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EU Enlargement Process and the Eastern Enlargement

Basics of EU Law

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HUNGARIAN
GOVERNMENT

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INVESTING IN YOUR FUTURE

TOPIC

EU Enlargement Process

Eastern Enlargement

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the lesson, students will have

- had an overview the EU Enlargement History
- understood the EU Enlargement Process
- had a general knowledge about the main steps of the accession

MATERIALS

The 2004 enlargement: the challenge of a 25-member EU- <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=LEGISSUM%3Ae50017>

EU ENLARGEMENT FACTSHEET, HOW DOES THE EU ACCESSION PROCESS WORK?

https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/publication/factsheet_en.pdf
<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/>

EU ENLARGEMENT HISTORY

6 waves of enlargement rounds have increased the number of Member States.

Past enlargements

Northern Enlargement

Denmark, Ireland, United Kingdom 1973

Southern Enlargement

Greece 1981- Greece's accession consolidated democracy in the country.

Portugal, Spain 1986- This enlargement consolidated democracy in Portugal and Spain.

EFTA-rest Enlargement

Austria, Finland, Sweden 1995

Eastern enlargement

Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia 2004- Intended to reunite the continent after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, this enlargement was launched by the European Council meeting of December 1997. Negotiations were conducted separately with each country, based on a single negotiating framework.

Bulgaria, Romania 2007- The pace of reform in Bulgaria and Romania did not allow these countries to join in 2004. A ‘cooperation and verification mechanism’ in key areas — judicial reform, the fight against corruption and the fight against organised crime continues to monitor progress after accession.

Croatia 2013- The accession negotiations with Croatia were subject to the stricter conditionality instituted in December 2006 by the European Council’s ‘renewed consensus on enlargement’.

EU ENLARGEMENT PROCESS

Enlargement is the process whereby countries join the European Union.

Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may **apply to become** a member of the Union (Excerpt from Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union)

Values listed in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union: respect for human dignity; freedom; democracy; equality; the rule of law; respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities

Accession criteria

The first step is for the country to meet the accession criteria. These criteria were defined at a European Council meeting in Copenhagen in 1993, and often referred to as the '**Copenhagen criteria**'.

The Copenhagen criteria set a number of democratic, economic and political conditions for countries who want to join the EU:

1. stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities
2. a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU
3. the ability to take on and effectively implement the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union

The EU also needs to be able to integrate new members.

Main steps of the accession

1. The applicant country (potential candidate) submits its **application** to the country holding the rotating presidency of the Council of the European Union.
2. The European Commission makes an initial evaluation of the applicant country and submits its **opinion** to the Council of the European Union.
3. In the light of the European Commission's opinion, the Council of the European Union decides whether to consider the applicant a **candidate** country. The Council may also set certain conditions that need to be met before accession negotiations can begin.
4. Once **accession negotiations** are opened, the European Commission investigates the candidate country in greater detail in a process known as screening. The resulting **screening** report identifies shortcomings in the candidate country that need to be gradually addressed in order for it to comply with the body of rights and obligations binding for all EU Member States (also known as the *acquis*).
5. For the **accession negotiations**, the *acquis* is divided into 35 chapters, each of which covers a specific policy area. The negotiations process aims to help candidate countries

prepare to fulfil the obligations of EU membership. The chapters cover the major aspects of EU policy, such as free movement of goods, capital, and workers; economic policy, energy, transport, regional policy, foreign policy, fundamental rights, and more. Benchmarks are set in every chapter to guide the candidate towards fulfilling the obligations.

6. After the candidate country has reformed its national laws so that they match the *acquis*, every criterion has been fulfilled, and every chapter has been closed, the agreements reached are set out in an **accession treaty**, which must be signed by the candidate country and all EU Member States. The accession treaty must also win the support of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, and the European Parliament. The candidate country then becomes an acceding country.
7. After the accession treaty has been signed, it must be **ratified** by the acceding country and each individual EU Member State according to their constitutional rules (i.e. parliamentary vote, referendum).

EASTERN ENLARGEMENT- ACCESSION OF HUNGARY

From 1987 to 1996 thirteen countries submitted applications to join the EU.

To prepare for EU membership, the candidate countries first signed **Europe Agreements**.

The EU supported their work to adopt the Community's rules through its pre-accession strategy. It gave them financial assistance for developing their institutions, infrastructure and economies.

Accession negotiations began on 31 March 1998 with the six best-prepared countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic and Slovenia)

From 1998 the Commission published regular reports every year on the progress of each candidate country. The priorities for each candidate country and the specific support this required were defined in the accession partnerships adopted in 1998 and revised in 1999 and 2002. These documents were the basis for "*screenings*" (sector-by-sector evaluation) to establish a "roadmap" for each candidate specifying the legislation that needed to be adopted or amended to comply with the Community *acquis*.

The Copenhagen European Council of December 2002 found that 10 of the 13 candidate countries (Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta and Slovakia) fulfilled the conditions necessary for joining the EU. They therefore signed their **Accession Treaty** on 16 April 2003 in Athens and officially joined the EU on 1 May 2004 after the ratification procedures were completed.

SELF-TESTING QUESTIONS

What are the main steps of the accession process?

When was the Northern Enlargement, and who joined the European Union?

What are the criterias of the Enlargement?