



Plenary sitting

B9-0502/2023

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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on behalf of the S&D Group

B9-0502/2023

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 the European Council conclusions of 21 and 22 June 1993 (the Copenhagen criteria),
- having regard to the applications for EU membership by Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Georgia, and to the European Council’s consequent granting of candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova in June 2022, and to Bosnia-Herzegovina in December 2022,
- having regard to its previous resolutions on EU enlargement, the Western Balkans countries, Türkiye, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine,
- having regard to the Enlargement Package, adopted by the Commission on 8 November 2023,
- 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 the Treaty on European Union (TEU) and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
- 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 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 Article 2 TEU, which lays out the founding principles of the European Union, including the commitment to democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights,
- having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

¹ OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 105.

- A. whereas enlargement has proven to be the most successful EU foreign policy instrument; whereas it has been a very effective tool for boosting necessary reforms both within the EU and in applicant countries and helping to encourage democratic transformation; whereas it represents a strategic, future-oriented geopolitical investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity on the European continent;
- B. whereas 30 years ago, on 21 and 22 June 1993, the EU's 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, respect for and protection of minorities, a functioning market economy and the ability to effectively implement the EU *acquis*;
- C. whereas eight out of the 10 countries currently aspiring to join the EU have candidate status; whereas some of them have had this status for many years; whereas those candidate countries fare at various stages of the accession process and negotiations;
- D. whereas on 8 November 2023, the Commission recommended opening accession negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova and conditionally with Bosnia and Herzegovina; whereas it recommended granting candidate status to Georgia; whereas the European Council is set to decide on this recommendation on 14 and 15 December 2023;
- E. 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 increasing the importance of the EU's enlargement policy;
- F. whereas enlargement is a win-win process, as it has effectively promoted comprehensive reforms and fostered democratic transformation in the candidate and potential candidate countries; whereas previous enlargement rounds having successfully strengthened the single market, fostered economic growth and enhanced the EU's global influence;
- G. whereas the EU has learned important lessons from previous enlargements, namely the need for enhanced conditionality, a strict implementation of reforms and effective monitoring mechanisms;
- H. whereas reform of the EU Treaties, namely simplified decision-making procedures and new competences to provide the EU with a greater capacity to act, must be discussed and adopted in parallel with the ongoing accession negotiations; whereas the mechanism to ensure compliance with the EU's fundamental principles, values and the *acquis communautaire* must also be strengthened in parallel with the next enlargement; whereas a reformed and better-functioning EU is in the interest of both the current and future Member States;
- I. whereas the credibility and effectiveness of its enlargement policy depends 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, namely the rule of law, democratic standards, fundamental rights and freedoms and economic reforms, 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;

- J. whereas candidate countries must also demonstrate their adherence to the fundamental values of the EU by aligning with the common foreign and security policy;
- K. whereas the EU should considerably step up its conditional technical and financial support for fundamental reforms, the resolution of bilateral disputes and the regional economic integration of the accession countries;
- L. whereas enlargement is also a major challenge for the EU's financial sustainability, in particular regarding cohesion and agriculture policies; whereas the current and the next multiannual financial frameworks should be strengthened considerably to enable EU enlargement;
- M. whereas the role of the European Parliament should be strengthened throughout the entire enlargement process;
1. Welcomes the Commission's 2023 Enlargement Package and its positive recommendation to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia-Herzegovina and to grant candidate status to Georgia;
 2. Calls on the European Council to follow suit and decide to open accession negotiations with the three countries and to grant candidate status to Georgia at its December 2023 Summit; acknowledges EU's historic challenge of meeting its commitments to the countries in the Western Balkans, as well as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia;
 3. Strongly deplores the statements by the Prime Minister of Hungary concerning the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and the country's change of policy towards Kosovo; reminds the Council of the potential negative consequences of Hungary taking over the EU's presidency in July 2024;
 4. Calls on the European Council, when evaluating the progress made individually by the candidate countries for EU accession and deciding on further steps, to take into account the background of Russia's ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, which has had significant consequences for Ukraine's immediate neighbouring countries, as well as for the stability, security and prosperity of the entire European continent and therefore requires a long-term political vision and bold decisions that reflect the strategic importance of European unity and, therefore, EU enlargement;
 5. Believes that enlargement is of the utmost strategic importance for the EU, and all the more so in the face of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; stresses that an enhanced enlargement policy has become the strongest geopolitical tool at the EU's disposal;
 6. Welcomes the efforts by the candidate 'countries' authorities to advance a reform agenda and encourages them to redouble their efforts in order to progress towards EU membership, in line with the recommendations set out by the Commission; expects concrete progress in the coming period through the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and expects the involved parties to deliver on their commitments;
 7. Expresses its strong commitment to the enlargement policy as a key instrument for promoting peace, stability and shared values in Europe, and to the Copenhagen criteria,

which are the key set of criteria for EU membership; 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;

8. Underlines that accession to the EU must always be a merit-based procedure in which each applicant is assessed on its own merit in terms of fulfilling 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;
9. Calls for a robust monitoring mechanism to track the reforms and progress made by the candidate countries in respecting all political criteria; calls for, in particular, a specific and effective monitoring mechanism to be set up for protecting fundamental values and the financial interests of the Union, in the context of accession procedures; reiterates, in this regard, its calls to include candidate countries in the EU rule of law mechanism and its annual reporting exercise, which could create an incentive to uphold all political criteria; calls for the mechanism to protect the rule of law and the EU's fundamental principles and values, as well as the monitoring capacity to ensure compliance, to be strengthened ahead of the next enlargement; stresses the need for a broader rule of law conditionality mechanism that covers the entire Union budget and all of the Union's fundamental values, as set out in Article 2 TEU;
10. Welcomes the interest and the political will to join the EU shown by so many countries, and acknowledges the serious efforts made by candidate countries to meet the requirements for membership; reaffirms its commitment to the candidate countries' future membership of the EU; stresses the need to establish clear deadlines for concluding negotiations with the accession countries by the end of the current decade at the latest; stresses that there should be no fast track for membership; underscores that there can be no shortcuts on fundamental values;
11. Reiterates its call to launch a convention to review the EU Treaties in order to enhance the EU's capacity to act by reforming decision-making through the introduction of qualified majority voting, including for foreign and security policy decisions and in areas relevant to the accession process; calls for the abolishment of, in particular, the requirement for unanimity when deciding on the start of the negotiations process, as well as for the opening and closing of individual negotiating clusters and chapters, but stresses that the final decision on the accession of each candidate country should remain unanimous;
12. Recalls that progress towards overcoming unanimity would also be possible by making full use of the potential contained in the Treaty of Lisbon; highlights that the reforms would ensure the effective functioning of an enlarged Union as a whole, in parallel to accession negotiations with candidate countries, which would prepare the EU to welcome new members within a reasonable timeframe;
13. Stresses that European institutional and financial reforms should increase the EU's ability to act and to promote good governance, functionality and sustainability; notes

that reforms are needed to improve the EU's and its institutions' ability to absorb new members and to promote their successful integration;

14. Calls for the EU and its Member States to accelerate the integration of countries that demonstrate strategic orientation towards and unwavering commitment to EU-related reforms, democratic consolidation, fundamental values and foreign policy alignment; reiterates that accession can only proceed once a country aligns with EU sanctions against Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine;
15. Calls for the introduction of conditionality for accession countries, with positive effects when they make progress, for instance through access to EU policies, and negative effects in the event of regression or a persistent lack of progress, namely the suspension of accession negotiations and pre-accession funding; calls, in particular, for the introduction of stricter and more enforceable accountability with regard to the spending of such funding;
16. Calls for the EU and its Member States to actively engage in conflict resolution and the promotion of good neighbourly relations in the accession countries; deplores the use of unresolved bilateral and regional disputes to block or considerably delay candidate countries' accession processes and calls for the adoption of an official mechanism for the resolution and arbitration of these disputes to support their resolution separately from accession to the EU;
17. Calls for the EU and its Member States to significantly step up public engagement and improve strategic communication efforts jointly with 'the authorities in accession countries to inform and engage citizens in both EU Member States and candidate countries on the benefits and challenges of the enlargement policy;
18. Calls for the EU and its Member States to continue to support media literacy, the independence of the media, and civil society in candidate and potential candidate countries in order to strengthen democratic institutions and values; emphasises the importance of structurally involving civil society organisations in the enlargement process;
19. Considers that there is a need for stronger parliamentary oversight of the EU's enlargement policy; insists on strengthening the role of Parliament throughout the entire accession process, including allowing it to fully scrutinise the progress made by the candidate countries across policy fields; calls for consideration to be given to appointing an EU chief negotiator, who would be accountable to the European Parliament, to carry out negotiations under a broad mandate for each country;
20. Reiterates its call for an innovative, complementary and flexible interaction between the implementation of current agreements, such as association agreements, and the accession negotiations 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;
21. Stresses that the Political and Security Committee has a vital role in preparing decisions

related to the common foreign and security policy, including on restrictive measures, and further underlines that candidate countries for EU membership are systematically invited to align themselves with the EU's restrictive measures;

22. 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.