



## **Resolution**

# **One Continent, One Future: Delivering Enlargement for Europe's Peace and Strength**

## **EPP Presidency Resolution**

**Adopted by the EPP Political Assembly: 29-30 June 2026, Vienna**

**One Continent, One Future: Delivering Enlargement for Europe's Peace and Strength**

As the European People's Party (EPP), we are convinced that enlargement remains the most successful driver of long-term security, peace, stability, and prosperity in Europe. Past expansions prove that a larger Union is a stronger Union, fostering common values, reconciliation and economic growth: following the 2004 "big bang" enlargement, the GDP per capita of the ten new Member States rose from 59% of the EU average to over 80% within a decade. Yet, the geopolitical landscape has fundamentally shifted, with Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and a strained transatlantic partnership ushering in a new era that demands a renewed consensus on European integration. There is no more time for grey zones. To prevent foreign interference and strengthen resilience, we must ensure that the speed of any accession process matches the pace of geopolitical challenges. Ultimately, integrating our partners is not merely a procedural task, it is a strategic choice for peace, security, prosperity and freedom.

First and foremost, we believe that the enlargement of the EU towards Ukraine and Moldova, the Western Balkan countries and potentially our Nordic partners is not about generosity, but about merit and mutual benefit.

Every candidate country must advance on the basis of its own achievements, in compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and the values enshrined in Article 2 TEU.

The accession of Ukraine into the European Union is of mutual advantage, since Ukraine is crucial for European security and stability. We recognise Ukraine's path towards the EU, which requires a targeted approach. We support a credible, just and lasting peace framework. We must be ready to offer Ukraine a strong and realistic prospect of integration. This perspective should remain merit-based, while recognising the unprecedented nature of the current situation, and in this light, we welcome all efforts aiming at establishing a concrete pre-accession toolbox. Beyond securing peace, our duty is to deepen Ukraine's connection with the EU and to embed the EU more firmly within Ukraine's future.

We are fully aware of the serious and persistent threats that Russian interference poses to the sovereignty, democratic processes, and the European future of Moldova. Despite these challenges, Moldova has emerged as one of the most committed and reform-oriented candidate countries. Moldova is implementing ambitious reforms in record time while simultaneously defending its democracy against continuous hybrid attacks. Moreover, we must continue to strongly support pro-European actors in Georgia and Armenia.

The enlargement process must also strengthen resilience against foreign interference, disinformation, cyberattacks and hybrid threats originating from authoritarian actors seeking to undermine democratic institutions and the European project.

We believe that the EU is not complete without the Western Balkan countries. The future of Western Balkans lies within the European family. We regret the loss of credibility caused by repeated delays in the accession process despite reform efforts and underline that the European Union and all Member States must honour their commitments. While we acknowledge the varying degrees of progress in the region, we praise the momentum of front-runner Montenegro, which is moving forward in closing all negotiation chapters towards EU accession. Furthermore, we hereby welcome the recent signing of the Joint Declaration of the EPP-Affiliated Parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina under the auspices of EPP President, reaffirming joint efforts in upholding European values and undertaking necessary reforms in building the EU future of BiH. The fight against corruption, as well as strengthening the rule of law and the independence of justice and media and good neighbourly relations will bring the region forward and make it fit for joining the European Union.

Finally, the Nordic dimension of enlargement has gained increased importance recently. The Icelandic decision to hold a referendum on resuming the accession negotiations with the European Union this August has contributed to a renewed dynamic on the question of an enlargement in the European North. We are positive towards accession ambitions in Iceland, Norway and Greenland.

In today's fast-changing context, we acknowledge the need for accelerated enlargement, while recognising that the merit-based process and the adherence to the Copenhagen criteria remain indispensable. However, the current process needs to be further adapted to respond to current challenges. We need to shift from slower traditional accession models to faster and more flexible tools with a committed plan to fulfil all membership criteria. No EU institution can credibly guarantee a quick, concrete and binding membership date to complement the current path towards accession. Nonetheless, within the end of this decade, we wish to see new members joining our Union.

We underline that all EU candidates must underpin their ambition to join with credible implementation of the necessary reforms to make a strong, positive case for their added value. The EU accession process must serve as an accelerator of such reforms – not just for the benefit of joining the EU, but of the lives of all citizens. Credible integration requires candidate countries to deliver on the “fundamentals”: the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, have stable institutions that guarantee democracy, and the fight against corruption. We will scrutinise democratic standards to ensure that no backsliding occurs. Being pro-EU, pro-Ukraine, and pro-rule of law remains our EPP compass.

We stress that the EU enlargement process remains a shared responsibility and can only succeed through mutual commitment. Alongside candidate countries' efforts, we reiterate that the European Union must undertake its own internal reforms, as its current architecture is not suited for a Union of more than 30 members. This requires overhauling decision-making structures to remain effective in today's geopolitical context. In particular, we must move beyond a system where single countries can block decisions, by expanding qualified majority voting (QMV) in enlargement-related areas, whilst recalling that, pursuant to Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, the final decision on accession to the European Union rests with the Member States, acting unanimously in accordance with their own constitutional rules.

We must deliver tangible early benefits to candidate countries through new Growth Plans, linking reforms to gradual access to the Single Market, the Four Freedoms, SEPA, democratic and security frameworks, roaming, infrastructure, renewable energy, and energy diversification, with a pathway toward Schengen and the Eurozone.

This gradual integration should make enlargement credible, allowing countries to benefit before full membership and avoiding a “waiting room” dynamic. By doing so, we want to strengthen prospects for younger generations and boost competitiveness across Europe. Combined with targeted and performance-based financial support, security arrangements, and support for agriculture, this will ensure a smoother integration. Enlargement must be seen as an investment in collective security and freedom, higher living standards, lower unemployment, and economic growth, which have been the result of previous enlargements.

We underline that public support is essential for successful enlargement, requiring a robust dialogue to communicate mutual benefits. We call on political actors in candidate countries to refrain from negative rhetoric towards the European Union. Local and regional actors can play a key role in this process too. We must also highlight the tangible contributions that new members bring, including greater European security and welfare, new markets, and a young, educated population as a net asset, not a burden. Enlargement is also a promise to the young generations: it must give a real perspective by creating opportunities in education, employment and political participation, helping to prevent emigration and brain drain, while enabling young and regional voices to actively shape Europe’s future.

While supporting enlargement as a vital process, we recognise that it must be matched by the EU’s integration capacity. We believe it is important to clarify the scope and geographical boundaries of future enlargement and to foresee innovative frameworks for close and structured cooperation in alternative to full membership, drawing on existing models developed with strong partners like the United Kingdom or Switzerland. Such transparency and flexibility are crucial to maintain public trust and support within the European Union. Only by clearly defining its long-term boundaries can the European Union sustain credible momentum for the accession of partners such as Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans.

While acknowledging that the current political situation in Türkiye rules out the possibility of Türkiye's accession to the EU, we remain open to a phased, proportionate and reversible strengthening of EU–Türkiye relations, including the upgrade of the existing customs union, provided that the necessary conditions are met. Any such progress must be linked to Türkiye's fulfilment of its obligations towards the European Union and all its Member States, respect for international law and the sovereign rights of Member States. The EPP attaches particular importance to resumption of and progress in the Cyprus settlement talks in further enhancing EU–Türkiye cooperation.

Our Union remains the world’s most successful peace and prosperity project. As the strongest European political party, we have the responsibility to lead the process of adapting enlargement to a changing geopolitical environment. Enlargement is key for Europe’s global strength, security and stability. The time to deliver is now.