

THE EUROPEAN COMMON GOOD

A Statement on the Enlargement of the European Union

29th April 2004

Introduction

1st May 2004 marks a momentous development in Europe's history when ten new members join the existing fifteen states to form an enlarged European Union (EU). Enlargement should be celebrated as a healing of the divided continent and as an opportunity to develop greater solidarity between rich and poor. This complex process inevitably brings with it fears about identity, sovereignty and material well-being. These must be taken seriously and considered with respect.

Yet, despite its flaws, the EU has been a powerful source for the promotion of peace and prosperity and enlargement strengthens its potential for developing further the common good. For enlargement to work, the EU's existing richer members need to show the generosity and vision necessary to create real solidarity with the new poorer countries entering the Union. This has been done in the past, for example, when central EU funding helped Ireland and Portugal to develop their economies and the new members deserve similar support.

What is Enlargement?

The accession of ten new members is so important because it brings to an end the division of Europe that emerged as a result of the Second World War. From the end of the War in 1945 until 1989 when the Berlin Wall fell, Europeans found themselves alienated from each other by the Iron Curtain. It was only with the collapse of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe that the cultural, political and economic ties that had traditionally bound Europe began to be renewed. For Pope John Paul II, enlargement will begin to allow the 'two lungs' of Europe to be brought together again. This process begins on 1st May with the acceptance into the EU of eight Central and Eastern states (the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) and two from the Mediterranean (Cyprus and Malta).

Although the European Community has undergone several expansions in the past, such as when the UK and the Republic of Ireland joined in 1973, the addition of ten new states simultaneously is unique and will result in an EU with around 452 million inhabitants. Once the 'candidate' countries enter the EU their citizens will enjoy all the rights and responsibilities of existing member states including those of free movement and employment within the Union, although some of these provisions will be phased in gradually.

In order to join, the ten candidate countries have agreed to a number of stringent conditions so that their political systems and economies will converge with those of the existing members. This process has involved complex negotiations between the European Commission and the candidate countries over the terms of membership and the steps needed to ensure compliance with EU law. These measures require a stable democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and a functioning market economy. By promoting these standards for membership the EU has acted as a powerful stimulus for democracy within the region.

A Community of Values

For the Bishops of England and Wales, enlargement offers an opportunity to celebrate the cultural richness and diversity of Europe and to reflect on how it can help to develop the common good of all Europeans. Equally, enlargement offers Catholics a chance to look at

the moral values that remain the only sure foundation for Europe's future. For the Church, the primary purpose of any political authority is to promote the authentic development of its peoples and to work in openness and solidarity with the international community. Alongside its profound humanist tradition, Europe also has a darker history of warfare, racism and totalitarianism, and so there is a special imperative on Europeans to create a culture of reconciliation and peace. This remains an urgent task, as the continuing turmoil in Kosovo demonstrates.

If the EU is to flourish, it is essential to continue building a community of values based on respect for the dignity of the human person and the family, an objective that goes far beyond the creation of a single market in people, goods and services. This vision was underlined when Europe's bishops gathered in Rome at the 1999 Synod to discuss the challenges facing the region. The bishops urged European leaders to:

"Raise your voices in the face of the violation of human rights of individuals, minorities and peoples, beginning with the right to religious freedom; pay utmost attention to everything that concerns human life from the moment of its conception to natural death and to the family based on marriage; these are the foundations on which our common European home rests...respond, with justice and equity and with a great sense of solidarity, to the growing phenomenon of migration, and see in it a new resource for the future of Europe; make every effort to guarantee young people a truly humane future with work, culture, and education in moral and spiritual values. "

The Challenges of Enlargement

The future of the European Union and the wisdom of wider and deeper integration have been divisive issues within British public life. Clearly, as with any complex phenomenon, there will be legitimately different perspectives about the desirable future direction of the EU. It is not the role of the Bishops' Conference to prescribe a particular position to the Catholic community on controversial issues such as monetary union. However, following from their duty as moral teachers, the Bishops are very conscious that there are public policy issues that will need careful scrutiny.

Amongst these is the question of what solidarity means in an enlarged Union of 25 members. To what extent, for example, are wealthier EU states prepared to create a culture of acceptance for migrants, voluntary and involuntary, from poorer countries? Migration remains a deeply contentious issue but willingness to welcome migrants and asylum seekers and their gifts remains an essential element of any civilised polity. It is also important to remember that Britons enjoy a corresponding right to work and travel throughout the EU - something which has helped the UK immeasurably. Allied to this is the question of the EU's openness to the wider Europe and to those countries which remain outside its borders. The European Union is not a synonym for Europe, and nor is it the only institution that can help foster solidarity.

Imagination and energy are therefore needed to prevent a new rigid political division replacing the Iron Curtain, and to ensure that the needs and concerns of the EU's neighbours are taken into account. This commitment to openness will be particularly important as further enlargement is considered so that the legitimate aspirations to membership of countries such as Turkey are treated fairly and transparently. Further, the expanded Union must recognise its moral obligations to the developing world, not only through its aid programme, but also by ensuring that its economic power is used to promote fairer trading conditions. Another moral imperative is the fulfilment of internationally agreed targets such as the Millennium development goals which seek to halve global poverty by 2015.

In addition, if it is to retain legitimacy on the eyes of its own citizens, the EU will have to tackle major constitutional challenges. Perhaps the gravest of these is the perceived distance of its electorates from the Union's institutions and decision-making procedures. To be sustainable, a polity of 455 million people requires not just democratic and accountable institutions but also a moral vision. A constitutional treaty that helps to secure these, and enjoys popular legitimacy, is vital if enlargement is to be a success. European politicians face a critical test of leadership over the next months in codifying the principles that will ensure that their peoples and parliaments feel empowered to help shape the EU.

Within the constitutional treaty, it will be important that the role of the great faiths, especially Judaism and Islam, in shaping European culture is recognised. We trust that the unique contribution of Christianity will be acknowledged as one of the sources that will nourish the Union's future. Within our own community, it is helpful to remember the involvement that Catholics and the Church's social teaching have had in the creation of a peaceful and democratic order in Western Europe, for example, through the work of figures like Robert Schuman, Jean Monnet and Konrad Adenauer. Ideas and principles drawn from Catholic teaching such as subsidiarity and solidarity are also powerful tools for sustaining a moral vision of the EU. The Church, drawing on its experience of reconciling unity and diversity must continue to try and work in many different ways for the benefit of the whole continent.

Conclusion

Ultimately, the new European Union is going to be what we the citizens make of it. That is why the EU needs a culture of active and educated citizenship, especially amongst its young people who are the future and hope of Europe. In this regard, participation in the elections to the European Parliament that will take place between the 10-13th June is important and needs every encouragement if the EU is to enhance the common good especially of the poorest and most vulnerable. If we take seriously this obligation to be active and informed citizens then we can begin to realise the vision that Pope John Paul II described in *Ecclesia in Europa*:

"Be Certain! The Gospel of hope does not disappoint! It is the invitation to everyone, believers and non-believers alike, to blaze new trails leading to a Europe of the spirit, in order to make the continent a true common home filled with the joy of life."