Deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Constitutional Affairs jointly adopted an own-initiative report by Petras AUŠTREVIIUS (Renew, LT) and Pedro SILVA PEREIRA (S&D, PT) on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement.

The report sets forward Parliament's position on reforms and a pathway towards the future functioning of an enlarged EU.

Enlargement has become one of the strongest EU policy and geopolitical tools. According to the Eurobarometer of June 2023, the majority of the EU's population is in favour of the future enlargement of the EU. However, a new impetus, commitments and vision are urgently needed to re-energise the enlargement process. The lack of engagement in previous years has created a **vacuum**, thus opening the space for Russia and China and other external actors.

As a reminder, nine of the 10 countries currently aspiring to join the EU have candidate status, some of them for many years. Those candidate countries find themselves at various stages of the accession process and negotiations.

In 2023, the European Council decided to grant candidate status to Georgia and to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova as well as with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria has been achieved.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and other ongoing geopolitical challenges have given new geostrategic meaning to the enlargement of the European Union. The stability, security and democratic resilience of the Western Balkans and the Eastern Neighbourhood are inextricably linked to those of the EU.

On accession procedures and the role of the European Parliament

Parliament is undoubtedly the most supportive EU institution when it comes to enlargement however its role remains **extremely limited** throughout the entire enlargement process and should be strengthened in order to increase democratic legitimacy and accountability.

Members noted that significant pre-enlargement reforms are needed to guarantee the efficient functioning of the enlarged EU and its capacity to absorb new members and to promote their successful integration as well as to respond properly to the many challenges it currently faces. It is suggested that passerelle clauses could be used immediately to switch from the requirement for **unanimity to qualified majority voting** in specific policy areas.

The report acknowledged the historic opportunity and challenge facing the EU of meeting its commitments to the countries and the peoples of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia, and of Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia. It reiterated the view that Türkiye's EU accession process cannot be resumed in the current circumstances.

The Commission is called on to improve the consistency, efficiency and transparency of pre-accession assistance, clearly reflecting the priorities in the fundamental areas in the allocation of IPA III funding.

The report also called for the introduction of stricter and more enforceable accountability with regard to spending and for improvement of the overall cycle of disbursement, implementation and scrutiny of pre-accession funding.

The report stressed that it could be useful to have a separate post of **Commissioner for Enlargement**.

On European institutional and financial reforms

The committee considers that the processes of preparing for enlargement should proceed in parallel in the EU and accession countries. It firmly believes that European institutional reforms should increase the EU' s ability to act, and include simplified and more effective decision-making procedures, moving away from unanimity. Qualified majority voting should be implemented in areas such as the protection of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the MFF, sanctions and other relevant foreign policy decisions, such as the start of EU accession negotiations and the opening and closing of individual negotiation clusters.

Pre-enlargement reforms must also address the implications of enlargement for the **composition of Parliament** according to Members.

The report stressed the need for a swift revision of the Council's functioning and decision-making process in view of enlargement. It is proposed to review the system of rotating presidencies of the Council. The calculation of qualified majority voting thresholds should also be reconsidered to improve the balance between larger and smaller states and to set higher thresholds for the most important decisions.

Stressing that enlargement is both a major financial challenge for the EU, Members stressed that this challenge requires a properly designed, prioritised and funded MFF and a more effective EU budget that enables the Union to take on new commitments while continuing to deliver on existing programmes and political priorities. Sufficient additional and genuine own resources are also needed to meet the enlargement challenge.