

**Follow-up to the European Parliament non-legislative resolution
on
the EU enlargement strategy**

- 1. Rapporteur:** Petras AUŠTREVICIUS (Renew Europe / LT)
- 2. References :** 2025/2110(INI) / A10-0016/2026 / P10_TA(2026)0077
- 3. Date of adoption of the resolution:** 11 March 2026
- 4. Competent Parliamentary Committee:** Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET)
- 5. Brief analysis/ assessment of the resolution and requests made in it:**

The European Parliament's resolution emphasises the strategic importance of the European Union's enlargement amidst geopolitical challenges like Russia's aggression against Ukraine and China's influence. It identifies enlargement as crucial for promoting stability and prosperity through democratic values across Europe, insisting that accession be merit-based and reliant on irreversible reforms, evaluated individually. Candidate countries are encouraged to align with the EU's foreign and security policies to bolster collective security.

The resolution stresses the importance of continued EU support for necessary reforms addressing judicial independence, anti-corruption, and governance, alongside strategic investments and connectivity projects to increase competitiveness. It calls for a robust communication strategy to enhance transparency and public awareness about EU membership, fostering civil society engagement and citizen involvement. Moreover, it advocates cooperation with candidate countries to counter disinformation and foreign interference, ensuring resilience. The Parliament highlights the urgency for EU enlargement, emphasising both benefits for Member States and risks of non-enlargement, urging institutions to commit actively to aligning candidate countries with EU values and priorities.

- 6. Response to requests and overview of action taken, or intended to be taken, by the Commission:**

On paragraphs 8, 9, 10, 26 and 27, on the need for accession to remain a merit-based and reversible process, the Commission recalls that while it supports enlargement countries on their path towards EU membership, the pace of their accession will continue to be determined by the principle of own merit. The revised enlargement methodology adopted in 2020 puts the so-called “fundamentals” at the heart of the accession process, the fundamentals cluster (cluster 1) being the first to be opened and the associated chapters being the last to be closed in the course of the negotiations. The Commission monitors progress in these areas closely, conducting regular and objective assessments of reforms in candidate countries and potential candidates,

including through its annual Enlargement Package of reports, which provides a detailed analysis of developments and country-specific recommendations, and the Rule of Law Report (currently covering four enlargement partners). These thorough assessments also consider data and information from a variety of sources, including monitoring bodies from international organisations and civil society organisations, as well as peer reviews with experts from EU Member States. Based on a wide range of information, derived from both qualitative monitoring and quantitative data gathering, the Commission assesses progress on reforms and results achieved, including on the track record on combating corruption and organised crime and serious crimes.

On paragraph 12, on the call to include all enlargement countries in the Commission's annual rule of law report, the Commission emphasises that this inclusion is based on objective criteria, both as regards the partners' formal stage of advancement in their respective accession process and the level of preparedness specifically concerning matters related to the rule of law and in particular *acquis* chapter 23 (Judiciary and Fundamental Rights). As President von der Leyen announced through the current Commission's Political Guidelines, the Report will eventually cover other enlargement countries, as and when they are ready. The inclusion of these countries on an equal footing with Member States is visibly strengthening EU support for rule of law reforms, for their accession process and will help maintain a sustainable pattern of high standards after accession.

On paragraph 16, 17 and 18, the Commission concurs on the need for candidate countries and potential candidates **to align with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)** and send clear signals of their geostrategic orientation with the EU's interests. As stated in the 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy, the Commission closely monitors the alignment rate of candidate countries with CFSP and calls to make it a condition for candidate countries to benefit of the advantages of gradual integration.

On paragraph 32, on the call for the EU's capacity to act to be enhanced through the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV), the Commission recalls that the 2024 Communication on the pre-enlargement policy and reviews clearly mentions that the possibility of empowering the Council to decide by qualified majority could be explored for certain interim steps of the enlargement process. Decisions in this regard remain in the hands of Member States.

On paragraphs 30, 31, 33 and 34 on the importance to accommodate new Member States and ensure the efficient functioning of an enlarged Union, the Commission Political Guidelines 2024-2029 underline that an ambitious reform agenda is needed to ensure the proper functioning of a larger Union, equipping it to tackle current and future geopolitical challenges and improve democratic legitimacy. Following up on the European Council's roadmap for future work on internal reforms from June 2024, the Commission will present its pre-enlargement policy reviews and put forward proposals to enhance Europe's capacity to act, including with broadened membership. The policy review focuses on four strands, namely governance, values, policies and budget. For each of these

strands, it identifies concrete initiatives to address key challenges and opportunities resulting from enlargement. In doing so, the Commission intends to focus on what can already be done now and those areas where a broad consensus is emerging.

On paragraphs 35, 36, 37 and 38 on gradual integration, the Commission recalls that it is an integral part of the 2020 revised enlargement methodology. When candidates deliver, the EU can consider granting measures of gradual integration, which allow enlargement partners to enjoy some of the benefits of EU membership prior to their accession. Recent examples of gradual integration include the integration of enlargement countries into the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) and the 'Roam like at Home' initiative. The Commission stresses that gradual integration does not replace EU membership and remains contingent to delivery on reforms by our enlargement partners.

On paragraph 45, on the call for adequate pre-accession funding under the new MFF, the Commission recalls that its proposal for the next MFF envisages an indicative envelope of EUR 43.2 billion for the Europe pillar, which includes the Western Balkans, the Eastern Neighbourhood and Türkiye. Given that most of the partners are now enlargement partners, this envelope will mean increased pre-accession funding, commensurate to the level of advancement on the accession path and delivery of reforms. At the same time, setting the resources only at the level of the pillar as a whole ensures sufficient flexibility to respond to changing realities, for example, in case additional partners are granted candidate country status or in the case of backsliding on democracy and rule of law. Under the Facilities for the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine, the Commission applies conditionality rigorously, with payments released once reforms and pre-conditions are both fulfilled. Pre-conditions which are assessed at each request for payment include standard conditionality that needs to be fulfilled at all times, namely that the beneficiaries continue to uphold and respect effective democratic mechanisms, the rule of law and human rights. These conditions apply for instance to funds under the Reform Agenda which reforms need to be fully completed. There are also necessary pre-conditions and general conditions to be fulfilled throughout the implementation of the instrument.

On paragraph 54, on the importance of strategic communication, the Commission recalls that strategic communication on EU enlargement is a shared responsibility with other EU institutions and Member State authorities as well. The Commission has recently strengthened pro-active strategic communication on the tangible benefits of EU membership within the Member States and enlargement partners as well. A baseline for outreach and engagement was established through opinion poll results. Special attention has been paid to outreach in Member States with low support to enlargement as well as to countries most advanced in the accession process. The first Enlargement Forum, held in November 2025, put enlargement on the radar of relevant stakeholders as a key political priority of the EU. To enhance informed, evidence-based and inclusive discussion, several

events on enlargement took place, including in cooperation with think-tanks. To foster inclusive public debates, the Commission further plans to extend support to grassroots organisations in several EU Member States, to organise small scale events at local level. Outreach efforts focused on audiences in EU Member States also include press trips, production of human-centred stories creating emotions or co-production by public sector media of short video stories on EU enlargement. Campaigns in partner countries organised by EU Delegations as well as regional communication programmes continued highlighting the benefits and challenges of EU integration to audiences in enlargement partners. The role of young people is key: the network of Young European Ambassadors and other youth influencers have been deployed, including to raise public awareness of the EU's investments in candidate countries.

On paragraphs 3, 54, 55, 56, 57, 60 and 61 on cooperation to counter foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI), the Commission underlines that it is implementing and will continue to scale up an integrated, whole-of-society approach that addresses both the symptoms and the root causes of disinformation. While monitoring and debunking false content remain important, the Commission considers resilience-building to be the most effective long-term response. Support is delivered through regional and bilateral programmes that strengthen media, digital and information literacy, independent and quality journalism, and civil society, alongside efforts to reinforce preparedness against cyber and hybrid threats and to protect democratic institutions and processes. These actions are complemented by proactive communication on the tangible benefits of EU enlargement. This approach is consistent with the objectives of the European Democracy Shield and demonstrates how the accession process is a means to strengthen institutions and democratic resilience. Experience shows that coordinated and targeted support can help partners withstand major interference attempts, while also underlining the need for sustained vigilance. Building on these lessons, the Commission will continue to step up its support across the enlargement region.

On paragraph 56 on the need to use clearer and more direct language in its public communication, the Commission recalls that it closely follows and reports about developments in the enlargement countries, including those related to the rule of law. The enlargement communication and reports contain very clear messages on backsliding or shortcomings, which are also clearly reflected in the public communication of the Commission.