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<p><b>WHAT ARE THE LIMITS OF 'EUROPE'? THE INTERNATIONAL AND INTERNAL CHALLENGES FOR EU ENLARGEMENT</b></p> <p>Those countries that have joined the EU since the end of the Cold War fall into three categories. Either they are states of the former Soviet bloc (Hungary, Poland) liberated after the fall of the Berlin Wall, or of the former Yugoslavia (Croatia, Slovenia) having dealt with the harrowing legacy of wars in the early 1990s, or else ex-colonies of the British Empire in the Mediterranean (Cyprus, Malta). What all of these states and their populations had in common, however, was the desire to become 'European'; to break free of the geopolitical and ideological chains shackling them to the past and join a Union of liberal democracies.</p> <p>Although EU expansion has thus far been very successful, there are nevertheless important questions that merit consideration for the future – not least because, just over ten years since the 'big bang' enlargement of 2004, the European project finds itself mired in an existential crisis. Undeniably, the sovereign territory of the EU is fast approaching the geopolitical boundaries of what can be described, at least non-controversially, as 'Europe'. Several westerly cases aside (Iceland is on a very different path indeed), those countries that currently enjoy candidate or potential-candidate status present problems for the EU, both internationally and internally.</p> <p>The international problems are well known – in fact, the problem (in the singular) is Russia. Already unnerved by the present level of EU and NATO expansion, Moscow is positively furious at Brussels' recent overtures to the Caucasus, and perhaps even more furious at those countries' enthusiasm for European integration. Russia's as-yet unsuccessful effort to mimic the European project with a rival Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is one of the main causes of civil war in Ukraine, prompting quips that the Cold War front has not been removed but rather shifted two-thousand kilometres eastwards. This puts the other states in Russia's 'near abroad' in a difficult situation: do they seek protection from the EU and US by strengthening economic and political ties with Brussels, or keep quiet so as not to provoke Moscow? The question remains unresolved, and it is hard to see how the EU and EEU could peacefully occupy the same geopolitical space whilst their respective ambitions remain so at odds.</p> <p>The internal problems facing enlargement are more subtle, and in some respects more interesting. If one looks at a map of the Europe the western Balkans appear as an island within Union's ocean of blue, largely the legacy of the Yugoslavian Wars. These states suffer from a variety of complications which have slowed their progress to accession; Serbia and Montenegro have struggled to close the book on the 1990s in the same way as Slovenia and Croatia have, whilst (the Former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia still experiences an enduring name dispute with Greece, and the issue of Kosovo's statehood remains unresolved. Yet there is no reason that these countries, in the spirit of European reconciliation, cannot become EU member-states in the medium term. As opposed to a century ago, when the Balkans were caught in the teeth of at least</p>	



three rival imperial powers, there is only one realistic path forward for the region today. That path is EU membership.

The cases of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Turkey are a different story – why? These are two very different countries, but the accession of either would mean the EU stepping into thus-far uncharted territory. For the first time, the Union would contain member-states with a majority of Muslim citizens.

That this could be considered a problem by some Europeans is symbolic of the current disparity between the EU's ideals and the reality on the ground. As modern Europeans with an understanding of our continent's history, we pride ourselves on our multi-ethnic, multicultural Union. To take a crude but important example, after centuries of persecution culminating in the Holocaust, there has never been a safer or more peaceful time to be Jewish in Europe. Nevertheless, in recent years and partly in response to the rise of Islamist terrorism, we have seen the growth of anti-Islamic sentiment within our societies. The resurgent far-Right leads with a vision of a monocultural European 'civilisation' that excludes migrants from the Middle East and North Africa. Even moderate Christian democrats often assert, with an intellectual vintage reaching back to the first days of the ECSC and EEC, that what binds the Union together is its ecumenical Christian heritage. From these perspectives, allowing the accession of either Bosnia or Turkey would mean robbing Europe of its key cohesive element.

The EU therefore faces a fork in the road in the future of enlargement. On the one hand, it could impose a limit on its aspiration to reconcile unity and diversity, tacitly accepting that some differences between communities are too great to be bridged. This is certainly a feasible option, but it would call into question a great deal that Europe stands for, especially its supervening narrative of peace and reconstruction. On the other hand, the EU could persevere in upholding the humanistic spirit so eloquently spoken of by Pope Francis in his address to the European Parliament last November, accepting Bosnia into the Union as just another Balkan state with its own unique culture, and Turkey not as an oriental spectre but as a country with a strong tradition of secularism and religious tolerance.

Future enlargements will in some cases present the same challenges as in the past, and in others provide new ones to be overcome; some we will face from beyond our borders, others in persuading our fellow citizens at home. Regardless, the EU's ideals of peace, democracy and reconciliation – building on what is common whilst respecting and rejoicing in what is difference – are ones that deserve to be promoted and strengthened across our continent.

