

What do our citizens expect of the European Union?

Personal statement by Prof. Danuta Hübner,

**Secretary of State in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Poland
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Presidency, Excellencies, Dear Colleagues,

I come from a country which has seen its share of conflict over the past centuries, so it is natural that I expect the European Union to deliver peace and liberty to the citizens of Poland. This may seem obvious, but we should not take these fundamental values too lightly. We also look on the Union to provide support for the achievement of the fundamental reforms which took place in Poland at the end of the nineteen-eighties.

The European Union, as the guardian of these basic European values, is also expected by my compatriots to be both fair and efficient.

Fairness is, I am convinced, one of the keys to acceptance of the conditions for accession to the Union by the citizens of Poland. Equity is more important for us than generosity. This is why a clear indication that after accession the new member states and the old member states will have the same rights and obligations in the Union is important.

But fairness and equity cannot be used to justify an inefficient or unreformed Union. I do not believe that a Union of 27 is inherently less efficient than one of 15 or 6. The questions are how efficient are our institutions, how efficient are our decision-making processes, how democratic are they and how big is the decision-making agenda.

We are impressed with the decision-making abilities of the present Union, but these processes could certainly be improved. I would personally support an extension of qualified majority voting, though as we saw at Nice, every Member State has its own particular areas which it considers vital to defend fundamental national interests, which are just as often of a cultural or moral nature as economic.

I would also support a simplification of the decision-making process. What citizens would like from the Union is a simple and transparent system of decision-making, understandable to all. We have a European Parliament elected by universal suffrage, which however does not play the same role or have the same powers as the national Parliaments we know so well. Let us work towards giving the European Parliament the real power to do the job.

But in the Union, we do not know who the Government is either. We must propose a decision-making system which clearly identifies the agenda-setting authority and the way in which the legislature deals with proposals.

One way to expedite decision-making in the Union is to limit the area of policy in which decisions need to be taken. However, we can probably never absolutely delimit the scope of policy which is communatarised, and indeed it would not facilitate the efficiency of the Union to adapt to new conditions. But I personally would be in favour of a statement on what areas of policy the Union is not responsible for and therefore which are the exclusive domain of the Member State.

Finally let me touch on the question of economic efficiency. Citizens of the Union expect macro-economic stability, employment and a rising standard of living. Of course we know that responsibility for achieving these objectives lies firmly with national Governments. The objective of the Lisbon process is to achieve reforms with open coordination and I personally do not think that enough has been done to meet the promises at Lisbon. But we must emphasise that what happens at the national level is also important for the way people view the Union. While I support a clearer definition of responsibilities, it has to be pointed out that the Union cannot advance if there is blockage at the level of the Member States.

The Monetary Union will determine in large measure the outcome of the problem of the economic relationship between the Member State and the Union. But governments still have the choice to reform or to settle for slow growth and high unemployment. This choice will greatly matter for the way people will view the Union and the reform of the Union. I know what I prefer and I think I know what the citizens of my country desire too.

Thank you.