Dear excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen

Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the question inspired by this morning’s expert workshop.

Being a Dane, this is obviously a task that I’m happy to take on.

After all, Denmark has an enlargement track-record to defend.

In 1993, the now famous Copenhagen criteria were agreed in the Danish capital.

In 2002, the big bang enlargement was finalized in Copenhagen.

And, well, who knows, - since Denmark holds the EU-presidency in the 20-25, Copenhagen may be in for yet another important enlargement decision –

A triple Copenhagen, if you like.

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Just opposite this building, there’s a brilliant exhibition called

“*Roads not taken.*

*Oder: Es hätte auch anders kommen können*”.

What *if* Austria, and not Prussia, had won the battle of König-grätz in

18-66?

Or what *if* Konrad Adenauer had accepted the so-called Stalin Note in

19-52?

Well, a similar *what if*-question was the backdrop of our working group this morning:

*What if* we cannot enlarge the EU?

And *what if* we enlarge, but fail to reform our institutions?

Indeed, it is only when we consider costs of not acting that we realize what is at stake.

As we now know, a failure to enlarge would leave candidate countries in a dangerous gray zone – and this could be seen by some as an invitation to move borders by force.

Likewise, *if* we don’t reform our institutions,

which were designed for a much smaller group of countries,

we could be left with an EU that is unable to deliver for Europeans on the key challenges of today.

Be it economic growth, climate change, or defending our shared values on the global stage.

So why don’t we just do it?

Well, that’s because we are operating with *two timetables*.

On the one hand, it’s a geopolitical im-pe-rative to enlarge – so speed is of the essence.

Indeed, we are already running behind schedule.

But on the other hand, we must take our time to ensure that the EU *and* the candidate countries are ready for enlargement.

So, what will it take to be ready for enlargement?

Well, I want to draw your attention to four points inspired by the workshop:

*First* of all, we need to get the fundamentals right,

and by that I mean the *rule of law.*

Rule of law must be *the* non-negotiable constitutional principle for the EU’s functioning and a precondition for membership.

*No* rule of law; *no* access to the single market or EU funding –

this must apply to both present and to future member states.

What would this mean? Well, ideally art. 7 should be enhanced – or, at least, all future EU financing should be conditional upon compliance with rule of law.

*Secondly*, because we have to operate on the basis of two timetables, muddling through cannot be the answer.

Indeed, this would lead us to a cul-de-sac or trigger an EU-version of waiting for Godot.

And as we all know, he never turned up in Samuel Becket’s famous play.

So member states have to agree upon a strategic plan for both enlargement *and* reform – a so-called *Agenda 20-30,* inspired by the *Agenda 2000*, which set out the path for the big bang enlargement in 2004.

A commitment to a new *Agenda 20-30* should already be made at the European Council meeting in December –

And just like the 2000-version, the Commission should be asked to present proposals on institutional and policy reform, as well as the enlargement process itself.

Indeed, a new *Agenda 20-30* should take into account that the EU’s multiannual financial framework must be enlargement-ready by 2028.

To stimulate action, member states should agree on 20-30 as the target date for enlargement, thereby sending a clear signal to the candidate states:

*We are ready, when you are ready*.

Thirdly, although one should not give up on the idea that staged or sectoral integration could help overcome the challenge of our two timetables,

by giving both candidates and the EU more time to reform –

This approach is anything but a silver bullet.

Just take the fact that it’s not possible to join the single market before mastering rule of law.

*AND* that the four freedoms are seen as one package.

There is no cherry-picking, or *Rosinenpickerei,* as we all learnt during the Brexit-negotiations.

So, more pragmatic and ad hoc cooperation in areas such as energy security, transport infrastructure or raw materials is a better approach

and this should be combined with the decision to grant candidate countries observer status, with speaking rights.

After all, already being *at* the table is the clearest signal that membership *will* happen.

Finally, for enlargementto succeed, we shouldn’t take public support for granted.

Indeed, public support is probably the most underestimated challenge so far…

Just take a brief look at the history books –

Norway twice rejected EU membership in a referendum,

and the constitutional treaty was rejected in France and Netherlands in 2005,

not least due to fears of the infamous Polish plumber.

The EU’s response to the “double no” in 2005 was the so-called *plan D* –

D for dialogue with national and transnational actors.

But maybe *this* time, let’s learn our lesson and start with the dialogue –

let’s call it a plan E – E for enlargement.

And why not use this format as a starting point by including representatives from the European and national parliaments, as well as civil society from all over Europe?

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Our host has already mentioned the report by the group of 12:

“Sailing on high Seas:

Reforming and enlarging the EU for the 21st Century”

So let me also end with the following *maritime* saying:

“the pes-si-mist complains about the wind;

The op-ti-mist expects it to change;

The realist *adjust* the sails”.

Quote unquote

So, adjusting the sails is what this conference is all about.

Full steam ahead, captains.