

# E.U. plans to add 10 new states

By Constant Brand  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

BRUSSELS, Belgium — The European Union's parliament endorsed the bloc's historic expansion eastward Wednesday, but not without cautioning current and future members to fulfill their commitments so the larger union can "speak with a common voice."

In separate votes for each of the 10 acceding nations, the 626-member EU assembly overwhelmingly supported the expansion scheduled for May 1, 2004. Those 10 nations are Poland, Lithuania, Estonia, Latvia, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus.

The expansion will be the union's fifth and largest since its founding in 1957. It currently has 15 members.

"Finally, after all the arguments and after all the debates, we get the defining moment," European Parliament President Pat Cox said. "The time for enlargement has come and the time is now."

While approving the expansion, the EU assembly in Strasbourg, France, warned that the club's current and future members had to commit to building an "ever-closer union."

The assembly insisted that a 25-member EU "speak with a common voice in world politics" and urged EU capitals to show "a stronger sense of solidarity" — a reference to the gaping rift within Europe over Iraq.

The European Parliament also urged newcomers to "fulfill commitments" and fix remaining problems, especially in fighting corruption, crime and in protecting minority rights.

The expansion will cost the present European Union another \$41 billion in aid over three years to boost the new member's economies, notably by supporting farmers, building roads or replacing Soviet-era nuclear power plants.

The new members' entries still have to be

approved by national legislatures in the current EU members, and that is considered highly likely. The candidates also are holding referendums to ratify membership, with Malta and Slovenia already voting in favor and Hungary voting Saturday.

Ewa Haczyk, a spokeswoman for Polish government's negotiating team with the EU, said the vote is "of colossal significance" and recognizes the democratic and economic reforms undertaken in Poland since communism fell in 1989.

In Hungary, the government welcomed the EU assembly's vote.

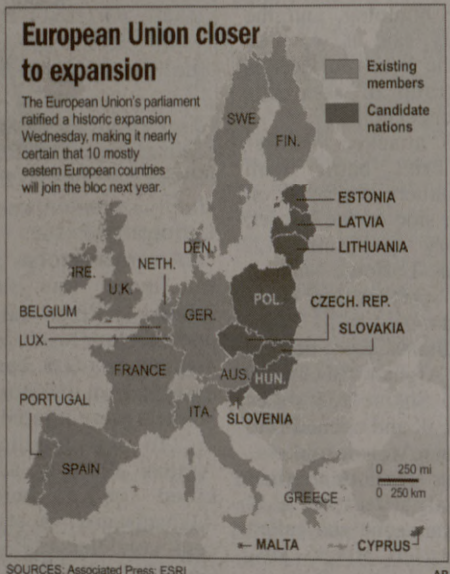
"Now the decision is in our hands, this historic chance to rise with the developed side of Europe," Foreign Minister Laszlo Kovacs said in Budapest.

On average, more than 500 of the parliament's 626 members voted in favor of the expansion. Not all assembly members were present Wednesday.

The Czech Republic received the most "no" votes, with 39. Ten German conservatives voted against it to protest the Czech Republic's refusal to repeal laws expelling ethnic Germans from Czechoslovakia after World War II.

Leaders from the 10 new states will sign their accession treaties in Athens, Greece, next Wednesday at a special EU summit.

With the new members, the EU will surpass the North American Free Trade Agreement as the world's largest market.



## Cuba defends prosecution of 75 citizens

HAVANA (AP) — Cuba defended its speedy prosecution of 75 dissidents, saying Wednesday it had to protect itself against U.S. attempts to subvert the government. It also maintained that the cases' timing had nothing to do with war in Iraq.

The United States, which has dismissed the Cuban allegations, condemned the crackdown. "This is symptomatic of the dictatorship of the Cuban regime," White House press secretary Ari Fleischer said Wednesday.

The known sentences for 57 of the government opponents who were tried ranged from 6 to 28 years. The remaining 18 sentences were expected by week's end. None of the trials has lasted more than one day, activists said. There were no reports of acquittals.

"We have been patient, we have been tolerant," Foreign Ministry Felipe Perez Roque said. "But we have been obligated to apply our laws."

Perez Roque also denied international criticism that the arrests and convictions over the course of three weeks were timed so that the world's attention would be focused on war.

"This decision was taken before the war on Iraq," Perez Roque said.

The defendants included independent journalists, pro-democracy activists, opposition party leaders and other dissidents.

They were arrested last month and accused of receiving American government funds and collaborating with U.S. diplomats to undermine the socialist state.

The United Nations also protested against the quick trials.

"There are questions about the fairness of such expedited proceedings," said United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Sergio Vieira de Mello in Geneva. "Cuba must ensure that the accused benefit from due process, including the right to an adequate defense."

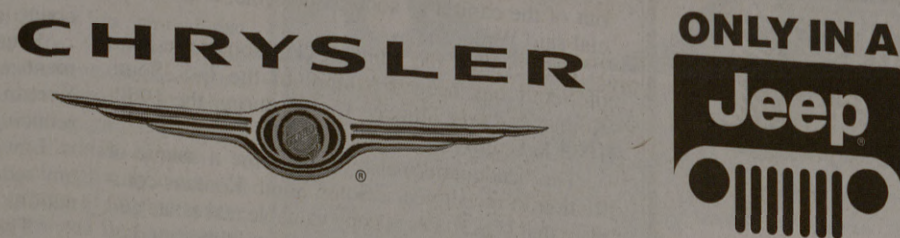
Perez Roque presented letters and detailed lists of payments among numerous documents he said proved the defendants were linked to and receiving money from the U.S. government.

Many of the payments the foreign minister mentioned appeared to come from Miami- or Washington-based groups that receive funds from the U.S. Agency for International Development to support the opposition and prepare for a transition in Cuba.

The foreign minister also said that the legal proceedings strictly followed Cuban law, with all defendants represented by attorneys. All have the right to appeal, he said.

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