

20 MYTHS AND FACTS ABOUT ENLARGEMENT

After generations of division and war, the European Union is peacefully unifying Europe. From the six founding members, the EU has enlarged to 25 and soon 27 member states.

Over the last fifteen years, the gravitational pull of the EU has helped transform Central and Eastern Europe from communist regimes to modern, well-functioning democracies.

Recently, it has inspired tremendous reforms in Turkey, Croatia and the other Western Balkans countries.

All Europeans benefit from having stable democracies and prosperous market economies as neighbours.

A carefully managed enlargement process extends peace, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity across Europe.

However, many EU citizens now question the grounds of enlargement. While addressing the citizens' concerns with appropriate policies, myths should be countered by facts, which is the aim of this note. appropriate policies, myths should be countered by facts, which is the aim of this note.

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TOO FAST?

1) Did the 2004 enlargement go too fast?

Ten new members entered simultaneously in May 2004, but the reunification of Europe did not happen overnight. The countries of Central and Eastern Europe, Cyprus and Malta joined a decade and a half after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Over those 15 years, these countries achieved a profound democratic and economic transformation, which made them fit for EU membership and made Europe better off.

2) Was the latest enlargement adequately prepared?

The 2004 enlargement was the best prepared in the history of the EU. As early as 1991, the EU signed the first "Europe Agreements" with Hungary and Poland, followed by other candidate countries. Thanks to these agreements, a free trade area was established by 2001 for 85% of bilateral trade, thus avoiding any trade shock in May 2004.

In 1993, the EU defined precise accession criteria. In order to join the EU, a country must be a stable democracy with the rule of law, able to respect human and minority rights, and have a competitive market economy, as well as the ability to fully implement EU law. Since then, the EU has closely monitored the efforts of the candidate countries against the conditions. As a result of these conditions, monitoring and financial assistance, the new member states have integrated well into the EU institutions and are successfully applying its rules.

3) Will there be another big bang enlargement soon?

There is no new 'big bang' on the horizon. Bulgaria and Romania will enter in 2007 or 2008, once they meet the criteria. Croatia will follow some time later, once it fulfils all the conditions. Other countries of the Western Balkans have the perspective of eventual accession, but they have major work to do and will only be able to join once they are fully prepared. Turkey is negotiating accession with the EU, but it will take a long time to meet all the criteria – perhaps a decade or more. Any decision on the accession of a country has to be taken unanimously by all member states.

The Commission is carefully managing the accession process, ensuring that it is gradual and that countries are well prepared, over many years, to meet the EU's stringent conditions. That is the best way of ensuring that once they are integrated it will be to the benefit of all.

4) Isn't it undemocratic and shouldn't the EU listen to the public opinion?

Every major decision leading to a country's accession is taken unanimously by the democratically elected governments of the EU member states. National parliaments have to ratify the decision. The Members of the European Parliament, who are directly elected, have to give their assent. Thus, all the key decisions are taken by all the relevant democratically elected bodies in each member state and in the Union.

For any of its policies, including enlargement, the EU has to win the support of its citizens. Both the member states and the EU institutions need to communicate the successes and challenges of enlargement better.

TOO WEAK?

5) Hasn't enlargement paralysed the functioning of the EU?

The accession of ten new members has not slowed down decision-making. The EU's institutions continue to function: new members of the European Parliament play an active role in its political groups; the Barroso Commission works effectively with 25 Commissioners; and the Council takes decisions as well as before. Already one year before accession, the representatives of new member states were participating in the work of the EU institutions as observers to prepare for full participation by the time of accession.

6) Won't enlargement prevent further deepening of the EU?


The history of the EU proves that there is no contradiction between widening the Union and deepening its integration. The EU has managed to do both. Since 1973 the EU has enlarged five times to take in altogether 19 new countries, while at the same time developing the Single Market, creating the Schengen area of passport-free travel, adopting the euro, and developing a host of other new policies, such as internal security and a stronger foreign policy. In external policy, the latest enlargement has increased the EU's influence in world affairs.

The EU's ability to function efficiently in response to citizens' concerns can and must be further improved, but that goal would not be achieved by putting an end to enlargement. The EU can continue to enlarge and deepen through a gradual and carefully managed accession process, in parallel with internal reforms of its institutions and policies. The Constitutional Treaty is intended to make the EU more effective and democratic and to further reinforce its global role. These are important goals, which need to be achieved soon by completing the institutional reform.

7) Can the EU still absorb more members?

Absorption capacity is about whether the EU can take in new members while continuing to function effectively. It is a functional concept, not a geographical one.

The Commission defined it in November 2005 as follows: "The pace of enlargement must take into consideration the EU's absorption capacity. Enlargement is about sharing a project based on common principles, policies and institutions. The Union has to ensure it can maintain its capacity to act and decide according to a fair balance within institutions; respect budgetary limits; and implement common policies that function well and achieve their objectives."



Absorption capacity is an important consideration, as stated by the European Council in Copenhagen in 1993: “the Union’s capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries”. The question of absorption capacity was dealt with for the 2004 enlargement by the Commission’s *Agenda 2000 document* (produced in 1997), which proposed reforms of institutions, policies and the budget of the EU. It paved the way for the decisions in 1999-2003 that prepared the Union for a smooth accession of the 10 new member states in May 2004.

While absorption capacity is an important consideration, we cannot wait for future enlargement to improve the functioning capacity of the EU – for the sake of today’s Europe. We need to improve the functioning capacity of the current EU, in order to enhance economic growth and competitiveness, job creation and social welfare, and thus to serve our citizens better.

TOO COSTLY?

8) Hasn't enlargement brought a flood of workers to the old Member States?

The doomsday predictions of a flood of workers from Central and Eastern Europe have proved to be unfounded. Labour migration from new to old member states has been modest, rarely reaching even 1% of the active working population of the host country. This is the case both in those member states that applied restrictions to access to their labour market and in those which did not. These workers have helped to ease labour shortages in sectors such as agriculture and construction.

Ireland, the UK and Sweden have successfully opened their labour markets to the workers from Eastern and Central Europe right from the start, on 1 May 2004. In Ireland, the arrival of workers from the new member states has played a major role in sustaining the country's high growth rate. In the UK, workers from the new member states have helped to fill a part of the half a million job vacancies. In light of these positive experiences, Finland, Portugal and Spain have now decided that they too will open their labour markets. Others – such as Belgium and France – have opted for partial opening.

Employment grew 1% on average in 2005 both in the new and in the old member states. Enlargement favours legal migration, which is easier to control, whereas the real problem in many member states is illegal migration, mainly from third countries.

9) Hasn't enlargement undermined labour conditions and led to social dumping?

By opening up opportunities for legal work in the old member states, the 2004 enlargement has helped to reduce the grey economy (and the black labour market). Legal workers are less prone to exploitation and poor labour standards; they also pay taxes and social security contributions.

The increase in the registered working population from new member states in the old members had no relevant impact in social security spending. In the UK, only 1 out of each 100 newly registered workers from the new member states has made any claims for social security benefits.

Meanwhile, the EU requires the new members to adopt its health, safety and other labour standards, improving working conditions for people in those countries and contributing to fair competition between companies. There is no evidence that enlargement has caused social dumping. On the contrary, through enlargement, harmonised social standards are slowly but surely spreading across the EU.

10) Hasn't enlargement led to outsourcing and relocation of business?

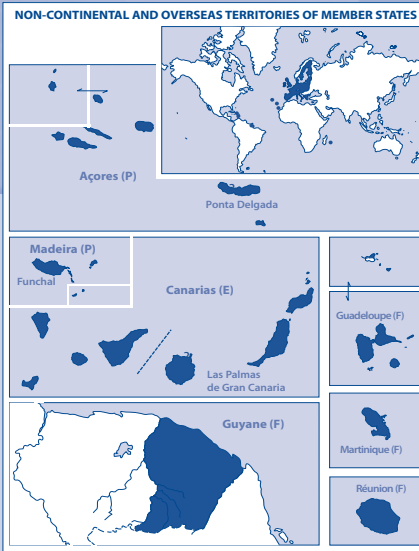
Studies confirm that relocation of companies from the old to the new Member States remains a marginal phenomenon. Moreover, Central and Eastern Europe is not the main destination for relocation, but rather Asia: it is not enlargement that mainly causes outsourcing and relocation, but global competition.

Companies will always seek lower costs, larger markets, technological innovation and other factors that give them a competitive edge. European companies face global competition, especially from China and India. Investing in Central and Eastern Europe instead of China or India can help European industry to maintain jobs and create growth throughout Europe. For instance, the expansion of service enterprises is creating jobs in both new and old member states. Enlargement helps the EU to meet the challenge of globalisation by increasing internal and external trade and thus keeping and creating jobs.

11) Hasn't enlargement distorted the functioning of the internal market?

Distortion of the internal market results from badly transposed and implemented common rules, whether by old or new members. The new member states are performing substantially better than the old members in applying EU laws, as shown by the Commission's internal market scoreboard.

By opening up a market of 75 million consumers to companies from the old member states, enlargement has strengthened competition in the internal market, which in turn also makes European companies more competitive on world markets. The same rules on internal market, competition and state aid now apply across the 25 member states.



ENLARGEMENT 2006

<http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/>

Acceding Countries

- Bulgaria
- Romania

Candidate Countries

- Croatia
- The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*
- * Negotiations not yet started
- Turkey

Potential Candidate Countries

- Albania
- Bosnia and Herzegovina
- Montenegro
- Serbia including Kosovo under UNSCR 1244

12) Isn't enlargement too expensive?

A cup of coffee a month is the price that each citizen of the old member states has paid for helping to reunite Europe. And a part of that cost comes back home because people in the new member states buy most of their imported goods from the old members. In the period 2004-06, the old 15 member states contributed an average of 26 euro per year per citizen into the EU budget for enlargement.

The new members' share of the Union's budget represents only 0.15% of the EU's gross domestic product. This money is mainly spent on better infrastructure, which benefits businesses across the whole EU. Moreover, the new member economies are growing twice as fast as the older ones. The money spent to help develop these economies creates new business opportunities in old and new member states alike.

TOO DANGEROUS?

13) Hasn't enlargement resulted in more illegal migration and organised crime?

Enlargement enables the EU to extend its police and justice cooperation to the new member states, thus making the fight against crime and terrorism more effective. The more EU members integrate their crime-fighting efforts with their neighbours, the better they can protect Europe's citizens.

Security and justice are areas where the EU can clearly do more to protect its citizens than any one country can alone. The EU has developed police, customs and judicial cooperation to tackle terrorism, organised crime, drugs, trafficking in human beings and illegal migration that are now part of the common rules that all member states must apply.

14) Hasn't enlargement put food safety and the environment at risk?

Food safety and animal health were key concerns in the accession negotiations. The EU took strict measures to bring the new members up to EU standards. Food processing plants, dairies and abattoirs which could not meet the standards had to close down before accession, and only those meeting the requirements were allowed to sell their products across the internal market.

Pollution and environmental risks do not recognise state borders. Environmental protection and climate change are issues that need to be tackled at international and European level.

Over the years, the EU has developed high environmental standards for cleaner air and water, protection of the marine environment, nature preservation and nuclear safety. All European citizens benefit from these improvements. The accession process is an effective tool for exporting these high European standards to candidate countries. Their environmental standards have been raised to a level sometimes higher than in the old member states. Enlargement means more environmental security, not less.

TOO MANY?

15) When will it all stop? Shouldn't we fix the borders of the EU once and for all?

The EU Treaty says that any European country which respects the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law may apply for EU membership. However, this does not mean that all European countries must apply, or that the EU has to accept all applications. It is not an automatic process, but one where conditionality is the key. The EU's borders are defined by decisions taken unanimously at the highest political level.

The EU is based more on values and political will than on rivers and mountains. The European Union is a political project, and its borders are political. They differ from physical and geographical concepts of Europe. Some Caribbean islands like Martinique and Guadeloupe are part of the EU's territory, while certain European countries are not part of the Union – such as Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. Geographers and historians have never agreed on the physical or natural borders of Europe.

The political border of the EU has changed every time a new country has joined, or a territory has withdrawn, as Greenland did. To avoid overstretch of the EU's absorption capacity, the Barroso Commission has consolidated our existing commitments towards the countries already in the enlargement process: apart from Bulgaria and Romania, this means Turkey, Croatia and the other countries of the Western Balkans.

16) Why could Turkey join the EU?

Europe needs a stable, democratic and more prosperous Turkey which adopts our values, our rule of law, and our common policies. The accession perspective has already driven forward bold and significant reforms. If the rule of law and human rights are guaranteed throughout the country, Turkey can join the EU and thus become an even stronger bridge between civilizations as it is already today.

By opening the accession negotiations, and without prejudging the final outcome, the EU member states decided unanimously to recognise Turkey's European vocation. Thanks to wide-ranging political reforms started already in the early 20th century, Turkey has anchored itself to Europe and to the Western alliances: the country has been member of both NATO and the Council of Europe for more than 50 years. Istanbul has always been a major centre of European history and culture.

To join the EU, Turkey must first meet all the strict membership criteria. The question is whether it can meet all these criteria, and if so, by when. This is why the journey – including the reforms and their implementation – is as important as the final destination.

17) Why should we take in a non-Christian country?

The EU is not a community built on religion. The Union is founded on common European values such as respect for human dignity, the rule of law, tolerance and non-discrimination. As a community of values, one of our strengths is that we are united in diversity.

There are now some 12 million Muslims living in the EU – many of them as citizens – alongside people of many other faiths, and of no faith. Religious tolerance and respect for diversity are core European values: Europe has had too many religious wars in the past. Therefore, religious faith has never been a criterion for accession. Turkey is a secular state, where a vast majority of citizens are Muslims, mainly of moderate strands of Islam.

However, freedom of worship, protection of minorities and non-discrimination are key political criteria for membership. As a necessary condition, Turkey must substantially improve respect for the rights of non-Muslim religious communities to meet European standards.

18) Why omit Ukraine if you admit Turkey?

Ukraine and Turkey are at different stages in their relationship with the EU. Turkey's membership prospects and European vocation are long-standing, while Ukraine's EU aspiration is very recent.

The EU supports Ukraine's quest for democratic stability and economic development through the European Neighbourhood Policy. It paves the way for free trade, economic assistance, enhanced political dialogue and better people-to-people contacts.

The EU has never offered a membership perspective to Ukraine, and any such decision would have to be taken unanimously by all member states.

19) Isn't there too much crime and instability in the Western Balkans?

The Western Balkans has gone a long way to overcome instability after a decade of wars and internal conflicts in the 1990s. Their European perspective is the best means to further consolidate regional stability and security in the interest of Europe as a whole. The continued intensive engagement of the EU will help the region to sort out remaining issues such as the status of Kosovo and the future of Serbia and Montenegro.

Crime and corruption are still widespread in the region. The good news is that the Western Balkans region has recently made progress in this area, partly thanks to EU assistance to build better police and judicial cooperation. The enlargement process has proved to be highly effective in motivating countries to tackle problems of crime and corruption, and committing them to cooperate closely with the EU to protect citizens.

Enlargement means that candidate countries have to adopt EU standards on border control and handling of refugees and immigrants from third countries. Therefore, enlargement gives us more control over the problem of clandestine migration.

The EU can best reduce crime by working directly with the countries of the region. The EU law enforcement bodies have to work with their counterparts in the Balkans to achieve real results in today's world of rapid communication and mass travel.

EVEN SOME BENEFIT?

20) Do ordinary EU citizens benefit from enlargement?

First and foremost, we all benefit from the increased stability and peaceful development to which the successive enlargements of the EU have contributed over the years.

Secondly, the citizens of the old member states benefit from rising consumer demand in the new members because companies have sold their goods, services and know-how in these dynamic markets, which has helped to keep and create jobs back home. Each machine sold by a German company in Poland benefits German citizens, while each French car sold or transaction carried out by a Dutch bank in the new member states benefits the French and Dutch economies. Trade between the old and the new members has quadrupled in the last decade. The old member states have long enjoyed a major trade surplus with the new member states, which has helped to maintain jobs.

Citizens can benefit from enlargement in many other ways, such as by easier travel, better chances to study abroad, and better business conditions. When the EU structural funds finance highways and bridges in Spain and Portugal, or in Poland, Estonia and Slovenia, all Europeans travelling, living or doing business in those countries benefit from enlargement.



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