

EUROPE'S BORDERS

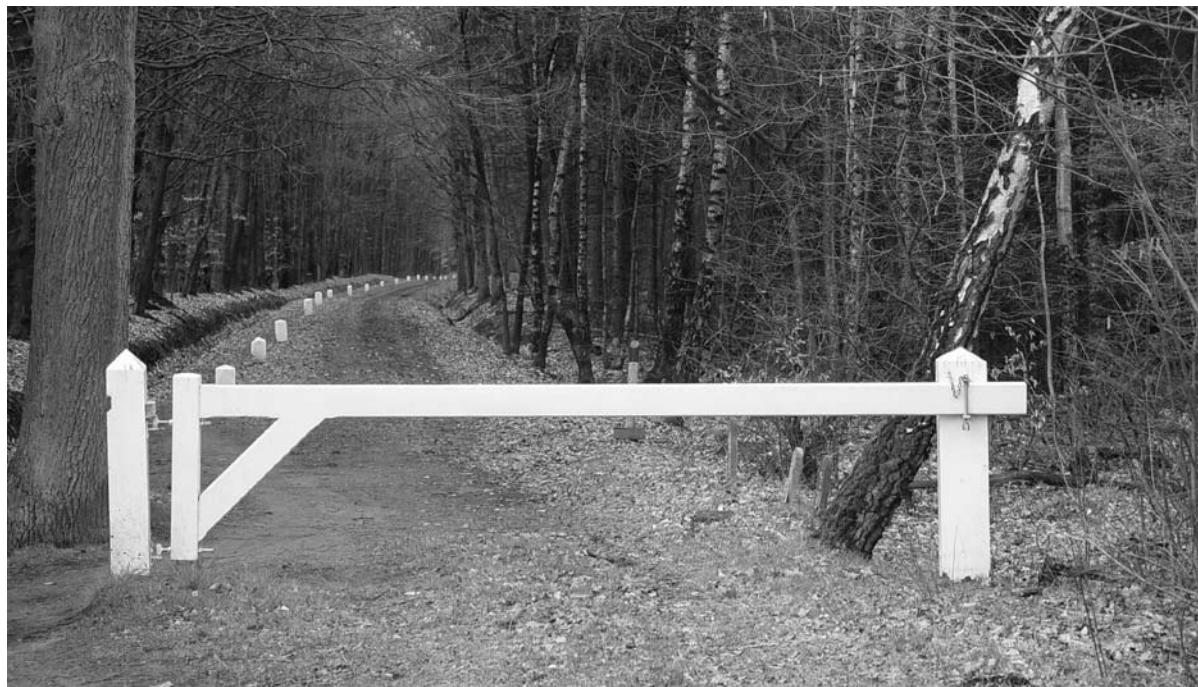
by Martí Anglada*

Whenever a debate as to Europe's borders begins, a frequent occurrence nowadays, two opposing positions immediately emerge: one shares the Council of Europe's concept of Europe's territorial limits, with its 47 member states that even include Russia. The other defends the view that the territorial limits of the European Union (EU) are relative and thereby variable according to the interests and objectives of the EU itself. While the first position is axiomatic, the second, by contrast, is evolutionary and modifiable according to the mutating perspective of interests. The European Union does not, therefore, have pre-established limits, but rather flexible limits that it sets itself. The second viewpoint is not only the most realistic, it is first and foremost the only viable option in an organisation such as the EU where additions need to be agreed unanimously. The only possible limits are those that are self-imposed by consensus.

An apparently separate debate is one which revolves around strengthening European political integration. Generally, the European Union is faced with a choice between enlargement and consolidation. This is to say that the EU needs to choose between continuing with its expansion or strengthening its integration. It is suggested (often with some vehemence) that the enlargement and strengthening processes are incompatible. The last two attempts at expansion towards Eastern Europe (from 15 members to the current 27) are often used to support this view. It sees constant enlargements as not simply slowing down the strengthening of common institutions, but rather making such a strengthening process impossible. A more open attitude is held by those that separate

the two processes and maintain that they are not incompatible and that they are two different paths that may, or may not, run parallel to one another. In my view, the two paths are so interconnected that whatever steps the EU takes to strengthen itself will in turn determine any interest in its expansion.

Between these two paths, these two objectives, there is necessarily a hierarchy: strengthening should set the pace. The expansion of the EU should not be an objective per se, but rather one of a number of tools available in order to strengthen the EU. Expansion should not imply a brake on strengthening, nor should it be stopped, but rather it should be administered in function of the needs of the EU at this historic mo-



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ment in time. In fact, a strengthening of the EU's institutions should set the pace and extent of European expansion and not the reverse.

European expansion only becomes the ideal weapon for abandoning a strengthening of the EU in the eyes of Eurosceptics. Accepting the incompatibility of the two processes is to fall into the trap of Euroscepticism. Announcing the internal logic of the two processes is not sufficient (although it is a worthwhile step), instead it is necessary to establish a hierarchy in favour of political integration. In any case, asserting that the expansion of the EU does not depend on any geographical principle, but instead solely depends on the interests of the EU at any one time is a great leap forward.

What is the European interest that should govern future expansion of the EU? In a recent debate held in Barcelona by the International Association of Veteran European Union Civil Servants, the lawyer and former politician Miquel Roca proposed that it is necessary to first answer the question: What do we want the European Union for? As a prior step to deciding what our interest in Europe is. He argued that up to now, fear has been the main engine of European integration: first came the fear of a repetition of a Franco-German war and the fear of a war on European soil between the Soviet Union and the United States (as a result of the Cold War). Later, more recent expansions were driven by the

twelve Eastern European states' fear of Russia. Currently this decadent Europe has a fear of cultures from emerging areas and of Islam in particular. Roca adds that it would do the EU good to first define its values in order to define its interests. These values include the Greco-Roman tradition, the Reformation and counter-Reformation and the Enlightenment and human rights.

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It appears true that this forms the background as to what constitutes European interests and it often informs attitudes as to possible new member states in a decisive manner. This is the case with the attitude of a part of European public opinion when faced with Turkey's candidacy, along with some Balkan states, and their lack of democratic consolidation and the presence of the Muslim religion. A similar phenomenon occurs with countries that are former members of the Soviet Union such as Ukraine and Georgia, with their fragile democracies. Nevertheless, what should be a determining factor in the configuration of European interests is the desire to create a nucleus of countries with a wish for political integration. Such an objective, that of strengthened cooperation of a political nature between various countries in the areas of security, defence and foreign policy, would undoubtedly set the rhythm and direction of possible enlargements. A generic strengthening of institutions would not only mark Europe's possible borders at any one time, but also boost cooperation. In other words, the two tracks within the EU would be the

engine behind the strengthening of its institutions. The EU's enlargement policy would not only depend on interests based on values, but would also go hand in hand with a strategy that emphasises reinforced cooperation of a political nature.

When the French President Nicolas Sarkozy ended his term as holder of the EU rotating presidency, he stated that Europe's greatest problem was its lack of visibility, which is to say that Europe did not have (and still does not have) a visible presence. This claim appears to be true, while we await the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in order to choose the president of the EU, but it should be noted that a neutral presence is not enough: what the EU needs more than anything is a presence that explains and argues, which is to say a presence that indicates a particular direction. A direction towards political integration for those that want it (without excluding anyone).

With a Franco-German heart, which is unarguably the only heart possible, where would the EU be headed geographically? At present, it is moving towards establishing and strengthening its ties with neighbouring zones. The Baltic Union already exists, as does the Mediterranean Union, the former made up of those countries bordering the Baltic Sea, nearly of which already belong to the EU, while the latter consists of those countries that border the Mediterranean, with its headquarters in Barcelona. The first is of German inspiration and influence, while the second essentially responds to French interests. Now that we are faced with the problem of Ukraine moving closer to the Union, the creation of a 'Slavic Union' might be possible. Perhaps even Russia itself could have some kind of presence, which would be in the interests of the Franco-German community



(and of many other members of the European Union).

In light of this shared interest it is probable that Turkey will have to wait on the margins of the EU, but without having the door slammed in its face. The seven Balkan countries would join the European Union without too many obstacles. The Balkan procession towards Brussels would therefore be led by the interests of Paris and Berlin, which would be balanced. Both promoted Kosovo's protected independence and what Croatia has historically represented for Germany is complemented

by the equally historic links between Serbia and France.

Contrary to what might appear to be the case, this will not be an easy path to follow. In fact it will be full of unexpected potholes and obstacles. However, Europe has no other driving force than this, it has no other impulse than that provided by its Franco-German heart. If what is sought is a controlled expansion without paralysing effects on the EU's combined institutions, then this fact should be accepted and given generous support.

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