



TEXTS ADOPTED

P10_TA(2026)0077

EU enlargement strategy

European Parliament resolution of 11 March 2026 on the EU enlargement strategy (2025/2110(INI))

The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular Article 49 thereof,
- having regard to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 23 to 24 June 2022, 29 to 30 June 2023, 26 to 27 October 2023, 14 to 15 December 2023, 27 June 2024 and 17 December 2024 and to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Copenhagen of 21 to 22 June 1993, also known as the Copenhagen criteria,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2023 on 30 years of Copenhagen criteria – giving further impetus to EU enlargement policy¹,
- having regard to the EU Association Agreements with Albania², Bosnia and Herzegovina³, Georgia⁴, Kosovo⁵, the Republic of Moldova⁶ (hereinafter ‘Moldova’), Montenegro⁷, North Macedonia⁸, Serbia⁹, Türkiye¹⁰ and Ukraine¹¹,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 4 November 2025 entitled ‘2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy’ (COM(2025)0690) and previous annual

¹ OJ C, C/2024/4173, 2.8.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4173/oj>.

² OJ L 107, 28.4.2009, p. 166, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2009/332/oj.

³ OJ L 164, 30.6.2015, p. 2, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2015/997/oj.

⁴ OJ L 261, 30.8.2014, p. 4, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/494/oj.

⁵ OJ L 71, 16.3.2016, p. 3, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2016/342/oj.

⁶ OJ L 260, 30.8.2014, p. 4, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/492/oj.

⁷ OJ L 108, 29.4.2010, p. 3, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2010/224/oj.

⁸ OJ L 84, p. 13, ELI: [http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2004/239\(2\)/oj](http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2004/239(2)/oj).

⁹ OJ L 278, 18.10.2013, p. 16, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2013/490/oj.

¹⁰ OJ L 361, 31.12.1977, p. 29, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/1964/732/oj.

¹¹ OJ L 161 29.5.2014, p. 3, ELI: http://data.europa.eu/eli/agree_international/2014/295/oj.

communications thereon,

- having regard to its resolutions on the 2023 and 2024 Commission reports on Kosovo¹², Serbia¹³, Albania¹⁴, Bosnia and Herzegovina¹⁵, North Macedonia¹⁶, Montenegro¹⁷, Ukraine¹⁸, Moldova¹⁹, Georgia²⁰ and Türkiye²¹,
- having regard to its resolution of 13 March 2024 on closer ties between the EU and Armenia and the need for a peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia²²,
- having regard to its resolution of 29 February 2024 on deepening EU integration in view of future enlargement²³,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 20 March 2024 entitled ‘Pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews’ (COM(2024)0146),
- having regard to its recommendation of 23 November 2022 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy concerning the new EU strategy for enlargement²⁴,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2021/1529 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 September 2021 establishing the Instrument for Pre-Accession assistance (IPA III)²⁵,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 on establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans²⁶,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2024/792 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 February 2024 establishing the Ukraine Facility²⁷,
- having regard to Regulation (EU) 2025/535 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 March 2025 establishing the Reform and Growth Facility for the Republic of Moldova²⁸,

¹² Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0094.

¹³ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0093.

¹⁴ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0155.

¹⁵ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0156.

¹⁶ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0157.

¹⁷ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0130.

¹⁸ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0175.

¹⁹ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0131.

²⁰ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0158.

²¹ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0092.

²² OJ C, C/2024/6555, 12.11.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6555/oj>.

²³ OJ C, C/2024/6746, 26.11.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/6746/oj>.

²⁴ OJ C 167, 11.5.2023, p. 105.

²⁵ OJ L 330, 20.9.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1529/oj>.

²⁶ OJ L, 2024/1449, 24.5.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1449/oj>.

²⁷ OJ L, 2024/792, 29.2.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/792/oj>.

²⁸ OJ L, 2025/535, 21.3.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2025/535/oj>.

- having regard to the Presidency conclusions of the Thessaloniki European Council meeting of 19 and 20 June 2003,
 - having regard to the declarations of the EU-Western Balkans Summits of 17 May 2018 in Sofia, of 6 May 2020 in Zagreb, of 6 October 2021 in Brdo pri Kranju, of 6 December 2022 in Tirana, of 13 December 2023 in Brussels, and of 18 December 2024 in Brussels,
 - having regard to the Berlin Process launched on 28 August 2014,
 - having regard to the joint declarations of the Eastern Partnership Summits of 7 May 2009 in Prague, of 29 to 30 September 2011 in Warsaw, of 28 to 29 November 2013 in Vilnius, of 21 to 22 May 2015 in Riga, of 24 November 2017 in Brussels, and of 15 December 2021 in Brussels,
 - having regard to its recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Eastern Partnership, in the run-up to the June 2020 Summit²⁹,
 - having regard to its resolution of 22 October 2025 on the polarisation and increased repression in Serbia, one year after the Novi Sad tragedy³⁰,
 - having regard to its resolution of 13 February 2025 on the further deterioration of the political situation in Georgia³¹,
 - having regard to the joint communication from the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of 29 November 2023 entitled ‘State of Play of EU-Türkiye political, economic and trade relations’ (JOIN(2023)0050),
 - having regard to the European Committee of the Regions’ opinion of 2 April 2025 on the Commission’s Enlargement Package 2024 – Western Balkans and Türkiye,
 - having regard to European Court of Auditors’ Special Report 01/2022 of 10 January 2022 entitled ‘EU support for the rule of law in the Western Balkans: despite efforts, fundamental problems persist’,
 - having regard to the Commission’s 2024 and 2025 rule of law reports,
 - having regard to Rule 55 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A10-0016/2026),
- A. whereas the EU enlargement process has progressed substantially in recent years in some candidate countries; whereas 9 of the 10 countries currently aspiring to join the EU hold candidate status, and some have held it for many years; whereas the opening of accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova has contributed to a renewed

²⁹ OJ C 362, 8.9.2021, p. 114.

³⁰ Texts adopted, P10_TA(2025)0248.

³¹ OJ C, C/2025/2251, 29.4.2025, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2025/2251/oj>.

dynamic in the enlargement policy;

- B. whereas enlargement is one of the EU's strongest foreign policy and geopolitical tools and remains a key driver of long-term security, peace, stability and prosperity in Europe, based on shared democratic values; whereas enlargement represents a historic and unique opportunity with significant socio-economic, political and security advantages for both the EU and the enlargement countries;
- C. whereas the latest Eurobarometer report on enlargement indicates that 56 % of EU citizens support further enlargement of the European Union, with Ukraine being the most favoured candidate for accession once all EU membership criteria have been met;
- D. whereas according to the Eurobarometer report, previous rounds of enlargement are perceived to have delivered the greatest benefits in the areas of economic growth and competitiveness, followed by strengthened global influence of the EU and enhanced security and defence;
- E. whereas the EU accession process delivers tangible results in itself, with the EU remaining the principal political, economic and trading partner of the enlargement countries; whereas the total trade volume of the Western Balkans with the EU increased by 62 % after the Stabilisation and Association Agreements came into force; whereas the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements had a transformative effect on Moldova and Ukraine in terms of both trade and economic development, increasing their trade by 65,4 % and 64,7 % respectively;
- F. whereas Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine poses a serious threat to security on the European continent and beyond, demonstrating that non-enlargement carries significant strategic costs and undermines security and stability across our continent; whereas stagnation in the enlargement process in recent years has created a vacuum, thus opening the space for Russia and China and other harmful non-EU actors; whereas Russia deliberately interferes in the countries of the Eastern Partnership and the Western Balkans through hybrid threat operations, including election interference and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI) campaigns, seeking to stall the EU accession process in these countries and posing a threat to security both for these regions, through its illegal occupation of parts of the territory of three candidate countries, and for the entire continent;
- G. whereas China's influence is expanding dangerously, from economic dependency projects to security cooperation, particularly in the Western Balkans and Georgia, as it continues to exploit political instability and institutional weaknesses in several enlargement countries in order to undermine their path to EU integration and their democratic governance;
- H. whereas enlargement is a merit-based process, of which irreversible progress on the rule of law, democracy and fundamental values remains the key cornerstone; whereas each country's accession to the EU is conditional on lasting, in-depth and irreversible reforms across fundamental areas, starting with the rule of law and the functioning of democratic institutions; whereas the quality of the necessary reforms undertaken by a country determines the timeline for accession;
- I. whereas the EU continues to be the biggest provider of investment and financial

assistance through the pre-accession assistance instrument IPA III, the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, the Western Balkan Facility, the Ukraine Facility, the Moldova Facility, the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) – Global Europe, and macro-financial assistance;

- J. whereas the candidate countries' alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP) remains one of the key preconditions for EU accession;
- K. whereas the decision-making process on enlargement is laid down in Article 49 TEU and in the negotiating frameworks drawn up for each candidate country;
- L. whereas Parliament remains a reliable partner for accession countries and an advocate of the enlargement process, enabling institutional and socio-economic reforms for the benefit of citizens;

Geostrategic dimension of enlargement

1. Reiterates that enlargement is a strategic response to the new geopolitical reality and an investment of the utmost importance for the EU's security and stability in the face of Russia's full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine, repeated border violations, hybrid attacks and other hostile actions against its neighbours, as well as other common geopolitical challenges, requiring a long-term political democratic vision and bold actions and steps towards the completion of the European project;
2. Reiterates that enlargement is a win-win for both current and future Member States; emphasises the political urgency of demonstrating the EU's active commitment to the enlargement process, also with a view to safeguarding the EU's credibility towards the enlargement countries and their societies; insists that EU enlargement will strengthen Europe's security and economy; stresses, yet again, that the future of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova lies within the EU, in accordance with the aspirations of their people; underlines that the cost of non-enlargement exceeds the cost of completing the process and would risk creating geopolitical grey zones vulnerable to malign influence by non-EU countries seeking to expand their political, economic and strategic influence;
3. Underlines that accession is a key tool to promote lasting peace, democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, to foster regional reconciliation and stability, and to protect candidate countries and the EU neighbourhood from malign foreign interference, particularly from Russia; considers enlargement policy indispensable for the EU's influence in times of heightened geopolitical instability; emphasises that the EU's prosperity and security rests on its ability to defend democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the rules-based multilateral order; recalls the shared cultural, historical and human ties between the enlargement countries and the Member States;

Strategic priorities of EU enlargement: merit-based process and conditionality

4. Welcomes the progress made in recent years, making EU enlargement likely in the near future; commends Montenegro and Albania for their significant progress, noting their ambitions to conclude negotiations by the end of 2026 and end of 2027 respectively; urges the EU institutions, particularly the Council, to reciprocate this ambition, remove obstacles on the EU's side and thus enhance the credibility and predictability of the

process, while fully respecting the ‘strictly merit-based’ principle; welcomes the fact that Bosnia and Herzegovina holds candidate status and encourages the country to take further steps to reform;

5. Commends Ukraine’s remarkable resilience and commitment to its European path, despite Russia’s war of aggression; calls for the EU and its Member States to continue supporting Ukraine and regrets the Council’s failure to agree on the use of frozen Russian assets; praises Moldova for advancing significantly on its EU accession path and successfully completing the screening process despite continuous hybrid threats; calls for the swift opening of negotiating clusters with Ukraine and Moldova and urges the Hungarian Government to refrain from continuing to block negotiations;
6. Reiterates that, in accordance with Article 49 TEU, any European state may apply to become a member of the EU provided it respects the values set out in Article 2 TEU, including human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights, including minority rights; takes note of the increased support for EU membership in several countries that were previously preparing to join the EU, including Iceland, which intends to hold a referendum by 2027 on restarting accession talks, and encourages the EU’s leadership to continue building closer links with such countries; notes that on 26 March 2025, the Armenian Parliament adopted a law formally supporting EU membership and calling on the country’s government to begin the EU accession process, and considers that sustained reforms consolidating Armenia’s democracy could open a transformative phase in EU-Armenia relations; welcomes potential initiatives by Greenland to strengthen its political, institutional and economic links with the EU, amid growing support for EU accession;
7. Recalls that previous enlargement rounds fostered considerable economic growth in both new and old Member States; underlines that free movement improved job prospects and wages, and reduced poverty through remittances; stresses that enlargement has had a positive impact on living standards by improving labour laws, health and safety, gender equality, digital services, education and non-discrimination;
8. Reiterates that accession must remain a merit-based and reversible process, with each applicant being assessed against the Copenhagen criteria, alignment with the EU acquis and all additional conditions of the enlargement framework; stresses that each country’s path towards EU integration must be assessed on its own merits and that no country should be coupled with another or treated as part of a package; underscores that there can be no shortcuts on EU values and fundamental principles;
9. Stresses that while the process should become more incremental and dynamic, with clear reform targets, roadmaps and intermediate timelines, there can be no fast track, as this could affect the integrity of the accession process; notes that several candidate countries have already set ambitious objectives for concluding negotiations, which should be encouraged when matched by tangible reforms;
10. Emphasises that the rule of law, democratic reform, media freedom and fundamental rights, including minority rights, must remain at the forefront of enlargement; stresses the importance of judicial independence, the fight against corruption, the inclusion of and support for civil society, and an enabling environment free of intimidation as crucial preconditions for sustainable progress towards EU membership, particularly at a time of rising authoritarian tendencies; stresses that progress on fundamentals must

guide all negotiating chapters;

11. Underlines the need to achieve and mainstream gender equality, including by eliminating gender-based and domestic violence, to protect the rights of children and their access to quality education, and to fully implement the principle of non-discrimination, including against the LGBTIQ+ community and persons with disabilities, throughout the accession process; stresses that human rights must be safeguarded not only in legislation but also through consistent implementation in practice; stresses the need for all enlargement countries to ensure genuine representation of minorities at all levels of government, to preserve minorities' cultural and linguistic identity, to ensure access to quality education in minority languages, and to effectively combat hate speech and hate-motivated crimes;
12. Calls on the Commission to include in its annual rule of law report all enlargement countries not currently covered by that report; is particularly concerned at the persistent shortcomings and stagnation in judicial reform processes, the attempts to reverse progress on anti-corruption, the limited progress made on public administration reforms, and the insufficient alignment of electoral legislation with European standards, as well as societal polarisation, the shrinking space for civil society and the suppression of the right to peaceful assembly in some enlargement countries;
13. Underlines that there is no place in the EU or in countries aspiring to become EU Member States for inflammatory rhetoric, genocide denial or glorification of war criminals from any side; stresses that confronting the past is indispensable for genuine reconciliation, which is crucial for prosperous societies and successful integration;
14. Encourages the enlargement countries to continue to resolutely implement the necessary reforms in a timely manner and to make tangible and irreversible progress, starting with the fundamentals; insists on the need for continuous efforts to foster media pluralism, defend the rights of journalists, safeguard the environment for investigative journalism and ensure freedom of expression in all enlargement countries while implementing effective mechanisms to address hate speech, smear campaigns, harassment, threats and attacks against journalists; insists on the investigation and prosecution of such offences, while tackling media concentration, political and economic pressure, and the lack of transparency regarding media funding and ownership;
15. Highlights the need to step up citizen participation and civil society involvement in the enlargement process; underlines the role of civil society organisations with proven track records and sectoral expertise in screening, negotiating, implementing and monitoring reforms, safeguarding transparency, accountability and public trust in the accession process; highlights the importance of sustained support for their work and a safe operating environment; urges the raising of national awareness of the importance of supporting civil society and increasing state support for its activities, including to prepare for changes in funding after EU accession;
16. Reiterates its position that alignment with the EU's CFSP is an essential indicator of a candidate country's clear geostrategic orientation, commitment to the EU's fundamental values and principles, and readiness for future EU membership;
17. Notes that some candidate countries, above all Ukraine, already contribute to European security and defence; expresses its deepest respect and gratitude to the people of

Ukraine, who every day pay the highest price for preserving the European way of life;

18. Welcomes the successful resumption of CFSP dialogue with the Western Balkan partners and underlines the importance of these partnerships for peace and security; urges all candidate and potential candidate countries to prioritise swift and full alignment with the CFSP and reiterates that the accession of a given country can proceed only once it fully aligns with the CFSP, including by adopting and implementing restrictive measures and aligning with EU visa policy; notes that the most concerning developments and democratic backsliding continue to take place in the enlargement countries with the lowest degree of CFSP alignment and in countries whose EU accession process has effectively come to a standstill, particularly Serbia, Georgia and Türkiye; urges the EU and the Member States to do their utmost to prevent other enlargement countries from following in these countries' footsteps; emphasises that systematic divergence from CFSP alignment constitutes a fundamental barrier to EU accession; expects candidate and potential candidate countries to also fully align with the common security and defence policy (CSDP), including its principles, objectives and missions, as a key component of the accession process; encourages the Foreign Affairs Council to invite the foreign ministers of enlargement countries that are fully aligned with the CFSP to attend its summits as guests;
19. Notes the importance of strengthening the role of the candidate countries in European security and defence and supports their merit-based participation in selected EU defence instruments, programmes and projects and the granting of observer status to them in the European Defence Agency; urges their inclusion in the discussion and commitment to providing security guarantees for Ukraine; recognises the contribution of several candidate countries to EU CSDP missions and their fight against anti-EU FIMI and hybrid threats, and underlines that closer integration strengthens collective security and resilience to hybrid threats;
20. Emphasises that failure to align with the CFSP poses security risks to the EU, such as by enabling citizens of non-EU countries to obtain visa-free travel rights to the EU by granting them citizenship of a candidate country, or by further increasing dependency on China; insists that there must be clear conditionality regarding engagement with geopolitical rivals that seek to undermine the rules-based international order and weaken Europe;
21. Emphasises that regional cooperation, particularly in the Western Balkans, is a prerequisite for EU accession; stresses that reconciliation, leading to good neighbourly relations, is key to successful EU accession; underlines, furthermore, that outstanding bilateral issues between EU and non-EU countries should be resolved bilaterally, in line with international law, and should not be used to block enlargement; warns that excessive delays can negatively impact both public opinion and political commitment in candidate countries;
22. Recalls that the EU accession process depends on fulfilling the conditions outlined in EU negotiating frameworks, fostering good neighbourly relations and respecting bilateral and international agreements, in line with the Copenhagen criteria, and is based on the country's own merits; calls on the Council to prevent bilateral issues unrelated to the Copenhagen criteria from obstructing progress;
23. Underlines the importance of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, which is crucial for Serbia

and Kosovo to advance on their respective European paths and will contribute to regional stability and prosperity, as well as the importance of continued good-faith implementation of the Prespa Agreement between North Macedonia and Greece and the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, in line with the EU negotiating framework;

24. Reiterates its position on the importance of opening and publishing wartime and communist historical archives to further enable truth-seeking and reconciliation and to strengthen democratic governance; highlights the importance of fully implementing domestic and international court rulings, complying with international obligations regarding war crimes and missing persons and addressing glorification of war criminals and historic revisionism;
25. Underlines that the merit-based approach may entail the freezing or reversal of accession negotiations in the event of backsliding on fundamental values, with negotiations only resuming after sufficient progress is achieved on reforms; underscores that countries underperforming in terms of democratic governance must face consequences to ensure that the accession process remains genuinely merit-based; reiterates that the EU must proactively support the democratic pillars in candidate countries to reinforce stability and the reform momentum;
26. Calls for a thorough evaluation of enlargement policy, covering both content and substance, to assess why some enlargement countries have made such limited progress, particularly on the rule of law, human rights and democracy; calls for an evaluation of the progress achieved not only on legislative level but also regarding implementation;
27. Calls on the Commission to establish a monitoring group on the implementation of reforms under the ‘fundamentals’ cluster, where rapid progress or backsliding is often most visible and can significantly affect the credibility and sustainability of the accession process;
28. Acknowledges that major flaws in previously completed enlargement processes allowed democratic backsliding to occur after accession to the EU, thereby undermining the credibility of the EU’s enlargement policy; notes that in candidate countries that have made insufficient progress towards EU membership, the EU should reinforce its assistance to pro-EU democratic actors in civil society who are committed to reforms and European values;
29. Calls on the EU delegations on the ground to consistently apply a credible and merit-based approach grounded in respect for the rule of law and protection of human rights;

Ensuring the effective functioning of an enlarged Union

30. Considers that the process of preparing for enlargement should proceed in parallel within both the EU and enlargement countries to safeguard the effective functioning of an enlarged Union;
31. Reiterates its call for the EU institutions and the Member States to undertake the necessary reforms to make the EU stronger and enhance Europe’s strategic autonomy, ensuring that the lack of such reforms does not delay the accession of new Member States;

32. Repeats its call for the EU's capacity to act to be enhanced through the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) in areas relevant to the accession process by abolishing, in particular, the requirement for unanimity in the intermediate steps in the enlargement process when deciding on the opening and closing of individual negotiating clusters and chapters; regrets the fact that the overuse of unanimity in the intermediate steps in the enlargement process has repeatedly slowed down EU enlargement and is undermining popular support for EU integration;
33. Considers a review of EU sectoral policies necessary to assess how to accommodate new Member States and ensure the efficient functioning of an enlarged Union; welcomes the forthcoming pre-enlargement policy reviews as an essential step in preparing the Union for new members;
34. Emphasises that the enlargement process offers considerable potential for convergence in several key areas, such as the economy, environmental protection and security, as previous enlargement rounds have shown; welcomes the early convergence effects triggered by a European perspective; underlines that cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy play a central role in promoting convergence among EU Member States and should be safeguarded for an enlarged Union;
35. Acknowledges the importance of broadly applying gradual integration, in a merit-based and reversible manner, into EU common policies, such as the single market, including the digital single market, for candidate countries that make substantial progress on EU-related reforms, while fully preserving the integrity of the EU internal market and maintaining a level playing field; stresses that while the gradual integration of candidate countries can help them implement the EU acquis and thus make the transition towards EU membership smoother, it cannot replace full membership of the EU; underlines that future Member States should have the same rights and obligations as current Member States and strongly opposes creating different classes of membership;
36. Highlights the fact that the most rewarding and best-received outcome of gradual integration is visa liberalisation; supports the new rules that would allow the suspension of visa liberalisation for nationals of enlargement countries who are responsible for democratic backsliding and grave human rights violations, including the persecution of and use of violence against peaceful protesters, civil society, media workers and opposition politicians;
37. Stresses that opportunities for gradual integration should be made available to the candidate countries in line with the merit-based and conditionality approach; emphasises that it is essential to ensure the reversibility of gradual integration in cases where a candidate country backslides in delivering on commitments;
38. Reiterates that the enlargement process should be supported by the involvement of candidate countries in the functioning of the EU institutions, including through observer status in relevant bodies and institutions, including Parliament and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights;
39. Stresses the importance of fostering public awareness within European societies about EU enlargement and its role in future-proofing European integration; highlights the fact that a successful enlargement process will depend significantly on a clear and transparent communication strategy;

Supporting enlargement countries on their path towards EU membership

40. Stresses that in addition to setting individual reform targets, roadmaps and intermediate timelines for each accession country, the EU should enhance the transparency of the process and establish clear and predictable timelines for the accession of the candidate countries most advanced on their accession path in order to avoid losing momentum and credibility; believes that EU enlargement should take place as soon as all accession conditions are met in the candidate countries concerned;
41. Stresses that key reforms affecting the functioning and independence of institutions must not be rushed or politically instrumentalised, particularly in candidate countries with complex constitutional arrangements; underlines that accelerated procedures or pressure to meet political timelines must not come at the expense of the legal quality and institutional integrity of the reforms;
42. Considers that pre-accession financial assistance, including the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova facilities, is pivotal for ensuring that enlargement countries receive structured financial support for institutional and economic transformation; stresses that all EU financial assistance must observe and maintain pre-accession support conditionality, including on the rule of law and the fight against corruption, in order to safeguard the financial interests of the EU and the citizens of both parties; notes the need to adjust IPA implementation modalities to facilitate the preparation and learning process necessary for the use of structural funds;
43. Emphasises that enlargement necessitates financial reforms to address challenges in cohesion and agricultural policies, among others, and to ensure that the EU budget continues to have the capacity to deliver on existing programmes and political priorities;
44. Notes that the Commission's proposal for the 2028-2034 multiannual financial framework (MFF) clearly identifies enlargement as one of the EU's strategic priorities; highlights the fact that enlargement is a central pillar of the Global Europe instrument, accounting for 21 % (or EUR 43,1 billion) of its proposed budget, covering all current and potential candidate countries as well as partners in the Eastern Neighbourhood, and providing targeted funding for pre-accession assistance, institutional strengthening and the EU's internal preparations for future accessions;
45. Calls for adequate pre-accession funding under the new MFF, suitable for the expected EU enlargement during its application as some candidate countries are likely to join the EU during the application period of the upcoming MFF; calls for clear and consistent allocations and earmarking of pre-accession funds for candidate and potential candidate countries in the Global Europe pillar of the MFF and stresses that these must be safeguarded from diversion to other external priorities and should clearly reflect the priorities in the fundamental areas while improving the visibility and transparency of pre-accession assistance; insists that funds must directly support the rule of law, public administration reform, social and territorial cohesion, and the empowerment and involvement of local civil society actors and independent media in order to ensure transparency, prevent misuse of funds and maintain the public accountability of beneficiary governments; calls on the Commission to consistently apply targeted conditionality on the basis of clear progress benchmarks, rewarding reforms and sanctioning regression or a persistent lack of progress;

46. Reiterates its call for the establishment of a framework for effective cooperation between the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) and the accession countries; encourages candidates and potential candidates for EU accession to swiftly conclude bilateral working arrangements with the EPPO in order to facilitate close cooperation and the prosecution of the misuse of EU funds;
47. Underlines the need to strengthen and better align funding for the implementation of environmental, climate and animal welfare measures, as well as capacity-building support for candidate countries; notes the cross-sectoral nature and high cost of these measures and the fact that they are crucial for sustainable development, alignment with the EU Green Deal and animal welfare legislation, and integration into the internal market;
48. Highlights the importance of including candidate countries in ongoing and future EU projects on EU connectivity, transport, energy infrastructure, the green transition, digital security, resilience and military mobility, so as to strengthen Europe's security in a challenging geopolitical environment;
49. Stresses the strategic importance of the Black Sea region for the security and prosperity of the entire European continent; underlines the need to enhance connectivity between Ukraine, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria and Türkiye across transport, energy and digital infrastructure, in order to reinforce regional resilience, diversify supply chains and secure alternative trade routes;
50. Stresses the strategic importance of transport and energy infrastructure projects in the EU's Eastern Neighbourhood and the Western Balkans with a view to strengthening the EU's geostrategic autonomy, and calls for their swift completion and full operationalisation;
51. Is concerned about China's increasing influence in the enlargement countries, the economic and political dependencies resulting from China's financial assistance programmes and considerable investments in key sectors such as energy, telecommunications, infrastructure and the extractive and raw material sector, and the long-term consequences for democratic resilience, economic security and European interests; calls for stronger, more visible EU engagement, including through credible investment alternatives;
52. Welcomes the tangible results achieved for citizens by reducing roaming charges between the EU and the Western Balkans; calls on the Commission to accelerate efforts to extend such roaming arrangements to all enlargement countries in order to achieve 'Roam Like at Home' and a Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) for all candidate and potential candidate countries as soon as possible;
53. Calls for greater focus on investment in human capital to foster competitiveness and innovation in the candidate countries and find tangible solutions to youth unemployment;
54. Reiterates its calls on the Council, the Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to strengthen proactive and strategic communication efforts on the tangible benefits of EU membership in enlargement countries and within the Member States, by developing tailor-made, fact-based and results-oriented communication

strategies that underpin EU objectives and include local civil society and media, rather than relying on generic communication campaigns; highlights, in this context, the crucial role of young people, as youth movements have repeatedly proven key in contributing to pro-democratic activism in candidate countries; reiterates, furthermore, its call on the Commission to ensure full visibility and public awareness of the EU's support and investments in candidate countries, including when these are channelled via international organisations, with clear signposting and the flag of the EU; emphasises that while the United States has stopped supporting independent media and civil society actors in candidate countries, the EU has a strong interest in stepping up rapidly; emphasises that citizens' support will be decisive in ratification processes and that communication must therefore appeal to both reason and emotion; urges the EU institutions to foster inclusive public debates on enlargement, engaging the general public in meaningful debate and enabling their effective participation in the process; underlines the importance of greater grassroots engagement of citizens in the enlargement process, both in the EU Member States and in accession countries;

55. Emphasises the key role of authorities and political leaders in the enlargement countries in building cross-party cooperation towards EU accession reforms, maintaining cross-societal consensus for EU membership and communicating the benefits of EU accession to citizens efficiently and continuously; highlights the crucial role of civil society organisations in promoting fact-based public discourse on EU integration, countering disinformation and facilitating informed public debate; calls on the Commission and the Member States to systematically involve civil society actors in strategic communication efforts relating to enlargement and EU-supported reforms;
56. Urges the Commission, including at the highest level, to use clearer and more direct language in its public communication, including on shortcomings, lack of progress and backsliding, particularly regarding the rule of law, in order to uphold conditionality, defend EU values and maintain the confidence of pro-European and pro-democratic actors;
57. Calls for the EU institutions and the Member States to fully engage in further strengthening the reform processes in the candidate countries, in particular by enhancing their administrative capacities through targeted capacity-building programmes; calls for academic and educational cooperation among EU Member States and enlargement countries to be boosted by encouraging training courses focused on European values and the rule of law, good governance, public administration and the eradication of corruption, and by creating a venue for joint training for public officials from enlargement countries, including officials from local and regional authorities; highlights the success of twinning projects in transferring sectoral expertise and stresses the need to build on this positive experience, not least to increase ownership of the enlargement process within the Member States; stresses that capacity-building programmes should also prioritise strengthening independent civil society organisations and safeguarding the space in which they operate; calls on the Commission to support programmes that empower local communities, volunteers and civic initiatives that promote democratic culture, European values and social cohesion;
58. Underlines the role of parliamentary diplomacy, accountability and EU democracy support programmes in sustaining the reform momentum; reiterates its readiness to enhance regular and transparent dialogue and cooperation with the national parliaments of candidate and potential candidate countries by building on previous positive

experiences and successful formats, making full use of Parliament's existing democracy support tools and initiatives and promoting increased parliamentary oversight of the EU accession process and related reforms;

59. Underlines the need for electoral reforms that ensure free, fair and democratic elections in line with international standards; stresses that benchmarks on pluralism, party integrity, the transparency of party and media financing, and judicial and media independence are preconditions for financial support and progress; encourages the EU and the Member States to use participatory instruments involving citizens, parliaments, civil society and young people to exchange views, increase mutual understanding and instil a sense of ownership before formal accession takes place;
60. Is concerned about the large-scale and malicious disinformation campaigns that have been continuously conducted by Russia and other actors for many years, which have increased in intensity since the start of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine; notes that candidate and potential candidate countries and the EU's neighbourhood have been a clear focal point of Russian FIMI operations, one of the aims of which is to discredit the EU and diminish the perceived value of EU integration;
61. Encourages stronger EU dialogue with civil society and greater support for independent investigative media, fact-checking bodies and civil society organisations working on media literacy in order to effectively counter disinformation and foreign information manipulation and interference (FIMI); highlights the need for continuous support for and close cooperation with all enlargement countries facing strong external interference in their process of convergence with the EU and in their electoral processes; calls for the lessons learned from the EU Partnership Mission in Moldova to be applied; stresses the importance of assessing and improving the effectiveness of EU instruments designed to assist candidate countries in countering FIMI; welcomes the Commission's intention to expand the proposed European Democracy Shield to the accession countries, thereby reinforcing their capacity to respond to threats such as FIMI and disinformation campaigns; calls on the Commission and the EEAS to deepen cooperation with vulnerable enlargement countries on information resilience, cybersecurity and hybrid threats; calls on the EEAS and the EU delegations in third countries to further strengthen their respective capacities to fight and counter disinformation and propaganda against the EU's CFSP, including by investing in communication campaigns to fight foreign influence;
62. Notes with concern that Russia has increasingly portrayed itself as a global defender of 'traditional values' by instrumentalising the Russian Orthodox Church as a vehicle for disinformation and soft-power projection, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet Union; underlines that such practices are designed to undermine democracy, social cohesion and pro-European orientations; calls for the CFSP and the enlargement policy to include specific measures to counter such influence, including faith-based diplomacy, strategic communication, and support for religious communities that were victims of Soviet oppression;

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63. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission, the

Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and the governments and parliaments of the enlargement countries.