

The reform of the European Union is becoming increasingly unavoidable.

Welcoming Ukraine (and other candidates) raises problems for certain Member States. Unanimity should coalesce around the consequences of a second term of President Trump.

The Commission's decision to recommend the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and to grant Georgia Candidate status is - if the Council votes unanimously in December - a decisive step towards the creation of the EU as a fully-fledged "Power" on the world stage.

There is no doubt that the Commission, led by Ursula von der Leyen, has made significant progress in transforming the institution by giving it a greater political role. The successes achieved in distributing vaccines, in coordinating aid to Ukraine, including the creation of an embryonic common funding mechanism, as well as promoting ambitious projects on global warming, greening of the economy, re-industrialization, securing autonomous sources of supply, reforming the energy market, and, more recently; the revitalization of the enlargement process, all point to an acceleration of the Union's ever closer integration.

Considering the growing awareness of the new geopolitical environment, these developments are to be welcomed; they also present some major difficulties. Indeed, the implementation of these policies implies - within the framework of the current treaties - unanimous votes on numerous subjects where the Members have divergent interests; these will be exacerbated in the enlargement negotiations, both by the weight of certain specific industries in the candidate countries (agriculture) and by the level of financial transfers which will see a large number of Member States change status from net "beneficiaries" to net "contributors" to the Union's budget.

This new direction has been spurred on by the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, symptoms of the growing interference and strengthening of autocratic regimes whose ambition is to reform global governance to their own benefit. Among them, China, Russia, Iran and Turkey are striving to restore a glorious imperialist epoch. They are relying on the resentment of the "global South" towards a colonial past and on agreements such as the BRICS (expanded to 11 members) or the "New Silk Roads", under the aegis of China. Today,

although their interests are often divergent if not diametrically opposed (China-India), they collectively represent a majority of the world's population and a significant proportion of its GDP.

Moreover, it is incumbent on the current EU to give urgent thought to its position in the event of a Trump election victory in 2024. It would be unforgivable and suicidal to gamble on his defeat by waiting for the results before formulating a possible policy reaction. This stance is likely to create a broad consensus, bringing together those who support the idea of a "powerful Europe" capable of determining its own future, those who realize that they carry little weight on their own outside the EU, and those who are viscerally opposed to the domination of the United States. The right conditions could then exist to justify the concessions needed to reform the EU. Thus, instead of confronting their selfish interests, the Member States and/or candidate countries would have to consider the balance for each of them between the positive and negative aspects of the new treaty.

These compromises will be particularly necessary in terms of structure, financing and participation in various EU policies (qualified majority voting, participation in the Eurozone, etc.). Enlargement will bring into the EU a number of Members and a population whose standard of living and level of development are significantly lower than those of the 27, not to mention the cost of rebuilding Ukraine. The possibility of a multi-speed Union will therefore have to be put on the table, offering new members at least, the Union's military and diplomatic protection from the outset.

Their integration could be phased in over time, as they carry out the reforms necessary to comply with the "acquis communautaire"; its final adoption, without any derogation, would confer on them the status reserved for the core members of the Union. This ultimate step implies, in particular, the adoption of the single currency, thus putting an end to the current unstable and ultimately untenable situation, where only 21 Member States are part of the Eurozone. In the process, the € would be considerably strengthened and would become a credible alternative to the dollar.

This fundamental inversion of the accession process would avoid the delay required by the prior negotiation of 35 chapters of Community law, which, because of its length, can become a deterrent (Turkey); all the more so as the candidate countries are powerless in the interim to influence political changes and have no say in the developments within the Union itself.

In return, this gives the Union the **immediate** advantage of projecting itself as a "powerhouse" to be reckoned with on the international stage. Such an approach seems particularly appropriate in the current geopolitical context, where it is urgent for Europe, while maintaining its alliances and Western solidarity, to be able to act independently and to pull its weight in the confrontation that is developing between democracies and autocracies.

Conclusion.

The outcome of the conflicts in Europe and the Middle East is rightly seen as crucial to the survival of Ukraine and Israel; **it is just as crucial to the future of Europe and the survival of the EU and its values.** Whatever the outcome of the US presidential election, the development of alternatives must start now (similar to the planning of a military operation) to avoid being caught unprepared should the United States revise its global positioning. This involves speeding up the creation of a European defense pillar within NATO, rearming its forces, mobilizing its capacity to produce military equipment to be financed by the EU budget. These imperatives can only be met within a reformed and revitalized EU, all conditions which should encourage the Member States to consider, constructively and show the necessary unity to implement a fundamental revision of the existing treaties.

As Paul-Henri Spaak would have said in his day: "It's not too late, but it's time!"

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