The future that once was 1989, the EU's eastward enlargement, and democracy's missed chances

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The way the European Community (EC) institutions approached and tackled the radical post-Cold War changes of the 1990s was at the root of a lingering 'democratic deficit,' the amplified effects of which we still experience today. In European integration terms, a 'democratic deficit' entails a systemic lack of democratic legitimacy and accountability on behalf of the EC institutions (the European Union (EU) from 1993). This chapter particularly examines how the chosen specific modalities for an eventual EC eastward enlargement had an impact in the generation of such deficit. I posit that the end of the Cold War represented a missed chance for the consolidation of an East–West integrated and increasingly deepened quality of democracy, especially taking into account the European Commission's investments and efforts, but also the investments and efforts of the overall institutional structure of the EU. First of all, this chapter will study the roads not taken concerning the EU's decision about eastward enlargement and their long-lasting influence on the unfolding of phenomena such as 'enlargement fatigue' and 'integration fatigue,' which developed in parallel to the EU's democratic deficit.[1] Second, it will address the 'EU Communication Strategy on Enlargement' and the ensuing 'discursive wall' that arose between EU citizens and institutions, analyzing such cleavage as a key root cause of the indicated democratic deficit.

This chapter will emphasize the notorious semantic charge of EU communication strategies, the power and influence of which was no less significant than hard power identity-building and boundary-making devices. I will focus on processes in which the European Commission configured and selected particularly charged discursive utterances relating to ways of interpreting a radically changing reality. These narratives were coupled with very specific methods of diffusing meanings of '1989' to reconnect with citizens and to gain their approval to move forward with the EU's eastward enlargement process. Indeed, this management of public perception for outreach and political legitimization purposes via the 'EU's Communication Strategy on Enlargement' acted increasingly as a metaphorical wall between citizens and institutions.[2] This communicative barrier mitigated citizens' engagement with the so-called 'reunification of Europe' after the 1989 turning point. I postulate that this was a lost opportunity to overcome the EU's democratic deficit and to actually implement the EU's full commitment to the

principles of solidarity, cohesion, and peace. In addition, this barrier was accentuated via the Commission instillment of artificial time perceptions in its communication strategy on enlargement (e.g. explaining the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004 with the contextual sentiments of 'a new beginning' taken from 1989), which contributed to further distancing EU citizens and institutions beyond the fundamental cleavage of a democratic deficit.

The EU's eastward enlargement process constituted a fundamental historical turning point and a geopolitical game changer in the European integration process. Certainly, this EU policy directly touches upon the key issue of the 'final frontiers' of the European integration process. In this respect, it offers insights about the evolving historical meanings of key concepts such as Community membership and the memory of belonging to a common polity. Enlargement policy was also a catalyst of structural change in the post-1989 period; it triggered new configurations of power balance within the European Community and EU institutions, new bargaining cooperation schemes, and new agenda-setting priorities, including a willing redress of neighborhood policy orientations toward dialogue, diplomacy, and positive cross-border socioeconomic interdependences. These were the opportunities in 1989. However, the present offers a picture dominated by instrumental frontiers of inclusion and exclusion: a proliferation of backsliding phenomena in the east of the continent, and the co-option of democratic principles to disrupt the so-called 'European social model' in the West.[3] For this reason, this case study of the EU's eastward enlargement policy helps to shed light on an East–West conversation that the policy-making actors of the time neglected to unfold, and that damaged changing and creatively diverse proposals for democratic political culture coming from both sides of the continent.

In the initial period between 1989 and 1993, two approaches to an eventual Community accession of the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs) dominated the debate within the European Commission: working on the prospect of an enlargement toward the CEECs versus providing a mere association agreement to candidate countries. From 1994 onward, the CEECs' new political elites would repeatedly announce that they had been imprisoned in a 'perpetual waiting room' due to the long process of EU accession negotiations. Later, between 2001 and 2004, the choice of technocratic perspectives over political dialogue would imprint an indelible mark on public perception and opinion on European integration. It entailed an increasing sense of stagnation and an unclear vision for a common future.

In this regard, this chapter will also tackle issues of institutional self-containment and reassertion on behalf of the European Commission in relation to the inception of a long-standing cleavage: namely the 'accession' vs. 'association' dilemma in EU enlargement policy, which was especially salient in the period 1989–93. This dichotomy was based on the existence of two intra-institutional schools of thought: one that considered the CEECs' accession as politically and economically risky and therefore non-advisable, and another one that purported that enlargement was the only long-term solution for pan-European political stability and further socioeconomic development.

In 2004, EU enlargement policy seemed to have reached a structural overload in terms of the effectiveness of its policy procedure, which was mainly based on elements of monitoring and conditionality. As a matter of fact, the limits of its operability as set by the relevant EU institutions (in this case, the European Commission DG1A in the early nineties, and the DG Enlargement from 1999) could be explained by the fact that this policy procedure constituted a too narrow response to the former inner contradictions of a Cold War, bipolar geopolitical paradigm within the continent, without taking into account new, binding, global power structures and interconnections in the post-Cold War era. More particularly, the scheme based on finding a post-Cold War placement for former Soviet satellites in the CEECs progressively ran out of compelling energy when other complex issues came into place, such as the enlargement toward Cyprus (implying a complex policy dialogue with Turkey as a candidate country), or the abandonment of the EU enlargement option for Ukraine (related to increasing difficulties in the policy dialogue with post-Soviet Russia). Since the early nineties, the foreign policy role of the European Commission became central due to the coordination of aid to the CEECs (e.g. PHARE, one of the three pre-accession instruments financed by the European Union to assist the applicant countries of Central and Eastern Europe in their preparations for joining the European Union), the trouble-free reunification of Germany, the automatic EC integration of Germany, and the negotiation of the Community's accession agreements with the CEECs. In this sense, the *supranational* boost given to the Commission by the direct mandate of the Community member states in 1989 was centered on the functions of verifying compliance with the requirements of conditionality through a series of new instruments (regular reports, monitoring, screening, etc.).[4] This would also imply a need to follow more closely the internal evolution of applicant states. Such closer monitoring was also explained by the heterogeneity of candidate countries' profiles signing the Europe Agreements in the nineties. Despite an initial reluctance to the CEECs' post-1989 applications for EU membership, these were eventually carried forward because of the following interrelated factors: the EU's need to legitimize its public international reputation with a positive reversal of image after the war in former Yugoslavia;[5] and the EU's willingness to stabilize relations with Russia, both during the delicate troop-removal operations in the Baltic States in 1994,[6] and later on, amid the deep Russian economic crisis of 1998,[7] which was contemporary to the outbreak of the Kosovo conflict.

In this context, the Commission was seeking to adapt its communication strategy toward its citizens in order to remain legitimate and accountable in its enlargement policy-making. Pat Cox, the former president of the European Parliament, even considered that communicating enlargement to the citizenry was 'the last brick of the Berlin Wall.'[8] As the Commission was in charge of formulating the main messages on the enlargement process, this constituted a power of ample dimensions that ran in parallel to its new and unprecedented foreign relations influence, thus also accelerating the post-1989 path of change from a supranational perspective.

The main primary sources for this study come from the Historical Archives of the European Union and the Archives of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Other relevant sources include a set of personally authored oral history interviews with key decision-makers at the European institutions (e.g. former presidents of the European Parliament and former DG Enlargement directors) on the risks, opportunities, and conclusions concerning the EU's eastward enlargement process in the nineties.[9] From a methodological point of view, oral history interviews entail an inherent difficulty to transmit the insights and implications of a given historical event because of their subjective nature, which is more prominent than in other source types. However, it is the inclusive function of this particular medium that offers unparalleled insights for the analyzed case. I made use of two different types of oral history interviews for this contribution: open-ended interviews, which consist of asking a key respondent about their insights about certain events and ideas and using such propositions as a basis for further enquiry, and focused interviews, which follow the same set of questions in all interviews to be able to compare the results afterward, departing from the same parameters. In the focused interview all the questions should be carefully worded so that the interviewer appears genuinely naïve about the topic to allow the respondent to provide a fresh commentary about it.[10] In both cases, I will compare oral history interviews with written sources of corroboratory evidence.

As well as the most authoritative figures, the oral sources referenced in this piece also include alternative voices, such as middle management officials and advisors, to widen the perimeter of knowledge on these specific areas within the European integration process.[11] A number of respondents agreed to share their testimonies, but requested anonymity due to the very recent nature of the events.

'The time of a great illusion'?[12] The impact of 1989 on the enlargement option for the future of the Community

The 2004 'big bang' EU enlargement was a direct consequence of 1989. It resulted in an increase in the diversity and complexity of EU membership as it brought in states from Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe. This historical process has been increasingly viewed as an integral part of the Union's development and heralded by its key players as the EU's most successful foreign policy tool in establishing stability in its neighborhood. However, its missed chances would result in what we now refer to as a degradation of the quality of democracy. This lack of attention to these unfolding democratic aspects of the EU's eastward enlargement process, originating in the early 1990s, would have a remarkable influence on the way the four freedoms were applied, as well as on the evolution of the 'Single Market,' upcoming enlargement processes, the Economic and Monetary Union, and the Constitutional Treaty in the making. This chapter aims to clarify their inception in order to offer possible scenario-design responses in hindsight.

Ulrich Sedelmaier and Helen Wallace have also indicated that the European Commission was credited, in the immediate post-1989 period, with having played

an influential role in the EU decision-making process and with furthering the cause of Eastern enlargement. Although the Commission, as the guardian of the treaties, would be committed to the expansion of the Community organization to the successfully socialized Central and Eastern European countries,[13] this approach was also consistent with rationalist expectations such as institutional projections and self-preservation. Indeed, Eastern enlargement appeared to be a welcome opportunity to expand the tasks and resources of the Commission.[14]

Right after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, this tendency became linked to the cause of enhanced cooperation of the EC with the CEECs. As the director of Directorate B in Charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission affirmed, 'history was giving us a second chance and this time we could not look in any direction but that of the future.'[15]

According to Karen Henderson, 'when 1989 heralded the collapse of communism in Europe, the division of the continent came finally to an end.'[16] The repeated ideal of creating 'a truly united Europe embracing both East and West' seemed to become a reality. Within the new democracies in the CEECs, the prospect of joining the EC symbolized the ultimate achievement of returning to Europe. But the initial excitement was tempered by the gradual realization that membership was far more than a symbol. As a matter of fact,

> It involved not only freedom, democracy and the expectation of growing economic prosperity, but also demanding and painstaking work in harmonising diverse aspects to the detailed regulations prescribed by the Union's existing members.[17]

From this perspective, the tangential relation between enlargement and democratization contributed to solidifying the perception of simultaneous transition to democracy and EC accession as two sides of the same coin.[18] It is also important to remark that the implementation of the enlargement policy went beyond mere democratization and economic transition processes. Surely it also implied a dimension of social dialogue, as well as a shift in mentalities, principles, values, and norms. This chapter delves into these more intangible heritage questions while connecting them to structural developments. Against this backdrop, the incentive created for accelerating internal reforms to advance the negotiations for accession was different to previous southern enlargement cases (e.g. Spain or Portugal), implying a heavier monitoring of the CEECs. Also the recovery of historical memory seemed to differ, distancing itself from a previous focus on an aspiring notion of reconciliation, as indicated by Marcelino Oreja, former Secretary General of the Council of Europe:

> One form of reconciliation was recovering the European spirit: A reconciliation of countries that had been ripped from the heart of Europe because of their antidemocratic systems—against the wishes of their people—and are conciliation with the countries that shared their ideals, their history, their culture.[19]

The historical significance of the context of the nineties lies also in the fact that, as Manuel Castells reminds us:

> Communism and the Soviet Union, and the reactions opposed to them observable around the world marked the different societies, internationally, during the last century. However, that powerful empire and its mythology disintegrated in few years, in one of the most extraordinary examples of unexpected historical change. This is the end of a historical era.[20]

The same interpretation of the nineties as a time of new beginnings was also shared by Marinella Neri Gualdesi, who affirmed that the nineties marked the present at its creation. In this context, the only thing that seemed obvious was the growing power of the attraction of the EU, which was supposed to represent a picture of hope. As a matter of fact, the Community of Twelve was considered during the nineties to be the main factor of stability in Europe and a model of reconciliation and economic prosperity. This transformed it into an object of attraction for the eastern part of the continent, while it also started rediscovering its own sense of belonging to Europe.

The retrospective analysis of EU institutional players echoes these scholarly considerations. Certainly, these analyses frequently allude to the game-changing character of accession negotiations for the balance of power in the continent, with their focus on a pan-European cooperation perspective tempered by the difficulties of an actual political and socioeconomic convergence between East and West. This is indicated by the director of the Negotiations and Pre-accession Directorate of the DG Enlargement:

> 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.[21]

This same *zeitgeist* perception was also shared by the Head of the Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs and Chief Assistant for Enlargement Policies at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission, who affirmed that 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.[22]

This initial feeling of a 'great illusion' pervaded the working atmosphere of the DG External Relations of the Commission (DG 1A) in the early nineties and made possible the proposal of the Central and Eastern European neighbors' accession. This was also rhetorically convenient—as indicated by the very same Commission key players—due to a need to find a counterpart to the EU's failure in stabilizing former Yugoslavia. Nonetheless, 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 discourse died as a priority of the Commission's foreign policy agenda. This shift had fundamental consequences in the ever-growing feeling of enlargement fatigue.[23]

Self-containment, reassertion, and the inception of a long-standing cleavage: accession vs. association dilemmas, 1989–93

It is important to bear in mind that it was the CEECs that raised the issue of accession to the EC and constantly kept pushing the Community for an explicit commitment to this goal. Although the Commission had already proposed the negotiation of association agreements in February 1990, it sought to avoid any reference to future accession, which reflected the limited impact of pro-enlargement European Commission officials in these early moments after 1989.

In its communication to the Council in 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.'[24] Eventually, the Commission agreed to a formula mentioning the future membership of the CEECs, but only went so far as to 'recognize membership as a form of association, but not as the Community's final objective.'[25] In this respect, it is pertinent to refer to the words of the chief economic adviser of the DG Enlargement at the Commission, 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.[26]

The other kind of association agreements he was referring to are those of 1989, described by the director of the Negotiations and Pre-accession Directorate of the DG Enlargement:

> In 1989 I actually wrote that the model we should follow with regards to the CEECs was that of the OEEC. I thought we should just create some kind of currency union with them. You should bear in mind that we were confronted

with German unification at that time. And, regarding the main arguments to enlarge, I remember also at that time, very curiously, there was a huge fear, especially as far as infrastructure was concerned but, also regarding everything else, that the CEECs would become an American culture.[27]

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.[28]

Furthermore, the head of the Unit of Economic Assistance for the CEECs and chief assistant for Enlargement Policies at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission indicates that:

> the real aim of Enlargement was 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 no to the CEECs. There was no other choice, except going back to the past and closing the gates of History.[29]

After the EC had been cautious not to commit itself to CEEC membership in the association negotiations, the Conclusions of the Presidency at the Lisbon European Council in June 1992 definitely started to change that initial trend and would put the issue of CEEC enlargement firmly on the agenda. Hence, 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.[30]

The former president of the First Task Force on Enlargement at the DG External Relations of the European Commission was a believer in the need to fulfill the 'historical debt' Western Europe 'owed' to the CEECs ('which,' he says, 'were cast aside from progress and prosperity'). He stated that,

> For the new democracies, Europe remains a powerful idea, signifying the fundamental values and aspirations that people kept alive after long years of

oppression, because Europe is about values. Enlargement is a challenge the Community cannot refuse. The other countries of Europe are looking to us to guarantee stability, peace and prosperity and for the opportunity to play their part in the integration of Europe.[31]

Very significantly, the Commission paper to the Lisbon Summit in June 1992, 'talked almost in a matter of fact way about accession as if it was already agreed as a common objective.'[32] This also reflected the individual views of its author, the former president, but always taking into account that 'widening must not be at the expense of deepening, because enlargement must not mean a dilution of the Community's achievements.'[33]

Conversely, and despite the continuous references to the unity of Europe, this relevant document of 1992 also showcased the explicit decision not to define what 'Europe' was, in a way that makes it difficult to know what the matrix was to which the CEECs wanted to return. This document also considered that the meaning of 'Europe' could not just be gathered in a simple formula and should be revised by each new generation. Therefore the Commission expressed that establishing the frontiers of the EU, whose limits would be redefined in the coming years, was neither possible nor opportune at that point.[34]

Helen Sjursen 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.[35]

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 of the enlargement process. Due to the formulation of the so-called Copenhagen criteria during the Copenhagen European Council, 1993 remained in the imaginary of pro-enlargement EU officials as an essential turning point where the reunification of the European continent was foreseen in a not too distant future. According to the director of Directorate B in Charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission,

> 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. However, it was not a compromise without conditions. And the conditions had to be respected and reforms thoroughly applied.[36]

In this regard, it is important to remark on the role of some Commission officials who held diplomatic jobs and functions in the CEECs in explaining many cases in which their sense of personal compromise with the countries involved enhanced their engagement for positive outcomes in the negotiations toward their actual accession. Certainly, their past diplomatic experience in the CEECs was a tempering factor during intermittent negotiation stalemates. In the end, eastward enlargement 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,' as remarked by the director general of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission.[37]

As Manuel Marín (former vice-president of the European Commission) indicated, at the beginning of the nineties,

> people started to talk about the 'peace dividends' and to say that we were entering a new era, that the future would be completely different. [...] It seemed as if we had managed to find a solution for planet Earth. The old system of Cold War international relations disappeared, the old disputes were replaced, but we realized that the former ideological confrontation was beginning to be a conflict of identity.[38]

Nevertheless, the decade of the nineties, as shown in the following sections, would become more of a bridge between eras than an actual new beginning.

The lingering public opinion of the enlargement 'permanent waiting room' from 1994 onward

The year 1994 marked a turning point in the Commission's acceleration of the enlargement option in order to prevent a destabilization of the CEECs similar to that being experienced in the Balkans. This was explained by the director of Directorate B in Charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission thus:

> 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.[39]

The expression 'future accession' reinforced the sense of postponed promise linked to the disappointment of the new elites of the CEEC being placed in a permanent waiting room. Actually, at the level of public opinion in the candidate countries, the disappointment with the real results of democratization and marketization had risen considerably[40] within the 'scenario for disenchantment'[41] increasingly present in the CEECs.

Competition for EU entry and the strategies followed to pursue such an aim were another particular characteristic of the challenges of eastward enlargement. EU membership was widely regarded as 'the' crucial factor for economic prosperity but 'it was perceived as having promised the most and having delivered the least.'[42]

As a matter of fact, the social perception of European citizens regarding the self-proclaimed 'reunification of Europe' materialized as an 'invisible turning point,'[43] despite the fact that this crucial change implied a differential increase in the diversity and complexity of the Community framework. However, despite the fact that the EU's enlargement policy was institutionally presented as the most successful foreign policy instrument for the consolidation of the stability of the changing borders of the Union, its implementation modalities led to the much-criticized 'enlargement fatigue.' This is explained by the cumulated and never resolved tensions created by the accession procedures. As a matter of fact, this is a lingering threat for new (Southern and Eastern) EC/EU member states, which constantly risk leaving the European 'core' to reintegrate a second-class periphery whenever the Community enters a new critical period.[44] Furthermore, despite being characterized by a 'rectifying revolution,'[45] this enlargement wave did not enjoy a high degree of impact or visibility in pan-European public debate. For that reason, the citizens of the candidate countries perceived it as an invisible historical turning point.[46] As a result, the candidate countries that engaged in the accession negotiations perceived and vividly criticized the absence of a great strategy of future-oriented integration.[47] This had a direct impact in creating a sense of the purposelessness of painstaking transitional sacrifices and investments, as shown by Karen Henderson.[48] This engagement dimension of enlargement was also severely diluted because of the oversized management and technocratic approach applied within the Commission to the European integration principles from 2001 onward.[49] Such trends resulted in an emphasis on conditionality, pragmatism, and expertise in the evolving EU accession modalities, leading to a general perception of stagnation in the negotiations in the candidate countries.

In this sense, it could be argued that the limited reactions against recurrent 'regression hazards'[50]—namely, risks of political regime relapse (e.g. Mečiar in Slovakia in 1994)—were a root cause of current hybrid regimes (e.g. Hungary and Poland[51]). This pattern has been particularly resonant in the south and the east of the continent, in countries where the residuals of dictatorship were not sufficiently tackled during their democratization processes and, thus, they continue to suffer from authoritarian and totalitarian revivals. Today some of these cases are crystallizing into ever-increasing 'illiberal democracies.' In this contentious context, the notion of enlargement fatigue became especially salient. One key factor for this mounting feeling was the criticism by further enlargement opponents of the lack of verification of whether existing EU institutions and policies were operationally capable of integrating (politically and economically) new member states into the Union. In this respect, Torreblanca affirmed that enlargement fatigue is not directly related to economic costs since enlargement turned out to be remarkably profitable (above all for the EU's founding members); nor to the intra-European

migratory flows (even smaller than might have been expected); nor to the slow-down in the decision-making process (since none of the Council, the Commission, or the European Parliament has had an institutional blockage due to enlargement). What the EU experienced in such circumstances is more like a process of an 'integration fatigue,' which had transversal consequences for a series of policies, among which enlargement policy was one.[52] This process of 'integration fatigue' also had an impact on the lack of definition of the meaning of democracy in the European Union. This resulted in many key policy-making actors in Europe pro-gressively drifting away from a commitment to enhance the quality of democracy as a good governance principle in itself.

Conclusions

The fact that the EU's eastward enlargement policy was too narrow a response to the challenges that arose from the end of the bipolar geopolitical paradigm of the Cold War is directly related to the ever-growing cleavage between voters and elected officials in the EU. This is explained by the unclear political definition of whether EU enlargement policy is a mere catalyst for change to be applied in very particular contexts (e.g. transitions to democracy) or a policy destination.

It is also important to note how the perceptions of the European public—both in candidate countries and in the EU member states—were notably disconnected from the EU institutional narratives. At the same time, EU institutional actors were disengaged from then present societal needs, priorities, and concerns. The post-1989 East–West debate included a new identity conflict related to the idea of enlargement policy as a legitimating strategy in the light of the then stark cri-tiques to the so-called democratic deficit. This debate became increasingly cen-tered on demands for democratic transparency and accountability on behalf of the citizenship. Against this backdrop, the management of public perceptions became a major concern and one that completely differentiated the post-1989 enlargement talks from previous Community enlargements. It was clear that with all the simultaneous widening and deepening dynamics in motion (e.g. the con-solidation of a single market; new foundational treaties; and plans for a monetary union, which never became an economic one), there was also a need for a new EU Communication Strategy on Enlargement.

However, an economic union could only be sustained by a technocratic elite that believed in an integration project, while an increasingly political union could only survive with the direct support of its citizens. The main problem of the EU Communication Strategy on Enlargement was its contextual detachment. It attempted to transmit the ethos and collective time perception of the period immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall by entailing a focus on reconcili-ation, reunification, and a new beginning, for the whole duration of accession negotiations. However, it was the duration of the accession negotiations that made it difficult to keep alive the feeling of *momentum* from 1989 up to 2004. This was caused by the fact that the post-1989 context entailed radically different politi-cal and socioeconomic priorities. The shift in the interests of contemporary EU

citizens, who were increasingly subject to the crises that derived from a stagnating global economic model, further aggravated this challenge.

In this regard, the EC's choices constituted a relevant paradox. They pertained to two different time periods but were seemingly disconnected from an institu-tional awareness of its power of influence at the Community level. Before 2001, the Commission privileged the institutional communication and debate of EC intra-units. Afterward, the Commission started focusing on an outreach dimen-sion toward the citizenship. Nonetheless, in this last phase of the EU's eastward enlargement process from 2001 to 2004, the Commission no longer enjoyed an influential foreign policy and monitoring role, as had been the case at the begin-ning of the nineties. Indeed, such a calculation mismatch had important conse-quences: this misguided strategic shift took place at a time when many of the officials in charge of this policy, who were linked to past diplomatic positions in the CEECs, were no longer in charge and, therefore, there was no sense of mem-ory or historic responsibility linked to policy-making in the enlargement realm, but rather an overbearing technocratic and managerial focus to just achieve objec-tives in due time.

Another cause of cumulative fatigue, apart from Schimmelfennig's premise of 'rhetorical entrapment,'[53] seems to have consisted in the difficulty of delimiting the axiological contours of the European integration process and in specifying the Community's eventual final frontiers (both geographically and in 'inclusive iden-tity' terms). On the one hand, it was the lack of a clear self-definition in the EU's integration objectives and final geographical/ontological borders that seemingly propelled the overall process in post-World War II Europe. Conversely, this was also the cause of a most conflictive reaction in the long run: social disengagement with the European project based on an increasingly denounced lack of 'quality of democracy,'[54] especially since the profound social tragedies and consolidated intra-European asymmetries related to the sovereign debt crisis in 2008. This reaction was partly engendered by the fact that the European integration scope was not becoming visibly clearer for the European public in the last phases of the eastward enlargement process post-2004, when uncertainty about the future started to delimit the genuinely democratic potential of the post-1989 'widening' and 'deepening' options. As well as this, the Commission's option to attempt to consolidate a 'pan-European' identity based on a top-down institutional crea-tion—in which historical turning points were discursively instilled and politically generated—contributed to the fact that the EU's 2004 enlargement was lived by citizens in old and new member states as an invisible historical turning point. This was also due to the asymmetry between the new contextual preoccupations of citi-zens in EU and new member states in 2004 (e.g. mainly socioeconomic concerns and much fewer worries of a political nature), and to the loss of the 'reunification of Europe' as a valid priority and demand of public opinion.

The studied 'roads not taken' help us illustrate the contentious long-term effects of not engaging strongly enough with a sustainable quality of democracy. They can be summarized as follows: the lack of an EU institutional commitment to fight against an ever-increasing democratic deficit before it reached an 'event

horizon,' resulting in some of today's challenges to the quality of democracy in the EU; the fact that the Commission did not strengthen its policy-making communication toward citizens when it enjoyed a far-reaching foreign policy role; and the mismatch between the Commission's underpinning of an enlargement communication strategy based on the reinforced instillment of time perceptions recalling new beginnings—typical of the 1989 period—while citizens' priorities from 2004 onward were already centered on socioeconomic and welfare policies and sustainability preoccupations.

In contrast a key question arises: how could the EU make a goal-oriented policy—implying an increasingly technical methodology and precise conditionality criteria—compatible with a longed-for collective expectation of inclusion, recognition, welfare, and reconciliation? Indeed, these apparent ideals seem to constitute the appeal of the EU's widening for any potential candidate country's citizens and residents. In this regard, there is an even more challenging dilemma: how could the EU reconcile club logic with the guarantee of eradicating instrumental inner discriminations and any notion of second-class citizenship? In sum, how could it prevent reinforced harmonization, via the adoption of the *acquis communautaire* and the incorporation of standardized Community practices, which could result in forms of second-class citizenship for new members instead of promoting an unfolding of convergence and cohesion opportunities? This key question is linked to the radically critical view of European integration as a form of colonial exploitation in disguise, in a way in which formerly 'incompatible' third countries (due to divergent regulations) would need to undergo harmonization to become fully profitable areas of influence for 'core Europe' member states.

In short, the EU can be a political and economic community, a community of laws, principles, and norms. It can be a community of interests, but it is also a community of values and of common, interactive memories capable of binding key players to the implementation of mutual solidarity, to the aspiration of a shared inclusive identity, and to the enhancement of coordinated international cooperation and integration.

From a research viewpoint, a very important perspective in these realms is still largely missing and unexplored: going back to the basic principles of European integration, we currently observe the abandonment of 'peace' as a key normative and policy implementation pillar. This dissociation between the peace principle and EU policy-making has caused a major cleavage in the relation between citizens and institutions. This is also related to the lack of understanding of peace as more than the mere presence of security and the absence of conflict. New research in this area of European integration history could well move toward the stability, sustainability, welfare, and policy innovation dimensions of peace studies to bridge this gap. From this perspective, further sources to be consulted could include the human rights and European integration holdings as part of the Barbara Sloan EU Delegation Collection (BSEUDC), currently hosted at the University of Pittsburgh Archives. This collection enhances the incipient research connections between European integration and the consolidation of memories of belonging to a common polity.

Other questions of interest for this field of research could be: how could historical EU enlargement experiences be useful for the design and implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy and further EU enlargements to the Western Balkans in a way that prevents conflict, hybrid regimes, and instability while fostering sustainable democracy-building cooperation? What are the neglected solidarity and diversity dimensions of European integration? And are narratives on 'shared values' in the EU and beyond sufficient to mediate countervailing factors of exclusion?

In conclusion, in so far as EU enlargement policy focused on responding to the open questions related to the rearticulation of the geopolitical, social, and mental frames of reference inherited by the Cold War and its uncertain aftermath, it is understandable that the same formula would be very difficult to apply to any reality beyond this framework (e.g. new and very divergent challenges with other post-communist countries, such as those in the Western Balkans and in the members of the current EU's Eastern partnership). Indeed, once the 'return to Europe' agenda is exhausted, there would be a need for a new, meaningful, and compelling driving force for the EU's role in the global arena. Perhaps it is high time to go back to the notion of 'community' itself.

Notes

1 Norris, *Democratic Deficit*; Torreblanca, 'Una España confusa,' 52.
2 Document adopting the official Communication Strategy for Enlargement. DG Enlargement. European Commission Document COM (2002) 350 Final. Strategy launched in May 2000.
3 Cianetti et al., 'Rethinking'; Blokker, 'EU Democratic Oversight.'
4 Hill, *The Actors*, 142.
5 Blanco Sío-López, Christina, Interview with the director of the Directorate B in charge of Candidate Countries. DG Enlargement. European Commission. Brussels, 1 December 2005.
6 European Commission, DG1A-B, Brussels, 20 June 1994, IR/CS/js/0511282, *Background Note: Baltic States, The Security Issue*, p. 2, by I. Rudolphi.
7 COREU/Sec/1478/98 Telegram. *An Interesting and Candid Discussion on Kosovo and Russia with a Walk-on Appearance on Albania*. Brussels, Belgium, 1998.
8 'We Have Removed the Last Brick in the Berlin Wall, Says Cox,' *Irish Times*, 21 October 2002.
9 Some of these interviewees agreed to fully disclose their names. Other interviewees signed privacy agreements to merely disclose their position.
10 Yin, *Case Study Research*, 84–5.
11 Cuesta Bustillo, 'Metodología,' 3.
12 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, 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. Brussels, 6 February 2004.
13 Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs).
14 Sedelmeier and Wallace, 'Policies.'
15 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, Interview with the director of Directorate B in charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 1 December 2005.
16 Henderson, K. (ed.) (1999). Back to Europe.Central and Eastern Europe and the European Union. London: UCL, p. vii.

17 Ibid.
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20 Castells, *The Information Age*, 26; Grabbe, 'Six Lessons.'
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22 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, 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. Brussels, 6 February 2004.
23 Devrim, D. and Schulz, E. (2009), "Enlargement Fatigue in the European Union: From Enlargement to Many Unions". Real Instituto Elcano Working Papers. WP 13/2009. March 10, 2009.
24 'Europe Agreement,' 5185, 2 February 1990, 2, accessed 4 January 2019, http://europa. eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-94-7_en.htm.
25 Torreblanca, *The European Community*, 40–1.
26 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, Interview with the chief economic adviser of the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 29 January 2004.
27 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, Interview with the director of the Negotiations and Pre-accession Directorate of the DG Enlargement. Brussels, 2 February 2004.
28 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, 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. Brussels, 4 February 2004.
29 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, 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. Brussels, 6 February 2004.
30 Commission's Report to the European Council celebrated in Lisbon on 26 and 27 June 1992, elaborated by the First Task Force on Eastern Enlargement, entitled 'The Challenge of Enlargement,' *Bulletin of the European Communities*, Supplement 3/92, p. 9.
31 Text provided by the former president of the First Task Force on Enlargement at the DG External Relations of the European Commission, during the personal interview held with him. Brussels, 2 February 2004.
32 Mayhew, *Recreating Europe*, 25.
33 Commission's Report to the European Council celebrated in Lisbon in June 1992, elaborated by the First Task Force on Eastern Enlargement, entitled 'The Challenge of Enlargement.' 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. 11.
34 Ibid.
35 Sjursen, 'Why expand?' 12.
36 Blanco Sío-López, Cristina, Interview with the director of the Directorate B in charge of Candidate Countries at the DG Enlargement of the European Commission. Brussels, 1 December 2005.
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40 Nagle and Mahr, *Democracy and Democratization*, 62.
41 Kolankiewicz, 'Consensus and Competition,' 477.
42 Nagle and Mahr, *Democracy and Democratization*, 50.
43 Blanco Sío-López, 'Reconditioning,' 30.
44 Blanco Sío-López, 'Reconditioning,' 31.
45 Habermas, 'What Does Socialism Mean Today?'
46 Jovanovic, 'Eastern Enlargement of the EU,' 830; Tsoukalis, *The Unhappy State*.
47 Baldwin, 'The Costs and Benefits.'
48 Henderson, *Back to Europe*.
49 Watson, 'Politics'; Armingeon and Guthmann, 'Democracy in Crisis?'
50 Blanco Sío-López, 'Reconditioning,' 28.
51 Kelemen, 'Europe's Other Democratic Deficit.'
52 Torreblanca, 'Una España Confusa,' 52.
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