

## 'Quicker, larger, more flexible' from the Süddeutsche Zeitung (16 February 2000)

**Caption:** On 14 February 2000, the German daily newspaper Süddeutsche Zeitung considers the consequences of the enlargement of the European Union on the way in which the Community institutions operate.

**Source:** Süddeutsche Zeitung. Münchner neueste Nachrichten aus Politik, Wirtschaft, Kultur und Sport. 16.02.2000, n° 36; 56. Jg. München: Süddeutscher Verlag. "Schneller, größer, flexibler", auteur:Ulrich, Stefan , p. 4.

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## Quicker, larger, more flexible

By Stefan Ulrich

The formula which Europe's architects can be heard mumbling in Brussels, Berlin and Paris sounds rather like an incantation: "No enlargement without reform; no enlargement without deepening; no enlargement without reform..." These murmurings, uttered in beseeching tones, are presumably meant to calm a citizenry suspicious of the forthcoming enlargement to the East. They are meant also to give our leaders the impression that they are doing something about the dangers which the Union is now courting with the accession of up to a dozen new members.

"No enlargement without reform" — that signifies: the Union cannot be allowed to grow larger until it has become more efficient, more transparent. "No enlargement without deepening"— that is to say: The Community of 15 must begin by strengthening the ties that bind it together. If these demands are taken literally, then the governmental conference which is supposed, beginning today, to pave the way for EU enlargement will need to renovate the European house from the basement up.

And yet the great reform will not be happening at this conference. Most Member States are against. Germany for instance, because it worried that the accession process might fall behind schedule. It can be assumed too that the summit to be held at the end of the year in Nice will settle for a modest set of reforms. The number of commissioners will be restricted and there will be a reweighting of votes in Council. That is something, but not enough. It does nothing to lift the threat of the new pan-European Union becoming a crippled giant.

The governments in Berlin and elsewhere now protest that across-the-board reforms will come —not quite yet, admittedly, but later when enlargement is well underway. But is this assurance honest? Is it realistic? In its current form, the Union is already making heavy weather of reform. So it is that the Maastricht Treaty agreed in 1992 almost came to grief on the no-vote by Denmark's citizens. Five years later, in Amsterdam, the Member States proved unable to reach an accord on important innovations. The latter are now back on the table at the governmental conference as left-overs. If the 15 find it such hard going, how is a 27-member Union going to manage?

27 Member States means 27 powers of veto. For amendments to the Treaties call for the unanimous vote of all Heads of State or Government and ratification by all the national parliaments. In many countries the people's endorsement is also required, so that in future the MPs of Slovenia or the citizens of Estonia could paralyse the EU. Just how real that threat is is clear from the Haider debate. A No from Vienna is quite enough to stop reform and enlargement in their tracks.

So if the great reform fails to come about this year, should not enlargement to the East be deferred? There is really no point in debating that issue. It is now a *fait accompli* that enlargement is on the way soon. The governments in the East and in the West have long since got used to the idea. In other words, the Union will be going into what may be its greatest adventure with undue haste. It will for decades be busy integrating the newcomers and will have no energy left to catch up on the process of reform and deepening which had had to be postponed. Worse still: the rush into enlargement could leave the Union faced with a fatal choice — either the enormous antagonisms between its members blow it apart or it degenerates into a glorified free-trade zone.

The Commission, the Parliament and some of the governments are perfectly aware of the danger. They will, at the reform conference, be fighting for a way out of the dilemma. "Flexibilisation" is the magic word. What this means is a Europe moving forward at different speeds. A few Member States willing and able to do so could grow together faster than others. The precedents are there: the Euro and Schengen groups. This strategy could be applied to areas such as defence, foreign policy and justice.

A flexible Europe along these lines would not shatter. Paralysis could also be avoided in this way. There would, however, be the risk of a number of members being shut out, of the EU turning into an inextricable

tangle of alliances, into a sort of à la carte Europe. Three things can be done to prevent this. The first can be put as follows: whatever is on the table gets eaten. There must be no retreat from the current level of integration. Secondly the chefs in Brussels must not offer a free choice of dishes; two or three menus only should be on offer. One could be called *Federal State* and encompass common currency, armed forces and economic policy. Another could sport the name *Federation of States* and contain the existing EU ingredients. And finally: the ultimate aim must still be for all to end up with gastronomic menu at some point.

A Europe moving forwards at different speeds is far from ideal but that is the price to be paid for rapid enlargement. And there is nothing new about the idea. Once already six States opted for integration. They founded the European Community in Rome in 1957. The project proved such a success that more and more countries chose to join and today even the Community's erstwhile enemies in the East want to get in on the act. What was true then is true now: the continent needs pacemakers that will pull the others along in their wake. If every country walks in step, Europe will be marking time.