

## New EU strategy for enlargement

Although European integration of the Western Balkans and Türkiye is still at a standstill, the war in Ukraine and the challenging geopolitical environment have lent new impetus to the enlargement process, in an attempt to secure its continuity, consistency, credibility and impact. In June 2022, EU leaders endorsed the 'European perspective' of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. The Western Balkan countries' prospect of a European future had meanwhile already been endorsed at summits in Thessaloniki (in 2003) and, more recently, in Sofia (2018), Zagreb (2020), Brdo (2021) and Brussels (2022). The European Parliament is expected to debate a report on the new EU strategy for enlargement during its November 2022 plenary session.

### Background

According to the [draft report](#) by rapporteur Tonino Picula (S&D, Croatia), enlargement policy is 'the most effective EU foreign policy instrument and one of the Union's most successful policies'. It is a strategic investment in stability and prosperity on the European continent. In 2019, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen [declared](#) her ambition to head a 'geopolitical commission' that 'stabilises its neighbourhood, accelerates enlargement and champions multilateralism'. In 2022, in her [State of the Union](#) address, von der Leyen stated: 'I want the people of the Western Balkans, of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia to know: You are part of our family, your future is in our Union, and our Union is not complete without you!'. However, since Croatia's accession in 2013, the six Balkan countries have made little progress towards EU integration, and accession negotiations with Türkiye are on ice.

In February 2020, the Commission adopted a [new enlargement methodology](#) to reinvigorate the enlargement process by instilling more credibility, predictability, dynamism, and a stronger political steer. New proposals from EU Member States (such as the [French non-paper](#) on enlargement policy reform, published in 2019) inspired this reform, together with authors such as [Pierre Mirel](#) and [Milena Lazarevic](#). The main proposals consist of gradual or staged inclusion of the Western Balkan countries in EU programmes, conditional on their progress on introducing reforms, the introduction of clear benchmarks for measuring reforms, and the design of a tailor-made sanctions mechanism. The 23-24 June 2022 European Council [conclusions](#) retain this [gradual approach](#), stating, 'Building on the revised methodology, the European Council invites the Commission, the High Representative and the Council to further advance the gradual integration between the European Union and the region already during the enlargement process itself in a reversible and merit-based manner'.

### European Parliament position

On 13 October 2022, Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) adopted a [report](#) drafted by Tonino Picula. The report stresses the need to re-energise enlargement policy, in order for the EU to retain its geostrategic relevance and credibility. The report also suggests that the current enlargement gridlock could be overcome by revamping the accession process, as a political goal and in terms of its methodology. In line with the above-mentioned European Council conclusions, the report proposes to offer all aspiring countries membership-oriented roadmaps with tangible steps, by further enhancing the revised enlargement methodology. The report recommends formally suspending accession negotiations with Türkiye, in accordance with the negotiating framework, until the country re-engages with the EU and demonstrates clear and significant progress on EU-related reforms. Finally, the report affirms that each enlargement country should be judged on its own merits.

Own-initiative report: [\(2022/2064\(INI\)\)](#); Committee responsible: AFET; Rapporteur: Tonino Picula (S&D, Croatia).

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