# Deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement

2023/2114(INI) - 29/02/2024 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 305 votes to 157, with 71 abstentions, a resolution on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement.

While welcoming the aspiration of numerous European countries and their citizens to join the EU, Members believe that enlargement is of the **utmost strategic importance for the EU**, all the more so in the face of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and other common geopolitical challenges, requiring a long-term political vision and bold decisions.

Parliament welcomed the Commission's recommendations in the 2023 enlargement package and further welcomed the European Council's decisions to open accession negotiations with **Ukraine** and **Moldova**, to grant **Georgia** candidate status and to open accession negotiations with **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria has been achieved.

***On accession procedures and the role of the European Parliament***

Parliament acknowledges 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, Moldova and Georgia. However, it reiterated the view that **Türkiye's EU accession process cannot be resumed in the current circumstances**. Any improvement in EU-Türkiye relations must be based on tangible progress on human rights, democracy and respectful neighbourly relations.

The resolution underlined that accession to the EU must always be a **merit-based procedure** and that each applicant must be assessed on its own merit in terms of its meeting the Copenhagen criteria in their entirety. The rule of law, democratic reform, media freedom and respect for human rights, including the rights of minorities, should be put at the forefront of the accession process, with judicial independence, the fight against corruption and the empowerment of civil society being crucial preconditions for progress along the path to EU membership.

Given that there can be no fast-track or pre-defined deadlines for membership, Members consider that the next EU enlargement should take place as soon as **all accession conditions are met in the candidate countries** concerned and in parallel the necessary European reforms are agreed and implemented; expects that the first candidate countries will be ready to join the Union **by the end of this decade**.

Parliament called on the Commission 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. It highlighted the need to ensure that EU funding provided to enlargement countries is in line with the EU's own strategic goals and interests. It also called for options to further strengthen protection of the rule of law and the EU's democratic values **against backsliding** for both existing and future Member States to be explored in the context of Treaty reform, ensuring that enlargement strengthens the EU and its single market.

Members believe that the challenge of an expanded EU requires an **enhanced enlargement policy** putting in place a clear incremental pathway towards EU membership, including gradual integration into common policies, such as the single market, for those countries that complete negotiations in a given policy chapter or that make substantial progress on EU-related reforms.

The resolution stressed the need for stronger, more effective and meaningful **European Parliament decision-making** and oversight of the EU's enlargement policy and its funding. It also stressed that it could be useful to have a separate post of Commissioner for Enlargement.

***On European institutional and financial reforms***

Parliament considered 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.

The resolution 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.