



Commission prepares for pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews

Brussels, 20 March 2024

The Commission has today adopted a Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews.

This document contributes to the ongoing discussion process about the internal reforms the EU will need to make to prepare for an enlarged Union. It looks at the implications of a larger EU in four main areas - values, policies, budget and governance - laying the ground for the pre-enlargement policy reviews announced by President **von der Leyen** in her 2023 State of the Union address.

The EU must deepen as it widens. We must start preparing today for the Union of tomorrow and use enlargement as a catalyst for progress. All of Europe has gained from enlargement. It made the EU the world's largest integrated market. It opened trade and financial flows, thereby contributing to economic growth in the EU and in acceding countries alike, and strengthened the EU's weight in global affairs.

While reforms were necessary before, with enlargement they become indispensable.

Getting ready for a larger Union

Enlargement is in the Union's own strategic interest. While there are challenges, the benefits of a well-managed enlargement process span across various areas: geopolitical, economic, environmental, social and democratic. The EU has successfully managed previous enlargements, by adjusting EU policies ahead of accession, ensuring a rigorous accession process, targeted assistance and – where needed – transitions.

For these benefits to materialise, both the EU and aspiring Member States must be well-prepared, and the accession process must remain merit-based. This requires full and sustained political commitment and engagement, first and foremost from the enlargement countries, but also from the EU itself. By drawing on the lessons learned from previous enlargements and further improving our policies at 27, we are becoming better prepared for a larger Union. Notably, gradual integration has become an important element in preparing enlargement countries well ahead of accession.

Values

Upholding democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights is a cornerstone of the EU. It has to guide a deep-rooted transformation in enlargement countries. These values continue to guide a deep-rooting transformation in enlargement countries. The EU is strengthening its tools to ensure the rule of law is upheld consistently across the Union, beyond accession.

Policies

While challenges may appear, a larger Union broadens the many benefits of the Single Market. However, for these benefits to materialise for citizens and businesses, the enlargement process must be well-prepared.

Today's document focuses on:

- **Enhancing connectivity:** A larger Union will strengthen physical connectivity, leading to lower logistical costs and smoother trade flows. It will ultimately bring tangible economic benefits to consumers and businesses. Much of this progress will depend on the availability of sufficient private and public investment and on regulatory convergence. The policy reviews may examine, for instance, how policy initiatives to enhance resilience through industrial breakthrough innovation could derive greater scale and support from Important Projects of Common European Interest.
- **Keeping up our climate and environment commitments:** A larger Union has the potential to positively contribute to addressing climate change and biodiversity loss. Enlargement countries also have huge potential in terms of renewable energies and energy efficiency. Policy reviews would have to examine what new challenges can be addressed by the EU's climate and

green industrial policy while safeguarding our ambitions and ensuring predictability.

- **Improving food quality and security:** A key challenge of future enlargement will be to strengthen the EU's Common Agricultural Policy's ability to support a sustainable and competitive agri-food production model, while accommodating the needs of farmers and the variety of agriculture models. The policy reviews would examine the candidate countries and potential candidate's ability to apply EU legislation on direct farm support schemes and to implement the common market organisations for various agricultural products.
- **Creating the conditions for social, economic and territorial convergence:** Membership of the EU brings tangible benefits to the economy, such as lower transaction costs, increased investment, intraregional trade, economic growth and stronger social rights. It also provides access to larger and more diversified financial markets, thereby reducing financing costs and providing consumers with more choice and lower prices. To address challenges linked to the governance of economic, social and territorial convergence policies within a wider group of Member States, the policy reviews would need to reflect on closing legislative and enforcement gaps, amongst other things.
- **Delivering strong security commitments, migration and border management:** In an increasingly challenging geopolitical context, a larger Union would increase its role in world affairs and in multilateral settings – if it is able to act in a united, fast and decisive manner. This external unity and agility requires an underlying shared vision and a strong degree of shared analysis and views among Member States. Yet, a larger Union might, at least initially, bring a greater diversity of external policy interests and agendas. The policy reviews should look into the Union's credibility and ability to act, which will depend on efficient decision-making.

Budget

The precise financial impact of enlargement will primarily depend on its timing, scope and on the result of the merit-based accession negotiations. In any event, enlargement should be factored into the reflections leading to the next long-term budget. Future EU spending programmes should be developed with future enlargement in mind. In parallel, there will also be a need to look at how pre-accession tools can be fine-tuned to better prepare for accession and the transition towards participating in EU funds.

Governance

Since 2022, there have been reflections on EU institutional reforms. The prospect of enlargement has given this debate a new sense of urgency. While the Commission has indicated its support to Treaty change, 'if and where it is needed', it believes that the EU's governance can be swiftly improved by using the full potential of the current Treaties, such as 'passerelles clauses' allowing for a shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting within the Council in key areas. It will also be necessary to take account of the enforcement workload ahead, which is crucial to preserving the integrity and functioning of the European Union and its single market.

Background

A larger European Union holds significant political and economic potential. Maximising these opportunities will depend on our ability to identify, define and anticipate areas for improvement, and to set out a clear strategy on how to progress on the parallel tracks of enlargement and EU reforms.

Today's Communication kicks off the work on the in-depth policy reviews, announced by President **von der Leyen** in her 2023 State of the Union address. The Commission will carry out these reviews in early 2025. The reviews may take different forms depending on the sectors and will benefit from stakeholders' input on the specific impacts of a larger Union on individual policies. Depending on the outcome of the reviews, substantive reform proposals in individual sectors, including the preparation of Commission's proposal for the next long-term budget, could then be a second step in this process.

For more information

https://commission.europa.eu/publications/communication-pre-enlargement-reforms-and-policy-reviews_en

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Quotes:

"Enlargement is a geostrategic investment, increasing the EU's political and economic weight on the global stage. It anchors democracy across the continent and strengthens the competitiveness of the Single Market, for instance, by reducing critical external dependencies. But to fully seize opportunities of this geopolitical investment, both the EU and future Member States must be well-prepared. This Communication is the first stepping-stone towards EU reforms inevitable to make us ready for a larger Union, with a series of in-depth policy reviews to begin in early 2025."

Maroš Šefčovič, Executive Vice-President for European Green Deal, Interinstitutional Relations and Foresight

Press contacts:

[Daniel FERRIE](#) (+32 2 298 65 00)

[Saul GOULDING](#) (+32 2 29 64735)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)

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