

THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS

Step-by-step

#EUEnlargement

November 2023

A credible enlargement policy is a geostrategic investment in **peace, stability, security** and **prosperity** in Europe. It is based on fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits. It requires candidate countries to implement complex reforms in many areas such as the rule of law and the economy and to align their legislation with the EU acquis. At the same time, candidate countries are expected to develop their administrative structures. Reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are of utmost importance.

Every year, the Commission provides an Enlargement Communication, which outlines its recommendations regarding the Enlargement process, and dedicated reports, which provide a detailed assessment of the state of play and the progress made by the candidates and potential candidates on their respective paths towards the European Union. This assessment focuses on the implementation of fundamental reforms, and also contains clear guidance on the reform priorities ahead. The Communication and the reports together constitute the “Enlargement Package”.

Main steps to EU accession



1 Country submits an application to the Council (EU Member States).



2 The Commission submits an Opinion on the application.



3 EU Member States decide unanimously to grant the country candidate status.



4 After conditions are met, Member States (unanimously) agree to open the accession negotiations.



5 The Commission proposes a draft negotiating framework as a basis for the talks at the request from Member States. Accession negotiations formally start once Member States agree on the negotiating framework.



6 During negotiations, which are structured according to clusters and chapters, the country prepares to implement EU laws and standards.



7 Once negotiations on all areas are finalised, the Commission gives its Opinion on the readiness of the country to become a Member State.



8 Based on this Opinion, EU Member States decide unanimously to close the accession negotiations. The European Parliament must also give its consent.



9 All EU Member States and the candidate country sign and ratify an Accession Treaty which enables the country to become an EU Member State.

Clusters of negotiating chapters

Following the introduction of the **revised methodology for the accession negotiations** in February 2020, negotiating chapters are now divided in **six thematic clusters**:

- 1** Fundamentals
- 2** Internal market
- 3** Competitiveness & inclusive growth
- 4** Green agenda & sustainable connectivity
- 5** Resources, agriculture & cohesion
- 6** External relations



Negotiations on each cluster **open as a whole** – after the country fulfils the opening benchmarks. Each chapter will be dealt with individually with respect to its provisional closure. Negotiations on the **fundamentals open first and close last**; progress under the fundamentals' cluster will determine the overall pace of negotiations. If there is sufficient progress on reform priorities, this should lead to closer integration with the European Union, through accelerated integration and increased investments and funding.