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THE REALITY BEHIND EUROPE

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Wider still and wider...

The EU's imperial ambitions extend much further than the inclusion of ten new states, argues Anthony Scholefield

With all attention being concentrated on the enlargement of the EU from 15 states to 25, it is easy to forget that the ambitions of the EU stretch much further.

From a British perspective the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership agreed at Barcelona in 1995 may barely come into view but it is clear from recent developments that EU states with Mediterranean interests have a much more ambitious programme.

The Barcelona Summit agreed to establish a free trade area between the EU and relevant countries (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Morocco, Palestine and Tunisia) by a target date of 2010 and to provide the inevitable 'financial assistance'. All this is being implemented by Association Agreements.

On 11th March 2003, the Commission set out a revised framework for relations over the coming decade with Russia, the Western NIS [newly independent states] and the Southern Mediterranean "countries who do not currently have a perspective of membership but also will soon find themselves sharing a border with the Union". Blithely overlooking the facts of geography, it continues "...in return for concrete progress demonstrating shared values (sic) and effective implementation of political institutional and economic

reforms (sic) all the neighbouring countries should be offered the prospect of a stake in the EU's internal market. This should be accompanied by further integration and liberalisation to promote the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital."

All of this was endorsed by the EU Council at Salonika on 9th July 2003 when Commissioner Verheugen was given a 'wider European Task Force' with the role of developing a new neighbourhood policy.

What is going on here? There are two possibilities. Either it is a very long-term effort to widen the EU to include the whole Mediterranean as advocated by such figures as Jacques Chirac, Dominique Strauss Khan, etc., to be achieved by means of 'mission creep' below the radars of British politicians and media. Or what is being proposed is a very blatant neo-colonial relationship in which the EU establishes 'shared values', sets benchmarks, works out the outline of reform, draws up action plans, hands out loans - and offers 'the prospect of a stake in the EU internal market'. Such a plan would be blatant even between, say, the USA and Nicaragua. Besides, precisely what is on offer in the EU internal market that is not available to any other WTO member is not stated. Commissioner Patten, an experienced colonialist, has said: "Over the past

decades, the Union's most successful foreign policy instrument has undeniably been the promise of EU membership. This is not sustainable."

This latter possibility would seem to reflect fashionable thinking among political elites in France. As we reported in an earlier issue, the *Institut des Relations Internationales Françaises* (30th May) has argued that the best hope of restricting the American lead in power terms would be by means of a neo-colonialist "integrated development plan" including Russia and the Arab states of North Africa.

Given the huge increase of populations on the southern and eastern Mediterranean shore, whether the EU proceeds either with a long-term plan to greatly increase EU membership or by creating a blatant neo-colonial apparatus, it is playing unnecessarily with combustible tinder. Simple opening up of EU trade markets is what these countries need. There is no reason to offer the long term illusions of free movement of people and EU membership or buckle a neo-colonialist monitoring apparatus on these poor countries together with 'extension of the Internal Market and Regulatory Structures'.

But empire building - perhaps literally in this case - is a characteristic of a non-democratic bureaucratic state.

Vote on EU Constitution may not be ruled out

Is the Blair Government being forced by the pressure of public opinion to change its mind about a referendum on the EU constitution? In the past, it has dismissed demands for a plebiscite almost arrogantly. But in an interview

on 17th July, Dr Denis MacShane MP, the Minister for Europe gave a hint that it might - just might - be rethinking its position. Instead of rejecting the idea out of hand, he said: "It is simply too early to call a referendum. We should

concentrate on having an open debate on the text before we consider putting it to the vote." Meanwhile, two more countries - Luxembourg and Portugal - have announced that they will be holding referendums on the issue.