



**European
Movement**
International

Policy Position Regaining the enlargement momentum

At a time when European unity is being challenged, the European Movement continues to support the enlargement process, which is a highly successful policy that is able to bring about positive change for aspirant EU member countries and their citizens. This policy position highlights ways forward for the enlargement process, as well as further cooperation between the EU and (potential) candidate countries, by providing a detailed input from the civil society perspective.

A credible enlargement perspective: key elements in the accession process

The European Movement International unequivocally supports the enlargement process, which is a highly successful EU policy with a real transformative impact. In prospective member countries, it fosters regional cooperation, leads to more democratic societies, more citizens' rights and freedoms, as well as peace and stability. It strengthens the countries' positions in international relations and enhances the well-being and living standards of their citizens. For the EU, enlargement offers the opportunity to emerge as a stronger, safer and larger Union, as long as the EU manages to solve the internal and external crises it faces.

To achieve these desirable outcomes, **the membership perspective offered should be credible.** The en-

largement process should continue at a pace appropriate both for the EU and the candidate countries, respecting strict and fair conditionality and the provisions outlined in the Copenhagen Criteria on the one hand, and the need for internal consolidation in the EU on the other hand. In parallel to the enlargement negotiations, visa liberalisation should be granted to the (potential) candidate countries, directly benefiting their citizens and fostering the advancement of the negotiation processes.

Furthermore, **the enlargement process should follow the 'fundamentals first' strategy**, which focuses on the opening of Chapters 23, 'Judiciary and fundamental rights', and Chapter 24, 'Justice, freedom and security'.

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This strategy consists of opening chapters 23 and 24 as early as possible in the enlargement negotiations in order to minimise uncertainty on the related issues. Bilateral disputes between (potential) candidates and Member States should be resolved outside of the enlargement process, but should be considered within the overall objective of membership negotiations.

During the accession processes ongoing in the Western Balkans and Turkey, the EU should also maintain its long-term political and economic commitment to the Eastern Partnership countries and prepare for the possibility of new formal applications to join the EU to be submitted in the future.

Regaining the enlargement momentum: developing a positive enlargement narrative

To reinvigorate the enlargement momentum, the EU needs to offer its partners not only a credible membership perspective, but also a positive enlargement narrative. **This positive enlargement narrative should focus on the success of enlargement in establishing peace and security**, using the positive examples of previous accessions, while acknowledging the current social and economic reality as well as sentiments of enlargement fatigue. A good example of the EU's



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longstanding engagement is the ongoing Berlin Process.

In communicating on enlargement, it is paramount that EU officials and national leaders demonstrate unity.

Long-term thinking and policies focused on the end goal of EU membership cannot fall victim to short-term national tactics and disunity, which undermine the perception of the EU as a trustworthy partner. In addition to this, **the EU needs to play a more proactive role in addressing discontent regarding good governance** and problems linked to democracy and the rule of law, especially those principles mentioned in Chapters 23 and 24. Adherence to European values must be ensured not only during the negotiation process, but also after achieving membership, including by current Member States.

Another element entails **working with civil society on the side of both the EU and (potential) candidate countries to restore confidence in the European project.** This means that open dialogue, the participation of interest groups, more participatory democracy and transparent decision-making are imperative to regain enlargement momentum, as

is the involvement of the local level through local authorities. In particular, youth should be the main recipient of these efforts; focusing on young people when communicating about the EU and its achievements, and allowing them to experience this through meetings and exchanges, may constitute a key to changing the narrative. In parallel, other stakeholders such as businesses and trade unions should also become more vocal in advocating enlargement and its benefits.

On the side of the Western Balkans and Turkey, **potential candidate and candidate countries should act as reliable partners with a strong EU narrative**, through advocacy and communication efforts, as well as with regards to the implementation of agreed reforms. The EU-optimism cannot overshadow the **“the enlargement process has a real transformative impact.”** real problems that the region faces, and these issues should be openly addressed, alongside vocalising areas for improvement in the European project.

Regaining the enlargement momentum: over coming obstructions

Apart from a credible enlargement perspective and a positive enlargement



narrative, there are multiple factors that negatively impact the enlargement process, and need to be addressed in order to succeed.

Throughout the Western Balkans, the low level of economic growth and rising poverty jeopardises support for EU accession. Regional disputes also keep impeding the enlargement process, while corruption and institutions that are incapable of implementing democratic values can lead to widespread disillusionment among citizens and a surge in nationalistic and protectionist political parties. **To counter these phenomena, it is necessary to support democratic development,** civil dialogue, pluralism, and the fight against corruption, as

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well as economic growth and regional cooperation. In this regard, regional cooperation should be supplemented by a broader notion of ‘European cooperation’, which would allow exchange of best practices and mutual learning and avoid isolation from the rest of Europe.

The various challenges that Europe faces, not in the least Brexit, turn its attention away from enlargement and towards internal consolidation. Coupled with the act of unity displayed by national leaders, these factors also undermine the position of the EU as ‘role model’ and could further exacerbate the distrust felt by both EU citizens and those in applicant countries towards the

EU institutions. **Further cooperation and a common plan for Europe’s future is needed to overcome this lack of unity in the EU.**

Furthermore, external factors such as the migration crisis, Daesh and the rise of extremism, and Russia’s geostrategic



use of soft and hard power have a great impact on the Western Balkan region. **A strengthened and more integrated European Common Security and Defence Policy** could support peace and stability in the EU’s neighbouring regions, including the Western Balkans and Turkey.

This policy position is based on the outcome of the European Movement Congress ‘Civil Society and Beyond: A Joint Dialogue on the European Path’ (Belgrade, February 2016) and a consultation with European Movement members in the European Union and (potential) candidate countries in the spring of 2016.

The European Movement seeks to provide a platform to encourage and facilitate the active participation of citizens and stakeholders in the development of European solutions to our common challenges. We offer thought leadership on the issues that affect Europe and we give the opportunity to representatives from European associations, political parties, enterprises, trade unions, NGOs and other stakeholders, through our 39 National Councils and 34 International Associations, to work together, towards improving the way that Europe works.

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