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**EU POLICY TOWARDS  
RUSSIA AND UKRAINE<sup>1</sup>**

**INTRODUCTION:  
THE EU'S NEW EXTERNAL BORDER**

At the European Council at Copenhagen in December 2002 the historic decision was taken that ten new states will become members of the European Union in 2004. One of the consequences of this enlargement is that the EU's external border will shift decisively eastwards. The current EU-Russian border with Finland will be extended to include borders with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland (the latter two with the Russian *oblast* of Kaliningrad) and for the first time the EU will also have a common border with Ukraine via the accession of Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. There will also be a common border with Belarus and at some point in the future (perhaps 2007) when Romania joins the EU there will also be one with Moldova.

The EU's new external border has significant implications for neighbouring states. Firstly, their trade with the new EU member states will be subject to the EU's common external tariff and customs procedures and controls. As EU tariffs on manufactured goods are generally lower than those currently imposed by the candidate states the main impact is expected to be on trade in agricultural produce when the EU's protectionist Common Agricultural Policy is adopted by the new members. Secondly, their citizens will be subject to the Schengen visa regime when travelling to the new EU member states.

Inevitably, therefore, enlargement will draw a clear distinction between those states that are *inside* the EU, and those which are *outside* it.<sup>1</sup> On the inside of the

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<sup>1</sup> Elhangzott a BGF Kereskedelmi, Vendéglátóipari és Idegenforgalmi Főiskolai Kar EU-tanulmányok szakirány alapításának 10. évfordulójára rendezett szekcióülésen, a Magyar Tudomány Napja alkalmából, 2002. november 7-8. között „HÍD KELET ÉS NYUGAT KÖZÖTT” címmel tartott konferencián.

Union there is free movement of goods, services, capital and labour. All goods and services from outside must conform to the EU's single market laws, for example on technical standards, which may seem like the imposition of new obstacles to trade. And ordinary people – both business people and tourists – may feel that it is more difficult for them to travel to neighbouring countries than before. Although there has been little open hostility to the prospect of the EU's enlargement in either Russia or Ukraine (in marked contrast to the issue of NATO enlargement), there is growing concern that it may have unwelcome consequences for its neighbours.

## THE POLICY CHALLENGE

There is therefore a clear danger that fifteen years after the end of the Cold War, EU enlargement will seem to be creating a new division across the continent – not this time an iron curtain but perhaps what VACLAV HAVEL called a 'silver curtain' based on disparities in income or a 'paper curtain' of visas and customs formalities. It is therefore widely recognised that one of the greatest policy challenges the EU faces in relation to enlargement is to find ways to avoid creating new divisions across Europe while at the same time safeguarding the EU's external borders and its internal security. As President PRODI said in a speech in Moscow in May 2002:

*We have no wish to see an exclusion syndrome developing on our eastern border. Enlargement must not draw new divisions across our continent. We want our neighbours to be prosperous and stable.*<sup>2</sup>

The concept of 'shared security' is central to the debate: it is important for us that Russia and Ukraine continue along the path of their reforms and develop into stable democracies and successful market economies. Trans-border problems of illegal immigration and organised crime are much more likely to be resolved if the rule of law is firmly established in neighbouring states and their people share in the expected rise in regional prosperity.

Ukraine and Russia will be the two largest of the 'new neighbours' but present very different challenges for EU policy. Ukraine has made what it calls its 'European choice' and seeks full membership of the EU. It is pressing for recognition of its potential candidate state status by getting its Partnership and Co-operation Agreement upgraded to a Europe (association) agreement and its own internal timetable envisages accession in 2011.<sup>3</sup> The problem, however, is

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<sup>1</sup> The concept of 'outsiders' is discussed by S. White, I. McAllister and M. Light in 'Enlargement and the new Outsiders', in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol.40, No1, March 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission at the European Business Club, Moscow 28 May 2002, SPEECH/02/237.

<sup>3</sup> 'European Choice' (Conceptual Fundamentals of the Strategy of Economic and Social Development of Ukraine for 2002-2011), Address by the President of Ukraine to the Verkhovna Rada on 31<sup>st</sup> May 2002.

that while the EU officially ‘welcomes Ukraine’s European aspirations’<sup>1</sup> it is unwilling to put the question of its accession even on the agenda for the foreseeable future. The Commissioner for Enlargement, GÜNTER VERHEUGEN, clearly upset President KUCHMA when they were both speaking at a conference in Salzburg in September 2002 by seeming to reject the prospect of Ukraine’s membership, at least for the next 10-20 years.<sup>2</sup> The danger therefore is that the ‘Turkey syndrome’ is repeated, with the EU running the risk of alienating a large and important neighbour by its apparent unwillingness to welcome it into the EU’s fold.

Russia, by contrast, offers a rather different challenge since it has so far expressed no interest in EU accession. In its Medium-term Strategy on Relations with the European Union membership is expressly ruled out for the period 2000-2010:

*‘As a world power situated on two continents, the Russian Federation should retain its freedom to determine and implement its domestic and foreign policies, its status and advantages of an Euro-Asian state and the largest member of the Commonwealth of Independent States, independence of its position and activities at international organisations.’*<sup>3</sup>

However, the Russian government is increasingly concerned to ensure that EU enlargement does not have a negative impact on its national interests and that it retains its influence over developments on the continent. Fortunately, Russia’s objective of establishing a ‘strategic partnership’ with the EU accords with the EU’s own view of the relationship as outlined in its Common Strategy on Russia but the challenge will be to move beyond fine-sounding rhetoric to develop practical forms of meaningful co-operation.

## THE EU’S POLICY OBJECTIVES

In 1999 the EU made its first use of the new procedure under the Amsterdam Treaty to adopt a ‘Common Strategy’ on both Russia and Ukraine. These two documents set out the EU’s ‘vision for its partnership’ with both countries and give a good indication of the ambitious objectives motivating its policy.

*‘A stable, democratic and prosperous Russia, firmly anchored in a united Europe free of new dividing lines, is essential to lasting peace on the continent. The issues that the whole continent faces can be resolved only through ever closer co-operation between Russia and the European Union. The European Union welcomes Russia’s return to its rightful place in the European family in a spirit of*

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<sup>1</sup> Joint Statement issued at European Union-Ukraine Summit, Copenhagen 4 July 2002.

<sup>2</sup> Stefan Wagstyl, ‘Ukraine’s hopes of EU membership rebuffed’, *Financial Times*. 17<sup>th</sup> September 2002.

<sup>3</sup> Medium-Term Strategy for Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the European Union (2000-2010) is available in English at [http://europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/Russia/Russian\\_medium\\_strategy/index.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/Russia/Russian_medium_strategy/index.htm)

*friendship, co-operation, fair accommodation of interests, and on the foundations of shared values enshrined in the common heritage of European civilisation.*<sup>1</sup>

Similarly, the Common Strategy on Ukraine stresses that:

*The strategic partnership between the European Union and Ukraine, based on shared values and common interests, is a vital factor enhancing peace, stability and prosperity in Europe. ... The EU remains firmly committed to working with Ukraine in order to support a successful political and economic transformation in Ukraine which will facilitate further rapprochement with the EU.*<sup>2</sup>

The Common Strategies identify the Union's 'strategic goals' which are almost identical for both countries. Firstly, the EU intends to support the consolidation of democracy, respect for human rights, protection of minorities and the establishment of the rule of law. All official documents and speeches emphasise that a strategic partnership must be based on shared values and the EU uses political conditionality as a key policy instrument to try to influence its neighbour's behaviour. Secondly, the EU wants Russia and Ukraine to be integrated into a common European economic and social area. This would only realistically be possible if they succeed in establishing stable functioning market economies and harmonise their economic and social legislation with the EU's single market laws. Thirdly, the EU hopes to co-operate with Russia and Ukraine to strengthen European stability and security. As the EU itself prepares to assume a greater regional responsibility for security with the development of its rapid reaction force the possibility for close co-operation with two of the largest military powers on the continent is increasingly important. Finally, it hopes to work together with them to 'meet common challenges on the European continent', particularly in relation to the environment, nuclear safety, illegal immigration and trafficking in people and organised crime and money laundering. Ukraine in particular is regarded as an important transit country providing a conduit for cross-border flows of a wide range of illegal activities. Co-operation on justice and home affairs issues is therefore a high priority with annual Action Plans setting targets and monitoring progress.

## EU POLICY INSTRUMENTS

The Partnership and Co-operation Agreements (PCAs)<sup>3</sup> provide the legal framework for the EU's relations with Russia and Ukraine and TACIS (technical assistance for the CIS countries) is the main source of financial support for their

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<sup>1</sup> 'Common Strategy of the European Union on Russia', in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L 157, 24. 6. 1999.

<sup>2</sup> European Council Common Strategy on Ukraine', in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L331, 23. 12. 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation between the European Communities and their Member States and Russia, in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L327, 28.11.1997 and Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and Ukraine, in *Official Journal of the European Communities*, L049, 19.02.1998.

economic and political transition. It is significant that in the early 1990s the EU adopted a differentiated policy towards the former communist states offering different types of agreements and financial aid for those that were regarded as future EU members from those that were assumed at that time at least not to be potential members. Thus the central and east European states, including the three Baltic states, concluded association agreements (the 'Europe' agreements) with the EU and received support under the PHARE programme, while Russia and Ukraine together with ten other former Soviet republics were offered the much less generous PCAs and TACIS.

There is absolutely no reference in the PCAs to Russia or Ukraine one day becoming EU members and the only future evolution of the relationship provided for in the treaties is the possible creation of a free trade area between them and the Union. Under the present agreement, however, the EU has only offered 'most favoured nation' treatment for their exports and the continuing use of quantitative restrictions and anti-dumping procedures are a cause of considerable resentment. In the longer term, the most significant economic aspect of the PCAs may prove to be the undertaking by the Russian and Ukrainian governments to harmonise their national legislation in a large number of economic areas which in practice means adopting much of the EU's single market *acquis*. As part of Ukraine's national strategy for integration it has adopted a *Concept and Working Programme of Gradual Adaptation of Ukraine's Legislation to the EU Norms and Standards*<sup>1</sup> and legislative harmonisation is currently afforded a high government priority in their strategy to meet the Copenhagen accession criteria. In the case of Russia, however, the absence of the incentive of EU accession has inevitably meant progress on legislative harmonisation has so far been slow. The recent proposal to create a Common Economic Space (discussed below) may provide the incentive that is needed for such a massive administrative as well as political undertaking.

The institutional provisions of the PCAs are very similar to those of the Europe Agreements and have created regular opportunities for political dialogue at ministerial, official and parliamentary levels. There are twice yearly summits between the Presidents of Russia and Ukraine respectively and the EU troika (the Prime Minister of the country holding the Council Presidency, the President of the EU Commission and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy). There are also Co-operation Councils at foreign minister level, Co-operation Committees and sub-committees at senior official level and Parliamentary Co-operation Committees bringing together members of the European Parliament and representatives from the Russian Duma and Ukrainian Rada. Reports from officials in both the Commission and the Russian and Ukrainian administration indicate that these bodies have gradually evolved into mutually useful vehicles for resolving specific issues and for developing new initiatives to strengthen the relationships.

Political dialogue is clearly one way in which the EU hopes to influence the policy of its neighbours, above all in terms of strengthening their commitment to shared values. The operation of the TACIS programme is clearly an even more direct attempt to influence their political and economic transition. The EU is the

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<sup>1</sup> Available on the Ministry of Foreign Affairs web-site at <http://www.mfa.gov.ua/eng/>.

largest international donor of technical and economic assistance but if one takes into consideration the large populations of both countries and the scale of reconstruction needed the funds available seem quite modest; they certainly fall significantly below the levels of financial support the countries of central and eastern Europe are receiving under PHARE and the pre-accession programmes.

Concern about the relative fragility of the democratic system in Russia and Ukraine has led to the TACIS Democracy Programme being afforded priority in the current financial period. In particular, EU funding is provided for the monitoring of elections, supporting non-governmental organisations to encourage the growth of civil society and reform of judicial services and public administration. Other priorities are enterprise restructuring and privatisation, infrastructure modernisation, environmental protection, nuclear safety and particularly for Ukraine, improving border control facilities. It is difficult to evaluate how effective the TACIS programme is in promoting the EU's objectives but it has brought a wide range of people and institutions from EU member states and the Commission itself into partnership, dialogue, and co-operation with their counterparts in Russia and Ukraine. In itself, this is a valuable socialisation process and helps to bring to an end the long period of isolation of both Russia and Ukraine from the rest of the continent.

## **THE NEW IMPETUS IN THE EU'S RELATIONSHIP WITH RUSSIA AND UKRAINE**

During the 1990s the development of the EU's relationship with its eastern neighbours was made considerably more difficult because of the uncertainty about the continuing progress of their political and economic reforms and the financial instability that plagued their economies. The EU was also preoccupied with its own internal agenda, especially the launch of economic and monetary union and the institutional and budgetary reforms required for enlargement. On their side, the Ukrainian and especially Russian governments afforded a relatively low priority to relations with the EU and were more interested in relations with the United States and NATO. However, since the beginning of the new century the relationship appears to have acquired a far greater importance for all the parties concerned and a number of new initiatives have been launched.

The prospect of the EU's imminent enlargement has been a key catalyst for the intensification of the relationship. As already discussed, the EU is acutely conscious that the regional security and stability that is one of the main *raison d'être*s for enlargement could be jeopardised if the countries to the east of its new external border feel excluded and isolated. From the perspective of the governments of Russia and Ukraine, the accession of their central European neighbours makes the EU itself seem infinitely closer and more relevant. Already the EU is Russia's largest trading partner and it is estimated that after enlargement the EU could account for over fifty per cent of its external trade. For Ukraine, trade with Russia and the rest of the CIS at the moment is more

important but the EU's share of its trade is growing and is expected to rise sharply after countries such as Poland, Slovakia and Hungary become members.

Domestic developments in Russia and Ukraine have also created a more favourable climate for closer relations with the EU. In both countries the economy has substantially recovered from the 1998 financial collapse and the more entrepreneurial sectors of the business community are pressing for better opportunities for increased economic cooperation with western Europe. The political climate in both countries is also more stable and although neither conforms to western views on a properly functioning liberal democracy there is enough common ground for normal political relations to be developed. President Kuchma has unequivocally backed Ukraine's bid for EU accession and at least in principle accepted the constraints on domestic policy this will impose. Although not prepared to go this far, President Putin seems by temperament to be a pragmatic westerniser and clearly believes that the key to Russia's modernisation lies with greater integration into the mainstream European economic and social systems. The publication of Russia's Medium-Term Strategy for the Development of Relations between the Russian Federation and the EU (2000-2010)<sup>1</sup> in October 1999 when PUTIN was Prime Minister marked a turning-point in Russia's policy on the EU, outlining the goal of a 'strategic partnership.' The new status afforded the EU by Russia's foreign policy was confirmed in the new Foreign Policy Concept approved by the President in June 2000, where it is stated that '*The Russian Federation views the EU as one of its main political and economic partners and will strive to develop with it an intensive, stable and long-term co-operation devoid of expediency fluctuations.*'<sup>2</sup>

The EU's decision in 1999 to develop a security and defence policy and for the first time equip itself with a limited military capability also enhanced its importance in the eyes of its two large neighbours and opened up new areas of potential co-operation. Generally the possibility of the EU playing a more active role in peacekeeping and crisis management scenarios on the continent has been welcomed as potentially reducing dependence on NATO and avoiding US military involvement.<sup>3</sup> The tragic events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the launch of the international war against terrorism also reinforced the sense of shared security needs and intensified co-operation between police and security authorities and the exchange of intelligence. In his speech to the Bundestag in Berlin on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2001 President PUTIN went out of his way to identify himself with a pro-European policy and called upon Germany and Russia to work together to build a 'united Greater Europe.'<sup>4</sup> At the EU-Russia summit the following month there was a clear determination to upgrade the relationship and there has been real progress over the past eighteen months in several important policy areas.

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<sup>1</sup> Op. cit.

<sup>2</sup> The text is available in English at <http://www.great.britain.mid.ru/>

<sup>3</sup> D. Danilov, 'The EU's Rapid Reaction Capabilities: a Russian Perspective', paper delivered at the IESS/CEPS European Security Forum, 10 September 2001.

<sup>4</sup> The text is available in English at <http://www.great.britain.mid.ru/>

## RECENT INITIATIVES

### *Co-operation on Political and Security Matters*

In the immediate aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup> atrocities, the EU-Russia summit in Brussels in October 2001 adopted a 'Joint Declaration on stepping up dialogue and co-operation on political and security matters.'<sup>1</sup> Regular monthly meetings at senior official level have been instituted between the EU's Political and Security Committee and the Russian and Ukrainian Heads of Mission (ambassadors) to the EU in Brussels. The meetings are largely informal and the agenda covers a wide range of areas of mutual concern and interest in Europe and the wider world. Both Russia and Ukraine have also accredited contact persons to the newly created EU Military Staff.

At the European Council at Nice in December 2000 it had been agreed in principle that non-member states might be invited to participate in EU-led crisis-management and peace-keeping missions and both the Russian and Ukrainian governments have expressed interest in the proposal. In June 2002 the arrangements were finally agreed for consultation and co-operation in the field of crisis management and it seems likely that there will some Ukrainian involvement in the police mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina when the EU assumes responsibility in 2003. All this is still untried but has the potential to upgrade the relationship very considerably.

### *Proposals for a Common European Economic Space*

There was a brief reference in the Joint Statement issued at the end of the EU-Russia summit in Moscow in May 2001 to the decision 'to establish a high-level group within the framework of the PCA to elaborate the concept of a common European economic space (CEES).'<sup>2</sup> At the time it passed almost without comment in the press but in the context of the post September 11<sup>th</sup> new momentum in EU-Russian relations, it has assumed a core position as one of the main initiatives for upgrading the relationship into a more 'strategic partnership'. The importance both parties afford the proposal is demonstrated by the fact that the high-level group is jointly chaired by CHRIS PATTEN, the EU Commissioner for External Relations, and Russian Deputy Prime Minister VICTOR KHRISTENKO. They published a joint report at the May 2002 summit and outlined their vision of what a common economic space might mean in practice:

*'Ultimately, economic agents should be able to operate subject to common rules and conditions in their respective fields of activity throughout the enlarged EU and Russia (a potential market of up to 600 million consumers.'*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> EU-Russia Summit Joint Statement, Brussels, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2001, Annex 4.

<sup>2</sup> EU-Russia Summit Joint Statement, Brussels and Moscow, 17.05.2001.

<sup>3</sup> *Report to the EU-Russia Summit of 29 May 2002 of the High-Level Group on the common European economic space*, [http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external\\_relations/Russia/summit\\_05\\_02/rep.htm](http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/Russia/summit_05_02/rep.htm)

The focus, therefore, is on what is described as ‘regulatory and legislative convergence and the removal of technical barriers to trade and investment’ in a long list of targeted sectors including standards, technical regulations, customs, financial services, public procurement, telecommunications and competition. In practice, it means Russia bringing its legislation in line with the EU’s *acquis*. It is also recognised that it will require Russia to create ‘appropriate institutional structures and strengthen enforcement and appeal procedures.’ This is an enormous task for the Russian authorities and it is still not clear whether the political will exists to undertake it. However, if it could be achieved the common economic space would be very similar in practice to the European Economic Area that integrates the economies of Norway and Iceland so closely to the EU’s single market. In their quest for a marked upgrading of their relationship with the EU the Ukrainian government is pressing for a similar initiative and it is expected that approval will be given for work to begin on a common economic space project at the next EU-Ukrainian summit.

### ***The New Proximity Policy***

At the General Affairs Council in April 2002 the Commissioner for External Relations, CHRIS PATTEN, and the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, JAVIER SOLANA, were asked to prepare a report outlining new ideas on the development of the EU’s relations with its neighbours in the context of the expected decision on enlargement at Copenhagen in December. The policy is still under active discussion but is expected to lead to a decision to upgrade the PCA relationships by offering a new ‘European neighbourhood agreement’ to Ukraine (and probably also Moldova). It is not yet clear exactly what such an agreement might contain, but the hope is that it would serve as ‘an important driving force’ for further reforms.<sup>1</sup> It is also hoped that it would strengthen the potentially positive impact that the new member states could have on their neighbours given the close political and economic relations they already have with them.

This new policy is part of a broader strategy that the EU is currently developing for all the states that President PRODI recently described as being in the EU’s ‘future backyard.’<sup>2</sup> These therefore include the Mediterranean south, the western Balkans and PCA states to the east. What PRODI wants to see is ‘a ring of friends surrounding the Union and its closest European neighbours, from Morocco to Russia and the Black Sea.’<sup>3</sup> He stresses that the proximity policy ‘would *not start* with the promise of membership and it would *not exclude eventual* membership.’ He sees the big advantage of such an approach is that it ‘would do away with the problem of having to say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to a country applying for membership at too early a stage.’ However, he clearly does envisage a

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<sup>1</sup> *Wider Europe*, report by C. Patten and J. Solana, 7<sup>th</sup> October 2002.

<sup>2</sup> *A Wider Europe – A Proximity Policy as the key to stability*, speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, at the Sixth ECSA-World Conference, Brussels, 6<sup>th</sup> December 2002.

<sup>3</sup> All the quotes following are from the speech cited above.

qualitatively different sort of relationship being developed with those states that wanted it and specifically refers to the European Economic Area as a possible model. He argues that participation in the single market, cross-border cultural and regional economic co-operation, and working together to deal with common threats such as regional conflicts, crime, terrorism, illegal migration and environmental dangers are all possible without partners becoming actual members of the EU. He advocates the concept of 'sharing everything with the Union but institutions' to 'extend to this neighbouring region a set of principles, values and standards which define the very essence of the European Union.' These ambitious proposals have yet to be endorsed by the member states in the European Council and translated into specific policy initiatives, but they do give an indication of the debate currently taking place at the highest levels of the Union as the implications of enlargement are being assessed.

## CONCLUSION

The EU clearly attaches considerable importance to developing a comprehensive policy towards Russia and Ukraine and is very conscious that the strategic goals of enlargement depend on ensuring that they too share in the expected increase in stability, security and prosperity. There is a growing economic interdependence between Russia and the EU and enlargement is expected to have a similar impact on EU-Ukrainian trade relations. There is also an increased awareness of interdependence in the broader security fields of terrorism, environmental dangers, regional instability and international crime.

The most important precondition for the development of the kind of close and co-operative relationship the EU would like to have with its eastern neighbours is that their political and economic transition should be as successful as those of the countries of central Europe. The challenge the EU faces is to devise a policy that will serve to encourage and support the desired reforms in Russia and Ukraine and provide mechanisms for mobilising effective joint action in areas of common interest without depending on the leverage afforded by the accession process itself. As has already been discussed, Russia's official policy is not to seek EU membership. Without wishing to preclude a reassessment of their position at some point in the future by the Russian authorities, it is clearly in the interests of the EU to ensure that a viable alternative relationship is offered. Ukraine presents a different challenge in that it is its policy to seek EU membership and it would be a grave mistake to appear to rule that out as a long-term goal. However, the scale of the domestic reforms still needed to meet the Copenhagen criteria for EU accession makes it all the more vital that a new kind of intermediate relationship is developed that will provide an incentive to undertake those reforms and provide tangible benefits in the medium term. The Commission's proposals for neighbourhood or proximity agreements could extend the primarily economic content of the PCAs to include the more recent forms of co-operation in security and defence and justice and home affairs. Because these are areas that fall within the intergovernmental procedures of the EU, they are more easily

extended to non-members and may provide the model for PRODI's concept of 'sharing everything with the Union but institutions'.

Enlargement will inevitably have an impact on the priorities and conduct of the EU's common foreign and security policy. It is hoped that the new member states will bring much needed experience and understanding to the difficult process of devising a policy to meet the special needs of their eastern neighbours. Understandably, the central European states have been preoccupied with their relationship with western Europe during the long period of accession negotiations but now it is time to build bridges of friendship and co-operation across the EU's new eastern border so that the zone of democracy, peace and prosperity will be extended to the rest of the European continent.