SUMMARY

The geopolitical dimension of enlargement policy became more pronounced in 2022, when Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia asked to join the EU. Since then, fresh geopolitical challenges have accelerated the need to reform enlargement policy and cemented a shift towards the merit-based integration of new countries. Geopolitical considerations include security and defence and also foreign policy alignment, for instance in terms of relations with strategic competitors, such as China and Russia. Enlargement also presents challenges for other areas, such as the EU’s budget, decision-making and agricultural policy. Regional cooperation and the resolution of bilateral disputes meanwhile remain key elements for aspiring members.

The European Commission presented its annual enlargement reports on 8 November 2023. Its strategic orientations and recommendations include accelerating the accession process with the Western Balkan countries, opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, and granting candidate status to Georgia. They build on policy work done in recent years, including the new accession negotiation methodology adopted in February 2020 and a gradual approach to integration endorsed by the Council in June 2022. The European Council is expected to decide on these recommendations during its meeting on 14-15 December 2023.

The two countries most advanced in their accession negotiations, Montenegro and Serbia, opened negotiations in 2012 and 2014 respectively. North Macedonia and Albania opened accession negotiations in 2022. Candidate country since 2022, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and potential candidate country, Kosovo*, have yet to open accession negotiations. Accession talks with Türkiye are on ice.

According to the European Parliament’s 2022 recommendation on the new EU strategy, enlargement policy is ‘the most effective EU foreign policy instrument and one of the Union’s most successful policies’. In 2023, Parliament supported the accession process and the opening of negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova. In addition to its role as the budgetary authority, that endorsing the financial provisions and the budget, Parliament monitors candidates’ overall progress and their implementation of the EU acquis.

Parliament’s consent is also required before any accession treaty can be signed.

IN THIS BRIEFING

- Introduction
- Enlargement policy reforms
- Accession process
- Challenges ahead
- Position of the European Parliament
Introduction

EU enlargement policy is a strong anchor for peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability on our continent. In 2019, when presenting her College of Commissioners and their programme, European Commission President-elect Ursula von der Leyen declared her ambition to head a 'geopolitical Commission' that stabilises its neighbourhood, accelerates enlargement and champions multilateralism. Supporting the future enlargement of the EU, she said that 'We share the same continent, the same history, the same culture and the same challenges. We will build the same future together'. However, since Croatia's accession in 2013, not a single country has joined the EU and the six Balkan countries have made little progress towards EU integration. Accession negotiations with Türkiye are meanwhile on ice. Internal constitutional reforms and tensions in some countries, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, are compounded by security challenges and external interference, in particular from Russia and China. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo are the only three countries in the region that have not yet joined NATO.

The geopolitical dimension of enlargement was accentuated in 2022, when Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia requested to join the EU. In her 2022 state of the Union address, von der Leyen included these three countries of the Black Sea region among those who share a 'European future' together with the Balkans: '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'. On 8 November 2023, von der Leyen confirmed the Commission's recommendations to strengthen enlargement policy, to speed up the accession process with the Western Balkan countries, and to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, ahead of the European Council meeting in December, when EU leaders are due to decide on the matter. She also said that 'Ukraine has completed ... well over 90 % of the necessary steps that we set out last year'. These steps were set out in the Commission's opinion on Ukraine's EU membership application. The Commission has since recommended that the Council open accession negotiations, with the negotiating framework being approved once Ukraine has carried out the ongoing reforms.

On 12 December 2023, the General Affairs Council approved conclusions on enlargement. The conclusions underline the need for the candidate countries to align fully with EU common foreign and security policy (CFSP), including in the field of sanctions. This alignment is perceived as 'a strong expression of a partner's strategic choice'. The conclusions also encourage exploration of additional measures with a view to implementing gradual integration, in a merit-based and reversible manner.

Faced with the challenges of enlargement, the EU has adopted several policy reforms over the 2020-2023 period. Political debate and expert analysis have made it clear that further enlargement would require a reform of the EU budget and other policies, as well as a potential rethink of decision-making and institutional reform. It is also crucial to maintain the merit-based approach.

Enlargement policy reforms

Twenty years ago, the Thessaloniki Summit (2003) opened the door to a European future for the Western Balkans. Since then progress towards EU membership for the countries concerned has been slow, however. Some of the countries of the region have struggled to implement the necessary economic and political reforms, or the rule of law and good neighbourly relations chapters. Taking into account lessons learnt following Croatia's accession in 2013, in 2018 the Commission adopted a strategy for 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'. The strategy reconfirmed the European future of the region as a 'geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values' and indicated 2025 as a possible accession date. However, in June 2019, and again in October 2019, the Council postponed
the decision to open negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, despite the positive recommendation from the European Commission and support of the European Parliament. By delaying this decision, the EU was seen by some as sending an ambiguous message to the region, reducing its credibility and potentially even fuelling nationalistic rhetoric, opening the door to the influence of third-country powers, in particular China and Russia. ‘Enlargement fatigue’ sparked a debate within academia and Member States (see French non-paper ‘Reforming the European Union accession process’ of November 2019) leading to a fundamental re-think of EU enlargement policy following the approval of the von der Leyen Commission on 27 November 2019.

Enlargement methodology reform (2020)

On 5 February 2020, the Commission adopted a new EU methodology for accession negotiations. Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi, stressed that the purpose of the proposal is to ‘re-establish a credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans’, as stability, peace and prosperity in our region is a ‘top priority’. The new methodology favours a merit-based approach, with greater ‘political steer’ and a stronger focus on key reforms, such as on the rule of law, fundamental freedoms and the functioning of democratic institutions, in particular within Cluster 1 (rule of law, economic criteria and public administration reform), which plays a central role. Sufficient progress therefore needs to be made under Cluster 1 (which remains open throughout the negotiations and is last to be closed) before the other five clusters can be opened (for more details see chapter on the accession process). The new methodology sought to replace the transactional approach and ensure irreversible reforms. Whereas accession negotiations were previously largely a technical process in which the Commission played the dominant role in the progressive negotiation of 35 chapters, the reform ensured more involvement and scrutiny from the Council and the Member States.

New proposals for a 'gradual approach' (2020-2023)

In the 2020-2022 period, new proposals emerged calling for a ‘gradual’ or ‘staged approach’, with greater financial assistance for accession countries, conditional on their reform progress, and the design of a tailor-made sanctions mechanism. The geopolitical argument supporting this gradual integration approach was the need to offset the influence of China and Russia in the region, while also supporting internal reforms and convergence with the EU by granting certain benefits of EU membership, in particular the ‘four freedoms’ (of goods, capital, services and people) even before EU accession. Following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the June 2022 European Council conclusions retained this gradual approach, stating that ‘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’.

Access to the European single market is among the key proposals of the ‘gradual approach’; it will also support mutually beneficial trade relations between the EU Member States and accession countries. The underlying macro-economic reason is to rebalance trade relations between the EU and accession countries, as the EU27 has a relatively large, and increasing, trade surplus with the six Western Balkan countries (€11.4 billion, including €6.3 billion with Serbia in 2022; the respective figures in 2021 were €8.5 billion and €4.3 billion). In the words of EU Enlargement Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi, the key to ‘long-term peace and stability’ is to close the ‘enormous gap in terms of economic development’ between Balkan and EU countries. Similarly, the trade surplus with Georgia has also been growing (€2.2 billion in 2022 and €1.2 billion in 2021) and Moldova (€2.1 billion in 2022 and €1.3 billion in 2021). In contrast, the trade balance with Ukraine diminished from €4.3 billion in 2021 to €2.5 billion in 2022. This is the result of the EU’s support for the war-torn Ukrainian economy and its granting of full trade liberalisation on a temporary basis to alleviate, to the extent possible, the difficult situation faced by the country.
Box 1 – Franco-German expert report (2023)

Published in September 2023, the report of the Franco-German working group on the EU institutional reform entitled 'Sailing on High Seas: Performing and Enlarging the EU for the 21st century' proposes policies and reforms to make the EU institutions 'enlargement-ready'. It includes several possible ways to run a larger EU, ranking from more to less ambitious. The authors propose a bigger EU budget, linking EU pay-outs more strictly to rule of law conditions, moving away from unanimity in the Council towards more majority voting (including by rebalancing the qualified majority threshold to benefit smaller EU countries) and creating a new watchdog that would probe the financial integrity of people working for EU institutions.

Furthermore, referring to the potential challenges brought by future enlargement, the report suggests that the EU budget must grow over the coming budgetary period both nominally and as a proportion of gross domestic product (GDP). The ongoing mid-term review has already exposed the extent to which the 2021-2027 budget was stretched beyond its limit by asking for additional contributions from the Member States. The prospect of enlargement and the reconstruction of Ukraine, as well as the fact that €600 billion a year will be needed to meet the EU’s emission reduction objectives, all call for a substantially larger EU budget. Repayments of the debt issued under the Next Generation EU programme will meanwhile begin in 2027.

Accession process

The accession process is composed of nine consecutive steps represented in Table 1 below. Experience shows that the longest is step 6 – the actual negotiations – involving detailed screening of the acquis. Currently, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Türkiye are already at this stage. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Ukraine and Moldova have been granted candidate country status. Georgia and Kosovo are potential candidates. In November 2023, the European Commission recommended granting Georgia candidate country status (step 3).

In December 2023 the Commission recommended that the Council open accession negotiations (step 4) with Ukraine and Moldova (see Box 2, below). The Commission also recommended that the Council adopt the negotiating framework (step 5) once additional conditions were fulfilled. The Commission must report on the state of play regarding the conditions by March 2024.

If the Member States take a unanimous decision in favour, accession negotiations effectively start (step 6) with the first intergovernmental conferences for Ukraine and Moldova, as was the case in July 2022 for Albania and North Macedonia.

The Commission and candidate country governments manage the accession negotiations (step 6). The negotiating framework agreed at the intergovernmental conference includes negotiation chapters divided into six ‘clusters’ (introduced by the 2020 revised enlargement methodology, see Figure 1):

- Cluster 1 – Fundamentals;
- Cluster 2 – Internal Market;
- Cluster 3 – Competitiveness and inclusive growth;
- Cluster 4 – Green Agenda and Sustainable Connectivity;
- Cluster 5 – Resources, Agriculture and Cohesion;
- Cluster 6 – External Relations.

Negotiations on each cluster open as a whole. Cluster 1 is opened first and closed last. Once the negotiations end (steps 7 to 9), the accession treaty is submitted to the European Parliament and to Member States’ national assemblies for ratification. According to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the European Parliament votes by a majority of its component members, under the consent procedure. Some Member States’ constitutions require a referendum for ratification of a new accession treaty.
Table 1 – The main steps in the accession process

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STEP</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>STEP 1</td>
<td>Country submits membership application to Council (EU Member States).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 2</td>
<td>Commission submits opinion on the application.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 3</td>
<td>EU Member States decide unanimously to grant the country candidate status.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 4</td>
<td>Once the conditions have been met, the accession negotiations are opened, with the agreement of all Member States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 5</td>
<td>Commission proposes a draft negotiating framework as a basis for the talks. Member States must agree on this negotiating framework before accession negotiations can formally begin.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 6</td>
<td>During the negotiations, divided into clusters and chapters, the country prepares to implement EU laws and standards. In each case, all EU Member States must agree that all requirements have been met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 7</td>
<td>Once negotiations on all areas are finalised, the Commission gives its opinion on the readiness of the country to become a Member State.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 8</td>
<td>Based on this opinion, EU Member States decide unanimously to close the negotiation process. The European Parliament must also give its consent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>STEP 9</td>
<td>All EU Member States and the candidate country sign and ratify an accession treaty, which enables the country to become an EU Member State.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data source: European Commission, 2022.

Box 2 – Recommendation to open negotiations

Three countries are waiting for negotiations to open (step 4). In this regard, the European Commission has requested different steps or key priorities be completed by Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. The November 2023 assessment found that Moldova had fully completed 6 out of 9 steps, Ukraine 4 out of 7 steps, and Bosnia and Herzegovina 2 out 14 key priorities. Taking into account progress made, the Commission recommended starting negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine and adopting the negotiating framework (step 5) once specific actions had been taken. In the case of Ukraine, the Commission requested actions in the field of anti-corruption and national minorities, while for Moldova action was needed on anti-corruption and the judiciary. With regard to Bosnia, based on the findings of its most recent progress report, the European Commission announced its intention to recommend the opening of EU accession negotiations ‘once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved’. The European Commission will report on progress made in all three countries by March 2024.
Challenges ahead

Budgetary policy

The accession of new EU Member States will surely have an impact on the EU budget, as there will be demand for new resources to cover additional costs, particularly for the agricultural and cohesion policies.

According to a study prepared by the General Secretariat of the Council of the EU, the cost of accession of all current candidate countries over seven years amounts to €256.8 billion, €37 billion a year. This very indicative assessment assumes that current rules would apply. This scenario would imply significant reductions in payments to current Member States and regions should the rules remain the same. However, the probable accession date of somewhere around 2030 goes beyond the current multiannual financial framework (MFF), leaving the necessary time to adjust policies and negotiate new rules. In this context, the European Committee of the Regions has asked the European Commission to carry out a detailed assessment before proposing new rules for the post-2027 cohesion policy. The aim of this assessment would be to ensure that the new rules allow continuation of EU support to all regions.
In a policy paper for the International Centre for Defence and Security, Michael Emerson points out that the costs of Ukrainian accession could be mitigated in several ways. First, transitional periods would be agreed in the negotiations, meaning that for a certain period of time payments to Ukraine and other new Member States could be capped. Second, enlargement costs could be connected to costs of reconstruction, which could be partly covered by other international donors, such as the G7 states, the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), by the private sector and by reparations paid from frozen Russian assets (estimated at €278 billion). Third, budgetary contributions could be delayed if financed with EU bonds with a maturity of up to 30 years. The author recommends that the Commission prepare an analytical working document assessing the impact on the EU budget of Ukraine’s EU accession.

To rise to all the challenges and expectations, the Franco-German Working Group on EU Reform has called for the EU budget to increase both in size and relation to GDP (see Box 1 above). This would imply, inter alia, establishing new own resources and enabling the issuance of common EU debt.

Box 3 – European funds

European funds are a good tool to foster competitive economies and a gradual approach might allow full access to EU funds even before accession. Currently, the main financial instrument for the Balkan countries’ accession and, to some extent, that of Türkiye, is the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). The general objective of the IPA III for the 2021-2027 period is to support beneficiaries in adopting and implementing the reforms required to comply with EU values, and to progressively align with EU rules, standards, policies and practices with a view to membership, thereby contributing to their stability, security and prosperity. With an allocation of €14.2 billion, the IPA III is clearly aligned with the flagship initiatives and priorities of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans (2020), the Commission communication on Enhancing the accession process – a credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans (February 2020), and the Global Gateway strategy, the EU’s contribution to narrowing the global investment gap worldwide in support of sustainable development. This can be further strengthened as European Commission has proposed a new €6 billion Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans (November 2023) for the 2024-2027 period. Once adopted, payments will depend on the fulfilment of agreed reforms.

Increased funding and investments – including through a performance-based and reform-oriented Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) – and closer cooperation with international financial institutions – are part of the new methodology. The new methodology also opens doors for ‘phasing-in’ to individual EU policies, the EU market and EU programmes. Accession country researchers already participate in Horizon Europe projects. According to Commissioner Várhelyi, in the future Western Balkan governments could be more closely involved in discussions on policy development as well. A similar approach can be expected with regard to new accession countries, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. Experts notes that while €50 billion Ukraine Facility is similar to the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans, a similar mechanism should also be proposed for Moldova and Georgia.

Common agricultural policy

The redistribution of common agricultural policy (CAP) funds has historically been a contentious element in enlargement negotiations, as existing Member States fear reductions in their budget shares. This was evident in the 2004 eastern EU enlargement, which included significant agricultural producers, such as Poland. This enlargement was preceded by a significant reform of the CAP, and a negotiated 10-year phasing-in of agricultural payments for the new Member States.

With the exception of Ukraine and Türkiye, the current EU candidate countries have relatively small agricultural areas of between one and three million hectares. Serbia, with 3.5 million hectares, has a similar agricultural surface to that of Czechia. These numbers are dwarfed by Ukraine’s 41.3 million hectares of agricultural land, which includes the highly fertile chernozem comprising 28.3 million hectares. Given its vast areas of agricultural land, integrating Ukraine in the current framework would pose significant budgetary challenges, leading to calls to reform the common agricultural policy (CAP) before Kyiv’s accession. Conversely, some studies have suggested that a
Ukrainian accession modelled on the 2004 enlargement could be ‘relatively manageable’ in budgetary terms. However, any attempt to estimate the final impact of Ukraine's membership on the EU's agricultural budget should factor in the CAP model applicable at the time of the enlargement, and the conditions negotiated in the accession treaty. Given that the EU has not yet opened enlargement negotiations with Ukraine and that the current CAP came into force in 2023, with no formal reform currently proposed, these estimates are speculative at best.

Alignment with EU foreign policy

Candidate countries' alignment with EU common foreign and security policy (CFSP) varies widely. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Ukraine have a very high level of alignment with EU foreign policy, which is reflected in a good level of preparation in the area of foreign, security and defence policy and alignment with EU foreign policy as described in the Commission's reports. Moldova – whose preparation level has been assessed as moderate – has proved that a major increase in alignment with EU positions in international forums, from 54 % to 78 %, is possible even within one year. Serbia and Georgia's preparation has been assessed as moderate, while Bosnia and Herzegovina and Türkiye are assessed as countries having some level of preparation. Kosovo's alignment has not been assessed.

Serbia's alignment level with EU positions in international forums was assessed at 51 % as of August 2023. Serbia has not adopted restrictive measure against Russia over its aggression in Ukraine, and has not aligned with the majority of statements made by the High Representative (HR) concerning Russia and Ukraine or with a number of other HR statements and EU restrictive measures relating to Russia, China, Belarus and Iran. The European Commission has noted that Serbia needs to improve its alignment with EU CFSP, including restrictive measures, and avoid actions and statements that go against EU positions on foreign policy. Serbia must also take further action to prevent circumvention of EU restrictive measures; and take action against foreign interference and information manipulation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina's alignment with EU positions has improved significantly from 80 % to 98 %, as the country has aligned with the EU position on Iran and Syria, as well as on Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. At the same time, the country's alignment with the EU's sanctions regime against Russia remains problematic, as Serbia's representative of the country presidency advocated a neutral stance on Russia's war against Ukraine. This means that there is no ban on flights from Russia or on the broadcast of Russian state-sponsored media.

Georgia has shown itself to be well disposed, although its level of alignment has been assessed at 43 % only. Georgia introduced the special 'Donetsk and Luhansk' sanctions and has pro-actively engaged in actions preventing circumvention of EU sanctions and aligned itself with EU initiatives in support of Ukraine. However, Georgia, 20 % of whose territory is effectively occupied by Russia, did not apply restrictive measures regarding Russia, Belarus and those under the EU global human rights sanctions regime. Neither has Georgia aligned with EU positions on Iran, Türkiye and several African countries.
Türkiye’s unilateral foreign policy remains at odds with the EU’s priorities under the CFSP. The Commission’s 2023 annual report notes that Türkiye has maintained a very low alignment rate of 10% with the EU stance on foreign and security policy (as of August 2023), compared with 8% in 2022. Following Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine, Türkiye condemned the Russian military aggression, including at the UN General Assembly, and engaged politically and diplomatically, including by facilitating the export of Ukrainian grain and the exchange of prisoners. The UN- and Türkiye-brokered Black Sea Grain Initiative was terminated by Russia in July 2023. Türkiye also sought to facilitate talks between Ukraine and Russia and to work on de-escalation and bringing about a cease-fire. Nevertheless, Türkiye has refrained from aligning itself with the EU’s restrictive measures against Russia, despite being a NATO member. Türkiye also expressed support for Azerbaijan’s military actions in Nagorno Karabakh (2022) and those on the Armenian border in September 2023. Furthermore, the relevant Commission report found Türkiye’s rhetoric in support of terrorist group Hamas following its attacks against Israel on 7 October 2023 in complete contradiction of the EU approach.

Security and defence

Once officially part of the EU, every new Member State, including Ukraine, would benefit from the Union’s mutual defence clause, set out in Article 42(7) TEU. Article 42(7) TEU commits EU countries to aid fellow Member States that fall victim to armed aggression on their territory 'by all the means in their power'.

Some analysts suggest that Article 42(7) TEU contains a higher degree of legal obligation than the Washington Treaty (NATO) equivalent Article 5, under which each party has an obligation of mutual defence 'as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force'. Article 42(7) TEU has only ever been invoked once, by France, in the wake of the terrorist attacks in November 2015 in Paris. In the Strategic Compass, EU Member States committed to continue to invest in mutual assistance under Article 42(7) TEU, in particular through frequent exercises. However, it is not clear how activation of Article 42(7) TEU would work in practice, especially in the case of kinetic warfare. This raises other questions of the definition of 'armed aggression', and whether Article 42(7) applies to other forms of warfare, such as hybrid attacks.

Regional cooperation and bilateral disputes

In addition to the Copenhagen criteria, would-be members are assessed against the criterion of 'Good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation'. In the case of the Western Balkans a major break-through was the Prespa Agreement reached in 2018 between Greece and North Macedonia, under the auspices of the United Nations, resolving a long-standing dispute over the latter’s name. The EU is intent on improving good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans and promoting reconciliation. It also supports work towards achieving comprehensive normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia through the engagement of the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues. In case of the Kosovo-Serbia dispute, the most sensitive issue remains application of the 2013 Brussels Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia. The establishment of an association/community of Serb-majority municipalities
was the most important element of this agreement, but Kosovo has made no progress so far in implementing this engagement. On a more positive note, on 18 March 2023, Kosovo and Serbia committed to implementing the annex to the EU-proposed, 11-point Agreement on the path to normalisation between Kosovo and Serbia. In addition to being part of the EU-facilitated dialogue aimed at normalising relations between Belgrade and Pristina, this deal will have a favourable influence on both countries’ EU accession process, as the commitments made in Ohrid will be incorporated into their respective accession negotiations.

The Commission report gave Bosnia and Herzegovina a positive assessment for its neighbourly relations. The Commission’s assessment of the internal situation was less positive, however, as secessionist actions have undermined progress towards EU accession. Action to promote reconciliation within the country is, meanwhile, one of the assessment criteria to start accession negotiations. In this regard, some positive steps have been taken, including the appointment of a supervisory body for the implementation of a national war crimes processing strategy, and action at local level. At the same time political leaders have on occasion continued to revert to historical revisionism and to glorify war criminals.

Concerning Türkiye, the report found that there had been ‘no unauthorised drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean during the reporting period’. Türkiye, however, has continued to refuse the recognition of the Republic of Cyprus and repeatedly advocated a two-state solution for the island, in contradiction of the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and the European Council conclusions of June 2023, which support the speedy resumption of negotiations and express readiness to actively support all stages of the UN-led process.

Position of the European Parliament

According to the European Parliament’s November 2022 recommendation on the new EU enlargement strategy, enlargement policy is ‘the most effective EU foreign policy instrument and one of the Union’s most successful policies’, and a strategic investment in stability and prosperity on the European continent. Parliament welcomed the European Council’s decision to grant EU candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, and pre-candidate status to Georgia. It emphasised that EU accession remains a merit-based process that requires the adoption and implementation of relevant reforms, particularly on democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and the market economy.

Parliament has underlined that Ukraine’s membership of the EU represents a geostrategic shift and an investment in a united and strong Europe. It has also urged the Commission and EU Member States to open the accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova already in 2023. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Parliament welcomed the decision to grant candidate status ‘in the context of a changed geopolitical reality’ and reiterated its clear support for the country’s EU integration ‘grounded in unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity’. Parliament views Türkiye as a key partner and an important ally, but considers that without a drastic change in the course taken by the Turkish government the accession process cannot be resumed.

Parliament’s powers and influence in the context of enlargement are considerable. Under Article 49 TEU, its consent is required for any accession to the EU. Its budgetary powers furthermore give it direct influence over the amounts allocated to tools such as the IPA III. Parliament supports inter-party dialogue and facilitates mediation through the Jean Monnet Dialogue. It also holds annual summits with the Western Balkan parliamentary speakers. Parliament has observed elections in all the enlargement countries except Türkiye, which has yet to invite it to do so.
Enlargement policy: Reforms and challenges ahead

MAIN REFERENCES
Mirel P., In support of a new approach with the Western Balkans: Staged accession with a consolidation phase, Robert Schuman Foundation, May 2022.
Stanicek B., EU-Türkiye relations: Macroeconomic situation and EU financial support, EPRS, European Parliament, September 2023.

ENDNOTES
* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.
2 The European Commission reports use the following preparation assessment: early stage, some level of preparation, moderately prepared, good level of preparation and well advanced.

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT
This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.
Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.
Photo credits: © diamant24 / Adobe Stock.
eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)
www.eprs.ep.parl.union.eu (intranet)
www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)
http://epthinktank.eu (blog)