

# Institutional aspects of the European Union's capacity to integrate new Member States

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Alexander STUBB (EPP-ED, FI) on the institutional aspects of the EU's capacity to integrate new Member States. The report acknowledged that the Union was currently "confronted with difficulties to honour its commitments towards South-East European countries" and said that it needed to improve its institutional, financial and policy structure before any further enlargement can take place.

The committee said that the notion of "integration capacity" implies that, after any new accession, the EU institutions will be able to function properly and democratically, and the EU will have sufficient financial resources to finance its activities and will be able to develop its policies and attain its political objectives. The Union must therefore decide which reforms are needed before any future accession, taking into account the impact that new Member States will have on its institutional, financial and decision-making capabilities. The report reaffirmed that the Treaty of Nice "does not provide an adequate basis for further enlargements."

MEPs stressed that "integration capacity" should not be seen as a new criterion for candidate countries, since it is up to the EU to improve its ability to accept new countries and deepen its integration process. They added that enlargements have "tended to strengthen the Union, foster its economic growth, reinforce its role in the world and stimulate the development of new EU policies."

The report made a series of proposals concerning the institutional reforms needed before any further enlargement: the adoption of a new qualified majority voting system at the Council to simplify decision making; a clear definition of the EU's values, objectives and competences; more transparency in the EU's decision-making process, i.e. public scrutiny of the Council's legislative activities; increased powers of scrutiny for national parliaments and the adoption of a clause enabling Member States to withdraw from the EU. The committee also called for reinforcement of the European Neighbourhood Policy to provide a framework for relations with those countries with no prospect of accession.

In conclusion, MEPs in the committee stressed that enlargement was "an historic opportunity to ensure peace, security, stability, democracy and the rule of law, as well as economic growth and prosperity in Europe", and added that it must go hand in hand with the deepening of the Union. They reiterated their conviction that a constitutional settlement must be achieved before the next European Parliament elections in 2009, and reaffirmed their endorsement of the Constitutional Treaty, "which already offers solutions to most of the reforms needed by the EU".