



Plenary sitting

B9-0501/2023

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))

**Thomas Waitz, Viola von Cramon-Taubadel, Francisco Guerreiro,
Gwendoline Delbos-Corfield, François Alfonsi, Jordi Solé, Ana Miranda**
on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group

B9-0501/2023

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 Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular Articles 2 and 49 thereof,
 - 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 Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled ‘Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0057),
 - having regard to the 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 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 Rule 132(2) of its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas Article 2 TEU states that ‘the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities’; whereas, in accordance with Article 49 TEU, any European state which respects the values referred to in Article 2 TEU and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union;
- B. whereas in its conclusions in June 1993, the European Council established the Copenhagen criteria for accession to the EU, whose basis is Article 2 TEU;
- C. whereas Montenegro, Serbia, North Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Türkiye, Moldova and Ukraine are currently candidate countries to join the EU; whereas Kosovo and Georgia are considered ‘potential candidates’; whereas the European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova on 23-24 June 2022 and to Bosnia and Herzegovina on 15 December 2022;
- D. whereas, on 8 November 2023, during the presentation of the Enlargement Package, the President of the Commission announced that the Commission would recommend that the Council open accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, grant candidate

¹ OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 105.

status to Georgia ‘on the understanding that the government takes important reform steps’ and to open accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina ‘once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved’; whereas on 14-15 December 2023, the European Council will take a decision on these recommendations;

- E. whereas enlargement has been the most effective EU foreign policy instrument and one of the EU’s most successful policies, but its effectiveness has considerably decreased over the last few years owing to a failure on the EU’s part, notably from the Council, to live up to its promises; whereas unfair delays and vetoes in the Council have considerably damaged the EU’s credibility and its capacity to encourage political transformation in the enlargement countries; whereas Parliament is undoubtedly the most supportive EU institution when it comes to enlargement;
 - F. whereas a lack of genuine political will on the part of some of the political leaders in the enlargement countries to make progress on fundamental reforms has also damaged the EU’s enlargement policy;
 - G. whereas Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine has given a new geostrategic meaning to enlargement; whereas genuine commitment to enlargement is a strategic investment in stability, democracy, security, unity and prosperity in Europe;
 - H. whereas 2023 marks the 20th anniversary of the Thessaloniki Summit, when the EU first publicly committed to the ‘European perspective of the Western Balkan countries’; whereas since then, only Croatia has joined the EU, in 2013;
1. Welcomes the Commission’s recommendations to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as to grant candidate status to Georgia; in this context, calls on the European Council to endorse the Commission’s recommendations on 14-15 December 2023; notes, however, that in some instances, these assessments are based on geopolitical considerations rather than on tangible and concrete progress and reforms undertaken by the candidate countries;
 2. Notes the limited efforts made by some enlargement countries to meet the requirements for membership in line with the Copenhagen criteria; regrets the serious and worrying lack of progress – and even backsliding – by some enlargement countries in their path towards EU accession;
 3. Considers the Commission’s new methodology to represent a long-term policy framework, which should guide the enlargement process; underlines that accession to the EU must always be a merit-based procedure and that each candidate country must be assessed on its own merits in fulfilling the Copenhagen criteria, particularly in ensuring full respect for human rights, democracy, the rule of law and respect for and the protection of minorities;
 4. Stresses the importance of respect for and the protection of minorities as a key element of the Copenhagen criteria relying on the standards of the Council of Europe’s Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities; calls, in this context, for the protection of minorities to be followed up on once a country has joined the Union;

5. Calls on the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS), in particular on the EU Delegations on the ground, to apply a more credible and merit-based approach, firmly anchored in the Copenhagen criteria;
6. Urges the Council to refrain from blocking the candidate countries' accession processes by reference to bilateral issues; calls, in this context, for the Treaties to be amended in order to apply qualified majority voting in the Council for the interim steps and decisions during the accession process, while retaining unanimity only for the final step of accession; against this backdrop, calls on the Member States to exert greater political pressure on Member States which misuse their veto powers during the accession process with the aim of resolving bilateral disputes which are completely unrelated to the Copenhagen criteria; in this context, deplores the resurgence of anachronistic historical demands by certain Member States, which obstructs the EU path of certain candidate countries and considerably undermines the credibility of the EU;
7. Regrets the fact that the role of the European Parliament throughout the entire enlargement process is extremely limited, and calls for stronger parliamentary oversight of EU enlargement policy; calls on the Commission and the Council to take into due consideration the concerns and demands put forward by Parliament;
8. Highlights the specific role of parliamentary bodies in the enlargement countries and calls for their role in the EU accession process to be strengthened, given the specific and key role they play in the required reform process through legislative approximation, oversight and outreach to citizens, among others; recalls the need for the EU Delegations to actively support such interparliamentary cooperation in accession countries;
9. Reiterates its concerns about reports that the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi is deliberately seeking to circumvent and undermine the centrality of reforms in the EU accession countries in the areas of democracy and the rule of law; urges the Commission to launch an independent investigation into this issue and to report the results of the investigation to Parliament and the Council;
10. Calls for further robust monitoring mechanisms for the reforms and the progress made by the accession countries, in addition to the Commission's annual Enlargement Package; in this context, underlines the need also to include in the regular reporting the issue of non-progress or the reversal of progress, in a systematic and transparent manner; against this backdrop, calls for a clarification of the conditions for assessing any serious or prolonged stagnation or backsliding on which restrictive measures against accession countries are based; in this context, reiterates its calls on the Commission and the Council to lift the restrictive measures taken against Kosovo;
11. Reiterates its call on the Commission to implement the recommendations of European Court of Auditors Special Report 01/2022 in order to ensure the effective impact of EU financial assistance in support of the rule of law in the Western Balkans, in particular by developing clear guidelines and benchmarks on the application of the provisions on modulation and conditionality under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III); in this context, reiterates its calls on the Commission to limit the funding spent on border management under IPA III, as this is to the detriment of the 'fundamentals

window’; calls for an increase in the funding under IPA III to improve reception conditions for migrants and refugees, as well as access to asylum procedures in the Western Balkan countries;

12. Welcomes the new Growth Plan for the Western Balkans announced by the Commission during the presentation of the 2023 Enlargement Package; calls on the Commission to apply strict conditionality and disburse funds only to countries which deliver tangible results and implement reforms in the area of the ‘fundamentals’; against this backdrop, calls on the Commission only to provide financial support to accession countries which are genuinely working towards good neighbourly relations and sustainable reconciliation and are fully aligned with the EU’s strategic goals, values and interests, including with the EU’s common foreign and security policy;
13. Welcomes the Commission’s proposal for a regulation on establishing the Ukraine Facility², which will also support accession-related reforms; reiterates its position on the facility as adopted in October 2023; is concerned about the lack of progress in the legislative procedure and urges the Council to swiftly adopt a general approach on the regulation, and the overall revision of the multiannual financial framework, in order for interinstitutional negotiations to commence without further delay;
14. Calls on the Council, the Commission and the EEAS to strengthen strategic communication on the benefits of enlargement both in the accession countries and in the Member States, with a special focus on countering disinformation and intensifying the fight against foreign interference;
15. Highlights the need to step up citizen participation and the involvement of civil society in the enlargement process; in this context, calls for the EU to allocate additional resources to civil society actors dedicated to EU values and principles, democracy, peacebuilding and people-to-people contacts; underlines the need to mainstream gender equality, human rights (in particular freedom of expression), the protection of minorities (such as the Roma community, the LGBTIQ+ community and persons with disabilities) and the protection of human rights defenders in these areas, as well as to fully implement the principle of non-discrimination throughout the accession process; highlights the importance of increasing people-to-people contacts between EU Member States and enlargement countries;
16. Calls for the enlargement countries that have made substantial progress on EU-related reforms to be rewarded with a wider and gradual phasing-in into different EU policies and initiatives, as well as into the single market, thus being able to benefit from the four freedoms; against this backdrop, stresses that benefits and initiatives such as the European Political Community are not alternatives to or substitutes for enlargement, as this would dash the legitimate aspirations of countries which are seeking to become Member States of the EU;
17. Calls on the next College of Commissioners to nominate a separate Commissioner for Enlargement, as well as to restore the Directorate-General for Enlargement;

² Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 June 2023 on establishing the Ukraine Facility (COM(2023)0338).

18. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the President of the European Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the governments and parliaments of all enlargement countries.