

EU Enlargement

The EU was founded in 1957 with six members: France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. It now has twenty-seven members. Recent enlargement has proved particularly controversial as some existing members see the arrival of poorer, eastern European countries as a threat to their position in the EU and a drain on its resources. Romania and Bulgaria's accession in 2007 was not greeted with the same fanfare as the 2004 expansion. Croatia, Turkey, FYR Macedonia, Montenegro, and Iceland are official candidates for EU membership, and Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo are considered to be potential candidates. However, there are signs that the EU is taking a tougher line on future enlargement. Turkey had eight of its 35 negotiating chapters suspended in December 2006 for refusing to open its ports to Cypriot ships. When France held the EU Presidency in 2008, it caused the stagnation of the Turkish accession talks and the President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, has previously spoken against Turkish membership.

History

The EU has undergone several waves of enlargement. In 1973 Britain, Ireland and Denmark joined the original six. The 1980s saw the entry of Spain, Portugal and Greece, and in the 1990s Austria, Sweden and Finland also became members. After the fall of Communism in 1989, former Communist countries also wanted to join. In 1998 applications from 13 prospective members were accepted by the EU and on 1 May 2004 ten new countries joined: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Cyprus, Malta, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. Two more countries, Romania and Bulgaria, joined on 1 January 2007.

How does enlargement work?

A country wishing to join the EU must first follow a pre-accession strategy based on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). SAAs typically offer the incentive of free trade in exchange for commitments to political, economic, trade or human rights reform. Bosnia & Herzegovina is currently engaged in SAA talks with the EU. Once an SAA has been completed, a candidate country may then make an official application for EU membership to the Commission, as Serbia and Albania did in 2009. Iceland also applied to join the EU in 2009, following the collapse of its banking system. Iceland's membership negotiations were opened in July 2010 after its application was agreed by the Commission and the European Council. Montenegro applied in 2008, and formally became a candidate country in 2010.

Membership negotiations are conducted in chapters relating to the *acquis communautaire* and the *Copenhagen criteria*, including: 'Europeanness', democracy, respect for human rights, a viable market economy and adherence to the objectives of the EU. For example, Turkey opened its 12th negotiating chapter (on food safety, veterinary and phytosanitary policy) in June 2010.

Once negotiations are concluded on all chapters, an Accession Treaty is drawn up. This must be ratified by existing Member States in the European Council, and given assent by the Commission and the European Parliament. A date may then be set for entry.

Upon joining the EU a new member is bound by the *acquis communautaire*, but has full access to EU institutions and policies, as well as various structural funds. However, for the countries that joined in 2004 this has not been the full reality. Restrictions have been placed on the freedom of movement of workers from Eastern Europe and only Slovenia has thus far joined the Euro. Moreover, the final decision to admit Romania and Bulgaria was accompanied by demands that they continue reform in criminal justice and agriculture.

Facts and Figures

- The accession of new countries in 2004 and 2007 created 130 million new EU citizens, and the total population of the EU was, at the beginning of 2010, approximately 501 million.
- Upon joining, average GDP per head in the 2004 accession countries was 52.9% of the EU-15.

Arguments about enlargement

For

- A wider EU will mean greater security and wealth for everyone and will help prevent another European war.
- The membership process encourages countries to become more democratic and respect the rule of law.
- Western Europe needs cheap labour from the new member states to fill gaps in the job market.

Against

- Enlargement works to the detriment of existing member states: EU development aid will flow to the poorer accession countries and lower taxes in these countries could mean that businesses re-locate there.
- Migration from Eastern Europe to the EU-15 will take jobs from citizens of these countries.
- Letting a Muslim country like Turkey or Bosnia into the EU could undermine Europe's culture.
- No referendum has ever been called on enlargement.

Quotes

'The political price of stopping the process of enlargement now is very large.' Katinka Barysch, Centre for European Reform, June 2006.

'If we do not want to stop completely or even reverse integration, we have to say where the borders of Europe are.' Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, May 2006

Technical Terms

Copenhagen Criteria: Standards that must be met before a country can join the EU, as set down at the Copenhagen European Council in 1993.

Acquis Communautaire: The entire body of EU law.

Links

- http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/index_en.htm
- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11283616>