



Plenary sitting

B9-0506/2023

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 Left Group

B9-0506/2023

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 Article 48 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU),
 - having regard to the Copenhagen criteria, which are primarily addressed in Article 49 TEU,
 - having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union,
 - having regard to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union,
 - having regard to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR),
 - having regard to the Commission’s 2022 Enlargement Package of 12 October 2022,
 - having regard to the Commission’s 2023 Enlargement Package of 8 November 2023,
 - having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions of 5-6 July 2022 on the Commission’s Enlargement Package,
 - having regard to the statement by the President of the European Committee of the Regions of 8 November 2023 on the Commission’s 2023 Enlargement Package,
 - having regard to Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Article 49 TEU allows any European state that respects the values of the EU and is committed to promoting them to apply for membership; whereas the process involves notifying Parliament and national parliaments, submitting an application to the Council and obtaining unanimous approval from all EU Member States after consulting the Commission and receiving Parliament’s consent;
- B. whereas the Copenhagen criteria are a set of conditions that candidate countries must meet to be considered eligible for EU membership; whereas the Copenhagen criteria are crucial for ensuring that countries aspiring to join the EU share common values, have stable institutions and can effectively implement EU laws;
- C. whereas the Copenhagen criteria consist of three main components – a political criteria, an economic criteria and the administrative and institutional capacity to effectively implement the EU *acquis*;
- D. whereas the cornerstone of the Copenhagen criteria is that a candidate country must have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;

- E. whereas accession to the EU must always be a merit-based procedure whereby 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;
- F. whereas the process of evaluating a candidate's adherence to these criteria involves a detailed assessment by the Commission, which then makes recommendations to the Council and Parliament;
- G. whereas it is important to note that meeting the Copenhagen criteria is a necessary but not sufficient condition for EU membership; whereas even after a country fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, the decision to admit a new member is ultimately a political one, requiring the unanimous approval of existing EU Member States;
- H. whereas there is a need for a progressive approach that addresses the shortcomings of previous enlargements and actively engages with the challenges faced by candidate and potential candidate countries;
- I. whereas eight of the ten countries currently seeking EU membership have attained candidate status, with some having held this status for an extended period, indicating sustained commitment to the accession process; whereas those candidate countries find themselves at various stages of the accession process and negotiations;
- J. whereas, in recent years, there has been discussion and debate around the concept of a 'credible enlargement perspective' and the idea of providing a clearer path to EU membership for certain Western Balkan countries; whereas the countries of the Western Balkans have stated for decades their determination to join the EU;
- K. whereas there is no formal or standardised 'fast-track' EU accession procedure, and the accession process can vary in speed for different candidate countries; whereas the speed of accession is influenced by several factors, including the country's level of preparedness, fulfilment of the accession criteria, geopolitical considerations and the political will of both the candidate country and the existing EU Member States;
- L. whereas the enlargement process should not be directed against any specific country or group of countries and should not be seen as a component of a geopolitical struggle;
- M. whereas enlargement and reform of the EU are two closely interrelated processes; whereas, as proven by previous enlargements, the accession of the countries of the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe will be accompanied by fundamental changes within the EU itself; whereas the EU needs to create the capacity for enlargement in order to decide and implement fundamental reforms, which go far beyond the institutional level and the reform of the voting procedures; whereas a profound reform of many policy areas is needed, such as the reform of the cohesion and agricultural policies; whereas the Conference on the Future of Europe echoed citizens' broad demands to strengthen 'Social Europe';
- 1. Recalls that meeting the Copenhagen criteria is a necessary but not sufficient condition for EU membership; recalls that even after a country fulfils the Copenhagen criteria, the decision to admit a new member is ultimately a political one, requiring the unanimous

approval of existing EU Member States;

2. Underlines that the cornerstone of the Copenhagen criteria is that a candidate country must have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
3. Stresses that the environmental and climate policies and *acquis* of all candidate countries should be equally aligned with EU and international legislation, goals and treaties, with particular emphasis on the Paris Agreement and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework;
4. Underlines the need to fundamentally reform the common agricultural policy and to ensure that all legislation relating to the production of food and feed, notably on animal welfare, pesticides and fertilisers, in the candidate countries is aligned with EU rules and norms;
5. Insists that priority in the accession process should be given to completing the alignment of the labour legislation of all candidate countries with the *acquis* on social matters, International Labour Organization conventions and the European Social Charter to fight social dumping, and to the obligation in the Association Agreements to promote the role of social partners and social dialogue;
6. Notes the interest and the political will to join the EU shown by candidate countries, and acknowledges the serious efforts made by candidate countries to meet the requirements for membership; highlights that the rule of law, democratic reform and respect for human rights should be at the forefront of the accession process, alongside improved monitoring, reporting and assessment;
7. Notes that the European Council's decision to grant candidate status to an applicant country is based on political criteria relating to geopolitical and economic considerations;
8. Rejects any attempt to fast-track EU accession procedures resulting from geopolitical considerations, and stresses that candidate countries must have a strict compliance with and adherence to the Copenhagen criteria as it is an indispensable stepping stone;
9. Underlines that priority in the accession process and in the enlargement procedure should be given to democracy, the rule of law, respect for human rights and independence of the judiciary system; underlines that it is essential that the eradication of oligarchic influence on governments, parliaments and media, the fight against corruption, money laundering and organised crime, and media freedom are met;
10. Insists that citizens in both the EU Member States and the applicant countries must be closely involved in the reform processes linked to EU enlargement;
11. Reiterates its criticism of the enlargement process, which has so far neglected the social problems linked to reform processes in the candidates countries and has aggravated those linked to social dumping in the Member States; insists on strengthening the *social acquis* of the EU;

12. Expresses concern over the lack of a thorough and critical review of the social, economic and environmental impacts of previous EU enlargements, leading to potential oversights of systemic issues;
13. Reiterates that the EU should undergo a critical and thorough assessment of its enlargement policy and its capacity to deepen integration as a parallel process;
14. Stresses that the EU's enlargement policy should be driven by a desire to contribute to the project of common values, democracy, the rule of law, equality and freedom; notes that the enlargement policy should be aimed at the mutual development of citizens and should not be a geopolitical weapon leading to inequalities;
15. Expresses concern over the persistent democratic deficit in the enlargement process, emphasising the need for stronger mechanisms to ensure meaningful grassroots participation and representation;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the governments and parliaments of the Member States.