

LEADER

SQUEEZED

Between Copenhagen and Baghdad, Romania's EU accession may face a rough time both abroad and at home

by Alina Mungiu-Pippidi

FOCUS

2002 was a good year for Romania. NATO finally invited Romania to join its ranks at the Prague November summit, and the European Union made a lukewarm mention of Romania and Bulgaria at the Copenhagen summit, with the year 2007 as target for their entrance. Since then, however, the significance of these two victories has been rendered more and more blurred. NATO stumbled upon a decision to help Turkey protect itself in the event of a war in Iraq, and in an unprecedented move, three European countries, France, Belgium and Germany vetoed the United States. Central European countries and the Vilnius group answered the call for solidarity with the US and endorsed the American position, which prompted a severe reprimand from some Europeans, notably the French President Jacques Chirac. Perhaps not by chance, Romania and Bulgaria, the poorest and more vulnerable of the lot, whose entrance in 2007 is still disputed among EU member states, were made the particular object of French anger. Romania has already attracted attention to itself in fall of 2002 when she accepted to grant to the US a waiver from prosecution by the International Criminal Court, without waiting for a common European position. While Romania can argue that it acted judiciously in both circumstances, it is clear that neither she nor other East European countries fully understand that Europe is about a common position in everything, foreign policy included, and that such unilateral acts reinforce the argument of those who oppose European enlargement on grounds that Europe would become unmanageable.

How close was Europe from reaching a common decision in foreign policy before being so challenged by the 'New Europe' – the accession countries? In April 2002, the Dutch government of Wim Kok, driven by a virtuous environment minister, resigned over the 1995 failure of Dutch troops to prevent the slaughter of thousands of Muslims in the small Bosnian enclave of Srebrenica. The distance in space and time from the initial event, which triggered this development, to the final outcome is considerable. So is the novelty. Governments have resigned over failures in foreign policy before, but never over one with no direct impact to their own security. The Dutch case is the first in which a national government paid the symbolic bill of the

international community to the international public opinion¹. The guilt being in no way theirs alone, the Dutch paid however tribute to the new European *awareness* that the whole geographic Europe is the responsibility of the European Union (EU) and therefore of each and every member. Apart conscience, however, European leaders need some *instruments* to be able to do more than just resign now and then, when new evidence emerges that between will and act the gap is still too large to fill over a major crisis. And those are missing.

South-Eastern Europe was Europe's main test of strength, and despite the very celebrated last-hour success of Solana diplomacy in Macedonia (successful due to the presence of NATO on the ground) Europe has not passed it yet. European Monetary Union may well be a success, enlarging to ten countries may prove less costly and smoother a process than skeptics have expected, but ever since Adam Smith famously asserted in 1776 that 'defence is more important than opulence' we tend to measure the strength of a state by its capability to cope with threats to its security. In this respect, the European Union has often been described as an 'economic giant but a political pygmy'².

The weakness of Europe in decision-making was attributed to its complicated structures. Three offices are formally empowered to deal with the foreign policy of the EU, besides the foreign ministries of each member-state. First, the EU executive, Javier Solana in the newly created post of High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, subordinated to the European Council, in other words, to the member-states. Second, the Commission's Foreign Affairs Commissioner Chris Patten; third, the foreign minister of the country holding the EU's rotating six-months presidency. For the Balkans, the Stability Pact for South-East Europe (SP) established in 1999 was supposed to coordinate all the above, but managed to become just another office, often faced with unfair competition when not totally marginalized by powerful states or the EC itself. As a Balkan saying goes, a newborn with too many midwives risks remaining undelivered.

**Europe's
common
foreign policy
has never come
into being**

However, Europe is eager to prove itself as a major political actor in the world, not only in the Balkans, where it incessantly complains of lack of American involvement, but also in the Middle-East, Iran and China. So far, nonetheless, the two essential threats to the peace of Europe after the end of the Cold War, Serbian nationalism and Russian imperialism, have both been momentarily tamed due to considerable American involvement, using NATO as the main, although not sole, instrument. After EU failed to manage former Yugoslavia, a few Western European leaders have pushed ahead the European defense initiative, meant to boost Europe's defensive status. The need to have an increased European defense capability is beyond doubt, but the underlying assumption that Europe is a weak international actor due merely and fundamentally to its inability to deploy enough combat troops is highly questionable. The main reason is political, as the political will to create a decision making body able to reach a collective decision in a reasonable timeframe has clearly been missing. As Tony Judt has once put it, the European edifice being 'fundamentally and selfishly obsessed with fiscal rectitude and commercial

¹ "The international community has failed to protect the people in the UN safe areas (in Bosnia)," Mr Kok said in a short explanation of his resignation in parliament'. BBC World Service, Tuesday, 16 April, 2002, "Dutch Government quits over Srebrenica"

² see *Washington Times* of May 23, 2002, Gareth Harding, 'EU bids for bigger role'

advantage³, it is simply improper to deal with foreign policy. In other words, EU was never meant to be about anything else than management of prosperity, and when pushed to undertake other tasks, such as management of radical transformations or warlike environments, it cannot but show its limits. Not that the European leaders are not aware of this general problem: Romano Prodi sent to the European Convention, the wise men planning the future Constitution, a strong proposal making the Commission the sole driving actor of foreign policy in Europe. The French-German initiative to create a EU President from a EU Council member, thus entrusting one national leader with pan-European authority over foreign policy complicated things again. Efforts to solve the problem seem doomed by the same factors, which created the problem in the first place: the difficulty to reach a unity of views when a unity of interests – and ideology – was not reached yet. The recent convocation of a meeting to kick off European defense with only four participants, Belgium, France, Germany and Luxembourg shows that the transatlantic rift will not be mended easily, and due to it both EU and NATO face an uncertain future. As it showed quite soon in 2003, for instance in the division of ‘new’ and ‘old’ Europe over support for the American war in Iraq, the assassination of Serbian Prime Minister Zoran Djindjic, or the renewed unease over Turkey, the first enlargement to the East was far from having solved Europe’s challenges, rather it created new ones.

The main Romanian parties are poorly linked to Europe, and cannot help our diplomacy mobilize support for the country’s EU accession

It is not easy for Romania to find its path in this new and complicated context. She is handicapped by the worse legacy of Communist times (only Albania compares in similar terms) and the lack of a political elite able to draw upon the solidarity of various European political families. Romania’s main political party, the current ruling Social Democrats, is not yet a full member of the Socialist International. Due to the disappearance of Christian Democrats from political life, largely of their own doing, there are no means to attract support from the largest group of the European Parliament. The Romanian liberals are on paper the large paper, but far from consolidated. The fate of the German Liberals shows the danger for the Romanian liberals, who also built a party out of other parties’ remainders, also due to the example of their German colleagues (some influence being exercised through the influential Friederich Naumann foundation). Unable to mobilize the support of European Socialists and Christian Democrats, and with Liberals a weak European factor, Romanian leaders have to rely only on the small group of professional diplomats assembled around the current Minister of Foreign Affairs. The task is formidable when resources are considered. Being squeezed between Brussels and Washington is no enviable position. Finding a place in Europe and some European allies remains the main challenge for Romanian diplomacy. So far the Commission has been the only steady ally of the Romania’s candidature; Romania does not have champions as the Baltics had the Scandinavian countries and Poland had Germany. The most serious challenges for Romania’s accession remain, however, domestic, as they have always been.

³ Tony Judt, ‘Europe. The Grand Illusion’, in Ronald Tiersky, ed, *Euro-skepticism*, (Boston: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001) 285-297