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ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION IN 2004 – INTRODUCTION

The accession of eight central and eastern European countries together with Cyprus and Malta into the European Union on 1 May 2004 was a historic moment, which ended years of division. Reunited Europe is a crucial step to democratic and more stable continent, with a single market of 450 million consumers.

The latest enlargement was the biggest in Union history. It followed the birth and a final victory of Solidarity movement in Poland which paved the way to the collapse of communism, symbolised by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. These developments created unprecedented opportunity to extend European integration into central and eastern European countries, which after the second World War found themselves behind the iron curtain. One of the Union's first post-enlargement priorities was to raise the newcomers' living standards, which are all below the EU average.

The long process of preparation and negotiation resulted with ten newcomers joining formally the European Union on 1 May 2004. The enlargement was expected to be significant for economic growth of the new and old members alike. The newcomers are to benefit from investments from firms based in Western Europe and from access to EU funding for their regional and social development. Integration of their economies with the rest of the EU is already under way, as trade agreements, negotiated and applied in advance of membership, have already removed virtually all tariff and quota barriers on their exports to current member states.

According to the Maastricht Treaty, which came into force in 1993, any European state which respects the principles of liberty, democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law may apply to join the Union.

At the meeting in Copenhagen in June 1993 the heads of the EU governments laid down the basic conditions for membership:

- existence of stable institutions guaranteeing democracy;
- rule of law, respect for and protection of human rights and minorities;
- existence of a functioning market economy;

- capacity to cope with market forces and competitive pressures within the Union;
- ability to take on the obligations resulting from the membership, including economic and monetary union.

Before accession the new members had to adopt the *acquis communautaire*, which meant 80 000 pages of EU law, making their bureaucratic and administrative structures more efficient, strengthening judicial systems and tightening security at their eastern borders. They became the external borders of the 25-nation Union. Bulgaria and Romania, two candidate countries which belonged to the second wave of negotiations of February 2000 together with Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia, were unable to accede in 2004 because they were not ready.

There have been fears in the old 15 EU countries about more immigration, an influx of cheap labour and the impact of lower environmental standards. People in the new Member States have worried as to whether their economies could compete with those in the rest of the EU or whether their farmers can stand up to those who have benefited for years from EU subsidies. Similarly to earlier enlargements, safeguard mechanisms were adopted to cope with any unexpected problems. Other issues have been sorted out by the introduction transitional measures which refer to such problematic areas like the free movement of workers or the acquisition of property. The new members have taken up their places in the decision-making institutions of the European Union with no disruption of ongoing business. As far as Poland is concerned, the first year of its membership in the European Union showed that Poland was well prepared for accession. The span of time after May 2004 confirmed that fears and doubts of some of the old Member States of EU-15 regarding meeting by Poland the membership conditions were not legitimate. Although, according to the official analysis, in the case of many phenomena the accession effect is difficult to identify, the accession to the Union without doubts reinforced positive macroeconomic and structural trends in trade exchange, on labour market and especially in agriculture.

The authors of the volume try to look upon Europe after its historical turn concerning the accession of ten new Member States to the European Union in May 2004. It must be emphasised that the papers contained in this volume can neither be complete nor reveal the scale of problems, which can be better assessed only in a longer perspective. Their aim is to map the post-enlargement condition of the Europe from several (associated with the country of author's origin) perspectives.

Daniel Silander describes in his article the process of European integration and enlargement as an instrument of promotion of democracy. He stresses the new role of the EU in determining the future shape of Europe. The

article also sheds the light on the new role of the EU as the norm provider in the process of European integration. Ryszard Machnikowski provides the reader with the picture of Euro-Atlantic relations after the latest enlargement of the European Union. He argues that both Europe and America deeply need each other, and they can and should cooperate, because the world also needs this firm transatlantic partnership. There are a lot of common values and interests, which create a common ground for a close cooperation. Eugeniusz Ponczek presents the process of consolidation of the Polish democratic system in the context of conditions of accession to the EU. In his opinion the Polish full and authentic participation in the political, economic and legal structure of the European Union may appear very difficult, despite a tremendous work done by Poland to adjust to the EU standards. The last contribution by Cesar Villanueva offers an interesting insight into the enlargement of the EU as seen from the position of Latin America. The author tries to give answer to a question: what is going to be the place of Latin America for the European Union after 2004?