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The Evolution of the European Union Enlargement
Policy: A Historical Approach to the Copenhagen
Criteria

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The Evolution of the European Union Enlargement Policy: A Historical Approach to the Copenhagen Criteria

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Abstract

Twenty-two countries have been involved in the process of accession to the European Union since the founding of the Coal and Steel Community in 1951. It was not until 1993, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, that the criteria and process to be followed by the candidate countries for accession were formally established, with the aim of preparing the entity for its further territorial expansion. At the same time, the concept of the EU as a western European league was put to an end to give a new meaning to the word “European”. Thirty years later, this paper provides a historical contextualization of the European Union’s enlargement policy and assesses the evolution of the Copenhagen criteria through the successive enlargement processes. In addition, the study warns about the implications of setting double standards for Member States and candidate countries, and the importance of a balance between widening and deepening policies for the success of the European project.

Keywords:

European Union, enlargement policy, Copenhagen criteria, candidate countries, conditionality, integration

Introduction

The European Union and its enlargement policy is highly influenced by political, economic and social trends. Depending on the historical period, the perception of the process and priorities also changes. While in the post-Cold War years it was seen as a great political opportunity and foreign policy mechanism, in recent times it has become a sensitive issue to avoid at the national level of Member States, because of the economic and social implications of integrating countries that are poorer than the EU average, and with lower minority rights standards. It is therefore of vital importance to understand the framework of the six accessions and the impact these widening processes had on the Union’s fundamental texts and on the development of the current enlargement policy (i.e. the Copenhagen Criteria and their consequent additions).

Thus, this study will make a historical review of the context faced by the entity along the six enlargements and coupling it to the different stages and treaties that have been approved by the EU, paying specific attention to those measures and modifications related to the enlargement of the European Community. For this purpose, the policy tracing method will be applied to understand the evolution of the Union’s priorities. All these points will be analysed on the basis of primary sources such as the European Parliament and European Council as far as EU legislation

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is concerned and will also be supported by academic articles related to the European enlargement and integration policy.

In the second section, the Copenhagen criteria and how they have been modified over time will be addressed in more depth. In addition, the successive legislative changes in enlargement policy will be discussed, understanding these as the consequence of a revision exercise of the process carried out by the Union. This policy is flexible in form, but not in essence (i.e., the values of the Union always prevail), despite double standards accusations (Topidi 2013) (Balfour and Stratulat 2015). Thus, the uniqueness of each accession will also be noted. This will be useful to identify a pattern for further actions.

Finally, this analysis puts an accent on the deficiencies of the Union, highlighting the consequences of imposing requirements on the candidate countries that the EU does not have the capacity to enforce on its own Member States, given the limitations of its legal framework. In this way, it will be discussed whether further integration, as well as other practical modifications, are needed for the Union to be able to withstand a new enlargement without jeopardizing the viability of the project and even its own survival. The latter, together with the previous analysis of the Copenhagen criteria and their legal and historical evolution, will provide a holistic view of the European Union enlargement process.

The historical evolution of the European Union through its six enlargements

In 1951, the signing of the Treaty of Paris formalized the creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC). Thus, Belgium, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG), France, Italy, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands undertook to strengthen their institutional and economic ties with the aim of greater integration, under the fundamental premise of establishing peace and promoting cooperation in the European continent. The origins of the EU coincided with the Confrontation phase of the Cold War (1948-1962) (Carmichael 2017). This suggests that the beginnings of this association of Western European countries was strongly influenced by geopolitical pressures arising from the involvement of the two superpowers in the European economic recovery (the US Marshall Plan of 1947, as opposed to the Soviet Molotov Plan of the same year). This tension was consolidated with the definitive division of Europe between the two predominant political spheres of the time: the Western Europe of NATO (1949) and the Eastern Europe of the Warsaw Pact (1955). This partly explains why the ECSC's membership remained unchanged for more than twenty years. Unlike the Council of Europe, whose Statute specifies in its Article 4 that "any European State which is deemed to be able and willing to fulfil the provisions of Article 3 may be invited to become a member of the Council of Europe by the Committee of Ministers" (Council of Europe 1949), the predecessor of the European Union opted for a more conservative position in which "any European State may apply to accede" (ECSC 1951) to the Treaty. Thus, it is the candidate to join the ECSC who takes the initiative and not the entity concerned, which opts for a passive role in the process and, therefore, a less expansive and more continuity stance (Avery 2015).

The Community project was consolidated in subsequent years with the signing of the Treaties of Rome (TFEU 1957), which gave rise to the European Economic Community (EEC) and the European Atomic Energy Community (EURATOM). This way, the entity steadily deepened its roots in the direction of further economic growth "to lay the foundations for an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe" (EUR-Lex 2017, p. 11). It was the successful launching of the EEC that led Austria, Denmark, Norway, Portugal, the United Kingdom, Sweden, and Switzerland to collaborate

commercially and create in 1960 - in parallel - the European Free Trade Association (EFTA).

At that time, the EEC accession process was particularly rudimentary, as the course chosen was that of deepening rather than widening. Thus, this period was characterized by a low interest of its Member States in extending the limits of their borders and a high degree of attention on strengthening the foundations of an integration that could withstand possible Soviet interference. Then, the enlargement process was based mainly on Article 237 of the EEC Treaty, which made it unstructured and too general in its requirements. However, over time the Member States reconsidered their position, because “there was only so much that the EEC could achieve with just six members. (...) But if regional peace and economic prosperity were the two underlying purposes of integration, then other European States had to be brought into the fold through enlargement” (McCormick 2020, p. 77). It was under this premise that the first enlargement took place in 1973 and, therefore, during the period of *détente* in which negotiation between blocs prevailed in the Cold War (1962-1978). Among the new members were the United Kingdom, which finally gained access to the Community after two vetoes by France in 1963 and 1967, Denmark and Ireland.

A decade later, the fall of dictatorships and the establishment of young democracies in southern Europe - Portugal, Greece and Spain - led to the second (1981) and third (1986) enlargements. With this event, the Community doubled its initial membership to twelve member countries. This had an impact on the balance of economic and social viewpoints within the EEC and increased the difficulty of reaching unanimous decisions, given the increase in the number of dissonant voices due to heterogeneous standards between countries. Nevertheless, this milestone demonstrated the soundness of the project and placed the European community on the international map of influence, becoming “the largest economic bloc in the world” (McCormick 2020, pp. 80-81), at a time when the Cold War counterparts had resumed an aggressive rhetoric towards each other (Rapprochement phase, 1978-1992).

Another political change was to trigger the fourth and fifth enlargements of the EEC. On November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall fell and with it one of the most symbolic barriers ever built. A few months later, the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG, member of the EEC) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) were unified, which indirectly led to the accession of the first former Soviet-influenced territory to the European Community. The end of the Warsaw Pact and the dissolution of the Soviet Union finally took place in 1991, bringing about the emergence of new national identities in Europe. This new scenario prompted a reorganization of the EU's priorities, as well as a rapid refocusing of its enlargement policy, which had never face the entry of more than three new members at a time, but also “was not really prepared for these dramatic events or for the rapid expressions of interest in accession from its newly democratic eastern neighbours” (Barnes and Barnes 2009, p. 420). Therefore, a year later, the Council's approved the Treaty on European Union (TEU 1992). Article 6 (1) and 49 of the TEU provided the basis for the development and subsequent entry into force of the Copenhagen Criteria during the European Council in the Danish capital (1993), i.e. the principles to be complied with by the candidate countries. This way, the entity also placed at their disposal mechanisms with the main objective of enabling them to comply with the obligations of the EU Treaties and thus promote a harmonious accession process for the Union. However, the context in which these criteria were designed cannot be forgotten, much less the apparent urgency with which they were carried out. In just two years, the policy of enlargement was set out and mobilized in a way that had not been done in more than four decades.

With these much more sophisticated requirements, applications from the fourth enlargement countries (1995) - Austria, Finland and Sweden - were considered for membership. Undoubtedly, these States with strong economic and democratic trajectories became the idyllic candidates for the newly introduced criteria. A very different scenario faced the European Commission during the study and negotiations of the States that made up the fifth enlargement, which took two rounds to complete (2004 and 2007). Thus, the EU prepared for its largest expansion in terms of number of countries, by including eight Central and Eastern European States (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia), plus the two Mediterranean island States of Cyprus and Malta in a single move. This accession put the mechanisms and institutions of the European Union to the test, in order to transform 'the western European league' into an entity of an extension more in line with the geographical concept of Europe. This enlargement was partially completed in 2004, but required several prior legislative amendments, including the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997) and the Treaty of Nice (2001), as the most significant. Three years later, the accession of the Eastern European countries was concluded with Bulgaria and Romania, bringing the number of members from fifteen - before the fifth enlargement - to twenty-seven. This undoubtedly made discussions and decision-making much more complex, especially in view of the recent Soviet past of some States, which led to a change in Member States' approach to enlargement policy (Hillion 2015).

This series of events, coupled with the global context of the early 21st century, favoured the development of 'enlargement fatigue' in the Union. This phenomenon is attributable both to the difficulties faced by the European Commission in implementing the rules and to "the economic and financial crisis of 2008, the migration crisis of 2015, the Brexit of 2016 and the lack of a common vision in foreign policy" (Milosevich-Juaristi 2021, p. 2). Since then, only the Lisbon Treaty has been ratified and there has been one new accession to the Union, and that was Croatia in 2013.² This sixth enlargement stands out because it was made up of a single country, instead of a group as was usual on previous occasions.³ Following the effective exit of the United Kingdom from the European Union in January 2020, the entity has kept its number of members unchanged at twenty-seven. Even so, many countries are currently preparing their candidacy, either in negotiations or in preliminary steps.

An analysis of the components of the Copenhagen criteria will now be undertaken to understand more precisely the criticisms of these requirements and to evaluate the possible loopholes that could have affected the efficiency of the process both pre- and post-enlargement.

The Copenhagen criteria: Development and subsequent additions

The Maastricht Treaty (TEU) gave a key boost to the process of European integration by establishing the 'three-pillar system', paving the way for the adoption of a single currency in Europe, increasing the role of the European Parliament and establishing the name by which the entity is known today, the European Union. The TEU laid in its Article 49 the foundations for what would later be known as the "Copenhagen Criteria", and enhanced the role of the Commission and the Parliament in the accession process of new members.

² Croatia is the first country to accede to the EU after fulfilling both the SAA and the Copenhagen criteria (Stafaj 2014)

³ This fact is striking because the solo entry of a new member had only occurred with Greece in 1981.

Art. 49. "Any European State which respects the principles set out in Article 6(1)⁴ may apply to become a member of the Union. It shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the assent of the European Parliament, which shall act by an absolute majority of its component members.

The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded which such admission entails shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements." (EUR-Lex 2016)

A year later, in June 1993, European leaders met in Copenhagen to discuss the European Union's priorities. On this occasion, the Heads of State discussed in greater depth the potential accession of new partners to the EU, which was reflected in section four of the conclusions of the meeting. The document specifically noted the stage reached in the negotiation process with Austria, Finland, Norway⁵ and Sweden, and set a target date of January 1, 1995, for their admission. In addition, the Council discussed separately the circumstances and its position on the accession of Cyprus and Malta, Turkey, and the Central and Eastern European countries (distinguishing between associated and others). With respect to the latter, the institution was clear in its conclusions of the meeting (1993) on the conditionality of their membership:

- *Political criteria - "Stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;*
- *Economic criteria - a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU;*
- *Legal criteria - the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the 'acquis'⁶), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union."* (EUR-Lex 2021)

4 The entity recognizes the rights, freedoms and principles of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and gives it the same legal value as the Treaties. (EUR-Lex 2016)

5 Despite applying to join the European Union, the Scandinavian country finally opted not to join the entity, after a negative referendum result in 1972. In 1994, Norwegians voted again and reiterated their negative response to joining the European Union. However, in the same year, the Nordic State became a member of the European Economic Area (EEA).

6 The *acquis communautaire* is the body of treaties, laws and regulations governing the functioning of the EU and, therefore, it is essential to comply with it in order to accede to the entity. The *acquis* is divided into thirty-five chapters that are discussed one by one during the meetings between the candidate countries' representatives and EU delegations with the aim of transposing it into the national legislation of the applicant State. It is the Commission that establishes the *acquis* requirements to be fulfilled prior to accession, as it has sometimes been possible to establish - in justified cases - a transition period allowing countries to join the Union without having yet implemented some of the Community rules.

However, the Council also imposed a condition on the European institutions and arguably even on themselves, as the ultimate representation of the national sovereignty of their respective member countries.

“The Union’s capacity to absorb new members, while maintaining the momentum of European integration, is also an important consideration in the general interest of both the Union and the candidate countries.” (European Council 1993)

In short, the approval of this set of rules governing the accession of new countries to the European Union became a milestone, not because the requirements were substantially novel, but because with its approval the European Council formalized its enlargement policy. Through these membership obligations, this institution made the acceptance of new members dependent on the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria.

In December 1995, the European Council met again, this time in Madrid. Among the conclusions of the meeting and regarding the enlargement policy, the presidency approached the process as “both a political necessity and a historic opportunity for Europe” (European Parliament 1998), and called for intensifying the strategy to create the right conditions for a gradual and harmonious integration, especially in the economic field, between the European Union and the future members. Later, after the fourth enlargement, further changes were introduced through the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997), mainly focused on the common foreign and security policy, which would prepare the EU institutions for the accession of new partners.

Two years later, during the Helsinki European Council (1999), they further adapted the requirements to the European context of war in the former Yugoslavia. Thus, the Heads of State included a specific ‘good neighbour’ clause, encouraging the candidate countries to put part of their efforts “to resolve any outstanding border disputes and other related issues” (European Parliament 1999). The aim of this requirement was to avoid the importation of conflicts into the Union. This decision came a few months after the Union launched the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) in the Western Balkans region.

In 2001, the Union adopted the Treaty of Nice and with it a first amendment of the TEU. This text introduced institutional reforms aimed at preparing the entity for the entry of new members, as well as a preventive mechanism for the respect of fundamental rights, through Article 7 of the TEU. Thus, a member country that violates any of the rights mentioned in Article 2 TEU and hinders the Union’s financial interests could be sanctioned, in the worst case, with the loss of its voting rights in the Council. Later, the European Council of Thessaloniki (2003) “clarified that the Stabilization and Association Agreements (“SAAs”), outlining the new conditions necessary for membership under the Stabilization and Association Process (“SAP”), would serve as the primary contractual agreements guiding the membership process” (Stafaj 2014). This way, the EU added new specific requirements for each candidate country, the progress of which is also monitored by the European Commission, and complementary to the already consolidated Copenhagen criteria.

Finally, in 2008, Member States agreed on what is the last fundamental change of the Union to date: the Treaty of Lisbon. This document was the result of the negative outcome of two referendums to approve a European ‘Constitution’, but it also emerged as a response to the integration needs that emerged after the two rounds that made up the fifth enlargement. The text promoted reforms

of the EU's internal and external policies, creating for example the European External Action Service (EUR-Lex 2017) and introducing a mutual defense clause (European Parliament 2023), as well as changes in the decision-making processes, to adapt it to the needs of an entity with twenty-eight members.

At the time of writing, the Copenhagen criteria remain the reference framework for the candidate countries and the Commission during the accession process. However, as will be discussed below, there is a clear bias on the part of the Council when approving new members, in addition to the systemic deficiencies faced by the Commission in assessing compliance, which is a common feature of EU policies (Avery 2015). This constrains the conclusions of 'the guardian of the EC Treaty' in its Periodic Reports to the Council and results in inconsistent considerations for each applicant country (Janse 2019). Not basing its conclusions on external benchmarking studies that set standards for concepts such as democracy or minority rights, makes the system more easily adaptable to the internal objectives or interests of its members. This could have become, indirectly, the origin of the breakdown of confidence in the process.

The dilemma of the EU accession process: Is it just a matter of merit?

Although the implementation of the new Copenhagen requirements has been rigorously monitored by the European Commission since 1993, the political-economic principles addressed in the Criteria already played an important role in previous accession processes. As "the political conditionality first materialised in the context of the EEC relations with Greece, Portugal and Spain. Discussions on their potential membership were made conditional to their acceptance and establishment of democracy" (Hillion 2014, p. 4). However, as previously discussed, these requirements were sometimes contingent on other internal factors. Thus, when the three Mediterranean countries tried to access the Common Market, neither the economic context, nor the difficulties corresponding to the convergence of national economies that were not very developed due to the political-economic isolation of decades of dictatorship, were an impediment to their access.

From the point of view of this study, the approval of the Copenhagen criteria had above all a symbolic objective. The fact that they were drafted and approved so quickly was undoubtedly an important institutional gesture after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After all, this political move demonstrated, in a period of geopolitical changes on a global scale, that the European Union was willing to open its doors to the new republics, offering them a "more systematic and allegedly 'depoliticised' process relying on more objective criteria" (Hillion 2014, pp. 13-14). However, given the need to approve the accession of a new member by unanimity, the rigour of the procedure has been undermined by the biased positions of States, whose votes are heavily influenced by national political interests. Indirectly, this fact leads to the nationalization of the process by member countries, which convert extra-individual conditions into community ones in parallel to the Copenhagen criteria under the promise of a favourable vote (Balfour and Stratulat 2015). An example of this is the requirements that Greece placed on the accession of North Macedonia, which led the former Yugoslav republic to put the country's name change to a referendum in 2018 (France 24 2018). It is usually the Member States neighbouring the candidate country that usually apply this interventionist stance and place more obstacles to the admission of the new partner, as evidenced by other recent cases such as Bulgaria on North Macedonia, Cyprus on Turkey, or Slovenia on Croatia (Council of the European Union 2009).

On the contrary, the political interests of some members have led to favoured treatment by allowing certain accession conditions to be circumvented in specific cases. An example of this is the non-respect of the Helsinki European Council resolution (1999) and the ‘good neighbour’ clause in the case of Cyprus, Estonia and Latvia. All three countries joined the EU in 2004, despite no clear agreement with Turkey and Russia – respectively – regarding the establishment of their national borders (Christophe Hillion 2014). This leads one to believe that the process and requirements are more adapted to the context and circumstances of each case than the other way around. This calls into question the objectivity and systematization of the process consolidated during the Copenhagen European Council and other subsequent meetings, since in practice there are still certain loopholes that allow or deny admission to candidates based on situational factors. This flexibility of the system is not in itself a bad thing, but it is sufficient justification for some countries to criticize and argue that they have little motivation to continue with the accession process, even claiming ‘fatigue’ and showing real distrust of the procedure. This feeling is not only felt by the candidate countries, but also by scholars who relate this loss of credibility “in light of a double instance: on the one hand, the EU was unable to comprehensively monitor compliance and, on the other hand, some of the candidate States were inconsistent about applying the norm” (Topidi 2013, p. 45).

In this regard, Viljar Veebel (2011) made a comparison between several Regular Reports executed by the Commission to study the candidatures of Bulgaria, Croatia, the then Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM), and Romania, with the assessments of six other notable research centres⁷. The paper clearly shows how Croatia complied better with the access requirements than Romania, according to all the research institutions. However, the Commission placed the Romanians in a more advantageous position (Veebel 2011), allowing their accession together with Bulgaria in 2007 and delaying the entry of the Croatians until 2013. This decision was probably influenced by geostrategic and diplomatic factors, since after all the two former Soviet-sphere countries were originally scheduled to join in 2004 – the same year in which both did join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) – but had to be delayed because they did not meet the agreed objectives. The conclusions of that study would explain why Croatia joined the EU’s Economic and Monetary Union and not Romania, as the latter is not deemed ready to adopt the euro (European Central Bank 2022). Furthermore, it would also prove that allowing access to countries with major pending tasks is ineffective. Research shows how “as soon as an applicant country becomes a member, the ‘leverage’ of membership disappears. In fact, the loss of leverage begins when a target date is set for accession and an accession treaty is signed” (Hillion 2014, p. 15). This is partly because once the applicant States become members, conditionality disappears, even if a post-accession monitoring has been set up after the entry of Bulgaria and Romania. The legal disputes with Poland and Hungary also highlight the vacuum in the policy.

Conclusion

The European Union has undergone numerous institutional and political changes since the founding of its predecessor, the Coal and Steel Community (1951). The entity has adapted to different geostrategic changes, prioritizing enlargement over integration - or vice versa - according

⁷ These research centers include the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, Freedom House, the Bertelsmann Foundation, Transparency International, the Fraser Institute and the Heritage Foundation

to geopolitical trends. Therefore, “the motive for States joining is largely associated with changing political and economic circumstances” (Barnes and Barnes 2009, p. 419). In total, the European community has undergone six enlargements. The last three have taken place under the umbrella of the Copenhagen Criteria, requirements developed during the 1990s as a reaction to the high interest of the new ex-Soviet republics in joining the EU. Undoubtedly, the dissolution of the Soviet Union reshaped the internal strategy by reawakening the European “Manifest Destiny” to guarantee peace and stability in the region.

European politicians considered the fifth enlargement as a “unique historical achievement for Europe and the EU” (Devrim and Schulz 2009, p. 2). However, the feeling has spread that there are imbalances in the criteria application. To this must be added the successive crises of recent times and the current questionable capacity of the European Union to absorb new members. For these reasons, the analysis of the implementation of the Copenhagen criteria and its subsequent additions provides much information on the weaknesses of the European Union’s enlargement strategy, which “became even more stringent toward the Western Balkan countries, with conditionality taking the form of a ‘carrot and stick’ policy” (Stafaj 2014, p. 1701), and explains why negotiations with potential candidates have stalled for years.

At present, the EU must focus on strengthening its internal integration and compliance mechanisms, given the significant challenges it has been facing in safeguarding the principles of the Treaties and the EU Charter in some of its Member States, such as Hungary (Dudley 2020) and Poland (Janse 2019). So far, the mechanism of Article 7 TEU is limited, which has affected its effectiveness. Therefore, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of economic sanctions to increase respect for EU rules has been boosted (e.g. NextGenerationEU). “However, solely building the need to respect rule of law on economic benefits might not pay off in the long run” (Poli 2024, p. 20). To this end, as the pattern indicates, it is essential that member countries agree on a new treaty to prepare the entity to become EU 30+, in addition to reducing the gaps that result in the establishment of “double standards”. However, the new regional context derived from the war in Ukraine has reactivated the accession programs. An example of this is the upgrade of Georgia’s status to candidate country and the Council’s decision to open negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, Moldova, and Ukraine in December 2023 (European Council 2023).

Regarding the widening, the EU should be cautious and should not rush new memberships based on short-term solutions to geopolitical pressures. Nevertheless, it is happening. In less than two years, Ukraine has made the transition to applying for membership and has succeeded in getting the Council to approve the opening of negotiations, following a favorable report from the Commission in November 2023. This action is truly disturbing, considering that this applicant State is at war (i.e. it does not comply with the good neighbour clause) and that countries such as Albania or Macedonia have taken between thirteen and eighteen years to reach that point (EU Directorate-General for Communication 2023). Interestingly, the latter two managed to open negotiations in 2022. These cases are not isolated, as the vast majority of the countries currently in the accession process saw their candidacies advance after the start of the conflict in Ukraine. Therefore, a change of attitude of the member countries towards the EU enlargement policy can be observed, which became more obvious with the organization of the first EU-Western Balkans Summit in the Balkan region in 2022 (European Council 2022). This type of abrupt change of attitude jeopardizes the objectivity of the enlargement process and reveals the nationalization of this European policy, which may exacerbate ‘enlargement fatigue’ and reduce the efficiency of the

mechanisms made available to the Commission for the candidate countries. The apparent urgency could also compromise the ensuring of a smooth transition and a lasting political, economic, and social transformation of the applicant states.

On the 10th anniversary of the 2004 enlargement Štefan Füle, Commissioner responsible for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy, stated that “enlargement is in Europe’s DNA” (European Commission 2014). Nevertheless, only under a solid and meritorious system can an objective and reliable process be accomplished. One that provides the community partners and the applicant countries themselves with the assurance that the measures are efficient and respond to the EU’s *raison d’être* of achieving a more politically united, economically stable and socially peaceful Europe.

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