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DRAFT REPORT

on the EU enlargement strategy
(2025/2110(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Rapporteur: Petras Auštrevičius

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MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on the EU enlargement strategy (2025/2110(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular Article 49 thereof,
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 23 to 24 June 2022, 29 to 30 June 2023, 26 to 27 October 2023, 14 to 15 December 2023, 27 June 2024 and 17 December 2024 and to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Copenhagen of 21 to 22 June 1993, also known as the Copenhagen criteria,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2023 on 30 years of Copenhagen criteria – giving further impetus to EU enlargement policy¹,
- having regard to the EU Association Agreements with Albania², Bosnia and Herzegovina³, Georgia⁴, Kosovo⁵, the Republic of Moldova⁶ (hereinafter ‘Moldova’), Montenegro⁷, North Macedonia⁸, Serbia⁹, Türkiye¹⁰ and Ukraine¹¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 4 November 2025 entitled ‘2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy’ (COM(2025)0690) and previous annual communications thereon,
- having regard to its resolutions on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Kosovo¹², Serbia¹³, Albania¹⁴, Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁵, North Macedonia¹⁶, Montenegro¹⁷,

¹ OJ C, C/2024/4173, 2.8.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4173/oj>.

² OJ L 107, 28.4.2009, p. 166, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2009/332/oj.

³ OJ L 164, 30.6.2015, p. 2, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2015/997/oj.

⁴ OJ L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/494/oj.

⁵ OJ L 71, 16.3.2016, p. 3, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2016/342/oj.

⁶ OJ L 260, 30.8.2014, p. 4, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/492/oj.

⁷ OJ L 108, 29.4.2010, p. 3, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2010/224/oj.

⁸ OJ L 84, p. 13, ELI: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2004/239\(2\)/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2004/239(2)/oj).

⁹ OJ L 278, 18.10.2013, p. 16, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2013/490/oj.

¹⁰ OJ L 361, 31.12.1977, p. 29, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/1964/732/oj.

¹¹ OJ L 161 29.5.2014, p. 3, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/295/oj.

¹² Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0094.

¹³ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0093.

¹⁴ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0155.

¹⁵ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0156.

¹⁶ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0157.

¹⁷ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0130.

- Ukraine¹⁸, Moldova¹⁹, Georgia²⁰ and Türkiye²¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 29 February 2024 on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement²²,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 20 March 2024 entitled ‘Pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews’ (COM(2024)0146),
 - 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 enlargement²³,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III)²⁴,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans²⁵,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/792 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Ukraine Facility²⁶,
 - having regard to Regulation (EU) 2025/535 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 March 2025 establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Republic of Moldova²⁷,
 - having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19 and 20 June 2003,
 - having regard to the declarations of the EU-Western Balkans Summits of 17 May 2018 in Sofia, of 6 May 2020 in Zagreb, of 6 October 2021 in Brdo pri Kranju, of 6 December 2022 in Tirana, of 13 December 2023 in Brussels, and of 18 December 2024 in Brussels,
 - having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
 - having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009 in Prague, of 29 to 30 September 2011 in Warsaw, of 28 to 29 November 2013 in Vilnius, of 21 to 22 May 2015 in Riga, of 24 November 2017 in Brussels, and of

¹⁸ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0175.

¹⁹ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0131.

²⁰ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0158.

²¹ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0092.

²² OJ C, C/2024/6746, 26.11.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6746/oj>.

²³ OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 105.

²⁴ OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1529/oj>.

²⁵ OJ L, 2024/1449, 24.5.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1449/oj>.

²⁶ OJ L, 2024/792, 29.2.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/792/oj>.

²⁷ OJ L, 2025/535, 21.3.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/535/oj>.

15 December 2021 in Brussels,

- having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the June 2020 Summit²⁸,
 - having regard to its resolution of 22 October 2025 on the polarisation and increased repression in Serbia, one year after the Novi Sad tragedy²⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 February 2025 on the further deterioration of the political situation in Georgia³⁰,
 - having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 29 November 2023 entitled ‘State of Play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations’ (JOIN(2023)0050),
 - having regard to the European Committee of the Regions’ opinion of 2 April 2025 on the Commission’s Enlargement Package 2024 – Western Balkans and Türkiye,
 - having regard to European Court of Auditors’ special report 01/2022 of 10 January 2022 entitled ‘EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans: despite efforts, fundamental problems persist’,
 - having regard to the Commission’s 2024 and 2025 rule of law reports,
 - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0000/2025),
- A. whereas the EU enlargement process has progressed substantially in recent years in some candidate countries; whereas nine of the 10 countries currently aspiring to join the EU hold candidate status, some of them for many years;
- B. whereas enlargement is one of the EU’s strongest foreign policy and geopolitical tools and remains a key driver of long-term security, peace, stability and prosperity in Europe based on shared democratic values; whereas enlargement represents a historic opportunity with significant socio-economic, political and security advantages for both the EU and the enlargement countries;
- C. whereas Russia’s full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine poses a serious threat to security on the European continent and beyond;
- D. whereas enlargement is a merit-based process, where irreversible progress on the rule of law, democracy and fundamental values remains the key cornerstone;

²⁸ OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 114.

²⁹ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0248.

³⁰ OJ C, C/2025/2251, 29.4.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2251/oj>.

Geostrategic dimension of enlargement

1. Reiterates that enlargement is of the utmost strategic importance for the EU in the face of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and other common geopolitical challenges, requiring a long-term political democratic vision and bold decisions;
2. Reiterates that enlargement is a win-win for both current and future Member States; emphasises the political urgency of demonstrating the EU's commitment to the enlargement process; insists that EU enlargement will strengthen European security; stresses, yet again, that the future of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova lies within the EU;
3. Underlines that accession is a key tool to promote democracy, the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights, and an essential anchor for fostering regional reconciliation and stability, increasing resilience and protecting candidate countries from malign foreign interference; considers that maintaining and enhancing enlargement policy is indispensable for the EU's influence in the region and beyond, especially at times of heightened geopolitical instability;

Strategic priorities of EU enlargement: merit-based process and conditionality

4. Reiterates its position that accession to the EU must always be a merit-based process and that each applicant must be assessed on its own merit in terms of meeting the Copenhagen criteria, ensuring alignment with the EU *acquis* and fulfilling all additional conditions set out in the enlargement framework;
5. Highlights that the rule of law, democratic reform, media freedom and respect for fundamental rights, including the rights of minorities, must remain at the forefront of the enlargement process, with judicial independence, the fight against corruption and the inclusion of and support for civil society being crucial preconditions for progress along the path to EU membership, particularly at a time of rising authoritarian tendencies;
6. Encourages enlargement countries to continue to resolutely implement the necessary reforms in a timely manner and to make tangible and irreversible progress, starting with the fundamentals of the EU accession process; insists on the need for continuous efforts to foster media pluralism, defend the rights of journalists and ensure freedom of expression in all enlargement countries;
7. Reiterates its position that alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) is an essential indicator of a candidate country's commitment to the EU's fundamental values and principles and its readiness for future membership; urges all candidate and potential candidate countries to prioritise swift and full alignment with the CFSP and reiterates that the accession of a given country can proceed only once it fully aligns with the CFSP, including EU restrictive measures; emphasises that systematic divergence from alignment with the CFSP constitutes a fundamental barrier to EU accession; expects candidate and potential candidate countries to also fully align with the common security and defence policy (CSDP), including its principles, objectives and missions, as a key component of the accession process;

8. Emphasises that regional cooperation is a prerequisite for EU accession; stresses that reconciliation, leading to good neighbourly relations, is key to successful EU accession; underlines, furthermore, that outstanding bilateral issues between EU and non-EU countries should be resolved bilaterally and must not be used as leverage to block the accession process of candidate countries;
9. Underlines that the merit-based approach may entail the freezing of accession negotiations in the event of backsliding on fundamental values, with negotiations only resuming after significant progress is achieved on reforms; underscores that countries underperforming in terms of democratic governance must face consequences to ensure that the accession process remains genuinely merit-based; reiterates that the EU must proactively support the democratic pillars in candidate countries to reinforce stability and the reform momentum; calls on the Commission to establish a monitoring group to closely follow the situation in candidate countries that are backsliding on fundamental values;

Ensuring the effective functioning of an enlarged Union

10. Considers that the process of preparing for enlargement should proceed in parallel within both the EU and enlargement countries to safeguard the effective functioning of an enlarged Union;
11. Reiterates its call for the EU institutions and the Member States to undertake the necessary reforms to ensure that the lack of such reforms does not delay the accession of new Member States;
12. Repeats its call for the EU's capacity to act to be enhanced through the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) in areas relevant to the accession process by abolishing, in particular, the requirement for unanimity in the intermediate steps in the enlargement process when deciding on the start of the accession negotiation process as well as the opening and closing of individual negotiating clusters and chapters; regrets that the overuse of unanimity in the intermediate steps in the enlargement process has repeatedly slowed down EU enlargement; recalls that Article 49 TEU enables a move to QMV without requiring Treaty changes;
13. Considers a review of EU sectoral policies necessary to assess how to accommodate new Member States and ensure the efficient functioning of an enlarged Union;
14. Acknowledges the importance of the broad application of gradual integration into EU common policies, such as the single market, for candidate countries that make substantial progress on EU-related reforms; stresses that while gradual integration of candidate countries can help them implement the EU *acquis* and thus make the transition towards EU membership smoother, it cannot replace full membership of the EU;
15. Reiterates its suggestion that the enlargement process should be supported by the early involvement of candidate countries in the functioning of the EU institutions, e.g. through observer status in relevant bodies and institutions, including Parliament;

Supporting enlargement countries on their path towards EU membership

16. Stresses that in addition to setting individual reform targets, roadmaps and intermediate timelines for each accession country, the EU should also establish clear and predictable timelines for the accession of the candidate countries most advanced on their accession path in order to avoid losing momentum and credibility; believes that EU enlargement should take place as soon as all accession conditions are met in the candidate countries concerned;
17. Considers pre-accession financial assistance, including the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova facilities, pivotal for ensuring that enlargement countries receive structured financial support for institutional and economic transformation; stresses that all EU financial assistance must observe and maintain pre-accession support conditionality, including on the rule of law, in order to safeguard the financial interests of the EU and citizens of both parties;
18. Highlights the importance of including candidate countries in ongoing and future EU projects on EU connectivity, transport, energy infrastructure and military mobility, so as to strengthen Europe's security in a challenging geopolitical environment;
19. Reiterates its calls on the Council, the Commission and the European External Action Service to strengthen proactive and strategic communication efforts on the tangible benefits of EU membership in enlargement countries and within the Member States, by developing tailor-made, fact-based communication strategies rather than relying on generic communication campaigns; highlights, in this context, the crucial role of young people, as youth movements have repeatedly proven key in contributing to pro-democratic activism in candidate countries; reiterates, furthermore, its call on the Commission to ensure full visibility and public awareness of the EU's support and investments in candidate countries, including when these are channelled via international organisations;
20. Calls for the EU institutions and the Member States to fully engage in further strengthening the reform processes in the candidate countries, in particular by enhancing their administrative capacities through targeted capacity-building programmes; highlights the success of twinning projects in transferring sectoral expertise, and stresses the need to build on this positive experience;
21. Reiterates its readiness to enhance regular and transparent dialogue and cooperation with the national parliaments of candidate and potential candidate countries, by making full use of Parliament's existing democracy support tools and initiatives and by promoting increased parliamentary oversight of the EU accession process and related reforms;
22. Is concerned by the large-scale and malicious disinformation campaigns that have been continuously conducted by Russia for many years, which have increased in intensity since the start of its war of aggression against Ukraine; highlights the need for continuous support and close cooperation with all enlargement countries facing strong external interference in their process of convergence with the EU; stresses the importance of assessing and improving the effectiveness of EU instruments designed to assist candidate countries in countering foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI); welcomes the Commission's intention to expand the proposed

European Democracy Shield to the accession countries, thereby reinforcing their capacity to respond to threats such as FIMI and disinformation campaigns;

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23. 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 enlargement countries.

EXPLANATORY STATEMENT

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the ongoing significant geopolitical shifts have prompted a new dynamism in the enlargement process. With the granting of candidate status to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, there are now ten countries that have embarked upon a path towards the EU. From the EU's perspective, enlargement is a geo-strategic investment in peace, security, stability and prosperity. While the expectations and progress of individual candidate countries are different, they are all evaluated based on fair and rigorous conditionality, the principle of own merits and reversibility.

This report evaluates the suitability and relevance of the current EU political position on enlargement and the methodology applied by the Commission, assessing the overall progress in the accession preparations and negotiations to drive forward irreversible reforms. It draws on AFET's prior work on the subject, including annual country enlargement reports and recommendations.