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THE CURRENT STATE OF EU ENLARGEMENT DISCUSSIONS AND PROSPECTS FOR TÜRKİYE

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Nowadays, one can witness vivid discussions on EU enlargement covering countries from Georgia to Montenegro. However, it was not the case two years ago. Enlargement has come to the fore recently with the help of a unique international and regional context. Even though 2010s experienced the accession of Croatia to the EU and some progress for accession processes of Western Balkan countries, the institutions in Brussels and European public opinion have seemed to show a genuine attention to enlargement only after the war in Ukraine broke out. This paper deals with the reasons for hesitant steps towards enlargement, reviving interest for it, the current discussions on how and under what conditions to enlarge and Türkiye's place in these discussions.

The Enlargement Stalemate

Enlargement has greatly been considered not only one of the most influential foreign policy tools of the EU but also an accelerator of the transformative power of the Union. For a while, however, it was not one of the priorities of the EU until the Russia-Ukraine war erupted and changed the atmosphere immensely. Although the Western Balkan countries were given candidate status and their future in the EU was reiterated by the EU authorities, the process was not at the top of the agenda. A number of reasons for this "enlargement stalemate" can be provided.

Firstly, in 2004 and 2007, the EU achieved the fifth and the largest enlargement of its history, which resulted in 12 new countries joining the Union. These countries were Bulgaria, the Greek Cypriot Administration of Southern Cyprus, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia. Most of them had been ruled by communist governments in addition to command economy before the system's collapse in 1989. Due to this divergence -and also as a result of the historical processes-, these countries differed greatly from Western European countries which were liberal democracies and market economies. In addition to systemic differences constituting a hardship for the "newcomers" to harmonize with the Union, the EU had to adopt itself and its institutions for this enlargement which almost doubled the number of member countries. Under those circumstances, -alongside the ongoing criticisms in the European public as to the rush in the fifth enlargement process and different opinions on the preparation levels of the current candidates- the EU focused on devoting its energy and sources for better integration within the Union and close the gap among the Member States rather than initiating a new enlargement phase.

Secondly, global challenges and crises had repercussions on European integration itself and the enlargement process. 2007-2008 Global Financial Crisis; the European debt crisis in



which some banks failed, and several governments did not manage to repay their debts; civil wars in Syria and Libya and the consequent refugee crisis which the EU had to face and finally, the COVID-19 pandemic distracted the EU to prioritize another enlargement -even if it would have wanted to do-. All these challenges greatly affected the way in which nation states see international developments. From the 2000s to these days, securitization and protectionism have extended their impacts as countries have been comprehending that the end of the Cold War does not mean an all-out resolution for all hostilities and ideological debates in favour of liberal democracy. Economic, political, and social hardships witnessed worldwide necessitate enormous efforts to stabilize the situation within the Union. In connection with this less optimistic global context, the lack of willingness shown by EU Member States to face with new challenges of integrating new countries into the EU has also contributed to the loss of popularity of a new enlargement process.

Last but not least, the Green Deal and digitalization agendas of the EU led to an intense and comprehensive legislative process in the EU. As a response to the climate crisis, the EU has initiated Green Deal firstly on December 11, 2019. By stating that:

Climate change and environmental degradation are an existential threat to Europe and the world. To overcome these challenges, the European Green Deal will transform the EU into a modern, resource-efficient, and competitive economy, ensuring:

- No net emissions of greenhouse gases by 2050;
- Economic growth decoupled from resource use;
- No person and no place left behind.¹

The Green Deal is a strategy and policy package impacting every angle of life from food supply and transportation to architecture and job market to ensure that “old” habits based on unsustainable activities and fossil fuels which have dragged the ecosystem towards a nearly irreversible catastrophe are quitted. Besides the Green Deal, the Digital Agenda for Europe has also gained great attention in the last decade. In 2010, the first 10-year digital agenda for Europe was adopted with the aims of accessible and better electronic communication and enhancing data protection. Like the Green Deal, digitalization agenda is directly related to the very functioning of society in almost every aspect; and it needs special attention and effort to be established and worked properly. To see the impact of the digital agenda and its scope, one can examine the digital single market strategy² presented in 2015. This strategy has aimed to reevaluate cross-border e-commerce rules to make it

¹ European Commission, “The European Green Deal”. Access date: 20.10.2023

https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

² European Commission, “The EU’s new digital single market strategy”. Access date: 20.10.2023 [https://eur-](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:3102_3)

[lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:3102_3](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=LEGISSUM:3102_3)



easier, overcome geo-blocking, regulate the rules on personal data and enhanced cybersecurity, enabled people to access and got the skills they need to utilize digital services in their personal and work life. As it can be seen, like the Green Deal, the digital agenda needed huge and comprehensive efforts from adopting new legislations and regulations to adapting the economic and social setting to the novelties without leaving anybody behind in the Union. This vast transformation both in the society and the EU's institutions has quite likely been a reason for prioritizing integration over enlargement.

In this context, the 2010s witnessed less passionate moves towards a new enlargement. After completing negotiations in 2011, Croatia became a member of the Union on July 1, 2013. Jean-Claude Juncker stated that there would not be any enlargement in his term in office in September 2014, just after he took the position of the President of the European Commission.³ During 2010s, the EU was negotiating with three candidate countries for accession, which are Montenegro, Serbia, and Türkiye. Accession negotiations with Türkiye were suspended in 2018, and negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia are continuing right now. After the accession of Croatia in 2013, the EU has not witnessed any country joining the Union. It was stated that the next enlargement would be for the Western Balkans. From 2018 onwards, EU-Western Balkans Summits have been held once a year. In 2020, accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia were decided to be opened even though no chapters have been opened or closed up until now.

How did Enlargement Regain Its Popularity?

Enlargement has increased its popularity especially after the Russia-Ukraine war started in February 2022. It has been the case because just after the war broke out, Ukraine applied for membership. This move was followed by Georgia and Moldova. The candidate status of Moldova and Ukraine were approved in the European Council meeting held in June 2022. In December of the same year, Bosnia and Herzegovina was also given candidate status. When it comes to Georgia, it was granted candidate status in European Council of December 2023. These actions have also increased the discussions on a new enlargement wave and its possible timing and the conditions under which it will take place. In his speech he made at Bled Strategic Forum in August 2023, European Council President Charles Michel even mentioned a target for the new enlargement, which is 2030,⁴ even though some objections to this target date were raised by other authorities within the EU such as European Commission.

³ European Commission, "The Juncker Commission: A strong and experienced team standing for change". 10.09.2014 https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_14_984

⁴ European Council, "Speech by President Charles Michel at the Bled Strategic Forum". 28.08.2023. <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/08/28/speech-by-president-charles-michel-at-the-bled-strategic-forum/>



Enlargement may have taken attention after the war in Ukraine started because of the EU's ambitions and geopolitical assumptions on the future of both world and Europe. Despite some arguments, an all-out conventional war in Ukraine was not predicted by many. It was thought that the interdependency between Russia and the EU, primarily in energy and economy, would make an open confrontation costly; thus, a war would have hardly been the outcome of the dispute between Russia and Ukraine. Plus, most of the analyses disregarded the possibility of a conventional war in the continent while indicating the changing nature of the warfare and risks that can be exemplified as disinformation, proxy wars, cyber threats, climate change and irregular migration.

Nonetheless, the war erupted, and it suddenly started to transform the mentality regarding European security. The war in Ukraine has been a sharp reminder of that what it was thought to disappear does not disappear. This realization may have been effective in rise of importance given to the new enlargement as the EU strives to become a geopolitical power in international politics. It tries to reach this goal through achieving strategic autonomy in various fields from industrial base to foreign policy and security. These strategic autonomy discussions have included even the military, which was epitomized by the quarrel over the efficiency of NATO and the ideas of the creation of a European army. Such moves, -or just relying more on Europe's own sources instead of that of transatlantic- necessitate resource and vision. An enlargement might equip the EU with the vision it needs, which is a Europe in complete unity, taking initiative, acting together, and moving forward.

On a more materialist side, an enlargement might mean taking more countries to the Union's side instead of geopolitical rivals like China and Russia, which is an outcome serving well to the aim of becoming a geopolitical power. The credible prospect of candidacy and the agenda of enlargement can incentivize more countries to align with the EU's policies on international and regional issues; and it is obviously an asset while a war is being fought at the gates of the EU. For example, Serbia's ties with Russia have disturbed the EU; and, by way of a working and convincing process of enlargement rather than "Mantra-like repetitions of political declarations and empty rhetoric about enlargement..." which "...only led to fatigue and even further into a technocratic impasse"⁵, the EU might win Serbia over Russia.

Moreover, a renewed enlargement process may accelerate the EU's inner reforms concerning to its functioning and the institutions to accommodate 30+ members and work without deadlocks. In her "State of the Union" speech earlier this year, the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen explicitly expressed that the EU must implement reforms considering the necessities of a Union with more than 30 Member

⁵ Paul Schmidt and Vedran Dzihic, "Europe Must Seize this Opportunity to Enlarge and Reform". 17.10.2023. <https://balkaninsight.com/2023/10/17/europe-must-seize-this-opportunity-to-enlarge-and-reform/>



States and must be ready for the enlargement by symbolizing it as “the call of history” and “completing our Union.” In her precise words:

“I started by speaking of Europe responding to the call of history. And history is now calling us to work on completing our Union. In a world where some are trying to pick off countries one by one, we cannot afford to leave our fellow Europeans behind. In a world where size and weight matters, it is clearly in Europe's strategic and security interests to complete our Union. But beyond the politics and geopolitics of it, we need to picture what is at stake. We need to set out a vision for a successful enlargement.”⁶

This quote clearly shows the vision of one of the most important and influential figures in European politics. As the fights continue at the backdoor and the tension in international politics is rising and leading to further polarization, the EU had better reach its full potential by closing the ranks both with the current members and the candidates.

One way or another, it is obvious that the enlargement has strengthened its position in the EU agenda. To see the recent situation in the topic, the communication on the EU enlargement policy papers provide comprehensive information as these present a lot of important insights and views of Brussels. These papers deal with the current state of play concerning the EU's enlargement plans and the situation of the candidate and potential candidate countries. The document is prepared each year by the European Commission to be distributed to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, which are the primary EU institutions active in the enlargement process. This year's one, 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy, has just been published.

In the remaining part of this brief, firstly this year's enlargement policy communication will be summarized to understand where the EU is in the context of the enlargement with specific attention to Türkiye's position there. Then, the disputed points on enlargement are provided and the report prepared by German and French academics is analyzed. Finally, Türkiye's position, possible advantages and disadvantages in this new enlargement wave are discussed.

⁶ European Commission, “2023 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen”. 13.09.2023. https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426



Main Points of the 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Strategy⁷

Starting by stating that accession to the EU is and will remain a merit-based process and the enlargement is geopolitically significant for the EU, the report provides the key developments that occurred in the reporting period. Then, the status of the countries that have a European perspective are given. The main difference between current report and the 2022's report is the inclusion of Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. European Commission recommends the start of accession negotiations with Moldova and Ukraine when their reform efforts and the distance they have covered so far. It is stated that Ukraine is implementing significant reforms despite the ongoing war. Moldova is also assessed positively as it reforms a lot of areas from public administration to fight against organized crime.

European Commission recommends Georgia to be given the candidate status as it has taken steps which were indicated in the former reports and statements. Gender equality, fighting violence against women, judiciary reform, and developing a strategy and an action plan to protect human rights in the country are some of the areas the steps have been taken.

Bosnia-Herzegovina was declared a candidate country in December 2022. The report underlines the achievement on the road while all coalition partners are embracing the EU membership and the process; however, the secessionist actions in some parts of the country are jeopardizing not only the EU accession process but also the unity, territorial integrity, constitutional order, and international personality of the country. The Commission recommends starting accession negotiations with Bosnia-Herzegovina after 14 priorities are set in the country report are addressed.

Montenegro is affected by political instability and polarization, whose impact is visible through the reform program losing momentum, the report suggests. Serbia's reform to harmonize with the EU acquis, especially with the constitutional amendment strengthening judicial independence, is taken positively by the report. Nonetheless, the necessity for Serbia to make additional efforts to align with the EU standards in general and the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) particularly is stressed. The importance of advancing the normalization of relations with Kosovo is also touched upon in the report.

North Macedonia makes some progress, but it still needs to make further progress in fields like the fight against corruption, public administration, and public procurement. The Commission thinks of starting negotiations on the "Fundamentals cluster" by the end of this year.

⁷ European Commission, "2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy," 08.11.2023.

https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_690%20Communication%20on%20EU%20Enlargement%20Policy_and_Annex.pdf



The alignment with the EU CSFP of Albania is presented as an open indicator to see the country's EU path and agenda. The report says that the country needs to work on enhancing the situations in fields like freedom of expression, minority rights, rule of law and property rights. It is stated that by the end of the year, negotiations on the "Fundamentals cluster" can be launched.

Full alignment of Kosovo with the EU CSFP and reform on the election system are presented as important steps for the country; nevertheless, the report underlines the importance of further efforts including an action plan on judicial reform and progress on the normalization process with Serbia.

When it comes to Türkiye, the report identifies Türkiye as "...a key partner for the European Union and a candidate country" which is a repeated phrase in most of the recently published reports and statements. However, it is also stated that the negotiations have been at a standstill since 2018, and the reforms have only implemented to a limited degree. The report claims Türkiye continues to move away from the EU, especially "...in the areas of fundamental rights and rule of law, including the independence of the judiciary, and the lack of reforms in some sectoral issues."

Moreover, counterterrorism, economy, energy and food security, migration and transportation are defined as "areas of joint interest", and the cooperation with Türkiye in these areas is significant for the EU, the report argues. The document includes lines emphasizing on the necessity for Türkiye to align with the EU CSFP and cooperate with EU institutions to detect and prevent circumvention of the EU's restrictive measures against Russia. Plus, it is mentioned that a report on the current state and the future of the relations, will be prepared "...with a view to proceeding in a strategic and forward-looking manner," and presented by the High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, is on the road.

Enlargement but How?

Officials of the EU and scholars working on European affairs have been aware of the necessity of reforming the institutions and decision-making processes of the EU for a long time. The question is how to make the institutions work effectively without interruptions. A Union with 27 Member States has naturally diverse views on negotiated topics. Even if the EU is a project of vast integration and unity, each country retains its own ways and viewpoints. Not only the governments of the Member States; but also, the publics have varied views and positions. So, while the enlargement is taking the ground -again-, the deal here is that the EU must be ready to accept new members, adjust itself and the Member States to a Union with 30+ members and implement necessary reforms to run the EU, its institutions, and policies in harmony. Furthermore, the enlargement process should not slow down the progress of the EU's long-term efforts such as the twin transformation, which is The Green Deal and the digital transformation.



Under these circumstances and with these concerns, discussions on how to reform and how to enlarge have been commenced. Some meetings have been organized and various reports have been penned. For example, a discussion report,⁸ which was based on an online expert conversation hosted by Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science on 12 June 2023 was published in July 2023. The participants to the conversation were academics and researchers from the Baltic countries. Although the report is not an official document demonstrating the positions of the governments on the issue, it still deserves attention to grasp the general tendency towards the enlargement and reforms needed in the process. The report which gives a voice to Nordic and Baltic countries of the Union says that:

- Enlargement is on the table as a real topic, which was not the case for almost a decade. This momentum should be utilized with a joint action of the national governments and the citizens of the parties to the process as concerns on governance and budgetary effects of an enlargement constitute real challenges.
- Gradual/accelerated integration and staged merit-based integration options should be discussed. Conditionality principle should not be breached at any phase of the enlargement process of each candidate. Rewarding like giving the candidate countries seats in the Council meeting in which they will be able to participate in the meetings as observers in the process can positively impact the process. However, this gradual integration option should not override full accession process. Enlargement policy may embrace Qualitative Majority Voting (QMV) in more areas to increase the momentum. The decisions to grant candidate status, open/close the negotiations and admit a candidate as a new member can be held out of this QMV system as they stand as the most politically sensitive points in the process.
- Institutional reforms should go beyond the discussions surrounded by the dichotomy of unanimity and QMV while the Treaty reform is difficult to make. Constructive abstention, supermajority, and consensus minus one maybe these options to consider at this point.
- The enlargement -and non-enlargement- is directly related to the EU's long-term security, stability, and geopolitical place. This aspect should not be ignored while discussing the enlargement.
- Making the enlargement process a success is possible through cooperation of the current Member States and the candidates and respecting the objectives of the EU Treaties.

⁸ Vilnius University Institute of International Relations and Political Science, "Enlargement: Creating an Opportunity for a Stronger EU". July 2023. https://www.tspmi.vu.lt/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/LT-discussion-on-EU-enlargement-and-reform_0711.pdf



One of the other interesting and holistic contributions to these discussions has come from a group of researchers submitted a report named “Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century”.⁹

The working group¹⁰ was tasked to write a report on the topic of the enlargement and the necessary reforms to be made in the process within the EU structure. The idea of writing a report on the subject belongs to German Minister of State for Europe and Climate Anna Lührmann and French Secretary of State for European Affairs Laurence Boone, and on 23 January 2023, the group was given the task of preparing a report by these two ministers on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Élysée Treaty and the German-French Council of Ministers.¹¹ The report was completed on 18 September 2023; and, presented in the General Affairs Council on 19 September 2023. The report does not reflect the official positions of both governments; nonetheless, it can be considered as the document showing the awareness of both governments as to the necessity of reform within the EU structure and the comeback of the enlargement agenda to Berlin, Paris, and Brussels.

The main intentions of the report are to demonstrate that the enlargement is a must for the Union and to emphasize the necessity of reforms covering various areas from the budget to the institutions for the EU to run efficiently during and after the enlargement. According to the report, the reforms made in the process ought to focus on “...increasing the EU’s capacity to act, strengthening rule of law and democratic legitimacy, and getting institutions enlargement-ready,” “...different paths to changes in the Treaty on European Union...” and the possibility of “...certain states move forward at different speeds, depending on their willingness to reform.”¹² The report basically deals with that:

⁹ “Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century”. 18.09.2023.

<https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2617206/4d0e0010ffcd8c0079e21329bbbb3332/230919-rfaa-deu-fra-bericht-data.pdf>

¹⁰ The report was prepared by “The Group of Twelve” which was composed of Daniela Schwarzer (Bertelsmann Stiftung) and Olivier Costa (CNRS CEVIPOF) as rapporteurs and Pervenche Berès (Fondation Jean-Jaurès), Gilles Gressani (Group of Geopolitical Studies/GEG), Gaëlle Marti (Jean Moulin Lyon 3 University), Franz Mayer (Bielefeld University), Thu Nguyen (Jacques Delors Centre), Nicolai von Ondarza (Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik - German Institute for International and Security Affairs), Sophia Russack (Centre for European Policy Studies/CEPS), Funda Tekin (Institute for European Politics/IEP), Shahin Vallée (German Council on Foreign Relations), Christine Verger (Jacques Delors Institute).

¹¹ Hertie School Jacques Delors Centre, “Franco-German expert group presents report on EU institutional reforms”, 19.09.2023. <https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/about/news/detail/content/franco-german-expert-group-presents-report-on-eu-institutional-reforms>

¹² Hertie School Jacques Delors Centre, “Franco-German expert group presents report on EU institutional reforms”, 19.09.2023. <https://www.delorscentre.eu/en/about/news/detail/content/franco-german-expert-group-presents-report-on-eu-institutional-reforms>



- The reform program specifically emphasizes the essentiality of “the rule of law” principle and the necessity to uphold it within the EU structure. The report recommends strict budgetary conditionality, setting time limits for the European Council and the Council of the European Union to act against breaches and introduction of automatic sanctions in case of violation of the principle.
- When it comes to institutional reforms, five main areas are stressed in the report. The first one is about strengthening and enhancing the main institutions of the Union’s ability to adapt to the enlargement while continuing to be efficient and responsive to the problems. At this point, The European Parliament should not be formed more than 751 MEPs -fewer is better, if possible- and adopt a system of seat allocation based on the Cambridge formula “...which is a transparent allocation method for determining the composition of the European Parliament (EP). The method is responsive to population changes and impartial to politics as well as objective, fair and durable.”¹³ For the Council of the EU, the trio system can be transformed into a quintet system which would be beneficial for setting and implementing an agenda covering longer periods. The report recommends two options for the European Commission. The first option is to reduce the number of Commissioners in the College to a number two-thirds of the Member States. The other option is to create a hierarchy between the Commissioners by introducing “Lead Commissioners” and “Commissioners”. In this system, each Lead Commissioner would make a team with a Commissioner, and they work on the same issues. Nonetheless, only Lead Commissioners would have right to vote. Not having a right to vote in the Commission for a whole legislative period (5 years) would be a source of complaint for the Member States; thus, changing the roles at the half of the legislative period (2,5 years) can be a solution, the report suggests.
- The decision-making processes occupy a large place within the reform agenda. Generalization of qualified majority voting (QMV) system in exchange for unanimity is the recommendation that the report defends. Enlargement and the rule of law, foreign policy and defense, and fiscal and tax policy are presented as the areas where QMV should be embraced.
- For a swift enlargement process, opening and closing the negotiation chapters should be decided upon by QMV while the final decision to admit a new member to the Union is given with a unanimity vote. For the rule of law principle, the European Council should accept sanction with four-fifths of the votes, the report says. In CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy), decisions on defense initiatives such as European Peace Facility or the European Defense Fund should act based on QMV. In

¹³ Prof. Dr. Friedrich Pukelsheim and Prof. Geoffrey Grimmett, “Linking the Permanent System of the Distribution of Seats in the European Parliament with the Double-Majority Voting in the Council of Ministers”, in *The Composition of the European Parliament*, February 2017.

[https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/583117/IPOL_IDA\(2017\)583117_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2017/583117/IPOL_IDA(2017)583117_EN.pdf)



the case of tax policy, the report suggests more space for QMV while saying that national vetoes for tax harmonization and the EU fiscal decisions limit the efficiency and power of the EU budget, which should be utilized effectively as a new enlargement process is coming into the stage. To make QMV more acceptable for the Member States who are concerned about their sovereignty, the report recommends establishing a “sovereignty safety net”, where the Members States will be able to declare the issue as a “vital national interest” and demand the issue to be transferred and negotiated in the European Council. Moreover, it is proposed to change the QMV from 55% of the Member States representing 65% of the EU population to a system of 60% of the Member States representing 60% of the population in order to respond the smaller and medium-sized Member States’ concerns to be dominated by the larger Member States. Plus, opt-out options for the policy areas which will be transferred into QMV are on the table.

- The other area which the reforms should target according to the Franco-German Report is strengthening democracy at the EU level. In this context, the report recommends the harmonization of EU electoral laws in which European Parliament elections are arranged accordingly; the European Parliament and the European Council to reach an interinstitutional agreement (IIA) on how to appoint the Commission’s President -or at least a political agreement between the institutions on the topic-; promoting participatory democracy by various ways such as enhancing the European Citizens’ Initiative and Citizens’ Panels and establishment of a new Office for Transparency and Probity which will be responsible for “monitoring the activities of all the actors working within the EU institutions or for them.”
- When it comes to powers and competencies, the report suggests that to have a more resilient Union, which can capably respond to unforeseen developments and crises like in health, climate, and finance, should strengthen provisions, and include the European Parliament in the crisis response processes. Furthermore, a “Joint Chamber of the Highest Courts and Tribunals of the EU,” which will initiate a non-binding dialogue between European and Member States’ courts, is proposed in the report.
- The EU resources take also great attention in the discussions of reforming the EU. The report calls for an “increase in the EU budget in the coming budgetary period both in nominal size and in relation to GDP”; QMV system for spending -or at least, “...enhanced cooperation between smaller groups of Member States to finance policies together”; and making the EU capable of issuing common debt.
- The report also deals with the issue of the Treaty change which proved to be highly tough and controversial as it is likely to be failed due to various reasons. Given this experience, the report suggests six options for replacing/instead of a Treaty change in a conventional way, which is convening a Convention followed by an Intergovernmental Conference (IGC). For example, if there is no agreement to



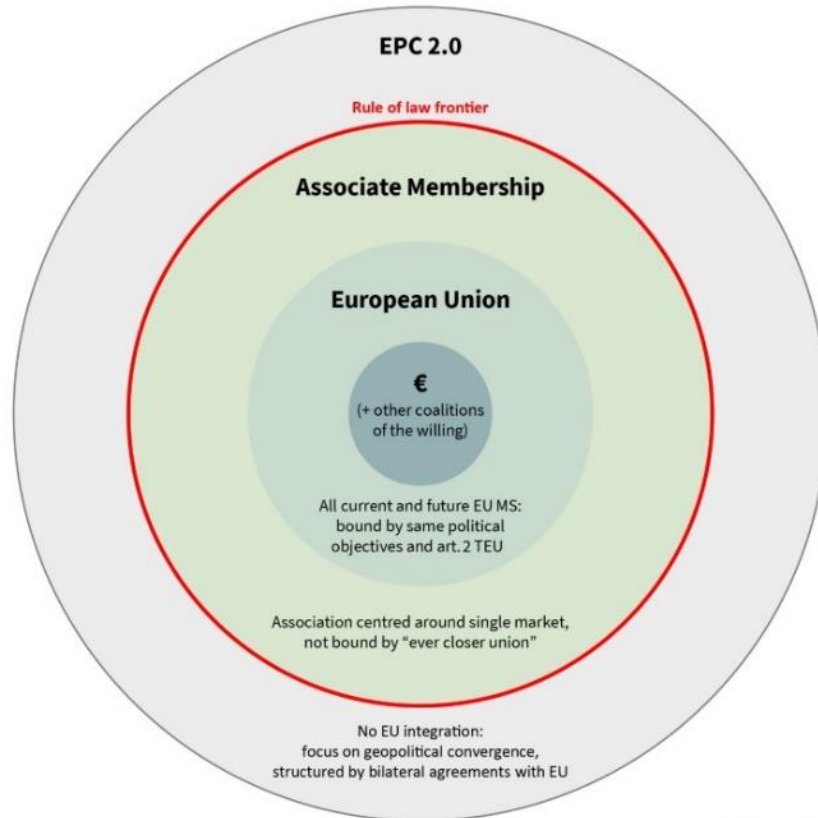
convene a Convention, there can be a simplified revision procedure. Or, implementing reforms as part of the accession treaties which modify the founding treaties.

- Differentiation is another topic which is highly relevant for the enlargement as to how the EU will be acting efficiently in a 30+ Member States situation. At this point, the report mentions the necessity of some “flexibility tools” enabling the Union to integrate and deepen further while a “*Europe à la carte*” is being presented as an undesirable method. Flexibility tools help the EU to act and integrate more easily; however, it should not mean two or three groups in the Union even whose fundamentals and essentials do not overlap. Thus, the report puts five main principles while utilizing differentiated integration in the EU. These principles are respect for the *acquis communautaire* and the integrity of the EU’s policies and actions, use of the EU institutions, openness to all EU members, sharing decision-making powers, costs, and benefits, and finally, making use of the willing can move ahead. Opt-outs in the future, the report suggests, can be an option in case some Member States go further in integration while some others are hesitant; nevertheless, the report makes it clear that there should never be an option for opt-out of the current *acquis communautaire* and EU core values (the rule of law, democracy, and fundamental rights).
- The report proposes a four tiers method for the European integration. The first one is the “Inner circle” where the EU Member States are parts of the Eurozone and the Schengen Area and further integration steps like PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation”) in the field of defense.
- The second tier is “the EU” in which all the Member States embrace the same political objectives and the countries there benefit from cohesion funds and other redistributive policies.
- The third tier is “Associate Members” where countries in this section are not parts of “ever closer union” or other integration steps like the EU citizenship. However, they are also expected to comply with the EU’s core principles and values. Single market can be the core to determining the countries falling into this category. These countries may participate in the Council of the EU meetings without having a right to vote, but they cannot benefit from cohesion funds.
- Lastly, the report proposes the European Political Community (EPC) as the fourth tier in the differentiated integration. The common denominator of this group is the membership in the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights. The Franco-German report suggests that the EPC should be turned into a structurally more stronger entity, rather than its current loose form, to act effectively. The main areas of cooperation in this tier are not based on the EU law or the Single Market; but cooperation in fields of “mutual importance and relevance” exemplified in the report as “security, energy or the environment and climate policy etc.”



Even though “...such a ‘multi-speed’ Europe approach has been criticized by avid proponents of EU enlargement and future members alike”,¹⁴ The four-tier understanding of European integration is presented in the report with the figure below¹⁵:

European integration in four concentric circles



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Source: *Report of the Franco-German Working Group on EU Institutional Reform - Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century*

- The final chapter of the report detects that the next enlargement will be different from the previous ones, and this is not only due to the accessions of Ukraine and Moldova. Therefore, a dynamic enlargement process which is based on merit is a must as it will also prepare the EU itself for the enlargement to happen. Bearing these thoughts in mind, the working group recommends the EU set a target date for the next enlargement, which will bring credibility to the Union and enhance the trust level of the whole enlargement agenda. The report suggests a “*regatta*” style of

¹⁴ Alexandra Brzozowski and Aurélie Pugnet, “Germany, France make EU reform pitch ahead of enlargement talks”, Euractiv, 19.09.2023. <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement-neighbourhood/news/germany-france-make-eu-reform-pitch-ahead-of-enlargement-talks/>

¹⁵ “Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century”. 18.09.2023. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/2617206/4d0e0010ffcd8c0079e21329bbbb3332/230919-rfaa-deu-fra-bericht-data.pdf>



accession rather than “*en bloc*”; thus, dividing the accession rounds into smaller groups of countries is recommended. Nine essential principles are exhibited in the report. Five of them deal with the qualification for accession. These are “Fundamentals first”, “Geopolitical”, “Conflict resolution”, “Additional technical and financial support”, and “Democratic legitimacy”. The remaining ones determine the momentum of the accession procedure, which consisted of “Equality”, “Systematization”, “Reversibility”, and “QMV.”

Prospects for Türkiye in this New Enlargement Phase

Enlargement is back into the stage in Brussels; nevertheless, to what extent this agenda will positively affect Türkiye’s accession to the EU seems to remain a complex story. The story is multidimensional, and the two sides of it should act in good will if there is real intention to make progress in the process of full accession of Türkiye.

When one looks into the Türkiye 2023 Report,¹⁶ s/he would probably face with a bold “backsliding” phrase more than once. The Commission uses the phrase for many areas, especially in Cluster 1 “The fundamentals of the accession process” and includes highly important sections like “Functioning of democratic institutions and Public Administration Reform”, “Rule of law and fundamental rights (Chapter 23 and Chapter 24)”. The report and the Communication of the EU Enlargement Strategy report¹⁷ demonstrate dissatisfaction and low level of excitement by the EU with the current state on progress of Türkiye overall. The report claims presence of “the negative trend of moving away from the European Union” and limited progress in necessary reforms. It should also be borne in mind that the accession negotiations were at a standstill for five years as little efforts made by the parties to revitalize and accelerate the process by putting the full accession at the heart of the relations.

As the EU is not willing to prioritize and put emphasis on full accession of Türkiye, Türkiye lacks the enthusiasm it needs. Ministry of Foreign Affairs published a statement on Türkiye 2023 Report.¹⁸ The statement sees the report as “worrisome” while the “unjust” and “biased” approach to Türkiye continues. The statement is highly critical of the EU and the report on Türkiye saying that the lack of advancement in the process is directly related to

¹⁶ European Commission, “Türkiye 2023 Report”, 08.11.2023. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_696%20T%C3%BCrkiye%20report.pdf

¹⁷ European Commission, “2023 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy”, 08.11.2023. https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_690%20Communication%20on%20EU%20Enlargement%20Policy_and_Annex.pdf

¹⁸ Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “No: 291, 8 November 2023, Press Release Regarding the European Commission 2023 Report on Türkiye”, 08.11.2023. https://www.mfa.gov.tr/no_-291_-avrupa-birligi-komisyonu-2023-yili-turkiye-raporu-hk.tr.mfa



the political obstructions, politicization of even the technical issues like the modernization of the EU-Türkiye Customs' Union, exclusionary attitude held by the EU in issues like the Eastern Mediterranean, Aegean and Cyprus, and lack of actions, discourse and steps about Türkiye's candidacy to the Union.

As it can be seen through the latest statements by both sides that the relations experience a lack of enthusiasm and fatigue. Under these circumstances achieving and pursuing the revitalization and acceleration of the accession process, which would be beneficial both for Türkiye and the EU as geopolitical unpredictability is rising day to day and challenges are varying, is left aside. The State of Union speech¹⁹ made by the President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen on 13 September 2023 is an example of this attitude. In her speech, she declared that it is the call of history to the EU to complete the Union without focusing on the dichotomy of "deepening integration or widening the Union." Von der Leyen suggested that the Union "...need to set out a vision for a successful enlargement" and made clear her awareness concerning "...how important the EU perspective is for so many people in Georgia" after enunciating that the future of Ukraine, the Western Balkans, and Moldova in the EU. In such a speech, which could be considered a generous one in mentioning the enlargement and naming countries involved, Türkiye was never addressed.

The enlargement process in coming years will not be easy for Brussels as it has to deal with 10 countries which have been given a European perspective. Other than the accession negotiations, the EU has to initiate its inner reforms to make the Union and its institutions ready to be an entity with 30+ Union without losing its ability to act, maneuver and respond to challenges. It seems that -for now, at least- the relations between the EU and Türkiye are limited to a few areas such as migration, counter-terrorism, food and energy security. In this context, expecting the new enlargement process to open a new, willing, and positive era for Türkiye's full accession to the EU might not be that realistic.

Nevertheless, it does not mean that there is neither room nor need for cooperation and coordination between the EU and Türkiye. The relations are beyond the accession process and too complex for a total break-up. There are a lot of areas in need of joint effort and for benefit of both sides. Trying to make progress and achieve visa liberalization and modernizing the EU-Türkiye Customs' Union through overcoming the highly politicized Gordian knot even in these technical points should be at the top of the to-do-list. At this point, seeing one of these issues to be solved may have a great positive impact as both sides can re-realize that they are successfully able to work on a problem and come up with a solution.

¹⁹ European Commission, "2023 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen". 13.09.2023.

https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4426



Conclusion

Enlargement is not -and will not- just about deciding if a new country to join the Union or not. There are immense number of adjustments and changes which need to be made both by candidate countries and the EU. The Union is an overarching project of integration covering almost all areas of politics and daily life. This kind of project should be able to respond to challenges and problems without being drowned in a deadlock. A possible enlargement by 2030s will bring a Union with 30+ members. There are several pros for having a larger Union of course; nonetheless, it should not make the EU an institution too heavy and ungainly to respond to both conventional issues like migration, climate crisis and energy security and unpredictable challenges the future will bring. To act in harmony, remain responsive and be resilient, institutional reforms should be made in the EU, and these reforms should go beyond the rules of accession, such as decision-making mechanisms and rules in the EU, the budget and the structure of the main institutions like the European Parliament and the Commission.

Now, there are 10 countries which have been given a European perspective. Nine of them, which are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye, and Ukraine are official candidates for the EU. Kosova is a potential candidate for the Union.

International politics and global agenda are changing rapidly in these days. Foreseeing what comes in the next years and the attitudes of the international actors towards the coming novelties is a difficult -even impossible- task. The EU is one of these actors and it positions itself for its own benefits and views. In such a context, the enlargement stands as one of the ambitious foreign policy and power projection tools of the EU. The President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen put great emphasis on the enlargement in her speech of the State of the Union while identifying it as call of history to the Union to complete the EU. Türkiye remains a candidate country although in these days its accession process is less mentioned when it is compared with the references given to the processes of Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova. However, the current situation between the EU and Türkiye does not necessarily imply that the highly politicized standstill goes as so. The positions and views of international actors are prone to change; and political, economic, commercial, cultural, and historical ties between Türkiye and the EU are likely to bring more engagement, cooperation, and convergence, which can be turned into a force to promote/reawaken the accession process for Türkiye in its relations with the Union.

