

Institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations

2025/2041(INI) - 22/10/2025 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 310 votes to 277, with 53 abstentions, a resolution on the institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations.

Nine of the ten countries currently aspiring to join the EU have candidate status, some of which have held this status for many years. The candidate countries are at various stages of the accession process and negotiations. Georgia unilaterally suspended EU accession negotiations on 28 November 2024.

The cost of not reforming the enlarged EU

Parliament believes that EU enlargement represents a **long-term geostrategic investment** and stressed that Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and other geopolitical challenges increase the urgency of continuing the enlargement process. Members noted that experience shows that each new wave of enlargement brings new challenges and recalled that each enlargement in the history of the European project has been preceded or accompanied by the necessary internal institutional reforms.

The resolution stressed that while the **use of unanimity** within the Council, including for intermediate stages of the enlargement process, ensures that the concerns of all Member States are taken into account, it may slow down the enlargement process. It recalled that the Treaty already allows for the use of qualified majority voting without amending the Treaties. Given the outdated structure and governance of the EU budget, as well as the potential for redistribution in the allocation of agricultural and cohesion funds, EU enlargement provides an opportunity to **recalibrate the EU's key policies** in this area.

Parliament affirmed that the deepening, widening, and unification of the EU must go hand in hand, and that **institutional and financial reforms** are necessary to integrate new members without destabilising the economies of other Member States. It recognised that ad hoc solutions can help, but are no substitute for sustainable and democratic structural reforms.

Moreover, the resolution stressed that **reforms of the EU's institutional framework before enlargement** should meet the objectives of improving the EU's effectiveness and making it more powerful on the world stage, more democratic, legitimate and accountable.

The efficiency challenge

Parliament stressed that, in order to improve the effectiveness of the enlarged Union, the **composition of the EU's institutions** should be adapted and their functioning and effectiveness improved. It suggested that the enlargement process should be supported by early and close involvement of the candidate countries in the functioning of the EU's institutions, for example through observer status.

Members noted that institutional reforms prior to enlargement must take into account the consequences of enlargement on the composition of Parliament, which should be examined at the same time as the voting system in the Council. The current composition of the Commission must also take enlargement into account and be gender, geographically and demographically balanced.

Parliament recognised the need to consider reviewing the Council's functioning and decision-making process and insisted that **qualified majority voting must be redefined** in order to improve the balance

between larger and smaller states and to maintain higher thresholds for the most important and politically delicate decisions. It is proposed to strengthen and reform the procedure laid down in Article 7 of the EU Treaty by abolishing the unanimity rule for European Council decisions.

The power and resources challenge

Parliament reiterated its call for a **review of the governance of the Multiannual Financial Framework** (MFF), including by granting full co-legislative powers over the expenditure side of the EU budget, including the adoption of the MFF. It is convinced that the current mandatory revision clause in the event of enlargement must be maintained in the next MFF and stressed that the next MFF must also put in place appropriate transitional and phasing-in measures for key spending areas, such as cohesion and agriculture. Members called for a **revamped long-term budget** that must move away from the historically restrictive limit of 1% of aggregate gross national income that the EU has imposed on itself.

The democracy challenge

Members stressed the importance of strengthening the **democratic legitimacy of EU policies** by reinforcing the decision-making and scrutiny rights and the position of the European Parliament by placing it on an equal footing with the Council, granting it the right of legislative initiative and strengthening the European dimension of elections. Highlighting the key role played by the parliaments of candidate countries in the EU accession process, the resolution highlighted the importance of **parliamentary cooperation** and consensus-building on EU accession issues.

Means of implementing institutional pre-enlargement reforms

Members stressed that the institutional pre-enlargement reforms can be implemented through existing treaty flexibilities, including **‘passerelle’ clauses**, enhanced cooperation, constructive abstentions and permanent structured cooperation (PESCO).

Phased-in solutions, temporary derogations and transition periods can be negotiated for certain policy fields in the context of accession procedures. Differentiated integration should, however, remain within the framework of the Treaties and preserve institutional unity.

Current mechanisms allow progress towards a European Defence Union without comprehensive reform, with PESCO allowing a group of Member States to move towards the creation of a European defence system. The Commission and the Council are invited to develop a realistic roadmap for these reforms.