



**Central and Eastern Europe:
Neighbourhood, partnership
and stabilization agreements in transition**

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The tensions and dilemmas surrounding the European Union's relationship with its eastern and south eastern neighbours are as enormous as they are labyrinthine. Our neighbours' desire to participate in European expansion and the European Union's current quandaries surrounding its own internal cohesion and autonomy are virtually contradictory. As a result, the problems of leadership, which arise from the need to produce cohesion and consolidation across a broad spectrum of issues bearing upon security stability, trade and politics, present a challenge tantamount to squaring the circle. How can Europe produce credible policy with respect to her neighbours and their legitimate interests when the internal pressures upon it pull it in diametrically opposed directions? At the most rudimentary level the European Union's neighbours to the east and south-east have huge expectations of becoming full partners in the European enterprise in a situation where the Union, desirous as it is of cultivating fruitful partnerships and promoting the freedom of movement of goods, services, money and people throughout the continent, is incapable of accommodating them institutionally. Thus the problem turns out to be: how to Europeanize our neighbours without promising them membership. It is indeed a matter of squaring the circle.

To reiterate: the Union has a vital interest in promoting the four freedoms in the Balkans and the various countries making up the former Soviet Union and consolidating their friendship at the same time that its own internal consolidation prohibits further enlargement. You might say that our very concern with "ever closer union" between the existing member states precludes extending the Union farther now. In this situation firm leadership is necessary to inspire confidence. That leadership role in turn requires competence, consistency and reliability of the European Union in a situation where logical consistency is scarcely possible. However, it is important to point out here that we are not referring to personal characteristics, as important as they are, but to intellectual qualities and moral values that must be institutionalized in the form of policy and anchored in practice with integrity in its execution. *Ad hoc* solutions in specific case are the most workable but they hardly constitute a policy and may in fact hinder the development of one.

Our relations with our eastern and south-eastern neighbours is further complicated by the fact that it is scarcely possible to bring all of the issues involved – security and defence, trading and finance, ethnic and political -- under one policy umbrella. Yet, if we do not, i.e., if the European Union is perceived as wishy-washy or irresolute with respect to, say, the criteria of reform that it requires of its neighbours for facilitating good relations with them, that will be evident to them and "they will take us for a ride" to paraphrase Ambassador Jandl.

The situation thus requires a coherent policy but the circumstances prevent us from being consistent. Steffan Jerneck is certainly right to insist that there cannot be any automatic stepping stones to European Union membership and there is certainly no sense in raising people's hopes only to dash them. What is needed is a sense that the European Union remains *constant* (a keyword in the vocabulary of Justus Lipsius, arguably the founding father of Westphalian Europe) despite the impossibility of being logically consistent in policy matters. Put differently, European Union policy has to be perceived as based upon a kind of integrity, which is not the integrity of individual persons or even of nations but the integrity of the Union itself. Substantial policy measures and firm, reliable actions speak for themselves in this respect. They are the guarantors of good will.

Steffan Jerneck is certainly also right in emphasizing the role that solid business agreements can play in building confidence. Successful large-scale business relations demand intelligence discipline and diligence; they produce cohesion, which can be the basis of further co-operation.

We have seen in the remarks of Ambassador Vukovich that the current Russian trade offensive is motivated by a felt need to use the economy to produce such cohesion in society, i.e., by combating “brain drain” there and establishing permanent partnerships in economic enterprises that will modernize the country (and even contribute to its democratization). Moreover, successful economic partnerships with countries like Switzerland and Norway are useful reminders of how well things can go in partnership with the European Union. Their relevance as models for developments in Central and Eastern Europe should not be overstated but it should not be understated either.

Regional action to confront regional problems and support regional undertakings is certainly advisable. However, Branislav Stanicek has pointed out that it is not always clear just what constitutes a region in Central and Eastern Europe. Here the transition that NATO is undergoing may provide us with some clues. The need to respond with the devolving American presence in NATO will be met by the formation of battle groups such as the Nordic one that already exists. Common interests with respect to security and defence issues help define regions. Discussions of security and defence in transition will certainly be capable of enlightening us about other aspects of neighbourhood policy.

Finally, the dubious successes of utilizing enlargement as an instrument of reform is a constant reminder to us within the European Union that enlargement is out of the question under the present circumstances. But that should not blind us to the spell-binding character of the Union in the eyes of aspirants, who understandably say “if they can make it, so can we!” That should make us all the more aware that it has to be part and parcel of our strivings towards “ever closer union” that we consider just what we want from a putative member state.