



Plenary sitting

B9-0500/2023

8.12.2023

MOTION FOR A RESOLUTION

to wind up the debate on the statements by the Council and the Commission

pursuant to Rule 132(2) of the Rules of Procedure

on 30 years of Copenhagen criteria - giving further impetus to EU enlargement
policy

(2023/2987(RSP))

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B9-0500/2023

European Parliament resolution on 30 years of Copenhagen criteria - giving further impetus to EU enlargement policy (2023/2987(RSP))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to its previous resolutions on EU enlargement, the Western Balkans and eastern Europe,
- having regard to the Treaty on European Union, in particular Articles 2, 4(3), 7 and 49 thereof, and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, in particular the articles thereof relating to respect for and the protection and promotion of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights in the Union,
- having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and to the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union,
- having regard to the conclusions of the Presidency of the European Council in Copenhagen on 21 and 22 June 1993, also known as the ‘Copenhagen criteria’,
- having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 29 and 30 April 1997 on the application of conditionality with a view to developing a coherent EU strategy for relations with the countries in the Western Balkan region,
- having regard to the declaration adopted at the EU-Western Balkans Summit held in Thessaloniki on 21 June 2003 concerning the prospect of the Western Balkan countries joining the EU,
- having regard to its recommendation of 23 November 2022 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning the new EU strategy for enlargement¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 22 November 2023 on proposals of the European Parliament for the amendment of the Treaties²,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 23 and 24 June 2022, and of 29 and 30 June 2023,
- having regard to the EU Global Strategy of 2016, which specifies that a credible enlargement policy represents a strategic investment in Europe’s security and prosperity, and has already contributed greatly to peace in formerly war-torn areas,
- having regard to the founding principles of the European Union, including the

¹ OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 105.

² Texts adopted, P9_TA(2023)0427.

- commitment to democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights,
- having regard to Ukraine’s application for EU membership on 28 February 2022 and to the consequent granting of candidate status by the European Council on 23 June 2022,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 8 November 2023 entitled ‘2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy’ (COM(2023)0690),
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas enlargement is one of the Union’s most successful policies, representing a strategic, future-oriented geopolitical investment in peace, security, stability, cooperation and prosperity on the European continent;
 - B. whereas more than 30 years ago, on 21 and 22 June 1993, the EU’s then twelve Heads of State and Government met in Copenhagen and adopted a set of criteria for EU membership, including on democracy, the rule of law, human rights, a market economy and the ability to effectively implement the EU *acquis*;
 - C. whereas the Union is founded on the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, which are part of the Copenhagen criteria and which all Member States have the obligation to uphold at all times; whereas the EU rule-of-law mechanism was designed to ensure the effective and coherent protection of the rule of law in all Member States;
 - D. whereas enlargement is a win-win process which has effectively promoted comprehensive reforms and fostered democratic transformation in candidate and potential candidate countries; whereas previous enlargement rounds have successfully strengthened the single market, fostered economic growth and enhanced the EU’s global influence;
 - E. whereas the EU must learn important lessons from previous enlargements, which highlight the need for enhanced conditionality, the full implementation of reforms, effective monitoring mechanisms and the full alignment of candidate and potential candidate countries with EU foreign and security policy objectives and action;
 - F. whereas enlarging and deepening the EU are parallel processes and it is essential that they proceed hand in hand; whereas a reform of the EU’s governance structures, including the streamlining of decision-making procedures, is already needed in the current composition of the EU and is a necessary precondition for the proper and efficient functioning of an enlarged European Union; whereas a reformed and better-functioning EU is in the interest of both the current and future Member States;
 - G. whereas Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has significantly changed the geopolitical landscape and given new geostrategic meaning to the enlargement of the European Union, further reinforcing the importance and urgency of the EU’s enlargement policy as a strategic tool to protect and promote peace, security, stability, cooperation and democratic values on the European continent;
 - H. whereas the credibility and effectiveness of the enlargement policy depend on the

effective political will and commitment demonstrated by candidate countries, as well as on the EU's ability to ensure a fair, rigorous and transparent accession process while recognising the unique circumstances and individual progress of each candidate country; whereas this should combine a strong focus on the fundamental issues – the rule of law, democratic standards, fundamental rights and freedoms and economic reforms – as well as on alignment of foreign policy and security orientation with the gradual phasing-in of candidate countries into various EU sectors, in order to sustain the momentum for reform and allow citizens to see the benefits of enlargement early on; whereas the absence of progress should make gradual and sectoral phasing-in reversible in order to strengthen the credibility of the process;

- I. whereas the accession negotiations should take into account the ongoing reflections about the future of EU policies, so that reforms implemented by candidate countries are consistent and help them to prepare adequately for the long-term perspective of EU policies;
 - J. whereas effective and permanent communication with and outreach to citizens in both EU Member States and candidate countries are crucial for maintaining public support for the enlargement process;
 - K. whereas the EU's capacity to address challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity risks and public health threats would be enhanced by integrating candidate countries into the European policy framework;
1. Expresses its strong commitment to the enlargement policy as a key instrument for promoting peace, security, stability, cooperation and shared values in Europe and to the Copenhagen criteria, which are the key set of criteria for EU membership;
 2. Reaffirms its commitment to the candidate countries' future membership of the EU; believes that enlarging the EU would constitute a geostrategic investment in a united and strong Europe;
 3. Welcomes the Commission's 2023 enlargement package and the Commission's positive recommendation to open accession negotiations with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova; calls on the European Council to follow suit and decide on the opening of accession negotiations with the two countries at its December 2023 meeting; welcomes the efforts by the candidate countries' authorities to advance their reform agenda and encourages them to redouble their efforts in order to progress towards EU membership, in line with the Commission recommendations;
 4. Calls for the EU and its Member States to enhance the EU's capacity to act by reforming decision-making, including through the introduction of qualified majority voting, and by ensuring the effective functioning of an enlarged Union as a whole, in parallel with accession negotiations with the candidate countries, so that the EU is prepared to welcome new Members within a reasonable time frame; calls for a comprehensive and inclusive dialogue among EU Member States to reconcile the differences between pro-enlargement and reticent states, fostering a consensus that recognises the need for both enlargement and treaty reform;
 5. Underlines that accession to the EU must always be a merit-based procedure whereby

each applicant is assessed on its own merit on its fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria, in particular those of ensuring full respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law; emphasises the absolute priority of strengthening the rule of law, which remains one of the most important conditions for EU membership, in all candidate and potential candidate countries to ensure that EU enlargement strengthens rather than weakens the EU and its single market;

6. calls on the Commission to ensure the continued effectiveness, fairness and transparency of the accession process, including in the assessment of candidates' progress in meeting the Copenhagen criteria;
7. Reiterates its call on the Commission to formally assess accession countries under the EU's rule-of-law mechanism with the aim of providing an objective and clear picture of the state of play in order to prevent a persistent lack of progress, serious deficiencies and regression; reiterates its call, at the same time, on the Commission to create a direct link between the annual rule of law reports, among other sources, and the rule-of-law conditionality mechanism;
8. Strongly believes that alignment with EU foreign and security policy objectives and action is a fundamental necessity for candidate and potential candidate countries; calls for the EU and its Member States to accelerate the integration of countries that demonstrate strategic orientation and unwavering commitment to EU-related reforms, democratic consolidation, fundamental values and foreign and security policy alignment;
9. Calls for the EU and its Member States to actively engage in conflict resolution and the promotion of good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership region and to continue to play a proactive role in resolving outstanding bilateral issues and promoting regional cooperation among candidate countries;
10. Reiterates its call for an innovative, complementary and flexible interaction between the implementation of current agreements, such as association agreements, and the accession negotiation process, allowing for the candidate countries' gradual integration into the EU single market, based on a priority action plan and relevant sectoral programmes and providing access to relevant EU funds, enabling candidate country citizens to reap the benefits of accession during the process rather than only at its completion; considers that this gradual accession to EU funds and programmes must be reversible should a candidate country fail to sustain its commitments;
11. Calls on the Commission to adapt the accession negotiations to take into account the ongoing reflections and the long-term reform perspectives of EU policies;
12. Encourages the Commission to explore innovative mechanisms for cooperation with candidate countries, including joint investment initiatives, research collaboration and educational exchanges, in order to address common challenges;
13. Calls for the EU and its Member States to significantly step up public engagement and improve strategic communication efforts to inform and engage citizens in both EU Member States and candidate countries regarding the benefits and challenges of the enlargement policy; calls on the accession countries' authorities to contribute fully to

these efforts;

14. Calls for the EU and its Member States to continue to support media literacy and the independence of the media, as well as civil society, in candidate and potential candidate countries, and to support them in their fight against information manipulation and foreign malign interference, in order to strengthen democratic institutions and values;
15. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the governments and parliaments of the accession countries.