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A further enlargement of the European Union is approaching. But this time the enlargement will differ from all previous ones since the countries which will be joining differ with regard to their economic performance, their living standards and are countries which have differing standards in their political culture, in other words, which have visions and requirements substantially different from those of existing Union member states. It is, therefore, not clear how this big bang will be reflected in the subsequent development of the Union. The first major step was a failure – the European Constitution has not been approved during its first debate, above all, because of the attitude adopted by the biggest applicant country, Poland, and the perception of its own importance. A second attempt is planned for this year, yet its success still remains most uncertain. That is why the statement made by Robert Schuman, one of the fathers and originators of the European Community, will most likely come true when at the time he said that a politically united Europe would be created only once there was a consensus of all the states and that unanimity among all nations was as rare as among individuals. European policy has never been a simple majority policy, and that is why Germany and France are today pressing with justification for the application of the principle of a dual majority in all decision-making. A further battle will take place on the subject of the future budget of the Union, which is supposed to be increased but those who contribute the biggest sums are not prepared to pay more. This applies once again to Germany and France. It is not difficult to understand why. The forthcoming European enlargement will, after all, terminate one era in the history of Europe, the post-war era, and in many ways Europe is going back to a situation, as it existed prior to the major conflicts of war. Victorious and defeated states, states which at some point were occupied and later liberated, the offenders and victims of the 20th century will now once again face each others as equal partners but now under the ceiling of one common Constitution and within the framework of a community with one common juridical subjectivity. Let us

admit that in the past many payments were made in a form resembling reparations and many a token of solidarity was rather an expression of recompense. All that will henceforth be a matter of the past. While Poland rightly claims to be included among the major Europeans, it seems to forget that it no longer holds a title under which it could demand higher payments for its own benefit. Under the circumstances it would do well to accept its new demanded role lock-stock-and barrel, and this in fact goes for all the candidate countries. Germany and France have for decades been the moving force of European integration and it is most likely that they will retain this role, provided they will continue to be afforded access to this role. That is why they should not confuse efforts at hegemony with efforts to legitimate leadership. The new epoch in Europe in the 21st century may well lead to further substantial changes in European politics, but what matters is that everyone should act in accordance with the same rules and norms, and above all, in a spirit of identical values. The greatness or the lack of importance of nations is, so to speak, not a matter of geography or of some natural determination, but of the will of these nations.

– *The Editors* –