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JEAN MONNET CENTRE OF EXCELLENCE (2024-27),
Cultivating Our European Resilience and Evolution,
Project ID: 101176336

Working Group 4

Enlargement, Normative Power Europe and Europeanization

Research Plan and Directions

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Objectives

The aim of the research is to map the reforms taking place in the Balkan and Eastern Partnership countries, examining the fulfillment of political and economic criteria. The state of democracy and the rule of law is a priority, as is the analysis of the challenges facing the countries. The enlargement capacity of the European Union is also at the heart of the study.

Research Questions:

1. What problems do the accession countries have?
2. How ready is the European Union to accept new members?
3. What reforms have been introduced to ensure better integration?

Background - Enlargement policy

The enlargement policy of the European Union is one of the most important and dynamically developing policy areas of the Union. EU enlargement means the gradual extension of political and economic integration between the founding Member States and aims to create a stable, secure and democratic continent. This process not only increases the number of EU Member States, but also has a significant impact on the political, economic and social development of the countries concerned, while strengthening European identity.

The enlargement policy of the European Union has historically and politically been one of the instruments that has contributed to the stability and development of Europe. The beginnings of the enlargement process date back to the late 1950s, when the former European Economic Community (EEC) was gradually enlarged. EU enlargement requires not only economic



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integration, but also political and social reforms aimed at strengthening unity between Member States and democratic principles and the rule of law.

With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the role of national parliaments has also been strengthened in enlargement policy, according to which “Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply for membership of the Union. The European Parliament and the national parliaments shall be notified of the application. The applicant State shall submit the application to the Council, which shall decide thereon by a majority of its members after consulting the Commission and after obtaining the assent of the European Parliament adopted by an absolute majority of its component members. The conditions laid down by the European Council shall be taken into account. The conditions of membership and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded which are necessary as a result of membership shall be settled by an agreement between the Member States and the State applying for membership. This agreement shall be ratified by all the Contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.”

The EU's enlargement policy is based on the following principles:

- Conditionality: Accession countries must meet the EU's political, economic and legal criteria, such as democracy, the rule of law and the functioning of the market economy.
- Differentiation: The EU takes into account the specific situation and needs of accession countries and tailors its support and requirements accordingly.
- Meritocracy: The pace and extent of accession depend on the progress of the accession countries, thus encouraging reforms and development.

The EU's enlargement policy is based on a number of principles that define the conditions for accession for prospective member states. In each round of enlargement of the Union, it has been clearly stated that countries wishing to join must fulfil certain political, economic and legal conditions. These conditions are called the Copenhagen criteria, and include:

- Democracy and the rule of law: The EU expects countries wishing to join to respect fundamental human rights, the rule of law and democratic institutions.
- Market economy: The countries wishing to join must have a functioning market economy that is capable of competing with the EU's internal market.
- Acceptance of the *acquis communautaire*: The countries wishing to join must fully accept the EU legal order and all its rules and standards, the so-called "*acquis communautaire*".
- EU absorption capacity: The European Union must be able to absorb the new member state.



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These principles ensure that the accession countries are able to maintain and strengthen the EU community while contributing to the economic and political development of the union. As can be seen, the first three conditions depend on the performance of the applicant country, while the last condition allows the EU to postpone accession to a later date. The enlargement of the European Union began in the late 1950s and has since undergone several major waves of enlargement. The first round of enlargement took place in 1973, when the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark joined the European Community. Other countries subsequently expressed interest in joining, and the EC continued to expand. In the 1980s, three countries joined, Greece (1981) and Spain (1986), as well as Portugal (1986). The southern enlargement was particularly important, as it helped to make these countries more democratic after dictatorships. Finland, Sweden and Austria joined in 1995. The 2004 enlargement was one of the most significant events in the history of the EU, as eight Central and Eastern European countries, as well as Cyprus and Malta, joined the cooperation. In 2007, Romania and Bulgaria also became full members, and in 2013, the last accession took place, with Croatia.

The accession process consists of several stages:

- Candidate status: The country officially starts preparing for accession and starts applying the EU acquis.
- Negotiations: The acceding country and the EU start detailed negotiations on various chapters, such as transport, environment and justice.
- Integration: The acceding country gradually transposes the EU acquis into its national legal order and applies EU rules and standards.
- Accession: Once negotiations have been concluded and the necessary reforms have been implemented, the country becomes a full member state.

During the accession negotiations, the EU acquis is currently divided into 35 chapters, in relation to which the European Commission examines the candidate country's readiness. As a result, the emphasis is on the candidate country in the adoption and full harmonisation of the acquis. The negotiations take place within the framework of intergovernmental conferences, where the Council and the candidate country participate and try to find a compromise solution. An important expectation is that the acceding country is obliged to adopt EU law, and can only receive a temporary exemption from it. In 2019, the policy underwent a transformation, during which new elements appeared, such as the grouping of chapters into clusters, fundamentals first, reversibility. The possibility of temporarily stopping the enlargement process or reopening already closed policy areas was also given.



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Country	Status	Accession				
		Submit the application for EU membership	Granting candidate status	Start of negotiations	Number of chapters opened	Number of chapters closed
Turkey	candidate	01.12.1964.	14.04.1987.	12.12.1999.	18	1
Montenegro	candidate	15.12.2008.	17.12.2010.	29.06.2012.	33	6
Serbia	candidate	22.12.2009.	01.03.2012.	21.02.2014.	22	2
North-Macedonia	candidate	22.03.2004.	17.12.2005.	19.07.2022.	6	-
Albania	candidate	28.04.2009.	24.06.2014.	19.07.2022.	7	-
Bosnia-Herzegovina	candidate	15.02.2016.	15.12.2022.	-	-	-
Kosovo	potential candidate	15.02.2022.	-	-	-	-
Moldova	candidate	03.03.2022.	23.06.2022.	25.06.2024.	-	-
Ukraine	candidate	28.02.2022.	23.06.2022.	25.06.2024.	-	-
Georgia	candidate	03.03.2022.	15.12.2023.	-	-	-

In the case of the Western Balkan states, we can witness a slowdown in the accession negotiations starting from 2022, as the last intergovernmental consultations were convened at that time. Due to Serbia's relationship with Kosovo and internal political tensions, no intergovernmental conferences were held from 2021. The 16th intergovernmental meeting was held for Montenegro on 26 June 2024, where successes were reported in relation to chapters 23 and 24. The first intergovernmental meeting was held with Albania and North Macedonia in December 2023. For Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was announced in March 2024 that accession negotiations could start, but the first intergovernmental meeting was not convened later either. As for the Eastern Partnership, the first formal intergovernmental conference with Moldova and Ukraine was held on 25 June 2024. Georgia was granted candidate status in December 2023, but negotiations have not started. Kosovo has still not been granted candidate status. Enlargement brings many benefits, but it also poses significant challenges for both the EU and the new Member States.

Advantages:

- Political stability: EU enlargement can contribute to strengthening political stability in regions, especially in countries with a history of war or dictatorship.
- Economic growth: Access to the EU internal market offers new member states the opportunity to accelerate economic growth and development.



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- Stronger geopolitical position: EU enlargement increases the Union's geopolitical influence and global role.

Challenges:

- Political and economic differences: Integrating the political and economic differences between new member states into the EU structure can be a major challenge.
- Bureaucracy and reforms: New member states need significant reforms to comply with EU standards, which is often a long and complicated process.
- Social and cultural differences: The EU is culturally diverse and enlargement will make it even more so, which can also cause social tensions.

Future challenges:

- Political and economic reforms: The accession countries will have to implement significant political and economic reforms to meet EU requirements.
- Migration and border control: The issues of migratory pressure and border control are particularly relevant in the Western Balkans region.
- Regional cooperation: Addressing the political and ethnic tensions in the region is essential.

Research directions

1. Political and economic impacts

- Economic impacts of enlargement: How does EU enlargement affect economies, especially the economies of the new member states? Research can focus on competitiveness, innovation, trade and infrastructure development.
- Enlargement policies: How are EU enlargement policies changing and shaping the integration of the new member states? It is also possible to examine different enlargement models and their effectiveness (e.g. enlargement of the Balkan region).
- Future of the Union and enlargement: The impact of enlargement processes on the institutional and legal structure of the EU. How should EU institutions be transformed to enable a larger community to function effectively?

2. Social and cultural impacts

- Multiculturalism and integration: Integrating the culture of the new member states into the EU community, with particular attention to preserving different national identities and strengthening community identity.



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- Migration and labour mobility: How does enlargement affect migration and labour mobility within the EU? Including issues of internal labour market and education mobility.
- Social cohesion: How does enlargement affect the social cohesion of the EU? Research could focus on the social systems of the new Member States and their harmonisation.

3. Legal and institutional aspects

- Enlargement conditions and legal harmonisation: How can the legal and institutional harmonisation objectives with the new Member States be achieved, in particular in the areas of the rule of law, anti-corruption measures and the protection of fundamental rights?
- Legal challenges and conflicts: What legal challenges arise during enlargement and how can the differences between different legal systems be resolved?
- EU institutional reform: What reforms are needed in the EU institutional system for enlargement to work effectively? For example, restructuring the decision-making mechanisms of the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council.

4. Security and foreign policy issues

- EU foreign policy cohesion: How will EU foreign policy change following enlargement? Research could focus on the foreign policy of neighbouring regions, in particular the Balkans and the Eastern Partnership countries.
- Enlargement and regional security: The impact of enlargement on the EU's security policy strategy, including strengthening relations with NATO and developing the EU's defence policy.
- Impacts of Russia and China: How might major powers, such as Russia and China, react to EU enlargement? Including an analysis of geopolitical and economic aspects.

5. Sustainability and environmental protection

- Enlargement and sustainability: How will EU enlargement affect sustainability goals, such as combating climate change and the green economy? Research could focus on how new Member States can fit into EU environmental policies.
- Energy and infrastructure developments: How can EU energy markets be shaped and what are the impacts of enlargement on energy security and infrastructure developments?



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6. The future of enlargement and different scenarios

- Future enlargement scenarios: What are the possible scenarios for EU enlargement? How might enlargement processes develop in the coming decades, taking into account political, economic and social challenges?
- Enlargement and a "renewed EU": How might future enlargement shape the structure and future of the EU? Within this, the issues of closer integration and a multi-speed Europe may also be of interest.

7. Historical and comparative analyses

- Lessons from previous enlargements: Research could focus on past enlargement waves (e.g. the 2004 and 2007 enlargements) and analyse their impacts and lessons for future enlargement processes.
- Comparison of Balkan and Eastern enlargement: The accession process of the Balkan countries and the chances of the Eastern Partnership countries, taking into account various geopolitical, economic and social factors.

8. EU Citizens' Rights and Identity

- EU Citizenship: How is the interpretation of EU citizens' rights changing with the accession of new Member States and how is the enlargement process shaping the development of European identity?
- EU Values and Democracy: How can we ensure that new Member States comply with the EU's core values, in particular the rule of law, democracy and human rights?

Each of these research areas offers an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the complex impacts and challenges of EU enlargement and their long-term consequences.

The future of EU enlargement policy is uncertain, but the most important challenges remain. The Balkan states and the Eastern Partnership countries, such as Ukraine and Moldova, continue their accession negotiations. It is crucial for the EU to manage the enlargement process in a way that ensures the stability of the continent while preserving the values and principles of the Community, as well as its credibility. The success of future enlargements depends on the EU's ability to address political, economic and social differences while preserving the Union's fundamental values and stability.



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Methodology

Due to the specific nature of the research area, we strive to implement multidisciplinary research, in which, in addition to social sciences – European studies, political science, international relations, history, military science – economic sciences also enjoy high priority. During the research, we strive for basic research, which, due to its topicality, can be a high priority for decision-makers and those interested in the region.

Outcomes

- November 14, 2025: international conference. VII. Balkans Conference – Stability and change in the Western Balkans.
- 2026: two workshops (one on current challenges, the other with the participation of Hungarian integration consultants).
- 2027: European Mirror special issue (at least 5 publications)

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