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Europe

EUROPEAN UNION: THE BRIGHT FUTURE OF ENLARGEMENT

Sylvain Kahn

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Is the European Union doomed to choose between enlargement and deepening? At a time when the Russian war in Ukraine is pushing new candidates for membership into Europe's arms, Sylvain Kahn, associate professor at Sciences Po and researcher at the Centre d'histoire de Sciences Po, argues for a resolutely political and optimistic vision of European Union enlargement.

Faced with Russia's war of invasion on Ukraine, the Europeans have decided to relaunch their enlargement policy. In June 2022, they granted candidate country status to Ukraine and Moldova, and at the same time affirmed their determination to finalise the accession of Albania, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, which has been dragging on for almost twenty years. This prospect has rekindled reflection and debate on what is historically known as deepening, i.e. on the reforms that need to be undertaken and that can no longer be postponed, unless there is a risk that enlargement will unbalance or even block the functioning of the EU.

Indeed, the history of the European Union teaches us that its enlargements are the catalysts of its institutional changes. The latter are in fact the product of a meeting between those who argue in favour of enlarging the EU and those for whom it is necessary to reform the institutions in order to deepen the European scale.

Deepening and broadening: the experience of history

The two most visible cases in the long term are France, whose governments, political class and senior administration are distinguished by their tendency not only to be a permanent think-tank for institutional reforms of the EU, but also and above all to embody the position that deepening is a prerequisite for enlargement. The archetype of the opposite position was the United Kingdom, whose governments all promoted a kind of permanent enlargement while obstructing as much as possible the increase in supranational prerogatives and shared competences within the EU: the important thing is to enlarge, not deepen. With the British gone, Poland has taken on this role – with

the difference that, while the whole of Poland has wanted Ukraine to join for the past fifteen years, the rejection of deepening has distinguished the majority in power from the opposition for the past eight years.

Finally, there are players who want both – if we confine ourselves to Member State-type players, the archetypal case being Germany.

Occasionally (and this is rarer), certain players are equally opposed to enlargement and deepening. This was the case when De Gaulle was the French president. He vetoed the accession of the United Kingdom, as well as the move to qualified majority voting in decision-making by the Six, the extension of the prerogatives of the Commission (then chaired by Hallstein), and the creation of the EEC's own budgetary powers.

Spaak and Luns, the Belgian and Dutch foreign ministers, were not giving up. They said: France must choose! Either it blocks enlargement or it blocks deepening. Blocking both is scandalous.

With De Gaulle gone, the history of European integration without a sovereignist leader resumed its course. There have been four waves of enlargement in forty years. Each was accompanied by institutional reforms designed to deepen the European political system. The summit of heads of state and government convened by Pompidou in 1969 (The Hague summit) remains the matrix, with its famous triptych: "completion, enlargement, deepening".

The emblematic couplings of this enlargement/deepening dynamic remain, for example, the Delors package decided at the same time as the finalisation of enlargement to include Spain and Portugal; and the reforms promoted by the Convention and included in the Treaty of Lisbon at the same time as the expansion of the EU to 25 then 27 members, in particular the new qualified majority as well as the embodiment of the EU by several mandates of leaders strengthened to be visible at the same time: Presidency of the European Council, Presidency of the Commission, Minister and Ministry of Foreign Affairs under the names HRVP and EEAS, management of the European Central Bank.

From an overall viewpoint, the EU's long-term enlargement process has been coupled with a process of deepening the European political system, i.e. over time with (relative) increases in the Community budget; with an increase in the prerogatives of both the Parliament, which is increasingly called upon to play its role, and the European Council of Heads of State and Government; with an extension and simplification of decision-making by qualified majority; with an ever more refined completion of Community policies: making agricultural policy sacrosanct and

integrating the United Kingdom (The Hague summit); expanding regional policy and integrating the Iberian countries (Delors Commission); making the euro irreversible with EMU and integrating the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Kohl-Mitterrand tandem); developing European defence and diplomacy by integrating Ukraine (ongoing process, Von der Leyen Commission...).

The EU: four waves of accessions and the burial of the empire

Enlargement is thus an integral part of the history of European integration. The European Economic Community had six members when it was founded in 1957. Between 1973 and 2013, twenty-two countries joined the EEC and then the European Union. This integration is an extension of the European territory in four major geographical sequences: the industrialised countries of the north-west in the 1970s; the more agricultural Mediterranean countries emerging from fascism in the 1980s; the very prosperous, neutral and social- democratic countries of the north-east in the 1990s; the ex-communist Central and Eastern European countries that have become democratic and capitalist in the 2000s.

On closer examination, it is from the outset that the construction of Europe has been characterised by its intrinsic force of attraction and seduction on the neighbouring countries of those joining forces: explicitly conceived for two States (France and the FRG) on 9 May 1950, the project was immediately extended to four more (those of the Benelux countries and Italy). These Six created the European Coal and Steel Community and then, in 1957, the European Economic Community.

These six countries comprise the traditional heartland of urban, commercial, trading and productive Europe, which was first extended to the north-western corner of Europe. The entry of Denmark, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland brings to a close this association of countries in which are located the regions that were the cradles of Europe's economic take-off, as much as of the emancipation of politics from the religious sphere and the Church, and of the origins of modern democracy. This first enlargement was completed in 1973.

This first enlarged group is that of the Europe of high population densities and centres of decision-making, surrounded by more rural, less urbanised, less metropolitan and less industrialised peripheries, which have been brought and held together with the centres by coercive states adorned with the flag of the nation in the course of their historical construction process.

The second enlargement took place in the 1980s. It concerned Southern Europe, which was more agricultural and had been liberated from fascist dictatorships (dating back to 1926 in Salazar's Portugal and 1939 in Franco's Spain). Greece (in 1981), Spain and Portugal (in 1986): these countries,

for the most part, had remained on the sidelines of the developments characterising this European heartland in the shape of an enlarged whalebone, running from the London basin to Tuscany, along the Rhine, the Meuse, the Rhône, the Paris basin, Lombardy and the Alpine foothills. On 29 June 1970, the Franco regime's requests for association only resulted in a very limited trade agreement.

With democracy in place, the EEC took the initiative. Membership very quickly became a major objective of the new governments. However, it was necessary to allay the fears of the Mediterranean populations of the States of the Europe of Nine, in particular farmers and primarily Frenchs among those. This was one of the functions of the very important budget reform promoted by the Delors Commission.

The third enlargement took place in the 1990s. It involved three neutral states on the northern and eastern edges of the European Community; neutral but also social-democratic, sparsely populated and very prosperous. Austria, Sweden and Finland bordered either the Soviet bloc, the USSR or both. The fall of communism and the USSR made possible what the particular situation of these three countries in the Cold War (limited sovereignty in foreign policy) had prevented: membership of the EEC.

The fourth enlargement to include Central and Eastern Europe liberated from Communism took place in the 2000s. It involved the five former People's Democracies which, in addition to the GDR which had been integrated into the FRG and the EEC in 1990, made up the Soviet glacis: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia, Romania and Bulgaria. Slovenia, from the former Yugoslavia. And Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, three former Soviet republics. Two Mediterranean islands, Malta and Cyprus, are also part of this unprecedented wave of enlargement, the largest ever undertaken by the European Union: twelve countries.



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Beyond their unique histories and political cultures, each of these countries saw joining the EU as an historic opportunity. The European Union, an association of states founded on the partial pooling of sovereignty, is the very antithesis of an empire. Each State, whatever its size and weight, is independent and sovereign, and equal in rights and dignity to the other members of the association. It is this historically unprecedented fact that explains why the citizens of these countries aspired to the EU and supported the efforts leading to membership, just as they were regaining their individual freedoms and national independence, at the end of half a century of imperial domination with totalitarian pretensions.

Dispelling the myth of the ungovernable EU

With each enlargement, the fear is expressed that the European entity will become ungovernable as a result of enlargement. This is a recurring theme. However, until there is proof to the contrary, in the period when the EU was the most blocked and ungovernable, from 1963 to 1969, there were only six Member States. In reality, enlargements do not correspond to inertia or paralysis. There is no correlation, studies have shown. Blockages, when they occur, are always political. It is the result, not of numbers, but of friction between doctrines, between visions, between projects, and of relationships of power and interdependence, between majorities and minorities, and of their motivation and their ability to find compromises.

In practice, the dynamics of enlargement are proceeding in tandem with the dynamics of supranationality, without the need for grand master plans. It could be said that, in the end, what we call “deepening” is a baroque composition of ingenious devices cobbled together to solve problems as they arise. Jean-Claude Juncker’s reform of the way the Commission works shows that even a Commission in which each Member State continues to have “its” own Commissioner well beyond 15 countries works, and works well. As Renaud Dehousse put it: Enlargement? Europe is adapting. Beneath the passionate and recurrent debates on enlargement, there are institutional reform configurations that have become, if not habitual, at least classic because they have been tried and tested: a (relative) increase in the budget and the development and completion of European public policies that promote territorial cohesion and the Europeanisation of societies; the extension and simplification of decision-making by qualified majority; an increase in the prerogatives of both the Parliament and the European Council of Heads of State and Government; followed, secondly, by the consolidation, again and again, of the Commission’s central role in both the preparation and implementation of these extensions to public policies pooled at European level – as we have seen, among other examples, with the European semester of the TSCG, environmental policy, the communitarisation of the Schengen area, debt to finance the recovery plan, the vaccination strategy and military aid to Ukraine.

The way in which the EU has been deploying a panoply of unprecedented public policies since March 2020, first against Covid and then alongside Ukraine against Russia, bears witness to this (if proof were needed). We are obliged to note that the right of veto is not an obstacle to innovations deemed impossible under the unanimity rule in budgetary and foreign policy.

Ukraine + 5: one more enlargement against Putin's violence

Croatia became the 28^e Member State of the EU on 1^{er} July 2013, following ten years of negotiations that had been suspended twice due to Croatia's border disputes with Italy and Slovenia.

Since then, enlargement has been off the European Union's agenda. While Croatia has joined, its neighbours in the Western Balkans (Northern Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania) have not gone from candidate country to Member State status. And none of the countries that emerged from the USSR in democratic transition or revolution (known as the "colour revolution") that applied for it (Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova) managed to convince the EU to grant them candidate status. With Brexit, there was even a shrinkage in 2020.

Russia's war on Ukraine prompted EU leaders to change their doctrine: faced with Russian aggression, they decided in June 2022 to set up the EPC (European Political Community), to give Ukraine and Moldova candidate status at breakneck speed, and to declare that it was time to finalise the accession of the countries of the Western Balkans, which had been under negotiation for some fifteen years since the end of the war in former Yugoslavia.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine can be interpreted as a bloody but rearguard attempt by the Russian state to test the depth and solidity of the mindset that drives European integration, to challenge and demolish it, and to prove that imperialism and violence are still structuring and effective in Europe. Quite the opposite is happening. The reaction of Europeans bears witness to the depth of their paradigm shift in international relations between Europeans. They are so attached to their interdependent, mutualised, pacified and non-imperialist territorial system that they are inventing new and imaginative policies and actions to defend it by committing their economic and industrial forces to the Ukrainians and against the Russian state. By this yardstick, the current accession process and the concomitant formation of the European Political Community tell us that the European Union has won and Russia has lost.

The Europeans are now deciding to integrate six more countries into their Union because of a new rational calculation: because of the imperialism and militarism of the Russian Putin state, it is more costly, more risky and more dangerous not to enlarge the EU to include these countries than to include them in the EU. Outside the EU, the societies of the six countries in question are far more sensitive to the actions and political culture of this Russian state, which is based on violence, corruption and authoritarianism as a way of living together. Outside the EU, these countries are far more exposed to the Russian state's plans to limit or violate their sovereignty, control their territory

and subjugate them in various ways. Insofar, as these six States are already closely linked to the EU economically, demographically and legally, this Russian policy has the effect of destabilising, intimidating or threatening the EU itself.

Compared with the four previous waves of enlargement, the current enlargement in the 2020s is therefore a different, special and specific case.

This time, the European Union has chosen to enlarge to include countries whose societies are largely structured by war or post-war conflicts that are difficult to overcome, and by nationalism. A fundamental feature of European integration is that its members have lost interest in both nationalism and war. War is no longer part of the repertoire of political solutions for Europeans, either internally (with rare exceptions, such as the thirty years war in Northern Ireland which ended twenty five years ago in 1997) or in their relations with each other. Today, in two countries (Hungary and Poland), parties may be able to come to power over the long term by mobilising nationalism, but this is very watered down, is neither imperialist nor militaristic, and remains very much constrained by the overwhelming desire of societies to belong to the European Union.

The six enlargement countries of the 2020s are also, to varying degrees, bankrupt states, or very vulnerable, or very corrupt, or partly amputated. They are also countries where some of the political and social forces are under the control of the Russian state. These problems may have been present in the wave of enlargement in the 2000s, but marginally and spread out: Cyprus joined the EU in 2004 with a third of its territory amputated, having been invaded by the Turkish army in 1974; Romania joined in 2007 in the grip of major corruption; Croatia, which joined in 2013, is affected by the end of the war and nationalism.

Four recommendations for a successful EU of 33

This time, enlargement is characterised secondarily by an increase in the number of co-decision-makers (in the Council of the EU, the European Council and the Commission) and members of parliament; secondarily, it is characterised by the classic economic and financial problem of the wealth and standard of living differential. This differential does exist, but Europeans have had experience of this type of difficulty since the Treaty of Rome and the creation of the EEC. And these two types of problems are less central than in previous enlargements: this time, in fact, the choice is being made to enlarge into societies that are primarily affected by war and nationalism. This is why the EU will not be preparing for this enlargement solely by mobilising its political culture and its proven experience of the past half-century.

Here are four ways in which we can prepare for this enlargement.

Recommendation #1: make access to the budget conditional on respect for the rule of law

Give breadth and depth to making access to European funding conditional on respect for the rule of law and pluralism. This new instrument was formalised at the same time as the EU budget for 2021-2027 (Multiannual Financial Framework, MFF) was adopted at the end of 2020. It has proved its worth in record time. It was invented to force Hungary and Poland to renounce the undermining of the rule of law since 2010 in the case of Hungary and 2015 in the case of Poland by their respective radical right-wing and illiberal parliamentary majorities (the Fidesz party led by Prime Minister Viktor Orban in Hungary; the PiS party led by Jaroslaw Kaczynski in Poland, from which comes the government led by Mateusz Morawiecki).

In the space of a few months, the tug of war that pitted these two countries against the rest of the EU on this issue has shifted in favour of the latter. Admittedly, the confrontation is ongoing, and the two illiberal governments are not giving up without resistance and persistence. But they are no longer ignoring pressure from their peers or the rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The Member States have entrusted the European Commission with the power to assess breaches of the rule of law, and to make the payment of Community funds from the European budget conditional on the correction of such breaches. The Polish and Hungarian governments thought they had minimised or rendered inoffensive this conditionality by obtaining the complex wording that is the secret of European negotiations. The breaches of the rule of law covered by this new instrument are supposed to be identified in the context of the use and distribution of European funds.

The Commission's legal experts were able to demonstrate without too much difficulty that the scope of this clarification was much broader than the central administrations of the two countries concerned had expected. The Commission also considered that the new instrument applied just as much to the payment of funds from the extraordinary budget known as the Next generation EU recovery plan as it did to the ordinary budget (MFF). The EU has thus equipped itself with an effective means of politico-administrative pressure due to its manoeuvrability and flexibility: illiberal governments, moderately sensitive to ethical injunctions backed by the law to that point, are much more influenced when they are hit in the wallet. It is true that, for example, structural funds represent 4% of Hungarian GDP. For these two governments, which have made clientelism one of the mainsprings (not the only one) of their electoral success, being threatened with being denied access to the European budget is a sobering thought.

Prior to this discovery, the activation of the political and legal procedure devised in the Lisbon Treaty to force a Member State to respect the rule of law in the event of failure to do so – the famous Article 7 – had no effect.

As things stand, the six candidate countries are characterised to varying degrees by the seduction of nationalist and illiberal political parties, which, when they come to power through elections, are characterised by a certain indifference to the rule of law. This is why it must be extremely clear that the EU will have the possibility of suspending the payment of Community funds in a proportionate and easy way at all stages of accession in the event of a breach of the rule of law by the governments negotiating accession. This will be all the more important as we are proposing that, for this fifth wave, the enlargement process should break new ground and become a gradual enlargement.

Recommendation #2: gradual accession with institutional dimension

Until now, for half a century, the four waves of enlargement have operated according to the same principle: to give the candidate membership and the status of Member State on final examination. It was necessary to have fulfilled all the conditions, in all sectors of public action and administration, regardless of the number of years of negotiations required to achieve this complete result.

We propose to replace the final examination and the transition from nothing to everything (from candidate to Member State) with a progressive (gradual) accession of the continuous assessment type: we do not wait to have opened and closed all the chapters of the accession negotiations before declaring the candidate ready for integration. Member States join the EU gradually, in groups of chapters corresponding to sets of public policies. As soon as they integrate an EU public policy, one of their ministers sits on the Council of the EU (the chamber of states) in the formation that decides on this policy and when the Council's agenda is dedicated to the conduct and development of this policy. Consequently, it would be logical to apply the same approach to the appropriate meetings of the Permanent Representatives Committee of the Member States (COREPER I and II), which meet on an almost daily basis to prepare the Council's deliberations. On subjects and areas in which the candidate states are not yet integrated into the EU, their representatives will have observer status. More generally, when a candidate country is integrated into the EU to a certain degree (e.g. 25%), their head of government will take part in discussions at the European Council, the body that brings together the heads of state and government and steers EU policies without executing them or making legislation.

When it is 50% integrated into the EU (for example), the MEPs that the candidate country will have been proposed to elect with observer status will cease to be observers and will become legislators. When the candidate country is 65% integrated into the EU, it will appoint a Commissioner approved by the European Parliament to the Commission. When the candidate country is 100% integrated into the EU, its Commissioner will be able to occupy one of the three posts of executive vice-president.

It is a question of transferring to the field of enlargement what is already de facto at work in the territorial system polarised by the European Union and formalised by the European Political Community (EPC). In these terms, we will characterise countries according to their percentage of integration into the EU. Of the EU Member States that share the euro and the Schengen area (i.e. 18 countries out of 27), we will say that they are 120% in the EU. EU Member States that are in only one of the two (i.e. 7 countries out of 27, including, for example, Ireland and Poland) are said to be 110% in the EU. Member States that are neither in the euro nor in Schengen (there are 2 of them, Bulgaria and Romania) are said to be 100% in the EU.

The non-EU countries that are part of the internal market (the historic and dynamic heart of European integration) and the Schengen area (Iceland, Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein) can be said to be 75% integrated into the EU. And so on, through the candidate countries, the customs union (Turkey), the associated countries, the “neighbourhood” countries (such as Georgia and Tunisia), the EU’s partner countries (such as the United Kingdom, which is integrated into the EU by 15% through its trade and cooperation agreement)...

The percentages here are illustrations, not data. In this de facto territorial system, below 100% are the countries that are not EU Member States and therefore do not participate in the decisions or design of the EU policies in which they are integrated. From 1972 (when the United Kingdom, Denmark and Ireland signed up to join the EU) to 2013 (when Croatia joined), this de facto situation also included countries with candidate status: they incorporated European legislation into their national laws as far as possible and participated as much as possible in EU public policies and financial programmes, but were not involved in decision-making. This reality corresponds to the pre-accession programmes and the associated process of incorporating the *acquis communautaire* into the regulations, administrative and legal practices and legislation of the candidate country. In the case of the six countries in the current fifth wave of enlargement, the process is so long that there may even be a specific period between the year in which candidate status is achieved and the year in which accession negotiations are opened. Albania, for example, has had candidate status since 2014 and has been formally negotiating its accession since 2022.

This must change: a candidate country must gradually enter the Community's political system and participate in decision-making as it closes the chapters. Ukraine is not the United Kingdom, Moldova is not Switzerland, Albania is not Norway: they are future members of the EU – because they want to be, and because Europeans want to be too, in a firm and clear way, since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. We are not going to do to Ukraine or Serbia what we are doing to Switzerland and Norway: it is important to make a very clear distinction between countries that are candidates and will soon be members, and EU partner countries that definitely do not want to be members. So we have to get going and work together on the ground, in practice and in mutual political and institutional acculturation.

Romano Prodi, then President of the Commission, had already tried out the slogan “everything but the institutions” to signify his plan to bring into the EU neighbouring countries that he did not imagine would become members. On the contrary, gradual accession must have an institutional dimension.

So gradual enlargement might better be called progressive accession – or gradual accession, in any case the word “accession” has to be used! Gradual accession will be based on the following principle: when a candidate country is 25% integrated into the EU's policies and programmes, it will participate 25% in the EU's political institutions. When it is 50% integrated into EU policies and programmes, it will participate 50% in the EU's political institutions. And so on. It's quite simple.

This new method of enlargement will make it possible to avoid this all-or-nothing final test, which this time is prolonging the accession process as never before, creating bitterness and allowing nationalist, illiberal political families, or those seduced by the Russian state, to wrongly blame the EU alone for this prolongation and lack of determination and resolution in the accession process.

Both symbolically and in terms of political conviviality, a progressive or gradual accession is reassuring and concrete. A minister from one of the countries concerned can say to his public and his society: “I have been there, I am deciding on this European policy with my colleagues. We are already 30% integrated into the EU. In two years we will be 45%”.

Recommendation #3: the veto +

As this fifth wave of enlargement is new, we have proposed reforms that are still new in order to adapt to this specificity. But there is no need to abandon the traditional debates we have inherited from the history of the four previous waves of enlargement. Can we enlarge without deepening? It has been suggested that the process of conditionality should be completed and used as a political

instrument in the gradual accession process. It has been suggested that the enlargement process itself should be deepened by introducing gradual accession. The desire for institutional reform is crystallised in this enlargement as in previous ones. And once again, one point in particular will focus attention and debate – it has already begun: qualified majority voting (QMV) and its opposite, the right of veto.

As in the past, there is a growing fear that the enlarged EU will run the risk of paralysis if the right of veto is not abolished once and for all. In our view, what may justify this fear this time is that the EU is embarking on an enlargement to include countries whose societies are marked by nationalism, the end of war and conflicts over identity – two types of values and one type of situation that promote sovereignism and mistrust of supranationality.

However, it would be counterproductive to abolish the right of veto at a time when we are preparing to welcome countries for which it may be of great value in the hierarchy of norms and political attitudes. On the other hand, recent history tends to show that maintaining the right of veto in foreign and budgetary policy does not prevent boldness or innovation. In fact, since the early 1980s, the (now residual) existence of the veto and the possibility of using it have acted as a symbolic guarantee. It could be said that sovereignist governments accept to participate in the supranational political life (that characterised European politics) because they know that they can mobilise the veto in the last resort. In fact, they rarely do so, even when they threaten to do so.

So we have to deal with reality. As the EU opens up to a growing number of nationalist and sovereignist societies, it will benefit from maintaining the veto while developing it.

The current qualified majority system, which came into force in 2014 under the Treaty of Lisbon, has considerably simplified the previous system, which was based on the number of votes allocated to each Member State. It is now simple and clear: in the event of a vote (which is very rare), a text is adopted and a decision taken if it is approved by 55% of the States representing 65% of the European population. There is no reason to change this rule, which satisfies everyone (in principle) and has proved its worth (in practice).

In this situation of residual veto (budget, taxation, foreign and defence policy), we propose to maintain the right of veto and to replace the veto by the “veto +”. The “veto +” could take two forms. In both cases, the aim is to reinforce the value of the veto, to ensure that it is not used lightly, but in a very significant way. It is a question of giving it all the weight it deserves in terms of what it means in a supranational, post-nationalist political system. “Veto + form 1” : in principle, the veto will no longer be exercised by a single country; it will be exercised by two countries. The dates on which

these two countries join the EU will be separated by a certain period of time – ten years, for example. In this way, France and Germany alone will not be able to block a decision, nor Hungary and Poland, nor Serbia and Albania (for example and by hypothesis).

“Veto + form 2”: for the reasons given above, it would be wrong, inflexible or idealistic to completely abolish the possibility for a single State to exercise its residual right of veto. This right should be maintained by making its exercise genuinely valuable: it must correspond not to a convenience, but to a firm conviction (if one can say so in the case of a nation state) that the decision taken in the name of the general European interest, which one is prepared to oppose, really does jeopardise the national interest or the supposed national interest. This is why the “veto + form 2” is a rare ability. Specifically, with the “veto + form 2”, each member state is entitled to a number y of vetoes in x years. For example, each member state is entitled to 3 vetoes per two-year rolling period.

With this “Veto +” forms 1 and 2, the value of the veto is enhanced. The veto becomes precious, rare and therefore expensive. It becomes a distinguishing feature: it is designed to be taken seriously and is therefore rarely used, even by 33 Member States.

Recommendation #4: observer MEPs elected from 2024 onwards

Finally, we need to consider the demographic composition of the European Parliament. Should the number of MEPs from 33 countries remain at 705? As we know, the Treaty stipulates that no Member State may elect fewer than six MEPs and more than 96, according to a principle of “degressively proportional” representation of the population.

As of now and in the immediate future, we propose that the Six candidate countries’ citizens elect MEPs who are observers and affiliated to the European parliamentary groups from the next elections in June 2024. The aim is to involve the societies of the candidate countries in the Europeanisation of political life, and to speed up their participation in the process of European socialisation through democratic political life. This would be a tangible and concrete expression of the political decision that has been taken not to drag out enlargement to the four countries of the Western Balkans and to grant candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova at high speed.

These are possible avenues, possible tools to be refined, among others. The point is that we can’t make something new out of something old, and there is no reason to be cautious or pessimistic – quite the opposite. But we do need boldness, more boldness, always boldness – for enlargement, as for the Covid and for support for Ukraine against Russia. So the fifty-year history of enlargement of the European Union has a bright future ahead of it.