

Justifying and communicating eastward enlargement: enthusiasm, disappointment and pragmatism from the perspective of the European Commission, 1989-2004

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Justifying and Communicating Eastward Enlargement

**Enthusiasm, disappointment and pragmatism from the perspective of the
European Commission, 1989-2004**

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Abstract

The main objective of this paper is to study the induction of collective time perceptions by EU institutional actors to implement politically and economically motivated long-term projects through internal and external communicative actions.

Within the different cases and periods analysed, I will specifically explore the perspective of the European Commission in EU's Eastward enlargement internal and external communication narratives from 1989 to 2004, the year of the actual enlargement project implementation. I have chosen to examine the question of the induction of forced transitional time perceptions in the process of enlargement from the perspective of European Commission actors because they assumed they were the self-appointed motor of the EU's Eastward enlargement process.

In sum, this paper aims at opening the debate on the issue of the relationship of change in history with the opposition between the determinism of rules presented as timeless in a constantly extended present and the consideration of new principles once the perspective of a different future is suddenly open.

Keywords

European Commission, Eastward enlargement, Communication Strategy, Central and Eastern Europe, Time perception, History of European Integration, Critical Discourse Analysis

The main objective of this paper is to study the induction of collective time perceptions by EU institutional actors to implement politically and economically motivated long-term projects through internal and external communicative actions.

Through the different cases and periods analysed, I will specifically explore the perspective of the European Commission (EC) in EU's Eastward enlargement internal and external communication narratives from 1989 to 2004, the year of the actual enlargement project implementation.

The main fact that attracts the attention of the reader when examining Commission documents of the early nineties is a pronounced emphasis on the Commission claims on the idea of being "making history", on the "special historical implications" of the turning point implied by the end of the Cold War and its alleged possibility of reconciling East and West and of "finally" making "European politics match with European geography" through the "Return to Europe" of the Central and Eastern European countries.

This epically elaborated rhetoric focused on the search for a new definition of European identity, on a narrative that would give new strength to the creation of a European political community and constituted a new guiding myth for European integration in a time of radical change.

In order to find a precise explanation for those "making-history" claims which constituted the basic legitimating political discourse of the Commission in a time of fundamental change, I have outlined an also precise analytical instrument for this study.

The presence of those claims is a constant in the Commission sources of this period. And therefore the chosen analytical instrument is also related to the EU's political need of emphasising, or apparently generating, historical turning points, "Zero Hours or points of never more"¹ as means of gaining legitimacy. They assume that this legitimacy would make them more bound to generate a favourable policy reception in EU when they feel are suspended by the pure potentiality of a moment of fundamental change. The main objective of such institutional behaviour would be to guarantee the survival of the EU institutional framework, to ideally contribute to change reality and to make the Commission become the first European instance of new geopolitical initiatives. In fact, ways of feeling and living time influence decision-making processes at the EU level as do ways of delivering political messages. In this sense, my objective is to shed light on a normally neglected factor: how determinate time perceptions affect individual and collective behaviours and transform a policy like Eastward enlargement, unthinkable for the EU institutions before the radical changes of 1989, in the focal point of new developments in EU integration.

If the process of European Integration has been seen as a future-oriented one, the turning point of 1989 could have been essential to renew its fuelling energy and appear as the only source of "peace, stability and progress" for the European continent. Perceptions of time in an era of fundamental historical change should not be underestimated among the interactive factors that shape the promotion and materialisation of Eastward enlargement.

Hence, I have chosen a very precise notion of time as my approach for the study of temporal dimensions in European integration since 1989. I have named this concept Illusion of the Neutral Time² (INT). The INT can be defined as an impression of being before an authentic point of departure which, after the analysis of the previous time-patterns, would decide to go towards the implementation of the most desirable realities in human and ethical terms. It can also be understood as an impression of observing reality from the point of view of a new

¹ Persson, H. A and Strath, B. "Time and Space. Introduction to Reflections on Europe as a Political Order" in Perssons, H. A and Strath, B. (eds.9 (2007) *Reflections on Europe. Defining a Political Order in Time and Space*. Brussels: PIE Peter Lang, p. 18

² INT from now onwards.

beginning featured by hopes and fears but especially, by an open time in which either new or largely longed for projects seem to find a favourable ground.

It is, of course, not a reality, neutral times do not exist. It would be enough to think about the terrible war in the ex-Yugoslavia during the nineties to deny the possibility of considering this period hopeful at all. This perception of time exists only as an illusion, as a blind moment of emotion and belief in a changing context. It is typical of any transition period in history, not only of the decade of the nineties. It is not the end of anything but only the illusive impression of a possible new beginning. The term illusion has a twofold meaning. First of all, it refers to the enthusiastic hope for the future and, secondly, to the quality of intermittent mirage that, in the light of unfolding events will see its brilliance erased and its falsity unveiled. On the other hand, the term neutral makes reference to a deliberate discourse on the lack of allusions to ideological attachments in favour of an absolute positive approach in which all, without exclusion, will benefit from enlargement policy. Among the main discursive manifestations of an INT in the European Commission documentation, we should emphasise the so-called “Return to Europe” slogan, which makes a special reference to the idea that after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the definitive moment has arrived to end up with the “unnatural” Cold-War divide and to start a new European path of unity and harmony. The Central and Eastern European countries³ (CEECs) would be, according to such view, coming back to the original European matrix to which they were always supposed to belong. This notion has been increasingly linked by the EU to the assimilation of the Copenhagen criteria⁴ as a source of definition of what the EU and even Europe stands for.

The decade of the nineties would be depicted by such documents as the right temporal soil for the new roots of Europe. The presence of an INT in the sources is, in any case, an assumption that is to be contrasted and verified through the sources themselves. I will focus on the roots, diffusion and uses of this slogan as they reflect the prioritisations of time concerns and historical arguments in the promotion of Eastward enlargement. It could be very useful to analyse to what extent, concepts of time such as the INT exercised their influence over the Commission institutional actors with direct responsibility on enlargement issues.

This essay section is divided into 3 different time periods which express, not the contextual time feelings but the changing characteristics and master narratives displayed in the relevant Commission documents:

-From 1989 and 1993 European Commission communication documents on Eastward enlargement show a phase of enthusiasm: In this phase the INT could be said to motivate political decisions. Enlargement is presented as a historical turning point. There is an impression that European politics could “at long last” correspond to the European geography.

-From 1994 to 2000 the Commission communication documents on enlargement show a phase of impatience and mutual disappointments: The new priority is the deepening with the Maastrich Treaty and the Single Market. In this phase the Illusion of the Neutral Time is an argument of justification and legitimisation.

-From 2001 to 2004, the Commission communication documents on enlargement evidence a phase of pragmatism and expertise: From the Treaty of Nice onwards, the Illusion of the Neutral Time survives as rhetoric and discourse in the communication strategies. It becomes a habit that continues to represent the EU as a “perennial positive” but the initial enthusiasm as conducting thread is lost. This perception of time is the fruit of the realisation of open-ended change since 1989. Some old and new dreams such as the “unification” of the continent and the

³ CEECs from now onwards.

⁴ The Copenhagen criteria are the criteria for accession of new EU member states elaborated by the European Commission officials and launched in 1993. They make explicit the necessary conditions to qualify for a candidate country to integrate in the EU and include principles like human rights, the respect of minorities, having a functioning market economy, etc. For more information, please refer to the first section of chapter three.

creation of a common European identity and citizenship were seen attainable. This realisation and the discourses derived from it were channelled through political decisions, administrative measures and communication strategies in a pragmatic manner based on the technical expertise of public relations companies hired for this purpose.

In 2004, the Illusion of the Neutral Time has survived only as a discourse to legitimate and justify policies which started as impossible dreams. This discourse passed from the communication strategies to public opinion, being the reactions of public opinion to those discourses the last result of that initial perception.

I have chosen to examine the question of the induction of forced transitional time perceptions in the process of enlargement from perspective of European Commission actors because they assumed they were the self-appointed motor of the EU's Eastward enlargement process. In fact, the position of the European Commission in foreign policy questions was very much transformed between 1987 and 1991. This was less the result of the Single European Act than of the earth-shaking events in Central and Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union from 1989 on. Practically overnight, the Commission found itself coordinating the international aid effort to the CEECs, playing a crucial role in the reunification of Germany by ensuring the trouble-free absorption of the former German Democratic Republic (GDR) into the European Community, and negotiating successive agreements with the former communist countries which defined their future relationship with the Community. Due to the perception of events moving really fast in this time of structural transformations, even member states (MS) working in the intergovernmental mode found that the EC institutional machinery too slow in its response to the events. Perhaps the single most striking event to enhance a new and more powerful status for the Commission was the decision of the Western Economic Summit Meeting in Paris in July 1989 to entrust it with the task of coordinating international assistance efforts to Poland and Hungary, extended in 1990 to other CEECs. This marked the acquisition of a new kind of legitimacy for the Commission. This new legitimacy was based on the reception of a mandate from outside the Community.

The Commission's role in negotiating the Community's agreements with the CEECs also conferred on it greater political weight. More so than traditional trade and cooperation agreements with third countries, these agreements had global political significance at a time when both East and West had lost the bearings which had kept them on course for more than a generation, and were facing with foreboding the prospect of an uncertain future. Furthermore, the Community made it plain in 1990 that coordinated assistance should be provided on the basis of commitments from the countries concerned to political and economic reform. This new element of conditionality was an important political factor: the missions to the countries concerned to receive the necessary commitments were carried out by the Commission, which thus became responsible for the pre-eminently political task of verifying compliance with the requirements of conditionality.

For the first time, the Commission was a foreign policy actor in its own right and this role would continue through the whole process of Eastward enlargement, in which the Commission played an unprecedented and fundamental role, also exemplified in the scope and design of the EU Communication Strategy on Enlargement.

Especially during the nineties, the social and political order established after the Second World War changed radically and irrevocably with the fall of communism; the end of the Cold War; a new liberal consensus based on liberal democracy and free market, which became a model for non-capitalist institutions like universities...; an information revolution and so on. These changes also influenced the way people and institutions communicate, because we have passed *from an informational to a promotional discourse*⁵. It is then important to take into

⁵ Fairclough, N. (1995) *Critical Discourse Analysis*. London: Longman, p. 128.

account that contextual institutional narratives like the “Return to Europe” constitute an example of a general trend of the so-called “*from tell to sell turn in discourse*”⁶, as political decision-making will then start to adopt an incorporation of the genre of commercial advertising into non-commercial genres of features.

Once the subject matter is explained, I would now like to address the motivations of Commission actors to induce transitional time perceptions even 15 years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the reception of the Commission enlargement communication strategies and outline the main direction and changes of the process from 1989 to 2004, giving illustrative examples of this.

1. 1989-1993: Enthusiasm or the beginning of promise as a way of life⁷?

From 1989 and 1993 the EC documents on Eastward enlargement show a phase of enthusiasm levered with the initialisation of a conditionality practise in which the promise of an ever-postponed better future for the candidate countries starts to be seen as a perpetual way of life. It is important to remember, as Ulrich Sedelmaier and Helen Wallace remind us that the European Commission is credited with having played an influential role in the EU decision-making process and with furthering the cause of Eastward enlargement. Although we would expect, from a sociological institutionalist viewpoint that the Commission, as the guardian of the treaties, would be committed to the expansion of the community organisation to the successfully socialised CEECs, the pro-Enlargement preference of the Commission is also consistent with rationalist expectations. In a public choice, perspective on bureaucracy, Eastward enlargement must appear as a welcome opportunity to expand the tasks and resources of the Commission⁸.

The phase of enthusiasm common to the political class and public opinion both in the CEECs and at the EU level started after the fall of the Berlin wall in 1989. As the Director of Candidate countries negotiations at the Commission affirmed, “history was giving us a second chance and this time we could not look in any direction but that of the future”⁹. This constitutes a relevant “making History claim”, especially from a person who considered that current enlargement plans to Turkey and the Balkans are more a political obligation to be followed than the historically legitimate reunion of the East and West of the continent after the end of the Cold war.

According to Karen Henderson, “when 1989 heralded the collapse of communism in Europe, the division of the continent, came finally to an end”¹⁰. Hence, the repeated ideal of creating “a truly united Europe embracing both East and West” seemed to become a reality. Within the new democracies of the CEECs, the prospect of joining the EU symbolised the ultimate achievement of returning back to Europe, but the initial excitement was tempered by the gradual realisation that membership was far more than a symbol. It involved not only freedom, democracy and the expectation of growing economic prosperity, but also demanding and pain-staking work in harmonising diverse aspects to the detailed regulations prescribed by the Union’s existing members.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ The idea of promise as a way of life relates to the rapidly diffused impression in many of the CEECs that they were being put in a permanent waiting room to enter the EU. It seemed a horizon that escaped from them whenever they felt they were about to reach it and, at some point, they perceived that being promised a better future without ever achieving it was becoming their particular way of life.

⁸ Sedelmeier, U. and Wallace, H. “Policies towards Central and Eastern Europe” in Wallace, H. and Wallace, W. (Eds.) (1996) *Policy-Making in the European Union*, 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 353-387.

⁹ Personal interview with the Director of the Directorate B in charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 1st of December 2005.

¹⁰ Henderson, K. (Ed.) (1999) *Back to Europe. Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union*. London: UCL, p. vii.

In addition, the meaning that the political actors of the Commission actively defending Eastward enlargement as the best option for the CEECs, give to the decade of the nineties as fundamental historical turning point seems to converge with the academic views quoted above. For instance, the Head of Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs states that:

“The nineties were a real break, you have a shift in terms of the security architecture in Europe, which had also led, in the last decade, to the fact that the United States is the only remaining superpower and that was a total change. But I also think that the nineties were an extremely important phase in the European construction in which we faced major challenges. But, above all, the nineties were the time of moving forward through contradiction”¹¹.

Furthermore, in the opinion of the Head of Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs the decade of the nineties:

“Had political leaders with a great European vision and this favoured the step forward towards enlargement. The capability to reach agreements and to prioritise consensus-building, as well as the generosity showed for example with German reunification is unheard of nowadays. In any case, the concept that best defines the decade of the nineties is illusion, illusion because it starts with a gift of History, like the end of the division of the Cold War. I think that all those who were working at the EU at that time perceived that the nineties were the time of a great illusion”¹².

This initial feeling of “great illusion” pervaded the working atmosphere of the DG External Relations of the Commission in the early nineties and made possible the proposal of the Central and Eastern European neighbours’ accession, which was also rhetorically convenient due to a need to find a counterpart to the failure of stabilising the ex-Yugoslavia. In this very first period, a sense of INT seemed to influence decision-makers, especially, as mentioned before, as the positive side of the medal balanced the dark side of the war in the Balkans. However, as the process went along in the mid-nineties, this fuelling energy started losing credibility and the “making History claim” of enlargement’s East-West reconciliation died as a priority in the foreign policy agenda.

It is important to bear in mind that it was the CEECs that raised the issue of accession to the European Communities and constantly kept pushing the Community for an explicit commitment to this goal. Although the Commission already proposed the negotiation of association agreements in February 1990, it sought to avoid any reference to future accession, which contradicts the idea of the perception of an INT in this initial moment by European Commission officials¹³.

In its communication to the Council en 1990, the Commission stated clearly that the associations “in no way represent a sort of membership antechamber, Membership will not be excluded when the time comes, but this is a totally separated question”¹⁴. This seemed to indicate that decision-makers were not pervaded by a sense of hope and change that inclined them towards the accession of the CEECs to the Community. “When the time comes” could just mean that they would keep the CEECs reforming their economies for the subsequent Community benefit without feeling any obligation to really welcome the Central and Eastern

¹¹ Personal Interview Interview with the Head of Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs and Chief Assistant for Enlargement Policies at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Held on the 6th of February 2004 in Brussels.

¹² Personal Interview with the Head of Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs and Chief Assistant for Enlargement Policies at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Held on the 6th of February 2004 in Brussels.

¹³ Following the first agreements to propose an integration of the CEECs in the EU, there was a sense of immediate reluctance to the unpredicted consequences of such decision. Many Commission officials wanted to backtrack and postpone the ineluctable process of Eastward enlargement, which became a reality thanks to few officials and Commissioners personally devoted to that then improbable plan. Such internal conflict within the Commission makes clear that the perception of an INT was not so pre-eminent. On the contrary, it was tempered by a constant opposition between two tendencies which could well mirror the continued dilemma between deepening and widening in European integration.

¹⁴ *Europe Agreement* 5185, 2nd of February 1990, p. 2.

European neighbours. During the beginning of the negotiations with the CEECs, the EC agreed to a formula mentioning their future membership but only went so far as to “recognise membership as a form of association, but not as the Community’s final objective”¹⁵, as Torreblanca has explained.

In this sense, it is pertinent to quote the Chief Economic Adviser of the DG Enlargement, who asserted that:

“we were not thinking in terms of enlargement at the beginning of the transition even if we knew that these countries would eventually join us, we had a sort of moral duty with the reunification of Europe. But we have done this for our own interest, our economic interest based on the certainty that Enlargement would be cheaper than any kind of association agreement and would benefit our image before the CEECs and before the international community. I do not think that we have done this only for political, historical or cultural reasons”¹⁶.

And another important motivation was that of considering that if enlargement was not pursued, “there was a huge fear that the CEECs would become an American culture”¹⁷.

This view contrasts with the opinion of the former Director-General of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission, who defended the option of EU accession for the CEECs since the beginning and explained some of its related “making History claims”:

“There is no reunification of Europe because Europe has never been united. There were only hegemonic unions, like those carried out by Hitler or by the Roman Empire, always imposing a partial view over a totality. That is why the EU is a complete success because it is the counterpart of the European traumatic past and those countries which enter the European club enter also democracy, a social rule of law and the opportunities of stabilisation”¹⁸.

Furthermore, another important official also said that “the real aim of Enlargement is to overcome, definitely, the History of Europe, which has been the history of confrontation and war. In any case, at the political level, we could say not say no to the CEECs. There was not other choice except going back to the past and closing the gates of History”¹⁹.

Such very strong statements relate also to the idea that the European Union is the culminating achievement of European history. It is the idea that the surprising end of the Cold war is a second chance that history gives to Europeans, a chance that should not be wasted with the creation of new divisions.

On the other hand, the “Return to Europe” slogan was already adopted in the communication strategy of the Commission to the CEECs since 1989. It was born as a way of showing solidarity to the CEECs and as a way of speaking their same language in a metaphoric sense, evidencing that they did identify with these countries’ present challenges. But, as Eastward enlargement was, of course, not already decided in 1989, this slogan was no more than the recognition, at the level of institutional discourse, that enlargement could become an eventual reality and that the attitude of the EC was to remain open to help and assist the CEECs²⁰.

¹⁵ Torreblanca Payá, J. I. (1997) *The European Community and Central Eastern Europe (1989-1993): Foreign Policy and Decision-Making*. Madrid: Centro de Estudios Avanzados en Ciencias Sociales, pp. 40-41.

¹⁶ Personal Interview with the Chief Economic Adviser of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Held on the 29th of January 2004 in Brussels.

¹⁷ Interview with the Chief Enlargement Negotiator, held on the 2nd of February 2004 at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission.

¹⁸ Personal Interview with the former Director General of the DG Enlargement and Chief Negotiator with the Central and Eastern European Candidate Countries at the European Commission. Held on the 4th of February 2004 in Brussels.

¹⁹ Personal Interview with the Head of Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs and Chief Assistant for Enlargement Policies at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Held on the 6th of February 2004 in Brussels.

²⁰ Refer to the European Council’s Declaration on Central and Eastern Europe celebrated in Strasbourg the 8th and 9th of December 1989, p. 1.

After the EC had been extremely cautious not to commit itself to CEECs' membership in the association negotiations, the Conclusions of the Presidency at the Lisbon European Council in June 1992 started to definitely change that initial trend and would put the issue of CEECs Enlargement firmly on the agenda. Thus, the Commission's report to the European Council, created by the First Task Force on Eastern Enlargement, stated that "the principle of a Union open to European states that aspire to full participation and who fulfil the conditions for membership is a fundamental element of the European construction and the integration of these new democracies into the European family represents a historic opportunity"²¹.

Helen Sjursen has also pointed out in this respect that "the EU had to promise that the CEECs could eventually become member states, because this would provide them with a reward for continuing with reforms even as those reforms caused hardship. But, in any case, the sense of duty and responsibility of Western Europe towards the other half of Europe was always underlined"²².

In 1993, the timid and tentative insinuations of the 1992 European Council Document and of the Commission Report *Europe and The Challenge of Enlargement* totally changed the time perception on the enlargement process and its own expected timing. Due to the formulation of the so-called Copenhagen criteria during the Copenhagen European Council, 1993 remains in the imaginary of pro-enlargement EU officials as an essential turning point where the reunification of the European continent was foreseen for a not too far away future. According to the Director of Candidate Countries Unit, "it was in 1993 when we knew that Eastward enlargement was born as a real commitment for the European Union. It was the beginning of everything, a point of no return, desired for many people who have spent years of their lives establishing contacts with Eastern Europe but also for those who opposed the probable cost or the conflicts that the process could bring. In sum, 1993 was the moment. Before, you had just good willingness confronted with much reluctance towards an unrealistic expectation"²³.

The story of Eastward enlargement as the winning option between the new necessary policy options after 1989 entailed the idea of the CEECs' accession over any kind of association partnership. In fact, this very much internally discussed option was a story written by few committed individuals, especially within the European Commission. In an interview with the current Director General of the DG Enlargement, he explained that the personal commitment of those individuals who had a long experience establishing contacts with the CEECs and believed that the future of post-Cold war Europe had to pass by the reunion of the East and West of Europe played a fundamental role in transforming enlargement in the winning option over different kind of vague association projects²⁴. In this sense, their personal compromise was stronger than the conflicts that they created with their choices. In the end, Eastward enlargement

²¹ Commission's Report to the European Council celebrated in Lisbon on the 26th and 27th of June 1992, elaborated by the First Task Force on Eastern Enlargement, entitled "The Challenge of Enlargement" and written by one of my interviewees. The whole text is available in Commission of the European Communities, "Europe and the Challenge of Enlargement". *Bulletin of the European Communities*, Supplement 3/92. p. 9 and constitutes one of the fundamental sources for the study of the early promotion of the Eastward Enlargement of the EU.

²² Sjursen, H. "Why expand? The Question of Justification in the EU's Enlargement Policy". *ARENA Working Paper*. No. 6. February 2001, p. 12.

²³ Personal interview with the Director of the Directorate B in charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 1st of December 2005.

²⁴ Personal Interview with the Director General of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 25th of February 2006. He was the Deputy Director General of both Director Generals and one of the most active promoters of Eastward enlargement since the early nineties, also participating in the creation and directing the DG IA within the DG External Relations, devoted to relations with Central and Eastern Europe.

became a reality “because of these individuals with a clear political vision of the future of Europe, a Europe which would be the opposite to the divisions and conflicts of the past”²⁵.

It is curious to observe that the idea that “peace and security in Europe depend on the success of Eastward Enlargement” starts as a political declaration (with a special focus on convincing fellow policy-makers) but will end up being used as the main argument to explain citizens why enlargement is necessary in the 2002 Enlargement Communication Strategy. It changes, therefore, through time, from a contextual political statement to a seemingly timeless and eternally repeated media message. This could explain also the low public attachment to the process on the eve of the 2004 enlargement. At this point, Inter-institutional and political communication seemed to be enough to legitimate Eastward enlargement and that is why this period could be understood as enthusiastic. Of course, not at the level of political decision-making, but at the level of the own legitimising discourses they were writing. Individual promoters, mainly the new political elites in the CEECs seeking their own legitimacy by “getting things back to their right place” in the sense of claiming their right to a “Return to Europe”, and some believers at the EU institutions materialised an initially enthusiastic generalised feeling. Such discourse survived through time because it became the main way to find a connection with the new leaders of the CEECs, immersed in their own legitimising exercise of recovery of their countries’ historical memory. On the other hand, the decision makers with direct familiar or long-term professional relations with the CEECs personally felt the weight of the “historical debt” of the “reunification of Europe”. They believed in the intrinsic good of carrying it out, increasingly seeing themselves as saviour heroes able to reverse history and turn it back to its “right” rails.

These perceptions also explain the use and abuse of historical arguments in this period: everything is meant to be “because of historical reasons” or to “reverse the mistakes of the past”. Hence, the temporal dimension of European integration in this context should be understood as an automatic first reaction to radical change, which usually dictates that “if you are being given a second chance, amend your mistakes”. In the EU this was being understood, yet by a minority of influential figures, as “let’s take the chance integrate in this seemingly peaceful, well-functioning and prosperity Union what has always been ‘the Other Europe’”, also because of material interests. On the other hand, in the CEECs change was being understood as “let’s ask Western Europe to do the minimum they could do after their secular disregard, let’s claim our right to belong to any Union called European”.

Even, if as the Chief Economic Adviser of Eastward enlargement said, enlargement was just calculated to be cheaper than any other form of association and would grant a glowing image of absolute good in the international arena²⁶, the discourses on enlargement show there were also some priorities at the level of discourse.

The CEECs’ leaders were demanding not only material help for the transition, they also longed for recognition: Recognition of their “natural” Europeanness, of their contributions to European history and culture. They were fighting back to be acknowledged for what they considered their inner self and did not understand why it was necessary to fight (even just within discourses) or to comply with growing conditionality. That is why the analysis of their time perception is also very important.

The Copenhagen criteria opened, officially, the door to Eastward enlargement but they also inaugurated “the time of a promise”. The CEECs felt their own new existence was pending on a promise to be completed. In the early nineties something unprecedented started and it was stronger than in any previous Community enlargement, it was the instauration of promise as a

²⁵ Personal Interview with the Director General of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 25th of February 2006.

²⁶ Personal Interview with the Chief Economic Adviser of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Held on the 29th of January 2004 in Brussels.

way of life. And, as time passed, promise meant less expectation and more relegation. Such temporal feeling then led to the next phase, featured by impatience and mutual disappointments

2. 1994-2000: Impatience, Reluctance and Mutual Disappointments

This section focuses on the period between 1994 and 2000, in which the negotiations between the CEECs' new leaders and the officials in charge of the Eastward enlargement process take place. In this phase, the enlargement process is successively postponed due to the deepening priorities associated to the implementation of the Treaty of the EU and the Single Market. Then the voice of the opponents within the EU institutions is more present and their reluctance awakes a parallel diffidence on the side of the CEECs, whose expectation of coming back to the Western European matrix after the "parenthesis" of communism contrasts with the expectation of a time of institutional consolidation and stability without risks on behalf of the EU actors.

The year 1994 starts full of initiatives and commitments related, partly, to the rhetorical entrapment²⁷ of the Copenhagen criteria and partly to the winning expectation of the political and economic benefits that Eastward enlargement could eventually bring.

One of the most outstanding steps forward regarding the implementation of the EU enlargement towards the CEECs was the so-called *Stability Pact* project, which was adopted by the Council on the base of the Article J. 3 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). This decision was taken on the 9th of June of 1994, nearly one year after the point of no return marked by the 1993 Copenhagen European Council Conclusions, which put Eastward enlargement, definitely, in the "to do" list of the EU integration process during the nineties.

In the eyes of the Director of Accession Negotiations, this period was also pervaded by the fear of ethnic conflict in the CEECs. In an interview I had with him, he explained that "the new emphasis on accession and the will to make the process irreversible came also from the fear to see that the CEECs could become a 'second ex-Yugoslavia'. At that time we did believe that if we did not compromise to accession, the alternative for the CEECs could be political disintegration and ethnic conflict. It was one of the most powerful reasons to give a green light to the Eastward enlargement process and the main motor of the Balladur Pact"²⁸.

In addition, the dense documentation on political compromises of the 1994 Corfu European Council, reaffirmed the Copenhagen objectives and continued the trend to adhere to the option of enlargement, while starting to state the main difficulties of the process, like how enlargement could affect the functioning of EU institutions. It was the genesis of the so-called "pre-accession strategy"²⁹. That was the reason why the Director of the DG Enlargement then stated that Eastward enlargement was the excuse "to give a soul to the European integration project, without forgetting that the pillar that would sustain that new layer is undoubtedly economic success"³⁰. The will of a "progressive" integration of the CEECs was made explicit by the so-called *French-German paper*, which was also presented during the European Council. Such document implied a diminishing hope in the future and an acceleration of the present in favour of a long-term strategy, in which the member states, in this case France and Germany,

²⁷ See Schimmelfennig, F. (2001) "The Community Trap: Liberal Norms, Rhetorical Action and the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union". *International Organization*, 55 (1).

²⁸ Personal interview with the Director of the Directorate B in charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 1st of December 2005.

²⁹ COMMISSION EUROPEENNE, DIRECTION GENERALE IA, RELATIONS POLITIQUES EXTERIEURES, *DRAFT CORFU CONCLUSIONS*, Brussels, 1994. Report elaborated by Michael Leigh, p. 1.

³⁰ Personal Interview with the Director General of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 25th of February 2006.

could examine the consequences of enlargement before succumbing to imitate the EU documents' idealist rhetoric³¹.

This positioning became the origin of the “monitoring attitude” on enlargement on behalf of the Commission and the EU member states. It marked the beginning of the end of the INT as motor of political decisions and the start of the INT discourse as a legitimisation of profitable political decisions at the EU level.

The political stability and the security factor appear repeatedly in the preparation documents of the Commission in view of the Corfu European Council in 1994, which reflected a tension that was always dread. In any case, the Commission discourse focuses on stopping any kind of escalation and does not talk so much about the eventual Baltic States' accession as about the need to take that opportunity to finally stabilise the relations with Russia and mark the frontiers of the “Return to Europe”³².

The Commission tried to tie the CEECs to the Baltic States and envisaged a parallel enlargement integrating both groups of countries at the same time, reflecting their perception of the new frontiers of the new European self, based on the trip back to “the roots of what the Cold War distorted”, following the lines of the discourses also promoted from the CEECs regarding the “Return to Europe” slogan. The relationship between both groups of countries established the basis for the internal organisation of the initial Task Force on Enlargement in the Commission and was a key element of the negotiations. On the other hand, this context was marked by the rise of one of the most difficult questions regarding the border distortion that Eastward enlargement implied, the Kaliningrad question, in which the potential conflict with Russian interests was a constant threat³³.

The crisis in EU-Russia relations stroked again later in mid-1994 and occupied the political agenda of this period. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that, in this period, the Commission fully exercised its functions as a political decision-making actor. This role became progressively blurred in communication documents when the Commission became more and more occupied with the media diffusion of supposed achievements that “have forever changed European History” as a means to consolidate a political legitimacy. In this sense, there is growing focus on the success of the Commission still in handling the peaceful divorce between Russia and the Baltic States, not exempt of crisis and disputes. And, funnily enough those moments of actorness were only publicised within the EU institutions. Nowadays, however, the Commission communication strategy, without the base of such a degree of geopolitical actorness, is more focused on diffusing facts to the public, which could be seen as a huge strategic mistake. It seems that during the first half of the nineties, when the Commission was in the situation of operating key political decisions, the focus was on internal institutional communication. However, from 2002 onwards, when it does not enjoy the same role any long, the focus lies on communicating with the European citizenship. Nevertheless, it would have been wiser to start with a wider communication scope at the beginning of nineties, at a time when the officially adopted perceptions of time of the Commission institutional communication were in line with contextual worries and challenges, rather than starting communicating Eastward enlargement to the public in 2002 when the world was very different from that of the immediate post-Cold war realities.

Firstly outlined at the Lisbon Meeting of the European Council and then irreversibly formulated in the Copenhagen criteria, the “Return to Europe” slogan turned out to be, in this

³¹ EUROPEAN COUNCIL, *GERMAN-FRENCH PAPER, 30TH MAY 1994, POUR UNE INTEGRATION PROGRESSIVE DES PAYS ASSOCIES D'EUROPE CENTRALE ET ORIENTALE*, p.1.

³² COMMISSION EUROPEENNE, RELATIONS POLITIQUES EXTERIEURES, Unite B1, Brussels, 20 June 1994, IR/CS/js/0511282, *BACKGROUND NOTE : BALTIC STATES, The Security Issue*, p.2. Background Note elaborated by I. Rudolphi, from the DG1A-B1.

³³ *Ibid.*

period, much more than a tranquilising gesture of solidarity to the CEECs. It became a true convergence, a true reciprocal use of political discourses. This enlarging Europe was presented as the mirror image of the historical reconciliation of the continent. In this sense, the Commission's European integration discourse recovered the impulse and the sense of a "grand design". It was just part of a constant opposition between the need for concrete developments and short-term solutions and the tendency to the abstraction towards the underlying transcendental principles that initially inspired the European project. Eastward Enlargement also reflected the oscillation between those ideological trends. It started out as a rhetoric on future-oriented ideals. At the same time it needed concrete realisations and tried to progressively implement them. Then, as it was the case with the end of the Cold War, a fundamental turning point created the possibility of finally implementing actions to reach the future-oriented ideals. It seemed to be the moment of a convergence between discourse and pragmatic implementation. Although rhetoric was supposed to provide the legitimising support to reinforce concrete steps, with the Eastward enlargement process, everything seemed to work the other way round. Rhetoric came first and set out the objectives that tried to be implemented. Then, when there was a need to discursively legitimate some achievements, it was impossible to come back to the initial rhetoric, because it had been the trigger of change and it was the fruit of an ephemeral context. Therefore, in 2004, the "Return to Europe" slogan belonged as much to the past as the fall of the Berlin wall. They were meaningful, had deep historical implications but did not directly affect the lives of those who were immersed in a new context, with new urgencies and new priorities. It was impossible to create an attachment to the motivations of a past background because the depicted scenes were the ruins of a theatre where we no longer acted.

However, the main turning point of the Eastward enlargement process in 1999 was the key fact of the creation, for the first time in European integration history, of a specific DG within the Commission: the DG Enlargement. Thus, the institutionalisation of the Eastward enlargement process reached a culmination with the decision to create a DG to specifically deal with all aspects of the enlargement process (its financing, its attached diplomatic relations, its communication towards the public, etc.), definitely reinforcing its legitimacy inside the EU institutions and also before the candidate countries.

One example of the very clear relation between the "Return to Europe" slogan and the INT could also be found in the following speech by Günter Verheugen, first Commissioner on Enlargement, in which the above described general perceptions are made explicit:

"I must acknowledge that for me, European unity is the task my generation must achieve. It is the sum of the historical experiences of this century. I want all the peoples of Europe, large and small, those favoured by History and those persecuted by it – or I could say by fate-, to be able to live together without fear. I would like Europe to combine its strengths and abilities so that all Europeans can enjoy the same degree of peace, freedom, justice and equality of opportunity"³⁴.

The allusions to the "Return to Europe" slogan in this realm and period are more abundant³⁵ but their common point is that they evidence that the "Return to Europe" slogan was the explicit dominant foreign policy goal of the CEECs and resulted from a strong identification with Western values and norms as well as with the European international community from which these countries felt they had been cut off under communist rule. The West came to constitute, in the nineties, the model of the "good" domestic and international order which was said to inspire the revolutions of 1989 and 1990 and which the CEECs tried to emulate in their

³⁴ Statement by Günter Verheugen, Commissioner-designate for EU Enlargement. Hearing before the European Parliament. 1st of September 1999, pp. 1-2.

³⁵ See references about Association Agreements in the classification of primary sources for the study of the Eastward Enlargement of the EU in the Bibliography.

transformation processes. EU membership would demonstrate, for them, the strongest indication that they had successfully transformed role models. At the same time, it could prove that they had broken the links with their communist past and had “cast off their Eastern identity”³⁶. However, this slogan also evidenced a sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit perception of INT in a period of change and expectation.

In 1999 the “now or never” feeling regarding the integration of the CEECs into the EU was also very much affected by the war in Kosovo and by the realisation, on behalf of the Commission actors that keeping the candidate countries in a comfortable and permanent waiting room could derive in a unexpected destabilisation of the area. Despite the Commission’s previous confidence in the fact that the reforms demanded by the EU, which expected that a candidate country would behave as a member state before acquiring such status, would guarantee the accession to a different level where any violent break-up would be unthinkable, some doubts started to arise. And, in those moments the Commission actors handling the enlargement negotiations recognised that leaving the door just slightly open could eventually mean closing it forever while observing the neighbours become a destabilising presence in the European “home”. Therefore, these actors become more open to a more rapid path for enlargement and stronger guarantees for the CEECs, while speaking in the common language of finally making the “Return to Europe” slogan come true in a time artificially presented as a new and sudden transition but lived as a lengthy adaptation to a growingly technocratic reality to qualify for the only available “European” future.

3. 2001-2004: Pragmatism and Expertise in the Materialisation of an Invisible Historical Turning Point

In 2001 Eastward enlargement was a certainty but a technocratic turn seemed to be, in the eyes of the Commission actors, the only possible way to successfully implement it. In fact, the old idea of geographical units dealing with each country individually was rapidly substituted by the notion of technical units focused on the different chapters of the *acquis* and the different policies upon which the main requested reforms were based (economic and trade policy, environmental policy, etc.). Therefore it is very interesting to note an absolute change in the time perception associated to this new perspective and its alleged procedures. While right after the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union there was a collective feeling of the stretching of time, of a new continuous present that seemed to become permanently prolonged, the beginning of the new century was not perceived as the extension of a perpetual present where largely desired realities could find a fertile terrain to grow. Very much on the contrary, from 2001 onwards there was a perception of shorter term events and realities which made a more general horizon difficult to be discerned. In the case of EU’s Eastward enlargement, the urgency given to the process, that should be done then or never to keep up the legitimacy of European integration as a “grand project” and its also legitimating role of rectifying revolution of a multilaterally violent past history blurred the vision of a vanishing point promising perennial positive futures.

In turn, pragmatism became the rule and step by step concrete technical realisations became the new manifestations of this new time perception. It seemed that the important thing was to deliver something already promised just to show the seriousness of the EU daily work. Even if some Commission actors still believed in the meaning of the project and the symbolism of breaking “finally” a secular frontier, most officials involved in the process, as we will see,

³⁶ Alamir, F. M. and Pradetto, A. “Identitätssuche als Movens der Sicherheitspolitik. Die NATO-Osterweiterungsdebatten im Lichte der Herausbildung neuer Identitäten im postkommunistischen Ostmitteleuropa und in der Allianz“. *Osteuropa*. No. 48, August 1998, pp. 136-137.

just wanted to get the lengthy job “off their chests”, guaranteeing, at the same time, that the enlargement digestion would not be visibly painful for any party and that would allow a rapid change of focus into other issues like the new enlargement wave towards Turkey and the Balkans (whose lengthy procedure would guarantee the survival of the DG Enlargement) and on other issues like communication with the citizens, climate change, the constitutionalisation process, etc. A pragmatic choice entails short term tasks and achievements, however, the discourse on the INT to sell and justify Eastward enlargement did not die at this time but was kept in artificial life to try to compensate the lack of real explanations when communicating enlargement to the citizenship in the EU MS and in candidate countries. I will now analyse the professionalisation and exteriorisation of the EU communication strategy on enlargement.

The temporal dimensions of the EC in this period reflect the EU future potentialities and portray Eastward enlargement as the gate to the new century, linking this argument to the discussion on the role of the EU in the context of globalisation. Furthermore, enlargement begins to be sold as a “demand of the citizens” instead of being a manifestation of the so-called “we know what’s best for you” kind of attitude, which will later become heavily criticised by the public opinion of different European countries³⁷.

At a different level, Romano Prodi, then President of the European Commission, pronounced his speech “The Enlargement” at the European Parliament in Strasbourg, on the 13th November 2001. This speech falsely stated that Eastward enlargement had been a priority for the EU since the beginning of the transition in 1989 and reaffirmed the guiding feeling of “historical duty” that inspired the Commission. At this point, the EC discourse on enlargement obviously had become ridiculously naïve and baroquely idealistic. There is also a part of Romano Prodi’s speech in which he refers to the fact that the presence of EU member states’ companies in the CEECs helps to “consolidate” their “sleeping” Europeanness³⁸. Prodi also produced the first EC document which links the terrorist attacks of 9/11 2001 and the outcomes of Eastward enlargement:

“The terrorist attacks on the US on 11th September have completely changed the world. It is now less stable, less predictable and more frightening. The world - whether we are talking about or fellow citizens, our neighbours in Europe and the Mediterranean or our US allies - now more than ever needs a strong Europe which is sure of its values, which encourages stability, *predictability*, security and prosperity around it, and which is active internationally. With enlargement, Europe's position as the world's biggest economy and trading power, with an internal market of 500 million consumers, will be confirmed”³⁹.

Is perhaps “predictability” of action a new tranquilising *sine qua non* condition for global security as designed by the US? Does it need to be adopted also by the EU as an already existing principle? In fact, being predictable will be assumed by the Commission actors working on enlargement as a guarantee of being stable and therefore bound to deserve to be admitted in the club, as well as prone to follow many times socially costly reforms which would make easier for the EU to digest enlargement in a fast sort of fashion.

On the other hand, Prodi’s references to a “new European era which is ‘just a few steps away’”, marked the come back of a feeling of eternal postponement of the culminating future of European integration. In this period, each policy was presented as an element of a “grand design”; it was the ante-room for a better future which was “just a few steps away”. But the

³⁷ At the Gothenburg European Council, held on 15 and 16 June 2001, the Heads of State or Government of the Fifteen draw up guidelines concerning, in particular, the future of Europe, the next stages of enlargement of the European Union and the modernisation of its institutions. *European Council meeting in Gothenburg: Presidency Conclusions* 16 June 2001. Brussels: Council of the European Union, [15.04.2005]. SN/2001/01/REV1, p. 1.

³⁸ *Speech by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, "The Enlargement" to the European Parliament* (Strasbourg, 13 November 2001). RAPID. The Press and Communication Service of the European Commission. Bruxelles: Commission européenne, SPEECH/01/531, p. 1

³⁹ *Ibid.*

future never seemed to arrive. And even if the policies, as it is the case of enlargement, were eventually effectively implemented, the promised opportunities of the future-oriented expectations became invisible. Hence, enlargement, in the end, did not look like the historical turning point it was supposed to entail, also because the duration of the process made it impossible to sustain enthusiasm. Sudden enthusiasm is usually the fruit of an unexpected and supposedly positive change. But it cannot be maintained at all stages of a long-term project. Not only because the changing context generates new priorities, but also because if the plans themselves and the communication of those plans are detached from the beginning, they can very difficultly find a harmonious convergence once the change is institutionally implemented. In the end, it just looks as a mirage that disappears and shows just the skeleton of a “grand design”, with indubitable results which lives up of self-praising and myth-making operations of contextually political, economic and social choices. It is then that the Illusion of Neutral Time reveals itself really as an illusion. The future is always just “a few steps away” because promise is the new way of life in many European policies.

In the Opening Address given by Pat Cox, then President of the European Parliament, in November 2002, we can observe the main concerns of the European *Parliament's Historic Enlargement Debate*, entitled "The future of the enlarged European Union". This *European Parliament's Historic Enlargement Debate* could be considered as the revenge of political discourse over the new trend of enlargement communication campaigns based on the delegation of EU decision-makers to public relation companies. These companies elaborated the main campaign messages, (formerly a task of EU officials and fruit of their internal debates) forgetting the need of a more direct contact between political representatives and the voice of the citizenry. As Pat Cox himself declared, “there is no public relations or information campaign substitute for real politics based on conviction and reason. Now is the time for politicians to repossess the enlargement agenda from the experts who have prepared the way”⁴⁰. The development of such argument is developed considering, once again, enlargement as “the last brick to remove the Berlin wall”. Also the discourse of a “stolen historical itinerary” for the candidate countries, which was now coming to an end thanks to the generous providers of enlargement from the institutions, came again, apocalyptically, into the scene⁴¹.

The whole speech was an explicit “making History claim” but it also contained a new element, that is, the allusion to the need to take into account public opinion perceptions in order to keep “the momentum”, the feeling of an INT as a valid legitimisation for the enlargement project. It is very important to observe that there was here a new addition to the debate on the actual end of the Cold War. According to the above mentioned declarations, it was also the success in convincing European citizens to support the directions of European integration which set “the removal of the last brick of the Berlin Wall”. Thus, according to the Commission's view, the political decision of implementing enlargement (among other important factors) did not seem to be enough to put an end to the Cold War. Not any more. It was only the success in convincing the population that the aim was desirable, the methodology ideal and the outcome positive which could guarantee the historical progress of Europe and a sense of “momentum”. In this sense, the EU became so dependent on public opinion legitimisation that it became lost in its own trap. The renouncement of political discussions and communication in favour of hired public relations campaigns increased the metaphorical distance between Brussels and EU citizens and made officials lose touch with messages they were supposed to generate.

In this period, the “rhetorical trap” of institutional communication on enlargement could be summarised as follows: First of all, the EU decision-makers communicated inter-institutionally, with the member states and with the candidate countries in a closed circuit of

⁴⁰ *Opening Address by Pat COX to the European Parliament's Historic Enlargement Debate: "The future of the enlarged European Union"*. Brussels: European Parliament, p. 2.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

messages full of historical allusions and arguments which were relevant to their discussions. When they realised the new need of communicating the enlargement project to the citizens as a vital mean to gain legitimacy for the European integration process in this (enlargement policy) and other realms, they reacted by working to recover and re-appropriate all the historical arguments and discourses of the institutional internal communication documents of the early nineties⁴². But, although in the early nineties these arguments were sincere symptoms and expressions of a context of transition, they no longer made sense in a later period and could not serve as an adequate explanation for the citizenship. The negotiations on enlargement lasted for fifteen years, during which a new world order (or disorder) was born and the priorities, the time perceptions and the expectations were no longer the same. Yet the EU institutions kept on using those arguments to explain why enlargement was imperative for a better future in Europe and thus created an artificial and discursively forced time perception. They tried to install the INT, which was a “real” perception at the beginning of the nineties, in the new century, by which time perceptions and feelings were totally different. Thus, in the EU communication of enlargement process two time perceptions coexisted, the “real” time perception of the inhabitants of the new century and the artificially imposed time perception of the EU institutions’ documents: a time in which the EU would incarnate the culmination of European history, becoming a synonym of a perennial positive, which was, in turn, no longer credible or transmittable. That is why the enlargement communication strategy did not work and did not connect with public opinion perceptions. And that is also why Eastward enlargement, an event which was supposed to be a historical turning point in European History blurred in the smoke and was lived as an invisible historical event, which, when it came down to it, awoke and still does awake more reluctances than triumphal greetings.

In conclusion, we could argue that Eastward enlargement, a process that many Commission actors defined as “the only successful foreign policy of the European Union” resulted in two ongoing but opposed time perceptions at the level of the institutional discourses: On behalf of the EC, the main time perception continued to be *a progressive way towards a future culmination* of European history, of which European integration was the finest example while, for the institutional actors in the CEECS, the main time perception was that of *finally returning to a seemingly original and forcedly denied matrix* so that the CEECs could become equal members of that changing “defining community” called European Union.

Last but not least, this section aimed at opening the debate on the issue of the relationship of change in history with the opposition between the determinism of rules presented as timeless in a constantly extended present and the consideration of new principles once the perspective of a different future is suddenly open.

⁴² Personal Interview with the Deputy Head of Unit, at the Information, Communication and Inter-Institutional Relations Unit of the DG Enlargement, European Commission, Brussels, 15th of January 2006.