

Commission's First Thoughts on Pre-enlargement Reforms

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News

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In a [Communication of 20 March 2024](#), the Commission contributed to the discussion on necessary EU internal reforms in the course of enlargement. The Communication looks at the implications of a larger EU in four main areas: values, policies, budget, and governance. As a result, it lays the ground for the pre-enlargement policy reviews announced by President von der Leyen in her [2023 State of the Union address](#).

The Commission stressed that two processes must evolve in parallel: Candidate countries must fulfill, in particular, the Copenhagen Criteria, which are the essential conditions that all enlargement countries must satisfy to become a Member State. At the same time, the EU itself must be ready to welcome the new Member States and keep its commitments. From the experience of previous enlargements, the EU should follow the strategy of "gradual integration" of enlargement countries into selected EU policies already before accession. With regard to the four areas analysed, the Communication makes the following key statements:

- **Values:** Upholding democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights must continue to be a priority of the EU to ensure a deep-rooted transformation in enlargement countries.
- **Policies:** The Commission reflects on the benefits and challenges, considerations for upcoming policy reviews and avenues of gradual integration with regard to the following fields: enhanced connectivity, climate and environment commitments, food quality and safety, social, economic and territorial convergence, and security commitments.
- **Budget:** Even though the precise financial impact of enlargement is difficult to foresee, enlargement should be factored into the reflections leading to the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF). However, other topics will influence the future long-term EU budget as well, such as global volatility, significant security threats, the financial impact of post-COVID recovery and the need to rein in national budgetary trajectories.
- **Governance:** While the Commission has indicated its support to Treaty change, "if and where it is needed", it believes that the EU's governance can be swiftly improved by using the full potential of the current Treaties. This could be done by applying the "passerelle clauses" in the Treaties allowing for a shift from unanimity to qualified majority voting within the Council in key areas and using the possibilities of integration at different speeds as also foreseen in the Treaties.

The Communication kicks off the work on the in-depth policy reviews, which will start in 2025.



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