

Move toward unification not without challenges

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London – Profound and peaceful change is at work in Europe – change that will affect the way European countries relate to one another, the way European countries relate to one another, the way the Continent sees its place in the world and the way it relates to the United States.

Encouraged by the successful introduction last month of the euro, which came about with surprising ease, the European Union will seek now to create a confederation that acts – in politics and economics – as a cohesive unit.

The *outlook is good, experts say, but the challenges are still monumental*. Among them:

- In the next two to five years, the impoverished states of Eastern Europe are to join the much wealthier members of the European Union.
- Once the union grows to embrace more than 25 nations, immigration policy will become an even more serious issue: some in Western Europe believe that the poorer states to the east may be incapable of controlling their borders, which could flood the European Union with undocumented immigrants.

Creating Europe

Most countries in Europe are the size of American states. By creating a sort of *United States of Europe*, proponents of integration hope to give Europe greater power in global markets and enough heft to provide a counterweight to the United States in world affairs.

If the union's most ambitious hopes are realized, the world will witness the birth of a new *superpower* during the next decade. But the idea for European union arose not from a longing glance at the world stage but from an inward look at *the continent's history*. Europe, the birthplace of two of the 20th century's greatest cataclysms, World War I and II, has learned its lesson, experts say.

"The fundamental core of the decision to create

'Europe' was a *strategic decision*," said Franco Pavoncello, a political scientist at John Cabot University in Rome. "What really moved the forefathers of 'Europe' was the realization that without the relinquishing of violence, this continent was basically doomed."

Violence in the Balkans, particularly Macedonia, could still pose a problem experts say. But they expect Europe's major challenge over the next decade to be not the containment of war but the management of integration.

That *integration got a major boost* this year with the introduction on Jan. 1 of a new common currency, the euro, in 12 of the 15 members of the European Union. Changing the currencies seemed a huge challenge but came off virtually without a hitch.

"All of a sudden, I think that this was a much better idea than they thought it was," Pavoncello said. Fortified by this success, Europeans will probably allow the pace of integration to pick up.

The United Kingdom seems likely to scrap its currency, the pound, and adopt the euro within a year or two. And the union's current 15 members – Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom – will see their numbers grow substantially.

Changing the equation

Ten countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Malta and Cyprus – hope to join the EU in 2004. Bulgaria and Romania could join 2007.

But those are poor countries. Their per capita production is just 40 percent of the level in countries that are now members.

Because of that, said Chris Brown, a professor of international relations at the London School of Economics, *the impact of integrating Eastern Europe will be "massive"*.

"The existing European structure is unstable",

Brown said. If a dozen new countries are added, he said, the confederation will either have to become much looser – or much tighter, along the lines of the United States.

Creating economic integration on paper is not the same as creating it in fact, which poses a problem for the effort to have a common economy and support a common currency.

“The fundamental element which you have, for instance, in the United States, to *redress economic imbalances*, which is people picking up in a U-Haul and moving from Michigan to California, is really missing for Europe, where people in Sicily are not going to pick up on a truck and go to Helsinki simply because there are more jobs there”, said Pavoncello.

Also, he said, expansion of the union raises questions about the capacity of the various countries to *regulate immigration*.

If the new countries are admitted, he said, “Once you’ve managed to enter into Hungary, then you’re in. So the issue is how can Hungary guarantee, for instance, that you won’t have 100,000 Armenians all of a sudden all across Europe, or for that matter Azerbaijanis, or whatever.”

Combating terrorism



Christian Lutz / Associated Press

The war against terrorism will continue to play a role in Europe’s relationship with the United States, said Dick Leurdijk, of the Clingendael Institute of International Relations in the Netherlands.

European leaders have made clear, Leurdijk said, that when the United States attacks another country, they will need much more information about how particular targets can be justified.

If the *coalition against terrorism* were to fall apart, he said, America would fight on alone – and might withdraw its troops from the Balkans before Europe could maintain the peace on its own.

But most European experts predict clear skies. “I see a period of growth and stability in Europe in the next decade”, Pavoncello said. “I think that there are conditions for this continent to progress in peace and in greater integration.”

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