



Revised enlargement methodology: Questions and Answers

Brussels, 5 February 2020

Why is the European Commission adopting this revised methodology?

Today's Communication sets out the Commission's proposals to strengthen the EU accession process. It aims to make the enlargement process more credible, predictable, dynamic and subject to stronger political steering. This will reinvigorate the accession process and make it more effective, enhancing credibility and trust on both sides.

What is new in these proposals? How did the enlargement methodology change?

The revised enlargement methodology builds on four main principles

Credibility:

Candidate countries need to deliver on the reforms they promised, and EU needs to deliver when they do.

Stronger political steer:

Engaging with the candidates at **top level** through regular summits and ministerial meetings.

Member States will be involved more strongly and have better opportunities to monitor and review the process.

A more dynamic process:

Clustering chapters will allow for more thorough political discussions on thematic areas and to identify opportunities for **early alignment and integration** into EU policies.

The cluster on fundamentals (rule of law, economic criteria and public administration reform) will take a central role and sufficient progress will need to be achieved before other clusters can be opened.

Predictability for both sides:

Defining more clearly the conditions for candidate countries. Providing them with **clear incentives** if key reforms successfully implemented – **closer integration of the country with the European Union.**

Clear incentives: supporting **solid and accelerated economic development and tangible benefits for citizens** in order to provide the environment that allows for the substantial reforms needed, e.g. increased investment opportunities, work for accelerated integration and “phasing-in” to individual EU policies, the EU markets and EU programmes, while ensuring a level playing field and strengthened regional integration.

More decisive measures sanctioning any serious or prolonged stagnation or even backsliding: from slowing down negotiations, to adjusting funding and withdrawing benefits of closer integration.

Is the Commission changing its enlargement policy?

The conditions to join the EU are set out in the Treaty on European Union and by the Copenhagen criteria, which are very clear, and do not change. The proposals will improve the process and make it more comprehensive.

Previous enlargement countries did not have to fulfil all these conditions. You are moving the goalposts and delaying the accession process.

No, the revised methodology is based on the same, **well-established criteria** to join the EU. These were defined already in **1993** at the European Council in Copenhagen: need to have stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU;

the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership.

In the case of the Western Balkans, **additional conditions** for membership were set out in the 'Stabilisation and Association Process', mostly relating to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.

There are no shortcuts to membership. It is true that the accession process today is **more demanding than in the past**. But this is because the process has been made more rigorous to help the countries tackle the more difficult challenges they face in their reform efforts.

How do you assess the progress of enlargement countries?

Each year the Commission adopts its "Enlargement package" - which includes a Communication on enlargement (setting out the way forward and taking stock of the situation in the enlargement countries) and individual country Reports. In the Reports, the Commission presents its detailed assessment of the state of play in each candidate country and potential candidate, what has been achieved over the last year, and set out guidelines on reform priorities. The assessments are based on the Commission's regular monitoring of the situation in the countries, input from the EU Delegations on the ground and from a variety of other sources, including: contributions from the EU Member States, European Parliament reports, contributions from the governments of the countries, and information from various international and non-governmental organisations.

How does the EU support reforms in the enlargement countries?

The EU helps the countries that wish to become members with political, financial and technical support. This makes it easier for them to make progress in meeting the well-established requirements of membership, in particular implementing far-reaching reforms and aligning with EU rules and regulations.

The European Union provides the countries with financial support through the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance. From 2014-2020, the EU dedicated EUR 11.7 billion for this purpose, with continued funding foreseen for 2021-2027. The EU and the national authorities decide on the areas where to invest the funds.

The Commission and Member States also support the enlargement countries' public administrations with technical assistance to align, apply and enforce EU legislation as well as facilitating the sharing of EU best practices. This is done *inter alia* through TAIEX / Twinning workshops, expert missions and study visits.

What does the revised methodology mean for the fundamentals, in particular the rule of law?

We propose a balanced approach, which will lead to a more dynamic and more credible process, while putting an even stronger focus on the core role of fundamental reforms essential for the EU path. Rule of law will become even more central in the accession negotiations, for example through anti-corruption work being main-streamed in relevant chapters. There will be a stronger focus on the fundamentals of functioning of democratic institutions, public administration reform and supporting economic reforms. Progress on the fundamental reforms will determine the overall pace of negotiations.

Will public administration reform now be part of the accession negotiations as a chapter? What does this mean in practice?

The Commission's proposal reconfirms the central role that public administration reform plays among the fundamentals of the enlargement process. These fundamentals will become even more central in the accession negotiations. **Negotiations in the area of fundamentals will be opened first and closed last** and progress on the fundamentals will determine the overall pace of negotiations. In this sense, public administration reform will be on an equal footing with the other fundamentals.

Will the new methodology be applied only to North Macedonia and Albania, or also Serbia and Montenegro?

The new methodology **will be formalised into the negotiating frameworks for North Macedonia and Albania** .

Many of the proposals could also be attractive for Serbia and Montenegro, as they can contribute to making the process more dynamic, predictable and credible for them as well. **Serbia and Montenegro will be able to opt in if they wish.** The negotiating frameworks already in place for Montenegro and Serbia would however not need to be changed.

The fact that a revised methodology will be the basis for the new negotiating frameworks will it mean there will be a two-speed process for accession: easier for the ones already negotiating and more difficult for Albania and North Macedonia?

The accession process is equally difficult for any candidate, but in different ways, since challenges differ. Negotiating frameworks are never identical. They take into account the context of each candidate and spell out the way negotiations are conducted. The speed of progress towards accession to the EU does not depend on the negotiations frameworks but on the political will of the country to implement the necessary reforms so the country meets the EU's accession criteria. The conditions to join the EU are the same for all countries and the speed depends on the time they take to meet the criteria.

But by proposing today adjustments to the methodology we aim at better supporting their reform process: through the clustering of chapters, clearer criteria, and stronger political steer, our objective is to help the countries to move faster on reforms.

What about Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo? What does this mean for them?

The EU has repeatedly confirmed its unequivocal support to the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The Stabilisation and Association Process remains the common framework of relations with the two.

In its conclusions of December 2019, the Council welcomed the Commission's Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's application to EU membership. The Council urged executive and legislative bodies at all levels of government to start addressing the key priorities identified in the opinion, in line with the legitimate aspirations of the citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina to advance towards the European Union.

The EU has welcomed the appointment of the new Government in Bosnia and Herzegovina and is ready to work with the authorities on the implementation of the 14 priorities identified, paving the way towards the candidate status.

For Kosovo, it is important that the new government resumes work on reforms, including the implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and building on the European Reform Agenda, to deliver tangible results for citizens.

The Commission looks forward to working with the new Government in Kosovo and to assisting in its European Reform Agenda, focusing on strengthening the rule of law, public administration and the economy. It is also important that Kosovo abolishes the tariffs and renews its engagement in regional initiatives and cooperation.

What are the next steps now?

The Commission hopes the Member States will endorse the proposal, in parallel with the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, ahead of the European Union-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb on 6-7 May, for which the Commission will also put forward an economic and investment development plan for the Western Balkans region. If the Council takes a positive decision in this sense, it will task the Commission with presenting **draft negotiating frameworks** with the two countries. These will **further spell out the proposals** set out in the revised methodology.

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