



European Union Enlargement to Eastern and Mediterranean Countries

The European Community was founded in 1957. The original Member States were Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and The Netherlands. Later, in 1973, Denmark, Ireland and the United Kingdom acceded to the E.C. With the accession of Greece in 1981 and of Portugal and Spain in 1986, Member States grew to twelve.

With the Maastricht Treaty the European Community became European Union and in 1995, thanks to the admission of Austria, Finland and Sweden, it counted 15 Member States.

However, the enlargement process continued. In 2002 the Copenhagen European Council established the enlargement of the Union to ten new countries: **Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia.**

With such countries on **1st May 2004** the E.U. reached 25 Member States. The enlargement appears to be a “dynamic” phenomenon and further countries have already applied to join the E.U. at the next enlargement round, namely Bulgaria and Romania, which are scheduled for admission in 2007, and Croatia and Turkey, which will follow depending on the pace of their negotiations.

Europe is enlarging towards the East and the Mediterranean. The enlargement involves an increase in the population of about 73 million individuals (from 377 to 453 million individuals) and in the territory of about 740.000 km². Moreover, the enlargement of the internal market makes the E.U. ever more alluring for international trade and ever more important as an economic and political entity in the world.

The enlargement has a marked effect on intra-community trade; suffice it to say that the Gross Internal Product of the new Member States totals about 800 billion euros.

The enlargement is a historic opportunity to bring together very different peoples with different traditions and is an unprecedented challenge.

As a matter of fact, previous enlargements involved neighbouring countries sharing traditions and culture. In the current enlargement round accession is granted to countries whose economies have been affected by their political experiences, which are very different from those of other Member States. The European Union, however, having started such a transition process more than ten years ago, believes the enlargement can guarantee economic stability and development to everyone.

The enlargement of the internal market enables the free circulation of people, goods and services, therefore without controls at the borders, which on the one hand increases the chance of people to extend their social and economic activities within the enlarged borders and, on the other, requires more effective controls at external borders. Institutionally, the body in charge of such a role of supervision and control, concerning Community and national financial resources, the safeguard of the citizens' safety and health and the protection of artistic and cultural heritage, is the Customs Authority.