

Editorial



Dr. Fritz Franzmeyer,
head of the "International Economics"
department, asks:

"Eastern enlargement versus
Mediterranean policy?"

In accordance with both his characteristic optimism and Germany's wider national interest, Chancellor Helmut Kohl held out to the Polish Prime Minister the prospect of Poland's accession to the European Union before the end of the century. What is sauce for Mr. Oleksy will be sauce for Messrs. Klaus or Horn. They, too, will not hesitate to extend this promise to their own countries. But was the German Chancellor sufficiently aware at the time of the Union's agenda over the next few years? Moreover, was it correct to make such a wide-ranging statement, placing an obligation on European heads of government and parliaments?

In both 1996 and 1997 the EU will have its hands full with the revision conference on the Maastricht Treaty and the ratification of the outcome of this conference. This will be followed, until May 1998, by an energy-consuming controversy surrounding participation in the third stage of European Monetary Union: that is, by the search for consensus in the interpretation of the convergence criteria. This will be followed immediately after by the next high-level point on the agenda: the reorganisation of the Union's finances, which is necessary because the EC's current medium-term expenditure plan and its underpinning on the fund-raising side expire in 1999. Given that eastern extension of the European Union will have serious repercussions for the budget, concrete negotiations on accession will have to wait until these questions have been cleared up. Of course, in practice it will not be possible to deal with all of these issues in orderly and consecutive fashion. They are far too closely intertwined. But even an attempt to deal with them simultaneously will not serve to speed up events. Indeed, it is more likely that the excessive burden on political decision-makers will finally result in a delay.

There are probably quite a few heads of government who are actually rather pleased about this. There has, for financial as well as political reasons, been opposition to rapid eastern enlargement in France and Spain, for instance. In fact the political argument would appear to predominate, because otherwise the southern European states would not at the same time be considering another costly political project: the Mediterranean strategy. The aim of this is to counter the growing northern and eastern bias in the Union. Such territorial comparisons are to be found in the financial decisions taken in Cannes and the political decisions taken in Barcelona. Yet Barcelona shows precisely just how poor the prospects for a unified and effective Mediterranean strategy still are. Thus, whatever the special interests of individual Member States or groups of countries, it is important that the priorities of the Union as a whole are not lost sight of. In the coming years the top priority must be to return Poland, Hungary and the Czech and the Slovak Republic to the "European fold". Sooner or later the leading lights among Europe's politicians will come to recognise this. Consequently, there is no cause for the countries in waiting to become impatient and, as is being proposed increasingly often, to be satisfied with a second-class membership status if only accession comes quickly. Even the Chancellor's mill takes time a-milling.