and Eastern Europe to complete their transfer from the status of communist states to the real qualities of democratic countries with market economies. Beyond the criticisms that were made during his mandate, Verheugen continued Helmut Kohl's, François Mitterrand's and Jacques Delors' reunification of Europe by repairing an "accident" of history from the middle of last century, which led W. Churchill, yet too late, to remain surprised in front of an iron curtain which divided the continent. Verheugen realized the historical value of his mandate, and a careful analysis of all his speeches and activities of 1999-2004 reflects the ability to become a man of his time.

Once these issues have been defined and assumed by both sides, negotiations were

held in their technical dimension. The remaining issues will be identified, selected and examined when the diplomatic archives will be available to historians.

The geopolitical interests of EU enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe are pretty clear judging from the point of view of the crises experienced by the continent at the end of the 1990s. The new EU Member States can interpret this enlargement as compensation for laying off the course of history on a napkin near a cup of coffee and a cigar.

At the same time, the perspective of joining the European Community determined the candidate states from Central and Eastern Europe to assume their role as members of the European space and to bridge some of the gap that separated them from the former victorious states of the Second World War. The road is still in its beginning and the process involves a degree of transformation in the internal organization of the new Member States which calls for the full participation of the future generations as long as the European Union will last.

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CONTEXT, STRATEGIES AND NEGOTIATION METHODS
IN THE EUROPEAN UNION ENLARGEMENT TO CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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