EU enlargement strategy

2025/2110(INI) - 11/03/2026 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted, by 385 votes to 147, with 98 abstentions, a resolution on the EU enlargement strategy.

Geostrategic dimension of enlargement

Parliament reaffirmed that enlargement is a **strategic response** to the new geopolitical reality and an investment of the utmost importance for the security and stability of the Union in the face of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, hybrid attacks and other hostile actions against its neighbours.

Members stressed the political urgency of demonstrating the EU's active commitment to the enlargement process, while affirming that **the future of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova lies within the EU**. They believe that the enlargement policy is essential for the Union's influence in a time of heightened geopolitical instability and that membership is a crucial tool for promoting lasting peace, democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights, for fostering regional reconciliation and stability, and for protecting candidate countries and the EU's neighbourhood from malicious foreign interference, particularly from Russia.

Strategic priorities of EU enlargement: merit-based process and conditionality

Members reiterated that any European state may apply to become a member of the EU, provided it respects the values enshrined in Article 2 of the EU Treaty, including human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law, and human rights, including minority rights. Accession must remain a merit-based and reversible process, with each candidate assessed against the Copenhagen criteria, alignment with the EU acquis, and all additional conditions of the enlargement framework. The fundamental values and principles of the Union are non-negotiable.

The resolution emphasised that **the rule of law, democratic reforms, media freedom, and fundamental rights, including minority rights**, must remain at the forefront of enlargement. Furthermore, judicial independence, the **fight against corruption**, inclusion, and support for civil society are crucial prerequisites for progress towards EU accession, particularly in the context of rising authoritarian tendencies. Progress on these fundamental elements must guide all chapters of the negotiations.

Parliament stressed the need to achieve and mainstream **gender equality**, including by eliminating gender-based and domestic violence, protecting children's rights and their access to quality education, and fully implementing the principle of non-discrimination, including towards the LGBTIQ+ community and persons with disabilities, throughout the accession process. It emphasised respect for **human rights** and stressed that all candidate countries must ensure genuine representation of minorities at all levels of government.

The resolution also stressed the importance of **alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)**, strengthening the role of candidate countries in European security and defence, regional cooperation, reconciliation between states, and resolving bilateral issues. Furthermore, it encouraged the **participation of civil society** and citizens and called for enhanced monitoring of reforms to ensure the credibility of the accession process.

Parliament congratulated **Montenegro** and **Albania** on the considerable progress they have made and noted their ambition to conclude negotiations by the end of 2026 and the end of 2027, respectively. It

commended **Ukraine** 's remarkable resilience and commitment to its European path and called for the swift opening of negotiating groups with Ukraine and **Moldova**. It encouraged the enlargement countries to continue to resolutely implement the necessary reforms in a timely manner and to make tangible and irreversible progress, starting with the fundamentals.

Ensuring the effective functioning of an enlarged Union

Parliament believes that the process of preparing for enlargement should take place in parallel, both within the EU and the enlargement countries to safeguard the effective functioning of an enlarged Union. It reiterated its request to:

- undertake the necessary **reforms** to make the EU stronger and enhance Europe's strategic autonomy, ensuring that the lack of such reforms does not delay the accession of new Member States;

- enhance the EU's capacity to act through the introduction of **qualified majority voting** (QMV) in areas relevant to the accession process by abolishing, in particular, the requirement for unanimity in the intermediate steps in the enlargement process;

- review EU **sectoral policies** to assess how to accommodate new Member States and ensure the efficient functioning of an enlarged Union.

Parliament recognised the importance of broadly applying **gradual integration**, in a merit-based and reversible manner, into EU common policies, such as the single market, including the digital single market, for candidate countries that make substantial progress on EU-related reforms.

Supporting enlargement countries on their path towards EU membership

Members believe that support for countries affected by enlargement must be based on **targeted reforms**, **clear roadmaps and timelines**, and increased transparency to maintain the credibility and momentum of the process. Accession must take place as soon as all conditions are met, without haste or political manipulation of reforms affecting the functioning and independence of institutions. Furthermore, **pre-accession financial assistance** is essential to ensure that the countries concerned receive structured financial support for institutional and economic transformation. Members called for adequate pre-accession funding under the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF), tailored to the expected enlargement of the Union during its implementation.

Parliament also called for: (i) financial reforms to address challenges in cohesion and agricultural policies; (ii) the establishment of a framework for effective cooperation between the European Public Prosecutor's Office and the accession countries; (iii) increased funding for the implementation of environmental, climate and animal welfare measures; (iv) support for capacity building in candidate countries; and (v) a stronger and more visible commitment from the Union in the face of China's growing influence in the countries concerned.