

Motion

Towards an enlarged European Union

signed by: Young European Federalists
(JEF Europe)

co-signed by: National Youth Council of
Moldova (CNTM), National Youth Council of
North Macedonia (NYCNM), National Youth
Council of Serbia (KOMS), National Youth
Council of Ukraine (NYCUkraine)

Introduction

The process of European integration, which has so far delivered for many of its members the longest uninterrupted period of peaceful coexistence in their history, has proven itself to be overall a success story in creating the conditions for peace among the countries of the continent. Born out of the ashes of war, and using economic integration as a way to build what ultimately became the European Union, European countries slowly developed a closer union.

This Union did not limit itself to the confines of its 6 original members, and over the decades grew to the 27-member union we know today. The process of enlargement allowed for an expansion of this space for peace where law and democratic institutions have become the way to solve disputes and establish rules applying to all equally.

At the same time, EU enlargement has opened the door for millions of young people to benefit from the positive aspects of European integration such as unrestricted mobility, educational and labour opportunities across Europe, and greater opportunities due to increased socio economic development¹.

While many have argued that the EU has been experiencing a sort of 'enlargement fatigue', it has instead been experiencing a 'lack-of-reform fatigue' which has clearly shown the limits of what the European Union can achieve under the current governance mechanisms. While the answer to that should have been a reformist agenda that delivered the adequate changes in EU governance and decision-making to make the Union fit for a future enlarged Europe, instead national governments have simply procrastinated and, at points, even stalled the beginning of membership talks². This is in spite of significant advances in many candidate countries, and with national governments sometimes making use of their veto powers for dubious reasons more related to electoralist interests at home than actual concerns about accession. This has jeopardised the prospects for enlargement in the near future and, in some countries, has even shelved the odds of EU

accession for the upcoming decades, which in turn will result in diminished opportunities for the youth in those countries due to the exclusion from EU programmes and regulatory frameworks.

Meanwhile, the EU is forced to step up as a leading global force for democracy and the rule of law. With the cut of USAID to a lot of the accession countries, the US has effectively left civil society - with a particularly strong effect on youth organisations³ - in these countries without important financial support, making them vulnerable to falling prey to dangerous dependencies with and influence from hostile foreign powers such as China or Russia. The EU must compensate for this loss of US money, in order to strengthen and defend democracy and its institutions in the candidate countries that are aligning their values and principles with those of the Calls to action EU. This will help in the long term by stabilising democracy in these countries while bringing them closer to the EU and supporting the work of youth civil society organisations in developing their activities.

1 Rapacki, R., & Prochniak, M. (2019). EU Membership and Economic Growth: Empirical Evidence for the CEE countries. *The European Journal of Comparative Economics*, 16(1), 3–40. <https://ejce.liuc.it/18242979201901/182429792019160101.pdf>

2 EU blocks Albania and North Macedonia membership bids. (2019, October 18). BBC. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50100201>

3 Boamong, M., & Hallberg Ady, K. (2025, April 16). What USAID cuts mean for youth development—And what the world must do next. *World Economic Forum*. <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/04/usaid-youth-development-cut-health-education/>

Calls to action

Therefore, the European Youth Forum:

- Calls for national governments and institutions in candidate and prospective candidate countries for EU accession to work with youth organisations and to actively incorporate a youth perspective and youth needs into the national accession plans;
- Deplores the misuse of veto powers within the unanimity decision making in the accession process when used by some Member States as a coercive mechanism to hamper EU enlargement as a way of pursuing their political goals and improve standing with parts of their electorates;
- Maintains that a committed monitoring process of, and adherence to EU values and respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of current EU Member States is an essential starting point for any state wishing to engage in an accession process;
- Requests from the European Commission an increase in resources to support accession countries in accelerating their reforms towards fulfilment of membership criteria, with a special focus on those pertaining to the rule of law, human rights, the environment, and socioeconomic standards;
- Advocates for embracing innovative approaches to EU enlargement such as a gradual accession by policy areas as a way to facilitate the accession of Western Balkan and Eastern Partnership states into the Union as soon as they fulfil accession criteria in said areas;
- Invites the European Institutions to work towards phasing out legislative opt-outs, both for acceding Member States and the existing ones for current Member States, in order to advance towards greater equality among the peoples and states of our continent;
- Calls for the EU to fill in the substantial financial vacuum, left by the cut of USAID funds, through an increase of their financial support to the accession countries that actively aim at aligning with the principles and values of the EU. Special attention should be given to the youth sector and to programmes supporting democracy, equality, and the rule of law;
- Demands that the Member States of the EU and the European Institutions engage on a treaty reform process that follows-up on the conclusions of the Conference on the Future of Europe and brings upon a renewed EU that is capable of handling an enlarged membership and with a gradual elimination of unanimity from ordinary decision-making on domestic EU policies with a transition towards Qualified Majority Voting;
- Invites the European Commission and Member States of the EU to include young people from accession countries in the EU Youth Dialogue process to include the perspectives of young people from candidate countries on an equal footing to the young people from current EU Member States;
- Asks the European Commission to strengthen its support for the youth sector and youth-led platforms in candidate countries in order to establish and maintain their autonomy, as well as to promote democratic values and as a way to build a stronger civil society that is ready for the challenges and opportunities of EU membership.



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