



## Five re-launch scenarios

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*Notwithstanding the euro, the enlargement, intervention in the Balkans and its role in the Middle East... European politics appears to be undergoing a phase of stalemate and distrust – a context that makes it hard to understand which “school of thought” will finally emerge the winner*

The European Union is a *sui generis* international organisation of the supranational and intergovernmental type, whose competencies have been progressively enlarged to areas earlier handled autonomously by member States.

By signing the European treaties, the member States decided to cede part of their sovereignty and delegate some of their decision-making powers to Community institutions that they themselves set up.

These are independent organisations representative of national as well as community interests. The European Union is hence an international player of the first order: a protagonist in global trade negotiations and an independent monetary entity, it is present, including militarily, in many crisis areas and forms part of contractual processes such as the Road Map and the initiatives to stop Iran’s nuclear programme.

The enlargement of its borders is the primary demonstration of the European Union’s exceptional force of attraction and the finest aspect of its foreign policy. Two years on, the biggest enlargement to have taken place since the creation of the European Union has proved to be not only a great political victory but also a success in economic terms. The European Commissioner in charge of enlargement, Olli Rehn, recently confirmed that efforts to speed up the process of EU membership have produced an acceleration of economic growth in the 10 new member States (EU-10) of 3.75% a year on average from 1997 to 2005 (they have hence done better than the older member States – the EU 15 – which grew by an average of 2.5% over the same period).

The enlargement process is not complete: the European Union is preparing for Bulgaria and Romania’s forthcoming entry, having already started negotiations with Croatia and Turkey. The EU has also acknowledged the former Yugoslavian republic of Macedonia as a candidate for membership and is preparing to acknowledge the candidature of Albania, Bosnia Herzegovina and Serbia, with a question mark as regards Montenegro and Kosovo. Meanwhile, Ukraine and Moldova are knocking on the Union’s door, encouraged by a European Parliament and Council of Ministers that have never excluded a European policy of proximity or nearness as the prelude to candidature for membership.

The enlargement has reinforced the image and international role of the Union, increasing its influence and strengthening its projection towards non-European areas. However, like all periods of profound change, it has generated a number of problems. The political and geopolitical management of the enlargement of the Community’s borders is a fiercely debated terrain where rival interests and visions

clash. Until today, the Union has avoided specifying the extent of its final borders, considering that this would undermine the credibility of its policy of stabilising and promoting democracy in critical areas such as the former Soviet republics and generally weaken the EU's force of attraction. This is particularly true as regards Russia (as far as Vladivostok), the former Soviet States in the Caucasus and Central Asia (which form part of the European Council and the OCSE) and Israel.

In the context of the dual need to maintain a balance between enlargement and "going deeper" with the process of European integration on the one hand and keeping in mind the dominant positions in European public opinion on the other, a recent exchange of views among the various European Foreign ministers has brought to light the need to slow the pace of enlargement. The European Parliament too has displayed its new preference for a system of multilateral relations as an alternative to enlargement, with territorial expansion guidelines that respect geographical borders. However, the combination of pressure from the U.S. administration and demands from countries outside the Community's borders is objectively pushing in the opposite direction, i.e. to let the European Union remain simultaneously an area of development and stability and a continuously evolving world whose borders remain voluntarily unspecified.

Apart from the debate on the Community's borders, it is necessary to emphasise that one of the strategic factors of greatest political impact is that the European Union's international projection goes well beyond the enlargement of its borders. The Union established preferential relations with the African countries a long time ago; these have since taken root and expanded in the spheres of the economy, politics and joint safety.

This framework includes the European Neighbourhood Policy as well as the dialogue with the Gulf Co-operation Council, bilateral and multilateral accords on the management of migratory flows, border control and the fight against organised crime and terrorism. Considering the uncertain scenario that we have been experiencing in recent years, the European Union hence takes on a strategic role of dialogue between the Arab world and the West.

Notwithstanding the significant achievements of recent years (as mentioned earlier – the introduction of the euro, the enlargement, intervention in the Balkans, a growing role in the Middle East and with Iran and the agreement on the Constitutional Treaty), Europe – and European politics in particular – is currently undergoing a phase of stalemate and distrust. There has been talk for too long of an "institutional crisis", without Europe managing to find a single line of shared action instead of 25 individual national responses.

Institutional reform of the Union therefore remains absolutely topical and necessary. The need for suitable institutional policies as well as tools to continue the process of enlargement is increasingly recognised. The Constitutional Treaty was drawn up to create a more transparent decision-making system in the EU. One of the Treaty's principal objectives is to clarify the powers and responsibilities that are the province of the EU and those that, on the other hand, remain the domain of member States and regional authorities. Today, the idea – expressed by the Constitutional Treaty – that European integration should be based on direct expression of the people's will





and the legitimacy of national governments is encountering the increasingly widespread distrust seen in member countries and their determination to defend national sovereignty.

No precise indications or strategies have emerged in the wake of the rejection of the Constitutional text in the French and Dutch referendums and the proclamation of an indefinite and unspecified period of reflection, followed by the interesting Europe-wide public confrontation of ideas and suggestions started with the so-called Plan D (Democracy, Dialogue and Debate) and strongly desired by the EU's Institutional Relations and Communications Commissioner Margot Wallstrom. The inability to develop really precise strategies can be seen in the difficulty with identifying a single solution among the five schools of thought that have emerged at the Community level:

Continue the ratification process: A position officially supported by many members of the European Parliament and the governments that have already ratified the treaty. Considering that at least 80% of member countries has already ratified the treaty, it is held that it is up to the EU Council to decide how to proceed with the countries that will not ratify. For the nine countries that have not so far expressed their opinion, the ratification process must necessarily continue so as to reach a consensus in 20 of 25 countries, as is expressly envisaged by Declaration 23 that accompanies the Constitutional text.

"Social Declaration": Spurred by British Liberal MP Andrei Duff and Johannes Voggenhuber, a member of Austria's Green Party, the European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Parliamentary Committee came up with the idea of adding a "Social Declaration" to be annexed to the Constitutional text to satisfy the requirements of France and the Netherlands. The idea is to leave the Constitutional text as it is only if accompanied by significant measures to reassure public opinion. This approach should open the way to French and Dutch ratification, avoid fresh ratification in the countries that have already adopted the Constitution and allow it to be operational by end-2009.

Nice-Plus: This hypothesis, strongly supported by the French President Chirac, takes the role of national Parliaments into consideration and suggests that reforms that have already been negotiated (such as those in the fields of foreign policy, safety and justice) be made operational in the context of the existing legal framework.

"Cherry-picking": There is a group of countries that believe the



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Constitutional Treaty is now dead, although they maintain that this cannot cause the end of Europe. The solution proposed and strongly supported by French Interior minister Nicolas Sarkozy suggests having Parliament adopt only the first and second parts of the Constitutional Treaty, while the other parts, which have not gained a Community-wide consensus, can be approved afresh without any changes to the Treaty.

“United States of Europe”: Based on the assumption that Europe must go ahead, the Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt has proposed the creation of a “Euro-nucleus” of countries (the 12 euro area countries) that are readier than the others to take steps ahead in the economic, political and decision-making spheres. According to Verhofstadt, waiting for all member States to agree on the more advanced decisions is a mechanism that slows growth and competitiveness.

A stalemate was inevitable after the shock of the French and Dutch “No” and it would be short sighted to interpret it as being indicative of what will happen in the medium and long term.

The issue therefore remains open, both because institutional reforms are a vital need for the functioning of the Union and because the number of countries, including Italy, that maintain that reform is indispensable are largely in the majority.

The experience of decades shows that a divided, quarrelsome and sluggish Europe, which is incapable of acting speedily and effectively, can only worsen the crisis of consensus from which it suffers. Overcoming the limits that the current institutional set-up and procedures place on the Union’s ability to act is therefore indispensable, not least to defend what has been built up to now. A modification of the treaties is absolutely necessary to overcome these limits, but it is just as fundamental to seek the support of European public opinion.

Whatever the modalities used to emerge from the political impasse, it is necessary to emphasise that the peoples of Europe are ever more tightly linked. Europeans can boast of a formidable cultural legacy, which is the foundation of present-day Europe. Europeans have overcome geographical, religious or political divides and mutually influenced and enriched each other over the centuries to build the common legacy that the multiple cultures of the Union can call upon. In fact, although they are different from each other, the European people share a history that gives Europe its place in the world, a history from which its specificity derives.

\_Following the rejection of the Constitutional text in the referendums, a public confrontation of ideas was started at the European level by the so-called Plan D, which was strongly desired by the EU’s Institutional Relations and Communications Commissioner Margot Wallstrom (facing page). This has created various schools of thought, such as Belgian Prime Minister Verhofstadt’s proposal to create a United States of Europe, French Interior Minister Sarkozy’s “cherry-picking” idea and “Nice Plus”, strongly supported by French President Chirac