

# EU Enlargement

The EU was founded in 1958 with six members; it now has 27. 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 and Turkey are currently negotiating membership, but 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. Following frequent disputes with France, Turkish membership negotiations are expected to stagnate during France's six month Presidency of the Council of the EU during the second half of 2008.

## 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, 10 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. Serbia and Bosnia & Hercegovina are currently engaged in SAA talks with the EU; Montenegro and Albania have concluded them. Once an SAA has been completed, a candidate country may then make an official application for EU membership to the Commission, as FYR Macedonia did in 2005. If the Commission accepts this, and the European Council unanimously agrees, then negotiations can be opened. Negotiations were delayed by violence at elections in June 2008 and an on-going dispute with Greece led to it blocking the FYR Macedonia's bid to join NATO in March 2008. However a new pro-EU government was approved in July 2008 led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski who "pledged to work day and night to become a member of the EU". At present, Turkey, Croatia and Serbia are involved in official membership negotiations.

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.

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. For the countries that joined in 2004 this has not been the full reality however. Restrictions have been placed on the freedom of movement of workers from Eastern Europe and only Slovenia, Malta and Cyprus have 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, bringing the total population of the EU to 480 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 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 will mean business re-locates 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 set down in the 2002 Copenhagen Accords that must be met before a country can join the EU.

**Acquis Communautaire:** The entire body of EU law.

## Links

- [http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index\\_en.html](http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/index_en.html)
- <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/2266385.stm>