

POLITICAL PARTIES IN THE EU AND THE CHALLENGES OF ENLARGEMENT

COUNTRY ANALYSIS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study provides an overview of how political parties across the EU view enlargement, revealing a landscape shaped by an interplay of geopolitical pressures, perception of national interests, and institutional concerns. Although enlargement is not a priority in any of the 27 member states, there is a general consensus among mainstream parties that Ukraine's accession is a geopolitical necessity for European security, and a defence mechanism to counter Russian imperialism and Chinese influence.

However, there are different sensitivities according to the geopolitical positions of different countries. On one hand, Baltic and Nordic countries prioritise Ukraine's integration (due to their proximity to Russia, and security concerns). On the other hand, countries with historical, cultural, and economic ties to the Western Balkans advocate for their integration, expressing concern about those countries being left behind.

The study confirms that all three right-wing families in the European Parliament are divided in their stances towards Russia, as each group has a component that shows clear pro-Kremlin leaning. Across the political spectrum in the 27 member states, there are elements of resistance to enlargement due to fear of mass migration, economic burdens, agricultural competition, threats to national sovereignty, and cultural identity. Nevertheless, such concerns are generally overcome once the idea of a merit-based approach is reaffirmed. Mainstream political parties across the continent, from the centre-left to the centre-right, emphasise that candidate countries must fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria (democratic governance, economic readiness, and implementation of the *acquis communautaire*) before they join the EU.

The study highlights a key issue affecting EU enlargement: how a larger EU will function. Pro-European and progressive parties tend to argue that the EU must reform its internal decision-making (for example, by replacing unanimity with qualified majority voting, or QMV) to prevent gridlock in an expanded Union. Opposition comes from a few smaller member states and nationalist parties who view the veto power as an essential mechanism for protecting their national interests and sovereignty.

INTRODUCTION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of political parties' positions on EU enlargement across the 27 EU member states. The study builds upon the preliminary findings of a previous policy brief, "Political parties in the EU and the challenges of EU enlargement", published in February 2025 by the *Foundation for European Progressive Studies* (FEPS) in collaboration with the *Karl-Renner-Institut* and *CeSPI*. While the initial brief examined the political landscapes of 13 EU member states, this expanded research encompasses all 27 member states. It specifically concerns the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, revealing complex landscapes where geopolitical issues differently interact with, among other things, domestic socioeconomic ones.

The study adopts a qualitative research framework centered on semi-structured expert interviews and a desk review (specifically, analysis of official political party programmes, and secondary literature). In particular, primary data was gathered in 2025 through in-depth interviews conducted across the 27 member states. The respondents included national experts, policy analysts, and some political representatives, including Members of the European Parliament. 29 interviews were carried out in the current phase to complete and update the previous analysis for the remaining member states.

The rationale for this research is to equip progressive forces and policymakers with a detailed understanding of the cultural, economic, and security-based arguments driving the enlargement debate in each member state. This research identifies the specific domestic pressures shaping the debate, ranging from rule of law concerns to geopolitical security implications.

The findings of this study are additionally subject to certain constraints. Direct primary data from all political parties was not always accessible, as many organisations lack detailed strategic plans or official position papers regarding enlargement. Secondly, the rapidly evolving geopolitical and domestic landscape in the member state means this document serves as a snapshot of current political positions rather than a permanent forecast.

This document offers 27 synthetic country analyses of the main national political parties' positions on EU enlargement. A cross-country analysis examining the different aspects is available in a separate research output. This separate analysis has been conducted on party positions through the following thematic lenses: ideological orientations, geopolitical and security issues, historical and regional perspectives, labour market implications, migration concerns, and EU institutional reforms.

AUSTRIA

While public opinion in Austria shows little support for the enlargement process, so far the country's traditional mainstream parties – the Social Democratic Party (Sozialdemokratische Partei Österreichs, SPÖ – S&D) and the Austrian People's Party (Österreichische Volkspartei, ÖVP – EPP) – have actively supported the Western Balkans' integration process.¹ Although it was not the main focus of their political campaigns, radical right parties like the Freedom Party of Austria (Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs, FPÖ – PfE) positioned themselves as ambivalent or even openly hostile toward EU enlargement, thus capitalising on popular scepticism.²

In the 2024 Austrian legislative election, the FPÖ's support surged from 16% to 29.2%,³ securing it first place and marking its best result ever. In March 2025, a centrist "grand coalition plus liberals" government (with conservative ÖVP, social-democratic SPÖ, and liberal NEOS) took office, excluding the FPÖ. (The FPÖ party's foreign policy has changed overtime: in the 1960s, it was federalist when the majority of Austrians preferred to remain equidistant from the two blocs. In the 1990s, when Austria negotiated its EU accession, the FPÖ started criticising EU bureaucracy and the threat it posed to national identity.)

The party is generally not favourable to the EU and its enlargement. Instead, FPÖ shows support for ethno-nationalists such as Milorad Dodik, former president of the Republika Srpska of Bosnia Herzegovina (BiH). It aligns with Serbia in its political conflict with Kosovo, which contradicts the Austrian traditional acknowledging Pristina's independence. Furthermore, the FPÖ has taken a pro-Russia stance, opposing EU sanctions imposed on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine. There were allegations

of financial support from Russian oligarchs, and recent scandals have involved party representatives suspected of enabling Russian espionage in the country.⁴

The other far-right party, the Team HC Strache-Alliance for Austria (Team HC Strache -Allianz für Österreich, THC – not affiliated with any European party), a far-right fringe group, is also sceptical of the EU and its enlargement to the Western Balkans and Ukraine, and firmly opposes the idea of financing a collective EU debt to support Ukraine.

The ÖVP has traditionally endorsed enlargement and has shown explicit support for Austrian business interests in the region, where Austrian banks, insurance companies, and firms have a significant presence. Under Sebastian Kurz's leadership, the ÖVP moved to the right, openly supporting local autocrats such as Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić as a result of its leader's strong personal relationship with Vučić. Since the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, some party leaders have emphasised the need for quicker and more inclusive enlargement to countries of the Western Balkans, fearing that they might be left behind.⁵

Among the Austrian progressive parties, the Greens are not hostile to enlargement but have limited interest in foreign policy. Their main concerns, as far as the Balkans are concerned, are migrants' rights on the Balkan route as well as the protection of democracy and the rule of law.

The SPÖ has a favourable position on Western Balkans' enlargement due to bilateral and regional relationships and influences, proximity to the region, and the business interests of Austrian companies. This fosters a positive narrative around enlargement, differentiating the Western Balkans from other candidate countries. For the SPÖ, EU accession of Western Balkans countries is a pathway to long-

term regional stability. On the contrary, less support exists for the immediate accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

A significant diaspora from the Western Balkans lives in Austria, where the migration impact due to the enlargement is not perceived as a problem. The SPÖ recognises that migration from the Western Balkans has been taking place for decades and those migrants have been integrated. More hesitancy is present in the case of migrant flows from Ukraine or Moldova. The Social Democrats see the need for reform and a faster decision-making process in the EU to prepare for enlargement, but at the same time, the party is cautious about ending unanimity in common foreign and security policy.

Finally, the New Austria and Liberal Forum (Das Neue Österreich und Liberales Forum, NEOS – Renew Europe) advocates for the United States of Europe. It is openly in favour of the enlargement process but underlines the need for full respect of the rule of law and democracy in candidate countries. NEOS would not support any country ruled by autocratic leaders joining the EU for fear that the anti-liberal front in the EU would grow stronger.

BELGIUM

The specificity of party politics in Belgium lies in the fact that the two major national communities have different dynamics and are influenced by their neighbouring countries: the Flemish discuss the issue of enlargement along similar lines as their counterparts in the Netherlands, while the French-speaking population is influenced by the debate in France.

The Christian Democratic and Flemish party (Christen-Democratisch en Vlaams, CD&V – EPP) is a centre-right, socially conservative party inside the European People's Party. It supports the enlargement ambitions of countries like Ukraine and other candidates. However, it backs accession only if all criteria for EU membership are respected. It believes that in order to enlarge, the EU must also work on reforming its internal structure.⁶

The Belgian liberal and centrist parties that are members of Renew Europe – such as the Reformist Movement (Mouvement Réformateur, MR)⁷ in Wallonie, the Different party (Anders – formerly known as Open Flemish Liberals and Democrats, VLD)⁸ and The Committed party (Les Engagés)⁹ in Wallonie and Brussels are generally pro-EU and pro-enlargement, but prioritise the reform of the EU.¹⁰

The MR and VLD are conservative liberal parties in favour of free markets, while Les Engagés are progressive liberals.

The New Flemish Alliance (Nieuwe Vlaamse Alianse, N-VA – ECR) is a right-wing Flemish conservative party. While historically favourable to a strong Flanders in a strong Europe, it is now critical of treaty change.¹¹ It can be inferred that they are neither strong supporters of enlargement nor against it in principle.¹²

Both Écolo (Écologistes Confédérés pour l'organisation de luttes originales, Ecolo – Greens/EFA)¹³ and Green (Groen, – Greens/EFA)¹⁴ are parties in favour of enlargement, although they do not prioritise it as a core campaign theme; rather, they emphasise strict accession criteria and institutional reforms to ensure an enlarged EU functions effectively as the rest of the European Greens.¹⁵ The Workers' Party of Belgium (Parti du travail de Belgique / Partij van de Arbeid van België, PVDA/PTB – The Left, GUE/NGL) is a party of the radical left. It questions the enlargement policy for its potential negative consequences for workers and is particularly sceptical about Ukraine entering the EU.¹⁶ Marc Botenga, a PTB political representative, declared to *Le Soir*, a prominent francophone newspaper, that Ukraine in the EU is neither realistic nor desirable.¹⁷

Flemish Interest (Vlaams Belang, VB – PflE) is a Flemish nationalist party which is strongly anti-immigrant and stands for an independent Flanders. It opposes what it calls the “enlargement drive of the EU”, and EU enlargement in general. It strongly opposes the idea of Turkey's accession. It is very critical of what it calls EU bureaucracy and interference in areas where national sovereignty should prevail. The party also believes that the territory of the EU should not exceed European borders. It identifies itself as a Eurorealistic party. The official party webpage states: “The EU should not be taken for granted. The European Union can only have enough support if it manages to make the right choices – and dares to do so”.¹⁸

The political agenda of the Flemish socialist party Forward (Vooruit – S&D) is largely domestically focused, and European topics (including enlargement) gain visibility mainly through MEPs or international initiatives. Vooruit, and the broader debate in Belgium, considers enlargement mainly as it pertains to Ukraine. In fact, due to the war, Ukraine

has triggered more engagement (and more debate on enlargement) that the Western Balkans has attracted, despite the presence of some diaspora communities (from Serbia, Kosovo and Albania). These diaspora groups are less politically active compared to Ukrainian citizens that have become more vocal since the war. Moldova is partly included in the enlargement debate, while Georgia is not. Among the arguments in favour of enlargement are that it will address geopolitical influences and security risks.

Vooruit is generally favourable towards enlargement, prioritising internal EU reforms (such as removing unanimity in decision-making) and reforms of candidate countries (with regards to rule of law, democracy, and so on) as prerequisites for accession. Nevertheless, there is a concern that reforming the treaties under the current political climate – that is to say, with the rise of the extreme right – could lead to anti-European outcomes.

BULGARIA

The major political parties in Bulgaria are generally in favour of enlargement, even though support for Eurosceptic political forces has grown in recent years. The emergence of more centrist parties has created some diversification, but the lack of a clear dividing line between the right and left wings makes for a chaotic political environment. The difficulty in forming a stable government – Bulgaria has held seven general elections in three years – generates broader uncertainty regarding EU alignment.

Despite being a full EU member since 2007, Bulgaria has remained partially involved in the integration process, as its access to the Schengen area was completed only in 2025 and the adoption of the euro arrived in January 2026. This issue continues to influence its approach and sensitivity to the integration of other candidate countries.

Regarding the nuances in the position of political parties on the enlargement process, support for Albania's entry is broad within the Bulgarian political spectrum. At the same time, a significant portion of this spectrum – especially the pro-Russian nationalist movements – shows a rigid attitude towards North Macedonia, which is asked to recognise the Bulgarian ethnic minority in its constitution as a condition for starting EU accession negotiations.

The pro-Russian and anti-EU stance of Revival (Vazrazhdane, V – ESN) has resonated with voters who feel disillusioned by the EU's influence on Bulgarian affairs. Its consistent electoral performance points to significant support for Eurosceptic views within Bulgaria.¹⁹

The largest coalition party in the country, the centre-right Citizens for European Development of

Bulgaria-Union of Democratic Forces (Grazhdani za evropeysko razvitie na Bulgaria-Sayuz na demokratichnite sili, GERB-SDS – EPP), created with German patronage, presents itself as pro-EU and pro-Western. However, GERB does not hesitate to adopt more nationalist positions if it deems it politically useful to do so, especially given the constant electoral campaigning in the country.

The liberal coalition of We Continue the Change-Democratic Bulgaria (Prodälzhavame promyanata-Demokratichna Bălgariya, PP-DB – split between EPP and Renew Europe), which entered the Bulgarian political scene in 2023 with the goal of marginalising GERB and its historic leader Boyko Borisov, was initially successful. However, it suffered significant losses at a later stage and failed to create a credible and stable alternative. As a consequence, the decline of public confidence in pro-European parties raises questions about future support for the EU and reform initiatives in Bulgaria.

The Movement for Rights and Freedom Party (Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi, DPS – Renew Europe²⁰) was established as an ethnic Turkish minority party. Although it supports EU enlargement, the complex interplay of internal and external political influences led the party to split into two formations before the October 2024 elections: DPS-A New Beginning (Dvizhenie za prava i svobodi-Novo nachalo, DPS-NN – Non-Inscrits) and the Alliance for Rights and Freedoms (Alians za prava i svobodi, APS – Renew Europe).

The Bulgarian Socialist Party (Bălgarska sotsialisticheska partiya, BSP – S&D) was part of the coalition government²¹ with GERB and the populist party There Is Such a People (Ima takav narod, ITN – ECR) that lost office in December 2025 (early elections are expected in April). The Bulgarian Socialist Party has a generally favourable position on EU enlargement, as stated in its

2024 European election platform. It affirmed that enlargement has historically brought democracy, prosperity, and security. BSP supports negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as the European aspirations of Georgia, while prioritising enlargement in the Western Balkans. EU enlargement is seen as an investment in security, stability, and prosperity for the continent and can help overcome destabilisation in the Balkans, fostering a common foreign policy among Balkan countries. According to BSP, candidate members must meet all criteria and enlargement should be accompanied by institutional reforms within the EU to ensure efficiency, democratic transparency and relevance to citizens. Having said that, regarding North Macedonia, the BSP has a position similar to that of other parties in the parliamentary spectrum, whereby the Bulgarian minority in North Macedonia must be recognised in order for the negotiation process to be unblocked.

The Bulgarian public fears that the country is viewed as a kind of “Russian Trojan horse” within the EU, similar to Hungary. After Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Bulgaria took a markedly anti-Kremlin choice. Meanwhile, if Serbia progresses in the accession process, old Bulgarian claims (territories, minorities) toward Serbia may emerge at the top of the bilateral conflict with North Macedonia.

Finally, future membership for Turkey is widely seen as an unlikely prospect in Bulgaria and is strongly resisted by local nationalist parties.

CROATIA

The mainstream Croatian parties show their support for enlargement in their platforms but all specify the need for candidate countries to fully respect the Copenhagen criteria. The current Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ – EPP)-led government under Prime Minister Andrej Plenković regularly underscores the strategic importance of enlargement, particularly for the Western Balkans and Bosnia and Herzegovina, within a merit-based framework.²²

The extreme right-wing Croatian parties that are Eurosceptic and have a sovereignist view of the EU, such as Homeland Movement (Domovinski pokret, DP – ECR) and the Croatian Party of Rights (Hrvatska Stranka Prava, HSP – not affiliated with any European party), which did not elect any MEPs, are cautiously in favour of enlargement. The Homeland Movement,²³ a government’s partner, is however a national-conservative party that prioritises Croatian interests. It also expresses concerns about the potential economic and social costs of further EU enlargement, because supporting financially weaker countries would require significant EU financial assistance.²⁴

The opposition Social Democratic Party of Croatia (Socijaldemokratska partija Hrvatske, SDP – S&D) holds a generally favourable position on EU enlargement. However, this stance is not highly visible in the party’s political agenda nor extensively articulated in formal documents. Enlargement is not a major political issue in Croatia. While ideological and geopolitical factors align the party with pro-enlargement positions, economic and public opinion dynamics play a relatively minor role. The SDP views the accession of Montenegro, North Macedonia and Albania favourably. Bosnia and Herzegovina holds a special place due to its Croatian

community. Additionally, President Zoran Milanović (former leader of the Social Democratic Party) has historically been an advocate for Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU membership. As for relations with Serbia, SDP is generally more favourable towards Serbia's accession than other political factions in Croatia. Its support for Ukraine's accession is driven by the current war. Georgia, Moldova, and Turkey receive little attention even among political elites (despite the existing interest and engagement of some MPs and SDP members).

It is to be noted that Croatia has various open dossiers with all its neighbouring countries on the issue of defining state borders: with Serbia, the border along the Danube is not well defined; with Bosnia and Herzegovina, the border issue near Neum is similarly unresolved; and with Montenegro, the maritime border is yet to be agreed upon.

Just as Slovenia caused difficulties for Croatia during the long negotiations over border issues, so Croatia is expected to do so with the countries of the Western Balkans. Other pending issues include missing persons from the wars of the 1990s, war criminals who have not been tried, and the issue of the Croatian minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including their demand for electoral law reforms.

CYPRUS

Cyprus's position on EU enlargement reflects a pragmatic and nationally conditioned form of pro-Europeanism, shaped by its geopolitical vulnerability and the continuing division of the island. While most political forces broadly support further enlargement, their approaches are filtered through Cyprus's particular security concerns – chiefly its complex relationship with Turkey and the enduring legacy of the 1974 occupation. Overall, Cypriot political parties rarely engage in debate on EU enlargement. The issue tends to reflect their general attitude towards the European Union rather than constituting a clear line of political division.

Enlargement is endorsed when it strengthens Europe's cohesion, democracy, and security, but resisted when it risks undermining the island's sovereignty, in particular in relation to Turkey. For Cypriot policymakers, enlargement can reinforce alliances and preserve diplomatic leverage in an unstable regional environment. Despite ideological differences, Cypriot parties converge on a generally supportive yet cautious attitude towards enlargement, viewing it primarily through the prism of national security.

The prospective accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkan states is regarded positively, though interpreted in light of Cyprus's own experience of division and territorial occupation.

Institutionally, Cyprus's political parties are wary of proposed reforms such as replacing unanimity with qualified majority voting, fearing the loss of its veto power in decisions relating to Turkey. Enlargement debates therefore intertwine with broader questions of sovereignty and the influence of smaller member states within the Union. Regional cooperation frameworks such as the Med5 and Med7 enjoy wide

cross-party support, as they are viewed as effective platforms for amplifying the voices of southern and small EU states within the policymaking process.

Under President Nikos Christodoulides, the current minority government – composed of centrist and social-democratic parties – maintains a measured pro-enlargement approach. The Democratic Party (Dimokratikó Kómma, DIKO – S&D) supports enlargement grounded in the Copenhagen criteria and the rule of law, regarding it as a mechanism for promoting regional stability and enhancing the EU’s credibility. Nonetheless, it remains cautious of developments that could compromise Cyprus’s national interests. DIKO supports the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans. EDEK Socialist Party (EDEK Sosialistiko Komma – S&D) holds a similar view, backing enlargement that strengthens democracy, social cohesion, and the rule of law, and remaining supportive of the European perspectives of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans. Democratic Alignment (Dimokratiki Parataxi, DiPA – Renew Europe) promotes enlargement as part of a liberal and reformist vision for the EU. It advocates market modernisation, democratic reform, and institutional transparency in candidate countries, endorsing the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans on a merit-based, conditional basis.

The centre-right Democratic Rally (Dimokratikós Sinagermós, DISY – EPP), the main opposition party and the most explicitly pro-European force in Cyprus, stands as the strongest advocate of enlargement as both a geopolitical and economic imperative. DISY argues that EU expansion promotes stability in the Eastern Mediterranean, consolidates democratic governance, and enhances the Union’s collective security. It supports the integration of the Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova, considering their accession vital for Europe’s resilience and credibility. However, DISY insists on full compliance with EU

norms, emphasising that enlargement represents a commitment to a stronger and more cohesive Europe – one founded on conditionality, democratic values, and respect for the rule of law.

On the left, the Progressive Party of Working People (Anorthotikó Kómma Ergazómenou Laoú, AKEL – The Left-GUE/NGL) has evolved from its early Euroscepticism to a more nuanced position of conditional engagement. The party supports enlargement that advances peace, social justice, and international legality but remains critical of neoliberal economic approaches and the growing militarisation of EU policy. AKEL insists that candidate countries fully adopt the EU acquis and respect human and labour rights. While the party is now regarded as neutral-to-positive towards the EU, it has never explicitly endorsed the policy of enlargement. The Movement of Ecologists-Citizens’ Cooperation (Kínima Oikológon-Synergasía Politón, KOSP – European Green Party), also endorses candidate countries, linking its support to robust commitments on environmental protection, sustainability, and democratic governance.

By contrast, the far-right National Popular Front (Ethniko Laiko Metopo, ELAM – ECR), Cyprus’s principal Eurosceptic party, opposes enlargement towards European states with significant Muslim populations, such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania. It portrays enlargement as a threat to national identity and sovereignty, while nonetheless acknowledging the EU’s strategic value as a political counterweight to Turkey. ELAM’s discourse combines nationalist and anti-immigration themes with selective pragmatism in recognising the EU’s role in Cyprus’s security architecture.

CZECH REPUBLIC

Consensus doesn't necessarily mean enthusiasm. Although Czech mainstream political parties generally agree on the need to enlarge the European Union, beneath the surface attitudes are more nuanced, and there is a gap of sorts between declarations and active measures. Overall, openness to enlargement meets caution and an inclination towards a gradual approach.

The topic isn't especially salient for either the political elite or the population: it is addressed in public only sporadically and it is not at the centre of parties' political programmes or manifestos. This reflects aspects of the country's post-independence journey.

After the fall of communism the consensus for a reorientation of the country to the EU, and to the west more generally, went unchallenged, save for the opposition of the reformed Communist Party of Bohemia and Moravia (Komunistická strana Čech a Moravy, KSČM – non-affiliated in the European Parliament²⁵). However, since the 2008 economic and political crisis, Euroscepticism has been gaining ground.

According to the latest Eubarometer, 54% of Czech citizens oppose European enlargement (which represents the highest percentage in the continent along with Germany), while a small majority (52%) tend not to trust European institutions.²⁶ For some, the Czech Republic's approach to EU accession has been a "fine balancing act"²⁷ between, on the one hand, fully restoring the independence and identity of the country, and on the other, gaining membership without wholeheartedly embracing the prospect of ceding part of its sovereignty to the EU. Perhaps anecdotally, this could be exemplified by the fact that the second president of the country

after independence, Václav Klaus - founder in 1991 and historical leader of the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská demokratická strana, – ODS –, ECR) – as a pPrime mMinister formally applied for European membership in 1996, later admitted to voting against accession in the 2003 European referendum.

No matter how many doubts were present among the population or the élites, the entry of Czech Republic into the EU was considered a pivotal step. A reference used to instil a sense of history at the time of its entry into the EU was that of the first President Tomáš Masaryk, who spoke of Czechoslovakia's democratic autonomy as a "European duty" – that is, that autonomy was something that could only have been realised in harmony with Europe.

An ambiguity therefore characterises the political landscape. Until September 2025 the country was ruled by a coalition formed by the Mayors and Independents (Starostové a nezávislí, STAN – EPP), The Pirates (Piráti – Greens/EFA, which left the government in 2024) and the SPOLU alliance, including the Civic Democratic Party (Občanská Demokratická Strana, ODS – ECR), the Christian and Democratic Union-Czechoslovak People's Party (Křesťanská a demokratická unie-Československá strana lidová, KDU-ČSL – EPP) and Tradition Responsibility Prosperity (Tradice Odpovědnost Prosperita, TOP09 – EPP), led by ODS leader Peter Fiala. The coalition represents possibly the most pro-European political force. The minister for European affairs at the time, Martin Dvořák of STAN party, explicitly stated that the Czech Republic is open to new waves of European enlargement and the gradual acceptance of new countries. According to him, it is important that each candidate "fulfills the necessary criteria and accepts the values of the European Union".²⁸ In this regard, there is an effort to balance two partially conflicting understandings of the enlargement process: on the one hand, Czech political elites generally view it as a mean to improve

the stability and security of the continent, especially in the face of Russian military aggression in Ukraine; on the other, they emphasise the need for candidate countries to go through all the required reforms before accession, given concerns that institutional flaws and deficits would be harder to correct after integration.

In January 2025 the Pirates MEP Markéta Gregorová said: “Although the desire and urgency to support Ukraine and Moldova in particular is understandable, it is more pragmatic and advantageous at this time to support the Western Balkans states first”.²⁹ In other words, in the current context of war and instability in countries such as Ukraine and Moldova, accelerating their accession to the EU without firmly established conditions for institutional reform may entail significant risks. At the same time, geopolitical orientation can generate scepticism towards those countries whose current governments are considered Russia-leaning, such as Serbia or Georgia. But the general feeling among parties’ representatives is that enlargement will not take place soon, due to the difficulties in changing European decision-making mechanisms, which contributes to the topic not being relevant in political debates.

However, recent elections could shift this approach towards a more Eurosceptical and anti-enlargement approach, given the victory of the right-wing populist movement Yes 2011 (Akce Nespokojených Občanů 2011, ANO 2011 – PfE), led by former prime minister and oligarch Andrej Babiš, and the participation in government of the far-right Freedom and Direct Democracy party (Svoboda a přímá demokracie, SPD – ESN) and the new party Motorists for Themselves (Motoristé sobě, AUTO – PfE). SPD, for instance, advocates exiting the EU and staunchly criticises support for Ukraine, whose government the SPD leader has called a circle of “Ukrainian thieves around the Zelensky junta”,³⁰ prompting

a diplomatic dispute. Once ANO 2011 entered the government, it had to drop its most radical postures, and in its campaign, the party mainly focused on domestic and economic issues. At the same time, the coalition programme notes that “the European Union has its limitations”, indicating that the party is likely to retain elements of its Euroscepticism while in power. It is noteworthy that Babiš used to own one of the country’s largest companies active in the agricultural sector. If enlargement proceeded (especially with Ukraine), this fact could influence his party’s approach to European agricultural policies.

DENMARK

Denmark’s stance on EU enlargement has evolved significantly in recent years, particularly following Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Once regarded as a cautious EU member, Denmark has gradually moved toward a more proactive and engaged role in enlargement policy, framing it not only as a geopolitical necessity but also as a moral and strategic responsibility. The 2022 referendum abolishing Denmark’s EU defence opt-out accelerated this shift, signalling a broader willingness to assume responsibility for Europe’s collective security. In this new context, enlargement – especially towards Ukraine – has emerged as a defining issue in Danish politics, even as ideological traditions, national interests, and security considerations continue to shape the precise contours of party positions.

Denmark generally supports reforms to EU decision-making aimed at enhancing efficiency, resilience, and responsiveness, recognising that the unanimity rule can often lead to institutional gridlock, particularly in foreign, security, and enlargement-related policy. Within political debate, there is growing consensus among political parties that the introduction of qualified majority voting (QMV) in selected areas would enable faster and more coordinated EU action, strengthen the Union’s strategic capacity,

and ensure that enlargement processes are not stalled by individual member states. This reflects a broader recognition that EU enlargement cannot succeed in isolation and must be accompanied by internal reforms to make the Union more adaptable, coherent, and capable of safeguarding democracy and the rule of law across an expanding membership.

The Social Democrats (Socialdemokratiet, S – S&D), Denmark's largest party and the core of the government led by Mette Frederiksen before the elections on 24 March 2026, frame enlargement as both a security imperative and a test of democratic credibility. They support accession negotiations with Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans, primarily for security reasons, while emphasising that Copenhagen criteria must be rigorously enforced and that the Union must adapt its decision-making processes to accommodate new members.

Security considerations and a “responsible” approach similarly characterise Denmark's two liberal coalition partners. Left, Denmark's Liberal Party (Venstre, Danmarks Liberale Parti, V – Renew Europe) is strongly pro-enlargement, highlighting the strategic and economic benefits of stabilising the EU's eastern neighbourhood. The Moderates (Moderaterne, M – Renew Europe) frame enlargement within a broader vision of institutional reform and explicitly back Ukraine's accession.

The opposition is fragmented into several parties, each with different visions regarding enlargement. The centre-right Conservative People's Party (Det Konservative Folkeparti, DKF – EPP) adopts a selective pro-enlargement stance. It supports the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans as aligned with Denmark's and the EU's long-term security interests. Likewise, Liberal Alliance, which joined the EPP only in the European Parliament, supports closer ties with Ukraine but stresses economic readiness and market compatibility. The

Danish Social Liberal Party (Radikale Venstre, RV – Renew Europe), on the liberal centre-left, also backs the accession of Ukraine and other candidates, linking deeper enforcement of Copenhagen criteria with the need for EU institutional adaptation.

The Green Left (Socialistisk Folkeparti, SF – Greens/EFA) views enlargement as a long-term process anchored in democracy and social justice. It supports offering a “credible membership perspective” to both the Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership countries, provided reforms are implemented in areas such as anti-corruption, environmental protection, and labour rights. The other Green party, The Alternative (Alternativet, Å – not affiliated to any European party) similarly favours enlargement insofar as it strengthens cooperation on climate action and human rights, envisioning a more democratic, transparent, and environmentally oriented EU before welcoming new members. On the far left, the Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten-De Rød-Grønne, EL – The Left-GUE/NGL) remains critical of the current enlargement model, viewing it as overly market-driven and insufficiently democratic. While it does not oppose future accessions in principle, the party insists that the EU must first reform itself to ensure social justice and transparency.

The Denmark Democrats (Danmarksdemokraterne, DD – ECR) oppose broad enlargement, prioritising the protection of Danish borders and limiting EU competencies. The Danish People's Party (Dansk Folkeparti, DF – PöE) takes a similarly restrictive approach, explicitly rejecting the accession of candidates such as Ukraine and Moldova on the grounds of national sovereignty and concerns about overburdening EU institutions.

ESTONIA

While having a strong tradition of supporting European integration both at the level of political parties and public opinion, today Estonia appears caught between short-term decisions and long-term vision. As is common among the three Baltic countries, Estonian political parties generally view European enlargement as a positive step given the fact that, since 2004, when the country joined the EU, national GDP grew almost fourfold (from €9.8 billion to €36 billion in 2022). Moreover, besides economic improvement, security benefits are one of the most appreciated features of being integrated in European and NATO structures. Indeed, as the editor-in-chief of *Diplomatiaa*, Merili Arjakas, puts it, “Estonia treats enlargement as a form of geopolitics”.³¹ Or, in the words of former Estonian prime minister and high representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kaja Kallas, from the Estonian Reform Party (Eesti Reformierakond, RE – Renew Europe): “Estonia knows from its own experience that joining the EU is a boost to both prosperity and stability, which in turn strengthens the security of Europe as a whole”.³²

Although current political debates appear more focused on domestic issues and short-term problems such as tax policies, rising prices, inflation, and educational reform, in the context of the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine, enhancing security and strengthening European cooperation represents a major concern among nearly all Estonian parties (and it has been so since the 2007 cyberattacks that targeted the country). Divisions and differences on the issue between parties are therefore very blurred: the majority of political parties consider enlargement mainly as it relates to Ukraine, and most all of them agree that its integration is a positive step for improving Estonian security and continental security as a whole.

At the same time, European enlargement is not considered a near-term prospect, and it therefore tends to fall outside current political debates. Moreover, while the consensus on the issue is high, most Estonian parties emphasise that accession of new members must take place in accordance with all the agreed criteria (adopting and implementing all the *acquis communautaire*) and there is widespread concern about the risk of accepting new countries that have not accomplished all the necessary steps and reforms. Many stress the importance of cooperating with candidate countries in the field of cybersecurity, where Estonia has particular expertise, as a way to help partners to achieve the conditions to join the EU (a case in point is the joint EU-Estonia cybersecurity project, which launched in Moldova in 2025).

The 2023 parliamentary elections largely confirmed these general orientations. The Estonian Reform Party secured a relative majority and then proceeded to form a ruling coalition with Estonia 200 (Eesti 200, E200 – EPP) and the Social Democratic Party (Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond, SDE – S&D). These forces are considered to be the most in favour of further enlargement, particularly in the case of Ukraine. While they don't support amending the European treaties, they are nevertheless more open than the opposition parties to exploring the possibilities for internal reforms under the existing treaties, and they would be more likely to support replacing unanimity with QMV than their right-wing counterpart.

Among the forces that entered the Parliament, those that seem to be the most sceptical about European enlargement – and, to a certain extent, about European integration as a whole – are the Conservative People's Party of Estonia (Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond, EKRE – PfE) and the Estonian Center Party (Eesti Keskerakond, EK – ECR). While the former tends to have strongly

populist and far-right positions, and tends to perceive EU legal provisions and initiatives as interferences in domestic affairs (and would certainly be sceptical about replacing unanimity with QMV, for instance), the latter usually doesn't articulate clear opinions about foreign policy, given the fact that its traditional constituency is formed by the Russian-speaking population, which tends to have a different orientation than the rest of the country when it comes to topics related to Russia and Ukraine (and therefore, potentially, to European integration of Ukraine).

The 2024 European Parliament elections saw the rise of the center-right party Fatherland (Isamaa, I – EPP), which won the majority of the votes. According to declarations by some of its members, the party is in favour of speeding up Ukraine's European integration (given the exceptional conditions created by the Russian invasion) while maintaining that other candidate countries should complete all the necessary steps and reforms. Among small parties, it is perhaps interesting to note that Estonian Greens (Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised, EER – Greens/EFA) explicitly mention in their programme the need to speed up European integration not only of Ukraine but also of Moldova and Georgia. This is coherent with their push to abolish unanimity in European institutions.

Generally speaking, however, Estonian political parties tend to articulate their opinion on European enlargement in connection with their positions on introducing QMV (the more they want to preserve veto power in order to safeguard the rights of "small nations", the more they are sceptical about accepting new members). Overall, there is widespread concern about corruption in candidate countries (such as Moldova) and about the fact that some countries could become "Russian Trojan horses" within the EU because of the geopolitical orientation of their governments (which could be the case for Georgia or Serbia, for example).

FINLAND

Finland's position on EU enlargement reflects its commitment to a rules-based international order, European solidarity, and pragmatic security thinking. As a member state on the EU's external border, Finland has long regarded European integration as both a shield and a framework for stability. This sense of strategic realism underpins its approach to enlargement: it welcomes the accession of new members that consolidate democracy and European stability but rejects any dilution of standards or shortcuts that could weaken the EU's foundations. In Finnish political culture, this principle of merit-based enlargement enjoys near universal consensus across the political spectrum. The debate therefore focuses less on whether enlargement should happen and more on how it can be managed without undermining EU cohesion or functionality.

Since 2022, Finland's outlook has been profoundly shaped by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The current right-wing governing coalition, led by Prime Minister Petteri Orpo, has continued the policy of the previous left-wing government under Sanna Marin – which made support for Ukraine's reconstruction and European path a cornerstone of Finland's EU policy – by committing to support Kyiv through various financing instruments, and to back its EU membership, provided that all accession criteria are met and that this does not destabilise existing policy frameworks or compromise EU solidarity. The government also emphasises the need to strengthen the EU's decision-making capacity, expressing openness to extending QMV in limited areas such as sanctions policy.

The National Coalition Party (Kansallinen Kokoomus, Kok – EPP) views enlargement primarily through a geopolitical lens. For Kokoomus, admitting countries such as Ukraine, Moldova, and those in the Western Balkans enhances Europe's security, but it insists

that every candidate must adhere strictly to rule of law and governance standards.

Its main coalition partner, the Finns Party (Perussuomalaiset, PS – ECR), presents the most complex position in the Finnish political arena. While acknowledging Ukraine's EU perspective as justified by security imperatives – which warrant an accelerated accession process – it emphasises the need for changes to EU agricultural policies, given the potential disruptions to EU agricultural markets and cohesion funding resulting from Ukraine's vast production capacity. This right-wing conservative party also argues that all other candidates remain economically fragile and institutionally weak, and that their rapid accession would increase financial pressures on wealthier members such as Finland.

The Christian Democrats (Suomen Kristillisdemokraatit, CD – EPP) – a smaller and less liberal party compared to Kokoomus – also bring a conservative tone to the governing alliance. The party supports enlargement that preserves unity and adheres to ethical principles but warns against excessive speed or decisions that could weaken cohesion or the influence of smaller states, in particular concerning the implications of Ukraine's accession for the Common Agricultural Policy. It advocates a controlled, phased approach to integration that safeguards northern agricultural interests and ensures that enlargement remains fair to all member states.

The Swedish People's Party (Suomen ruotsalainen kansanpuolue, RKP – Renew Europe), which represents Finland's Swedish-speaking minority, promotes a liberal and rights-based orientation, supporting enlargement as a means of reinforcing democracy, minority rights and the rule of law, while maintaining that progress must remain merit-based and gradual.

From the opposition, the Social Democratic Party (Suomen sosialidemokraattinen puolue, SDP – S&D) has consistently championed enlargement grounded in democracy, human rights and social justice. It supported the Western Balkans' European perspective long before the Ukraine war, viewing it as essential for continental stability. Since 2022, this view has been reinforced by solidarity with Ukraine, which the SDP regards as both a moral duty and a strategic necessity, supporting its EU accession – as well as that of Moldova and Georgia – albeit contingent upon their fulfilment of accession conditions.

The Centre Party (Suomen Keskusta, Kesk – Renew Europe), which is rooted in Finland's rural heartlands, describes enlargement as a strategic investment in European security and prosperity but calls for comprehensive impact assessments, particularly regarding agriculture and regional policy, and opposes reopening the EU treaties.

The Left Alliance (Vasemmistoliitto, Vas – The Left-GUE/NGL) adopts a similar position but frames it within the discourse of social justice, labour rights, democratic accountability and environmental standards. It supports Ukraine's and the Western Balkans' European paths but rejects any enlargement driven by military priorities.

The Green League (Vihreä liitto, Vihr – Greens/EFA) shares this values-based perspective, linking enlargement to sustainability, democracy and the rule of law. The Greens strongly support Ukraine's accession and advocate a credible path for the Western Balkans and Moldova, and openly support the abolition of unanimity in EU decision-making.

FRANCE

Traditionally, French centre-right parties see the 2004 enlargement as having jeopardised the deepening of the political Union. Moreover, they consider it to have economically benefited Germany at France's expense. Similarly, in the field of security, they see enlargement as having weakened France's position, as it coincided with NATO expansion. France believes it has a "responsabilité particulière" in the world order, beyond the United States' hegemony. In the Gaullist tradition, continued by the centre right, France should not advocate for a federal Union but rather take an intergovernmentalist approach.

However, the large-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia had an impact on the moderate centre and right-wing parties. President Emmanuel Macron (Renaissance – Renew Europe) saw a role for France in the new scenario where Eastern enlargement became a geopolitical priority, while insisting that it must go hand-in-hand with the reform of EU institutions. He gave a special twist to this Gaullist tradition, advocating for a deepening of the Union in an intergovernmental way, with France identifying itself as *primus inter pares*.³³ In his view, the EU could enhance France's role in the world. This line of thinking emerged as a result of the Ukrainian war. Through a geopolitical lens, Macron could identify the industrial and military benefits of France in investing in the East. However, today's positive stance on enlargement leans on an understanding that it will be subject to a referendum that allows France to halt the process at its final stages if it wishes to.

Democratic Movement (Mouvement Démocrate, MoDem) and Horizons (Renew Europe) are pro-European parties aligned with the Renaissance coalition. They are favourable to enlargement in principle (in particular for Ukraine, Montenegro

and Albania) on geopolitical grounds, with both advocating for candidate countries and internal EU reforms.³⁴

The Les Républicains party (LR – EPP) generally takes a cautious and conditional approach to enlargement, balancing its traditional pro-European stance with the protection of French sovereignty and influence.³⁵

The National Rally (Rassemblement National, RN – PFE) has not changed its hostile stance toward the policy, which is motivated by economic reasons, migration fears, and hostility toward countries with Muslim populations. RN sees the EU as a Christian-only project and its leaders use derogatory expressions to describe the countries in the Western Balkans with those populations. It believes migrants will undercut the wages of French nationals, and paints some Balkan countries as "mafia states" whose inhabitants, if they come to France, will increase crime.

RN is against extending QMV to other fields, including the intermediate steps of enlargement, as suggested by various think tanks and the so-called Group de 12, a "working group on EU institutional reforms" convened by the French and German governments.³⁶ From RN's sovereigntist perspective, retaining veto power in the EU is essential to protecting the national interest. Building on France's historical pro-Serbian stance, RN has established inter-party relations in the Western Balkans with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić and Bosnian-Serb secessionist Milorad Dodik.

On the far left, the Unbowed France (La France Insoumise – The Left-GUE/NGL), led by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, has never really defended the enlargement process. Its position is rather Eurosceptic and sees further expansion as unlikely to improve the situation.

The Ecologists - Europe Ecology The Greens (Les Écologistes Les Verts, EELV – Greens/EFA) are pro-enlargement, especially toward the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova, but emphasise strong conditionality, rule of law, rule-based governance, and human rights.

The stance of the French Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste, PS – S&D) towards EU enlargement is generally favourable – but with a conditional, low-priority endorsement, one that it does not champion actively. Its support for enlargement is particularly the case for Ukraine and the Western Balkans but not for Turkey. The issue is marginal within its political agenda and framed mostly through geopolitical and security arguments.

For the PS, support for enlargement is primarily done on the basis that it will enhance geopolitical stability and counter Russian influence. In its view, integrating the Western Balkans is a way to address geopolitical vulnerabilities and prevent Russia or other external powers from exploiting the region. Security is thus a greater concern than more values-driven concerns. The war in Ukraine has revived the debate, and the PS accepts the case for Ukraine and the Western Balkans, but this is not articulated through a strong party platform. A clear position on Georgia and Moldova is missing.

Institutionally, the PS supports reforms such as QMV and insists on linking widening with deepening, but concrete proposals are rarely developed within the party. Gradual integration is seen as an alternative acceptable option.

GERMANY

The current German government coalition – Christian Democratic Union (Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands, CDU – EPP), the Christian Social Union in Bavaria (Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern, CSU – EPP), and the Social Democratic Party of Germany (Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands, SPD – S&D) – broadly support EU enlargement to the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova. Among the opposition parties, the Greens (Bündnis 90/Die Grünen, GRÜNE – Greens/EFA) are also generally supportive of EU enlargement, especially towards the Western Balkans. In contrast, The Left Party (Die Linke, LINKE – The Left-GUE/NGL) expresses more scepticism, the Free Democratic Party (Freie Demokratische Partei, FDP – Renew Europe, which is no longer in the Bundestag, is cautious, and the Alternative for Germany (Alternative für Deutschland, AfD – ESN) is explicitly opposed.

The CDU/CSU has been largely in favour of enlargement and has committed the country to the so-called Berlin Process aimed at relaunching the Western Balkans' integration process after it stalled ten years ago. That said, CDU/CSU emphasises the importance of the Copenhagen criteria as a precondition to acceptance as a new EU member.

On the other side of the political spectrum, enlargement policy – in particular concerning Ukraine's accession – is rejected by the main opposition parties, such as AfD. The concerns are related not only to the issue of increasing immigration, but also to the financial burden it entails. Its opposition to Ukrainian accession in particular can be explained in part by its positive relations with Putin's Russia.

While AfD claims that EU accession will further drain the labour force from candidate countries and bring no benefits to them, they side with several ethnonationalist autocrats. As a matter of fact, AfD openly sides with Serbia in the political conflict with Kosovo, taking a revisionist stance by arguing against Kosovo's independence, which contrasts with Germany's traditional position on the issue. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, AfD supports the idea of creating a third entity for the Croats, with a clear stance against the Muslim population.

The Greens, now in opposition, have an approach that can be labelled as "strict but fair": they endorse the process but demand full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria. The party endorsed the relaunch of the Berlin Process, and in 2026 celebrated twelve years of engagement with the Western Balkans.

The Left in Germany believes that there is a need for more social inclusion and welfare for all EU citizens, which can be achieved through enlargement. However, it maintains that the EU should first address its internal issues before considering enlargement.³⁷

While enlargement is not at the core of public debate in Germany, it remains a policy orientation within the Social Democratic Party's European and domestic agenda. The SPD's position is shaped primarily by its ideological and political commitment to European integration. Geopolitical factors affect the SPD's position: the war in Ukraine and the growing influence of Russia in the EU's neighbouring countries make enlargement to the Western Balkans and Eastern countries more pressing. Enlargement is framed as a strategic necessity. Migration concerns are relatively marginal, with migration from the Western Balkans viewed positively in response to the labour shortage at home.

Serbia is no longer viewed as a primary part of the enlargement discussion, but rather as part of the debate concerning stability in the Western Balkans and the challenges posed by its autocratic leadership. Montenegro and Albania are seen as progressing due to their own political will and reforms.

Discussions within the party include how to balance enlargement with institutional reforms in the EU to ensure the Union's future functionality, with a particular focus on revising the unanimity voting principle. The SPD supports reforming the EU's decision-making rules – including abandoning unanimity voting in certain decisions – and considers models of phased, gradual, or conditional accession, especially for Western Balkans.

GREECE

In Greece, EU enlargement occupies a relatively low position on the domestic political agenda, but it remains a central instrument of foreign policy. It is framed less as a matter of domestic politics and more as a strategic tool to promote regional stability, protect national interests, and enhance Greece's influence within the EU, blending ideological alignment with European political families with pragmatic considerations derived from historical experience. The country has insisted on the resolution of bilateral disputes with historical and cultural dimensions as a prerequisite for backing EU accession – most notably with North Macedonia and Albania – using enlargement policy as a means of leveraging Greece's position in negotiations with neighbouring states. These experiences have shaped Greece's broader approach to enlargement, creating a policy framework that seeks to integrate neighbours while safeguarding what are considered national interests.

EU enlargement is also seen as a mechanism to counter the influence of external powers, such as Russia and China, in the Western Balkans, while support for Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia aligns with broader EU security strategies. The economic or migratory implications of enlargement receive relatively little attention in domestic political debates. At the same time, all mainstream Greek parties remain cautious about EU internal reforms that would reduce Greece's influence over enlargement decisions, resisting changes such as replacing unanimity with QMV in foreign policy and accession matters, which would dilute its ability to exercise a veto in cases directly affecting security or territorial interests.

Despite differing ideological orientations, all Greek parties recognise the geopolitical significance of enlargement, though they interpret it differently. Mainstream parties, both in government and opposition, view enlargement as a tool to stabilise the region, integrate neighbouring states into the EU framework, and enhance Greece's geopolitical leverage. Far-right and communist parties reject enlargement on ideological grounds, prioritising sovereignty, national identity, and anti-capitalist principles over strategic or economic considerations.

The ruling party New Democracy (Néa Dimokratía, ND – EPP) has historically pursued a strategy aimed at strengthening Greece's position in Europe, tracing its pro-European orientation back to Greece's inclusion in the European Economic Community. The party views enlargement as a key instrument for promoting regional stability and economic development, strongly supporting the accession of Western Balkan countries and endorsing the European aspirations of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. New Democracy's opposition to the introduction of QMV in foreign policy and enlargement matters underscores the party's prioritisation of Greece's veto power.

The Panhellenic Socialist Movement (Panellínio Sosialistikó Kínima, PASOK – S&D) similarly combines pro-European ideology with pragmatic considerations. The main opposition party supports EU enlargement in the Western Balkans, but its backing is conditioned on democratic reforms, adherence to the rule of law, and the promotion of regional stability. PASOK fully endorses the EU ambitions of Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, emphasising shared democratic values and the strategic importance of integrating these countries into the European framework.

The Coalition of the Radical Left-Progressive Alliance (Synaspismós Rizospastikís Aristerás-Proodeftikí Symmachía, Syriza The Left-GUE/NGL) also supports enlargement in principle but emphasises cooperation, peace, and European unity as central goals. The party advocates EU accession for the Western Balkans and Eastern European countries, aligning its pro-European stance with principles of alter-globalisation. Like PASOK, Syriza maintains a sceptical position on Turkey's accession, citing unresolved bilateral disputes as obstacles to support.

While mainstream Greek parties' enlargement policies are characterised by a careful calibration between pro-European ideology and pragmatic national interest, far-right and ultranationalist parties adopt sharply critical positions on EU enlargement. Greek Solution (Ellinikí Lýsi, EL – ECR), a national conservative and right-wing populist party, opposes the accession of countries such as Albania and North Macedonia – considered threats to national identity, sovereignty, and social cohesion – as well as Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, framing their EU ambitions as geopolitical manoeuvres that could destabilise the region.

Similarly, Voice of Reason (Foní Logikís, FL – PfE), another ultranationalist party affiliated with the European far-right family Patriots for Europe, rejects enlargement on the grounds of preserving national sovereignty and cultural identity, opposing both the Western Balkans’ accession and the European aspirations of Eastern European countries.

The Communist Party of Greece (Kommounistikó Kómma Elládas, KKE – European Communist Action, which sits among the Non-Inscrits in the European Parliament), by contrast, critiques EU enlargement from a Marxist-Leninist perspective, framing it as a capitalist project that undermines national sovereignty and workers’ rights, and advocates instead for socialist alternatives and regional solidarity outside the EU framework.

HUNGARY

The uninterrupted 15-year rule of Viktor Orbán in Hungary has shaped a specific relationship between the country and the EU. The Hungarian prime minister, who leads Fidesz-Hungarian Civic Union (Fidesz-Magyar Polgári Szövetség, Fidesz – PfE), represents one the staunchest critics of what he terms “the European status quo” within the continent’s political landscape. On the one hand, Hungary has used its veto power more often than any other member state (21 times out of a total 48 votes since 2011, with Poland ranking second with seven).³⁸ On the other hand, Orbán has been constantly trying to formulate and promote alternative arrangements for the Union. For instance, he recently advocated for a “multi-level” model of European integration, formed by concentric circles of member states and aspiring member states, with countries such as Ukraine and Turkey constituting a first circle, focused on the security of the continent, while at the same time raising several objections to Ukraine’s integration into the Union.³⁹ Moreover, as early as 2014, Orbán reoriented Hungary’s foreign policy in order to “open

it to the East” and forge the closest possible ties with Russia, China and Turkey.

This approach became even more problematic with the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Since then, Hungary has contested European foreign policy on many issues, including military support for Kyiv, sanctions against Moscow, and decoupling from Russian gas, while approving a nuclear plant project in cooperation with Russia.

In recent years, relations between Budapest and Kyiv have further deteriorated over the issue of Hungarian minorities in Ukraine. Since 2017 the issue has surfaced whenever disputes between the two countries occur. Orbán’s government, formed of an alliance between Fidesz and the Christian Democratic People’s Party (Kereszténydemokrata Néppárt, KDNP – PfE), is blocking Kyiv’s EU accession talks, with Orbán repeatedly stating that accepting Ukraine as a member state would mean war on European soil.

In the last two years Hungarian politics has been shaken up by the rise of the Respect and Freedom party (Tisztelet és Szabadság Párt, Tisza – EPP), which has benefited from the membership of former Fidesz member Péter Magyar. It now represents a credible opposition force in the run-up to parliamentary elections in April 2026. Magyar advocates for greater EU alignment and has vowed to put an end to Hungary’s dependency on Russian energy (though he later moderated his stance). However, judging from his public statements and interviews, Magyar’s position on Ukraine’s quick accession is similar to Orbán’s, even though the current prime minister tries to distance himself from his opponent. Still, Tisza’s leader does not support military aid to Kyiv, even though he unequivocally condemns Russia for starting the war. It remains unclear whether this mixed approach to the Ukraine

question is shaped by the need to appeal to a public heavily influenced by Orbán's rhetoric.

According to the latest polls, only 22% of Hungarians would support European membership for Ukraine. On the other hand, both the public and political parties display a mostly positive vision regarding the accession of other candidate countries.

Fidesz vocally supports enlargement for the Western Balkans and in recent years it has promoted several economic partnership and strategic cooperation agreements in the area. Similarly, KDNP took a very vocal and positive stance on enlargement for the Western Balkans, emphasising also the fact that countries in the region have waited too much time to join the EU and this was fostering a sense of disillusionment. The potential accession of Turkey is viewed in a mostly positive light (former European commissioner for enlargement Olivér Várhelyi often travelled to Turkey). The same can be said for Moldova, although there is concern about a rise in so-called "Romanian chauvinism", whereby Moldovan identity could become more entwined with its Romanian roots as a consequence of the country's reorientation towards the west. Georgia usually falls out of the spotlight.

Among the other parties, the leftist Democratic Coalition (Demokratikus Koalíció, DK – S&D) and Hungarian Socialist Party (Magyar Szocialista Párt, MSZP – S&D) are generally pro-enlargement, with the latter having a more merit-based approach. The centrist liberal Momentum Movement (Momentum Mozgalom, MM – Renew Europe) also holds positive views about enlargement and adopts very clear rhetoric in favour of Ukraine. However, in its programme, it stresses the need to manage the consequence of Ukraine's integration in the agricultural market via an EU-level financial compensation mechanism. The far-right Our Homeland Movement (Mi Hazánk Mozgalom, MH

– ESN), which formed out of Jobbik-Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik Magyarországért Mozgalom, JOBBIK – Non-Inscrits), is a strongly Eurosceptic force and advocates for exiting the EU, albeit gradually, while also opposing the entrance of Ukraine. Dialogue-The Green Party (Párbeszéd-A Zöldek Pártja, P – Greens/EFA) and the Green Party of Hungary (Magyarország Zöld Pártja, LMP – Greens/EFA) support enlargement, though the latter on some occasions has stressed the fact that the accession of Ukraine should be a long-term objective given the potential consequences for the agricultural sector. The Hungarian Two-Tailed Dog Party (Magyar Kétfarkú Kutya Párt, MKKP – which signalled an intention to join Greens/EFA) is a satirical party which is gradually becoming a more serious and ambitious political force. Although it doesn't explicitly speak about enlargement, its strong pro-European and pro-Ukraine stance suggests it would be generally in favour of new members.

Besides Fidesz's use of the veto in the European Parliament, political parties lack an articulated position on how to reform decision-making mechanisms also because the general perception is that, given the opposition by many members, the possibility to overcome unanimity is nowhere in sight.

IRELAND

Ireland's position on EU enlargement reflects a broad but understated consensus rooted in the country's long-standing pro-European orientation. Since joining in 1973, the Irish political establishment and public have associated EU membership with economic progress, social modernisation, and enhanced international standing. Although this experience underpins an instinctively positive attitude towards further enlargement, it is far from a salient political topic: enlargement rarely features in

electoral debates or domestic media, and few voters could identify the next likely members.

When enlargement is discussed at all, it is almost always in connection with Ukraine's EU aspirations, particularly since Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022. The result is a quiet but stable consensus: enlargement is framed as a continuation of Europe's democratic expansion and a demonstration of solidarity with Ukraine and other reform-minded candidates. While this is not a contentious domestic issue, Irish parties treat enlargement as an affirmation of Europe's cohesion and values, and as a source of national benefit, regional stability, and global influence.

Institutionally, Ireland has traditionally guarded its veto powers, particularly on tax matters, but it is broadly recognised that an enlarged EU requires more flexible decision-making. There is openness to targeted expansion of QMV, especially in foreign and security policy, where blockages by individual states may undermine the EU's effectiveness.

The Irish government, currently led by a coalition of Soldiers of Destiny-The Republican Party (Fianna Fáil-An Páirtí Poblachtánach, FF – Renew Europe) and Irish Family (Fine Gael, FG – EPP), strongly supports enlargement in principle and in practice. Dublin's backing of Ukraine's EU membership forms a central part of its political and diplomatic support for Kyiv, compensating in some sense for Ireland's military neutrality. This supportive stance also extends to Moldova and the Western Balkans, which are generally seen as uncontroversial candidates. Ukraine's agricultural scale could theoretically provoke concern among farmers, but this has not translated into visible party divisions or political resistance.

Both governing parties – Fianna Fáil and Fine Gael – frame enlargement as a natural continuation of the EU's success story in Ireland. Fianna Fáil emphasises Ireland's active role in shaping Europe's future. It explicitly backs Ukraine's and Moldova's membership prospects and supports Georgia's European path, while highlighting the transformative impact of enlargement in the Western Balkans. Fine Gael takes an even more explicit and structured stance in favour of enlargement. A core element of the party's pro-European identity is the commitment to an enlargement strategy encompassing Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Western Balkans. Fine Gael pledges to assist candidate countries in aligning with EU standards and insists that all must adhere to the same rules on their path to membership.

On the left, Ourselves (Sinn Féin, SF – The Left-GUE/NGL) occupies a more ambivalent space. Traditionally Eurosceptic, the party has moderated its position, framing the EU as a platform for peace, democracy and social justice while advocating institutional reform to make it less centralised and more socially oriented. Sinn Féin expresses support for the Ukrainian people's European aspirations but couples this with strong affirmations of Ireland's neutrality and a humanitarian focus. On enlargement more broadly, the party signals openness to engagement with the Western Balkans and other candidate states but does not explicitly endorse specific accessions.

Smaller parties generally align with the mainstream pro-European stance. The Labour Party (Páirtí an Lucht Oibre, LAB – S&D) explicitly supports the EU's future enlargement to the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine, linking it to respect for workers' rights, social dialogue, and the EU acquis. It emphasises that enlargement should promote social standards and democratic values alongside institutional compliance. Similarly, the Social Democrats express broad support for engagement with potential new

member states, while endorsing enlargement in principle for Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Western Balkans, though without detailed timelines or conditions. Independent Ireland (II – EDP/Renew Europe) focuses primarily on domestic sovereignty, with no explicit commitments to enlargement.

Aontú, a small, socially conservative and nationalist party with no political affiliation at the European level, expresses general scepticism towards EU integration, emphasising national sovereignty, neutrality and concerns about EU militarisation. While not issuing detailed statements on enlargement, the party's broader posture implies caution or opposition to further expansion, especially if it is perceived to enhance the EU's defence role or limit Ireland's national autonomy.

ITALY

Traditionally, all Italian governments in the last three decades have been in favour of EU enlargement. Current Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, from Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, Fdi – ECR), has visited the Western Balkans repeatedly, underlying her open support for the region's accession. Similarly, she has shown support for integration of the Trio on various occasions.

The novelty has been Meloni's focus on the bilateral migration outsourcing model and migration agreement with Albania, which granted the Italian government the support of other member states. The current foreign minister, Antonio Tajani, is the leader of Forward Italy (Forza Italia, FI – EPP), the party founded by Silvio Berlusconi. Since the beginning of his mandate, Tajani has shown a strong interest in the Western Balkans in the field of economic cooperation and has worked to stimulate investment by Italian firms in the region.

The third party of the governing coalition is League (Lega – Pfd), a Eurosceptic party whose main concern is fighting immigration, though Eastern Europeans who have integrated into the country are no longer the main target of its xenophobic campaigns. With a strong electoral base in the northern regions of the country, Lega sees the Western Balkans as a market. All parties of the current governing coalition had good relations with the Kremlin prior to the large-scale invasion of Ukraine, but they aligned with US foreign policy after that. Following Donald Trump's election in October 2024, there has been broad expectation of a softening toward Russia, even if it is unlikely that Italy will take a hostile position to the Trio's integration. In any case, the Italian coalition shares the view of the sovereignist EU that the accession of more countries could mitigate the risk of a deepening of the EU.

Overall, the current Italian political landscape shows a generally favourable and cross-party view on enlargement. The main opposition party, the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD – S&D) has traditionally expressed full support for the Western Balkans, but now extends this to Ukraine and Moldova, while taking a more cautious stance on Georgia due to its authoritarian turn. The war in Ukraine has brought the issue of regional stability to the fore in explaining support for enlargement, alongside concerns about security and the need to counter other geopolitical influences (for example, Russia, China, and the Gulf States). The rationale behind this support for enlargement lies in geographic proximity and historic ties with the candidate countries. Strong economic exchange and business presence, particularly of companies from northeast Italy, also reinforces the PD's pro-enlargement position. Enlargement is not considered a trigger of significant migratory flows nor as having a negative impact on the labor market.

The Five Star Movement (Movimento 5 Stelle, M5S – The Left-GUE/NGL) displays what has been described as an “eclectic populism” that extends to its foreign policy. This entails “mixing national securitisation and international humanitarianism.”⁴⁰ In the case of the Western Balkans, its programme for the 2024 European elections clearly endorsed enlargement: “We strongly support the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the European project. This process must be accelerated and we see their integration into the European Union as a natural step in the evolution of the Union. These countries are geographically, socially and culturally European *in toto* and their inclusion would bring benefits to all parties involved. The legitimate European aspirations of many countries must be measured by respecting all the necessary stages and conditions, without accepting shortcuts or facilitations based on the circumstances”.⁴¹

The programme makes no reference to the Trio accession, as the M5S is focused on criticism of the EU arms race generated by the war in Ukraine, which “not only requires public spending but also provides stratospheric profits to arms manufacturers, banks and investment firms that support them.” The paramount goal of the party is to stop the war in Ukraine: “We have condemned Putin’s invasion from the very beginning. We fully support the Ukrainian people, but now we say enough to the sending of new weapons and we pursue peace in all ways. The European Union must return to being a protagonist on the international stage by promoting incisive diplomatic actions aimed at an immediate ceasefire and the start of negotiations to reach a political, fair, balanced and lasting solution, working immediately for a Peace Conference to be held under the aegis of the United Nations”.⁴²

The party is often criticised for not being sufficiently hostile to Putin’s Russia, but this stance is common across the national political spectrum.

A conciliatory attitude toward Moscow prevails in Italy due to differing political traditions, with few minor exceptions. Finally, M5S joined The Left in the European Parliament, initially with an observer status, after years of uncertainty about its political alignment at the EU level.

The Greens and Left Alliance (Alleanza Verdi e Sinistra, AVS) elected six members to the European Parliament who were split between two groups: four joined the Greens/EFA and two joined The Left-GUE/NGL. AVS is not particularly concerned with the topic of enlargement. At the same time, its political programme mentions the need for reform of EU treaties, as it calls for a “federal, fair and inclusive Europe” with a common foreign policy capable of reshaping international relations in a multilateral framework, in dialogue with the UN. Thus, it is clear that AVS has no explicit pro-enlargement stance, but its vision of a common foreign and defence policy implies that the EU should act as a united force and incorporate other members. Regarding Ukraine, the idea is that the EU should counter global militarisation and take an active role in a peace process.⁴³

LATVIA

In Latvia, as in the other two Baltic countries, European integration is seen as a cornerstone of the country’s development. It has been a key objective of nearly all political forces since independence in 1991 (in fact, it is usually interpreted as a “restoration” of the country’s integrity after the 40-year Soviet occupation that followed World War II). This means there is general support for European institutions and, perhaps more importantly, participation in NATO. This position is fairly widespread both within Latvian society and the Latvian ruling classes (in the most recent Eubarometer survey, 73% of Latvians agree that their country benefits from European

integration while 91% say that EU members should be more united in facing current global challenges).

On the one hand, this orientation has become stronger since the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Military and political support for Kyiv is easily coupled with supporting internal security and European security as a whole. On the other hand, the fact that Latvia borders Russia may foster a subtle sense of detachment from the European project, and activate a more regional approach to issues of defense and security. This may enhance collaboration with countries that surround the Baltic Sea (besides Lithuania and Estonia, there is Sweden and Finland, which have recently joined NATO).

At the same time, given the challenging demographic situation (depopulation rates in Latvia are among the fastest in the world, losing 18,000 to 20,000 inhabitants annually), and difficulties in the economic sphere (real GDP growth slowed to 2.8% in 2022 from 4.3% in 2021), the most pressing concerns of the population are domestic policies, which means political parties tend to develop their programmes accordingly.

Political forces and alliances in Latvia are volatile: from one electoral turnout to another, new parties emerge while others disappear.

In the 2022 parliamentary elections, the alliance New Unity (Jaunā Vienotība, JV – EPP), which is dominated by the center-right party Unity (Vienotība, V – EPP), won the majority and gained 26 seats (18 more than in the previous election). This can be read as a confirmation of the strong pro-European and pro-NATO orientation of the country. Indeed, New Unity is a political force that has always been vocal about, and within, European politics. This is in part due to the fact that one of its members, former prime minister Valdis Dombrovskis, has served as European Commission vice president (and is now

commissioner for economic affairs), while Minister of Foreign Affairs Baiba Braže also served as NATO assistant secretary general for public diplomacy. New Unity advocates for a united EU “with a strong presence on the global stage”, and supports Ukraine and its possible accession to the EU and NATO.

Currently, it rules the country in a coalition with the centrist Union of Greens and Farmers (Zaļo un Zemnieku savienība, ZZS – Renew Europe) and the leftist The Progressives (Progresīvie, P – Greens/EFA). While the former focuses more on domestic issues, being a traditional agrarian force, the latter explicitly emphasises the importance of supporting Ukraine and the need to accelerate its integration into the European Union. The programs of both parties, however, include the idea of creating a united defence force on the Baltic, as a sort of “regionalist approach” towards the security issue, rather than being exclusively focused on EU integration.

The far-right opposition, which is composed of four parties – United List (Apvienotais saraksts, AS – ECR), National Alliance (Nacionālā apvienība, NA – ECR), For Stability! (Stabilitātei!, ST! - not affiliated with any European party) and Latvia First (Latvija pirmajā vietā, LPV – PFE) – expresses mixed views. All of them formally support Ukraine and Ukrainian integration in the European Union, but United List and National Alliance in particular tend to stress the national dimension of security and military spending, while For Stability! and Latvia First adopts a populist rhetoric, which is sometimes tainted with Euroscepticism. Nevertheless, perhaps more so than the ruling parties, the opposition focuses primarily on domestic issues. When it comes to European enlargement, the main focus is Ukraine (and, additionally, Moldova), since foreign policy issues are mostly seen through the lens of countering Russian belligerency and “hybrid threats” coming from Belarus. Along these lines, among candidate countries, Serbia is the one that potentially raises

the most concerns, given its good relationship with the Kremlin, although the issue is rarely openly addressed.

LITHUANIA

Traditionally the EU and European enlargement hold an important space in Lithuanian politics. Not only is the country's integration, which took place in 2004, generally seen as the culmination of the independence restoration process, but Lithuania has also tried – and still tries – to act as an “ambassador” for other Eastern European countries that would like to join the EU. This is particularly relevant with regards to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. Indeed, there is a sense of a historical mission: given the Nordic countries' support for the Baltic states' integration, which came via the Nordic-Baltic Eight format – a regional cooperation mechanism that included Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden – Lithuania opted to pursue the same role with its fellow post-Soviet neighbours, including Belarus, despite the freeze in relations after Lukashenko seized power in 1994.

The country's dedication, effort and involvement in Ukrainian affairs has been visible: former Lithuanian president Valdas Adamkus (independent) acted as mediator during the Orange Revolution (2004), while the summit where former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich decided not to sign the memorandum with the EU, thereby setting the stage for the Revolution of Dignity (2013-14), was held in Vilnius. Similarly, Lithuanian politicians such as former foreign minister Gabrielius Landsbergis, from Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats (Tėvynės sąjunga-Lietuvos krikščionys demokratai, TS-LDK – EPP), visited Georgia and even joined the protests against so-called “Russian laws” in order to help the Caucasian country resume European integration.

Similarly, Lithuania supported the pro-European forces in Moldova during elections, and in the public debates it was stressed, among other things, that Moldova was the first country to recognise Lithuania's independence.

In Lithuania, citizens' support for European enlargement is among the highest in Europe (74% according to Eubarometer), and Lithuanians tend to trust European institutions much more than their own political parties and governments (which usually have a level of trust between 30% and 40%). Historical experience, economic prosperity, benefits in terms of security and defense cooperation – all of these elements have kept the level of Euroscepticism in Lithuania extremely low, and nearly all the major political parties are in favour of European enlargement, or actively contribute to it.

This is not to say that the topic is widely discussed in public debates. Sometimes it involves technicalities that are not always considered worthy of being addressed by parties or dealt with in political campaigns. Moreover, precisely because European integration is considered so positively, potential problems and difficulties within candidate countries can become a matter of concern. For instance, the case of Serbia is usually treated with scepticism and suspicion due to the relation between Vucic's government and the Kremlin. Additionally, proposals for reforms and changes in European institutional mechanisms are usually not welcomed by Lithuanian political parties.

At the moment the government is led by the leftist Social Democratic Party (Lietuvos socialdemokratų partija, LSDP – S&D) in a coalition with the nationalist Dawn of Nemunas (Politinė partija Nemuno Aušra, NA – PfE) and a bloc comprising the agrarian Lithuanian Farmers and Green Union (Lietuvos valstiečių ir žaliųjų sąjunga, LVŽS – ECR) and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian

Families Alliance (Lietuvos lenkų rinkimų akcija-Krikščioniškų šeimų sąjunga, LLRA KŠS – ECR).

While the Social Democratic Party has ruled the country since the last elections in 2024, other parties were invited to join a coalition after Prime Minister Gintautas Paluckas resigned in August 2025 due to allegations of a conflict of interest. As a result, the Union of Democrats “For Lithuania” (Demokratų sąjunga Vardan Lietuvos, DSVL – Greens/EFA), which was at first allied with the Social Democratic Party, is now in opposition. The centre-right Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats won the second highest percentage at the elections and remained in opposition.

In general, there is strong support for European integration and European enlargement across the whole political spectrum. Traditionally, center-right forces and parties appear to be the most enthusiastic due to their constituency tending to have a very negative view of the Soviet past. This translates to support for a full shift towards the west. At the same time, European integration was implemented when the Social Democratic Party was in power, despite the fact that the party’s supporters tend to have a more nuanced view of the past, in particular about post-independence reforms. Indeed, according to its programme, the Social Democratic Party fully endorses European enlargement and it explicitly states that Ukraine must join the European Union as soon as possible, even if this means reforming the veto mechanism. Homeland Union-Lithuanian Christian Democrats seem to adopt a more gradual approach by envisioning a deadline to Ukraine’s access to the European Union by 2029, while being positive and active in advancing the process for Moldova.

Political debates in the country tend to focus on security issues in foreign policy, and Eurosceptical positions are rare. There are, however, fringe

populistic forces that sometimes promote alternative views on European integration and enlargement, and occasionally vote against measures connected to these issues. These include the Lithuanian People’s Party (Lietuvos liaudies partija, LLP – unaffiliated in the European Parliament), the Coalition for Peace formed by the Lithuanian Christian Democracy Party (Lietuvos krikščioniškosios demokratijos partija, LKDP – ECR), and the Samogitian Party (Žemaičių partija, ŽP – unaffiliated in the European Parliament). There are also individual members of major parties, such as Lithuanian Farmers and Green Union and the Electoral Action of Poles in Lithuania-Christian Families Alliance, as well as one government coalition party, Dawn of Nemunas, which take a similar view. However, these forces usually end up aligning with the general positive stance towards the EU and enlargement.

LUXEMBOURG

Luxembourg has long been one of the EU’s most consistent advocates of integration. Its small size, open economy, and history as a mediator between France and Germany have fostered a political culture where pro-European sentiment is mainstream. Yet its approach to enlargement combines conviction with caution. The debate focuses less on whether enlargement should occur than on how it should be managed – whether as a political imperative, a moral duty, or a carefully regulated process to safeguard the Union’s cohesion. Luxembourg maintains a cautious, criteria-based attitude toward enlargement, with the issue rarely featuring in electoral debates.

While positions on enlargement are largely shaped by the European political families to which national parties belong, Luxembourg’s general stance aligns closely with its Benelux partners, Belgium and the Netherlands, ensuring policy coherence and amplifying its voice as a small state. The result is a pragmatic, pro-European, yet measured, position:

Luxembourg supports enlargement as essential to Europe's stability and credibility but insists that the process remain criteria-based and reinforce the Union's democratic and institutional foundations.

With nearly half of the workforce composed of cross-border commuters, public opinion in Luxembourg remains among the EU's most cautious when a wave of new migrant workers is at stake. Historical experiences, particularly the wave of Portuguese migration in the 1980s, continue to negatively shape these perceptions. As a result, enlargement rarely becomes a prominent campaign issue, despite broad political support.

The war in Ukraine has nonetheless reshaped the discussion, recasting enlargement as a matter of European security. For many policymakers, integrating Ukraine represents both solidarity and a strategic step toward a more resilient continent. Enlargement is increasingly viewed less as an economic question than as part of a wider effort to stabilise Europe and strengthen collective defence. Institutional reform accompanies this cautious endorsement. Proposals such as expanding qualified majority voting are treated with prudence by centrist and left-wing parties, while conservatives oppose them as threats to sovereignty.

The current governing coalition – the Christian Social People's Party (Chrëschtlech-Sozial Vollekspartei, CSV – EPP) and the Democratic Party (Demokratesch Partei, DP – Renew Europe) – supports enlargement but insists on strict compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and rule of law standards. Since the 2023 elections, the government under Prime Minister Luc Frieden has pursued a pragmatic vision of enlargement as a strategic tool to reinforce Europe while ensuring institutional balance. The CSV supports admitting new members who meet the required standards, favouring quality over speed. It backs integration of the Western Balkans as a means

of stabilising the continent and acknowledges the geopolitical urgency of integrating Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia. Yet it insists that solidarity with Ukraine cannot replace a merit-based process. DP complements CSV's stance with a liberal-economic and technocratic outlook. It views enlargement as a way to strengthen EU institutions and supports closer ties with Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia to reinforce Europe's security and credibility. However, it cautions against a rushed process and advocates gradual, merit-driven integration of the Western Balkans.

In opposition, the Luxembourg Socialist Workers' Party (Lëtzebuenger Sozialistesche Aarbechterpartei, LSAP – S&D) represents the most explicitly pro-enlargement force. It views enlargement as both a moral responsibility and a strategic necessity for peace and social cohesion. The party's 2024 manifesto supports the accession of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, and Moldova, while insisting that the EU adapt its institutions and budget to accommodate them. LSAP ties enlargement to social convergence and the protection of workers' rights. The Greens (Déi Gréng – Greens/EFA) adopts a values-based approach, linking enlargement to the EU's mission to promote democracy, sustainability, and human rights. They are strong advocates of Ukraine's integration and a credible path for the Western Balkans. The Left (Déi Lénk – The Left-GUE/NGL) supports enlargement in principle but frames it through social justice and anti-militarism. It calls for a process that strengthens workers' rights and democratic accountability rather than serving neoliberal or geopolitical aims.

At the opposite end, the Alternative Democratic Reform Party (Alternativ Demokratesch Reformpartei, ADR – ECR) is Luxembourg's most sceptical actor. Affiliated with the European Conservatives and Reformists, it warns against deeper centralisation in Brussels. ADR does not

oppose new accessions outright but supports them only if they do not transfer further powers to EU institutions. It favours economic cooperation with Ukraine and the Western Balkans while rejecting political acceleration that could erode sovereignty.

MALTA

Despite Malta's deep integration into the European Union since its accession in 2004, enlargement remains a marginal topic in national politics. Electoral debates and media coverage rarely prioritise the accession of new members, and public attention tends to focus on issues with immediate domestic impact, notably migration. This prioritisation is shaped in part by Malta's geography and demography: as a small island state with high population density and significant reliance on foreign labour, Malta's political discourse around enlargement is rarely framed in isolation. While geopolitical developments have reopened the conversation, constitutional neutrality and a general reluctance to link EU enlargement to defence integration further tempers public and party discussions on the topic. Even in the context of Ukraine, debates about accession are moderated by concerns over neutrality, reflecting a distinct national balance between solidarity and strategic prudence. In practice, Malta's pro-European consensus is broad but low-profile, and enlargement is approached cautiously, with an emphasis on the conditionality of candidate countries meeting accession criteria and aligning with EU values.

Across the political spectrum, EU enlargement is a stable yet marginally discussed topic, recognised as contributing to European cohesion, stability, and democracy, but subordinated to the country's national priorities and cautious foreign policy stance. The two main parties, the left-wing Labour Party (Partit Laburista, PL – S&D) and right-wing Nationalist Party (Partit Nazzjonalista, PN – EPP), form the core of Malta's pro-European consensus,

although both treat enlargement as a secondary concern. Smaller parties, both on the left and right, either reinforce normative and values-driven arguments or articulate a nationalist, Eurosceptic counterpoint. Institutionally, all parties resist reforms that could diminish the country's influence in the EU, such as abandoning unanimity voting in the Council.

The ruling Labour Party frames EU enlargement within a vision of a future-proof Union capable of responding effectively to citizens' needs. The party supports enlargement towards the Western Balkans, emphasising democratic governance, human rights, and economic development, and advocates a clear, fair accession process that incorporates social and environmental standards. Labour also strongly backs the integration of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, viewing this as vital for regional stability and security, and underlines solidarity with these countries in support of democratic reforms.

From the opposition, the Nationalist Party similarly supports EU enlargement but interprets it through a lens of national interest and strategic positioning. Historically, PN backing for enlargement has emphasised the economic and political advantages of EU membership, both for Malta and for candidate countries. PN therefore expresses general support for the Western Balkans, contingent on full compliance with EU criteria, while Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia receive strong backing, particularly in the context of recent geopolitical developments and the EU's security interests.

Although excluded from parliamentary representation, smaller parties also contribute to the discussion, often framing enlargement through narrower ideological lenses. The Democratic Alternative-Democratic Party (Alternattiva Demokratika-Partit Demokratiku, ADPD – Greens/EFA) strongly supports EU enlargement, emphasising a green and democratic enlargement process for the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova and

Georgia. It explicitly links the EU accession process of potential new members to environmental protection, social justice, inclusive governance, human rights, and regional stability. Momentum (Partit Momentum, EDP – no seats in the European Parliament) mirrors these positions. As a newly established party with limited electoral reach, it links the enlargement process to democratic reform, adherence to EU standards, and regional stability.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, the non-affiliated Imperium Europa represents a far-right, nationalist critique of enlargement. Although largely marginal in electoral terms, this party is critical of the EU while advocating its own vision of a “United Europe” – a union grounded in shared values, culture, and identity. Within this framework, it may support the accession of countries with similar religious and cultural backgrounds, but it opposes the entry of states with a significant Muslim population, portraying further EU expansion as a challenge to the continent’s cultural cohesion and identity.

THE NETHERLANDS

In the Netherlands, most parties see enlargement as a promise already made, with discussions now focused on how best to implement it. As of January 2026, the Netherlands is governed by a minority coalition consisting of the social-liberal Democrats 66 (Democraten 66, D66 – Renew Europe), the Christian Democratic Appeal (Christen-Democratisch Appèl, CDA – EPP), and the liberal-conservative People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (Volkspartij voor Vrijheid en Democratie, VVD – Renew Europe).

Democrats 66 is a progressive liberal party, federalist with respect to the EU, and supports both EU deepening and widening. The CDA is traditionally a pro-EU party, though its influence has declined. It favours EU enlargement but insists on strict fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria.

The VVD is one of the most important parties in the country and has recently shown some support for the EU geopolitical approach regarding an accelerated economic integration of candidate countries with a strong rule of law conditionality. Under the leadership of Dilan Yeşilgöz, who followed Mark Rutte, the VVD has become more aware of the EU’s added value and the geopolitical importance of European enlargement. However, the coalition as a whole remains steadfast about the need for new members to meet the Copenhagen criteria.⁴⁴

The previous right-wing governing coalition (VVD, NSC, BBB, PVV) advocated a strict approach to enlargement, not wholly rejecting it but emphasising the need for candidate countries to fully meet all criteria. While the VVD and NSC were more open to enlargement, the Party for Freedom (Partij voor de Vrijheid, PVV – PffE), with its strongly anti-immigration stance and focus on strict external border control, opposed it.

The second far-right, populist, and Eurosceptic party is the Forum for Democracy (Forum voor Democratie, FvD – ESN). FvD also opposes new enlargements and occasionally supports the possibility of exiting the EU.

The New Social Contract (Nieuw Sociaal Contract, NSC – EPP) is a centre-right party that split from CDA. It is relatively pro-European and open to EU enlargement, but does not fully support all European initiatives. The Farmer-Citizen Movement (BoerBurgerBeweging, BBB – EPP) does not explicitly mention a position on EU enlargement. It will likely align with the governing coalition’s position of supporting enlargement, with an approach that focuses on strict adherence to the Copenhagen criteria.

The opposition also includes the member of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats (S&D), Labour Party (Partij van de Arbeid, PvdA), that is currently engaged in a political merger with Green/Left (GroenLinks, GL – The Greens/EFA) to formally establish a new progressive party. Both are generally supportive of EU enlargement.⁴⁵ The position of the Labour Party is that of a “favourable, but conditional endorsement,” emphasising that they are not sceptical, but they insist on Copenhagen criteria and other conditions. Enlargement is perceived as an electorally risky topic with limited vote-gaining potential, but significant vulnerability to political backlash.

In public and political discourse, enlargement is not a high-profile topic in the Netherlands and is largely overshadowed by other geopolitical and domestic concerns. Geopolitics is in fact a strong positive driver. The party supports enlargement as a mechanism for building a more stable and secure EU, particularly in the context of Russia’s war in Ukraine. It views enlargement through the lens of long-term EU security and regional stability. It remains cautious in public communication, as being overtly vocal about rapid accession could lead to it losing votes. The party also avoids linking migration with the enlargement issue, as discussions on migration tend to become toxic, leading to hesitancy in openly advocating for quick accession.

Volt Netherland (Volt Nederland, VOLT – The Greens/EFA), a pan-European and strongly pro-EU party like D66, also supports the integration of more countries.

Denk is a political party that represents ethnic minority interests. It is left-leaning on economic issues and more conservative on cultural matters. It does not have a clear stance on EU enlargement but would likely align with the stance of any coalition it joins.

POLAND

Poland has traditionally had broad consensus on enlargement due to its own positive experience with European integration. Most Polish parties support a geopolitical union, not only in relation to Ukraine but also the Western Balkans.

Although all parties, with the exclusion of the far right, support enlargement in principle, it is not a prominent topic in public debates. The programme of the Polish presidency of the Council of the European Union, in the first semester of 2025, formally and explicitly mentioned enlargement, both in the Eastern direction and with regard to the Western Balkans, as a means to respond to Russian aggression, and with respect to single market opportunities. Nevertheless, there was vagueness on the timeline as well as on the conditions under which EU internal reforms and candidate countries’ reforms would take place.

Recently, however, the discussion on Ukraine has evolved. Public opinion has turned more cautious and even hostile, and parties fear talking about concrete accession timelines because voters associate enlargement with loss of EU funds, more migration, agricultural competition, and historical disputes (for example, the Volhynia massacre).

This is why sceptical or cautious positions are more common, including in the governing coalition led by Donald Tusk, with Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska, PO – EPP), Poland 2050 (Polska 2050, PL20250 – affiliated with Renew group in the European Parliament), the Polish People’s Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL – EPP), and The New Left (Nowa Lewica, NL – S&D), which has been in power since December 2023. The current government officially supports the integration of Kyiv within the EU, but since feelings towards

Ukrainians in Poland are changing (with a certain hostility towards Ukrainian refugees is growing), support for the accession is shrinking, leading to a disconnect between politicians' potential agreement with accession and their actual support for it on the basis of the electoral impact that support would now have.

The strongest supporter of enlargement remains the conservative Polska 2050, a new, pro-European party with a technocratic approach. It believes in a fact-based, pragmatic approach toward EU policies and stresses the possible benefits of expansion for stability and regional cooperation.

The centre-right party Civic Platform (EPP) supports linking enlargement to institutional reforms (QMV, rule of law), and sees enlargement as a matter of geopolitical urgency. It is a keen advocate of enlargement due to its wish for a strong geopolitical union. The party very carefully balances the challenges of integrating Ukraine and the other candidate countries.

The 2025 presidential election, won by Karol Nawrocki as an independent candidate backed by the conservative Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS – ECR) party, changed the political landscape, with strong anti-Ukrainian messages becoming more mainstream. The PiS used to be in favour of enlargement and particularly supportive of Ukrainian accession, for national security reasons as well as to counter Russian influence in Eastern Europe.⁴⁶ PiS was particularly active in supporting Ukraine's application for EU candidate status in 2022. However, its position has become more ambiguous and partly negative. While PiS frames Ukraine as essential for Polish security, it increasingly opposes unconditional EU accession due to historical grievances, concern for the possible negative economic impacts on its eastern regions, fears of competition in the agricultural sector, and

rising anti-Ukrainian sentiment in the population due to the large refugee population in the country. While large businesses in Poland see the integration of Ukraine as an economic opportunity, the PiS electorate consists of small farmers and business people who feel threatened by Ukrainian imports. This is why the party supported a ban on Ukrainian wheat imports.

The Polish People's Party (Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL – EPP) mainly represents rural and agricultural interests. It supports EU enlargement but, like PiS, is concerned about competition from Ukraine's agricultural sector, reflecting the anxieties of its voter base.

The Confederation Liberty and Independence party (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość, KWiN – ESN), a far-right, economic ultra-libertarian party primarily supported by small and medium entrepreneurs, has become an increasingly influential mid-size opposition force, gaining popularity in Poland, especially among young people. KWiN is staunchly anti-EU and has shown some anti-Ukrainian sentiments.

While PiS is against internal EU reforms and wants unanimity in foreign policy, the governing coalition Civic Platform is open on the debate but prioritises enlargement over internal reform. It argues that the EU has already lost significant time when the new enlargement methodology was introduced, while we must convince member states and candidate countries that there is new momentum for enlargement. Polish parties do care about rule of law and the accession criteria, and oppose relaxing the Copenhagen criteria because Poland itself had to pay a high price to meet them.

PORTUGAL

Portugal's long-standing membership in the European Union and its historically pro-European orientation has not stopped EU enlargement becoming a marginal and technically-oriented topic within domestic politics. Public attention is minimal, and citizens are generally not engaged with the idea of new member states joining the Union, although this does not imply opposition. Portuguese parties and the electorate approach enlargement with a pragmatic and conditional attitude, recognising its potential strategic and geopolitical benefits while weighing its domestic implications. Geopolitical developments, most notably Russia's war in Ukraine, have elevated discussions, highlighting enlargement as a tool to reinforce EU security and cohesion. Yet debate remains largely confined to policy circles rather than the wider public sphere.

Overall, Portugal's position on EU enlargement is characterised by a stable, cautious, and conditional consensus. Across the political spectrum, parties generally endorse accession for Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans, on the condition of compliance with EU standards and safeguards for national interests. Debate is dominated by technical considerations rather than ideological or geopolitical ones, with parties converging on a vision of measured, rules-based integration. Institutional reform forms an implicit component of the debate. Portuguese parties recognise that an enlarged EU requires adaptable decision-making, but there is no major push to alter treaty arrangements. Structural and budgetary considerations dominate domestic calculations, ensuring that enlargement is viewed as a process that must be managed carefully to avoid negative economic impacts or overextension of the Union's absorptive capacity.

The Social Democratic Party (Partido Social Democrata, PPD/PSD – EPP), together with the CDS-People's Party (CDS-Partido Popular, CDS-PP – EPP), has led a pro-European minority government since the elections of May 2025, which confirmed Luís Montenegro as prime minister. The two parties form the Democratic Alliance (AD-Coligação, AD – EPP), a centre-right umbrella alliance. They jointly endorse enlargement, with a positive yet cautious vision that balances rules-based integration with domestic and Union-wide capacity. They stress the importance of institutionally and financially preparing candidate countries to integrate successfully into the Union. Support is more explicit for the Western Balkans, albeit with a focus on the need for reforms and regional stability, and EU accession for both Ukraine and Moldova is strongly backed on strategic and geopolitical grounds, viewing their integration as essential for European security.

The major opposition party, Enough (Chega, CH – PFE), a populist right-wing party affiliated with Patriots for Europe, foregrounds national sovereignty and migration concerns. Despite its vocal stance on border control and national autonomy, Chega does not articulate a coherent policy on EU enlargement. In statements by its leader, André Ventura, the party supports Ukraine's European perspective but otherwise refrains from detailed engagement with candidate countries, signalling that enlargement is at the bottom of its political agenda.

Among the major parties in Parliament, the Socialist Party (Partido Socialista, PS – S&D) frames EU enlargement as part of its vision for a social, democratic, and sustainable Europe, supporting the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans, provided that they comply with the Copenhagen criteria. The party stresses the need for synchronised progress in enlargement and internal EU reforms to ensure the Union has the capacity

to absorb new members effectively. It advocates a gradual integration of candidates in specific sectoral policies, reflecting the flexibility under the Lisbon Treaty to accommodate varying national circumstances.

Smaller parties, while often absent from detailed electoral debate on enlargement, nevertheless articulate positions that reflect ideological priorities. The Liberal Initiative (Iniciativa Liberal, IL – Renew Europe) is strongly pro-enlargement, endorsing the accession of Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans while stressing strict adherence to the Copenhagen criteria. Similarly, the Green-oriented parties, Free (Livre, L – Greens/EFA) and People-Animals-Nature (Pessoas-Animais-Natureza, PAN – Greens/EFA) – both of whom are part of the European Green Party (EGP), with no seats at the European Parliament – advocate enlargement in principle, but with significant caveats and potential supplementary criteria around social protection, environmental standards, and working conditions. On the left of the political spectrum, the Left Bloc (Bloco de Esquerda, BE – The Left-GUE/NGL) and the Communist Party (Partido Comunista Português, PCP – The Left-GUE/NGL) adopt a more sceptical or conditional stance. While the Left Bloc signals support for candidate countries that fulfil the Copenhagen criteria, it prioritises ensuring that enlargement does not negatively affect existing member states. The Communist Party's position is even more cautious, explicitly highlighting the economic implications of enlargement for Portugal and warning that rapid or poorly managed accession could penalise the country by reducing its structural funding or creating institutional strains.

ROMANIA

EU enlargement is generally not a salient topic for Romanian political parties, except when it concerns Ukraine and, more significantly, Moldova. The Western Balkans are not part of the national debate. Moldova's integration is a national cause due also to the pursuit of votes from the many Moldovans with dual Romanian citizenship, as well as nationalist discourses related to a potential merger, and for reasons of geopolitical influence.

The experience with Schengen, which saw Romania suffer Austria's veto for years, led to public debates in Romania on the use of QMV, although not for EU enlargement.

In the past there have been bilateral issues with Ukraine concerning the right of the Romanian minority to receive education in the Romanian language. Since the war in Ukraine began, Romania has adopted a strong pro-Ukraine stance, setting aside bilateral disputes.

The Social Democratic Party (Partidul Social Democrat, PSD – S&D) once had ties with both pro-Russian and pro-European parties in Moldova, and it currently holds conflicting positions, oscillating between a mild nationalist discourse and the need to maintain relationships with the European socialist family. The PSD narrative is ambivalent on enlargement to Ukraine due to internal differences – it is not overtly against Ukraine's integration, but nor is it proactively for it, likely out of a fear of provoking Russia.

The National Liberal Party (Partidul Național Liberal, PNL – EPP) is a Christian conservative party with a pro-European stance that is in favour of EU enlargement toward Ukraine and Moldova. The same is true of the liberal Union for the Salvation of

Romania (Uniunea Salvați România, URS – Renew Europe) and the minority party the Democratic Alliance of Hungarians in Romania (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România or Romániai Magyar Demokrata Szövetség, UDMR – EPP).

The Alliance for the Unity of Romanians (Alianța pentru Unirea Românilor, AUR – ECR) is an ultranationalist, revisionist and pro-“Greater Romania” party. It occasionally moderates its rhetoric for electoral reasons, but it remains firmly Eurosceptic and supports the concept of a “Europe of Nations”. AUR is not *a priori* against enlargement but has some concerns over the protection of Romanian minorities in neighbouring countries. It does not consider Moldova as a sovereign state and believes it should be annexed to Romania.

The S.O.S. Romania Party (Partidul S.O.S. România, SOS RO – Non-Inscrits) can be classified as a far-right party, nationalist, and with anti-establishment and Eurosceptic views. It successfully entered the Romanian parliament following the December 2024 legislative elections, clearing the 5% threshold, and thus contributing to a significant surge in far-right representation in the new assembly. It has two non-affiliated representatives in the European Parliament. It promotes Romanian-Moldovan reunification and takes an irredentist stance towards Ukraine, advocating for the denunciation of the 1997 treaty with Kyiv and asserting claims over Northern Bukovina, Budjak, and the Snake Island – an initiative Ukraine responded to with a three-year entry ban for its leader. It suggests that Romania should prioritise its own national interests before supporting further integration or expansion.

Finally, it has to be noted that Romania is one of five EU member states that do not recognise Kosovo’s independence. In general, Romania’s political parties maintain good relations with Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić.⁴⁷

SLOVAKIA

The Slovakian political context is changing and new approaches to European integration and enlargement are in motion. Traditionally, the country has looked at the EU in a positive light, although reservations have always been present. Since 2004, when Slovakia became a member state, the general position of the various governments has been to endorse further enlargement, with an emphasis on Western Balkan countries but also supporting reforms and the reinforcement of democratic institutions in Eastern countries such as Moldova, Ukraine or Georgia. Joining the European Union has been viewed as a way to modernise the country and make it prosperous.

At the same time, enlargement has also been considered a geopolitical tool to stabilise some regions and secure a lasting peace for the continent. More than half of the citizens went to vote for the 2003 referendum on joining the European Union, in which 92.46% expressed support for becoming a member state. As per the last Eurobarometer, in 2025 a high rate of the population (around 57%) supports enlargement, mostly motivated by the belief that it brings economic benefits and work opportunities. On the other hand, according to many polls, at present almost one third of citizens would vote to leave the Union if such a referendum were to be held today – a sign that Euroscepticism is growing.

In recent years there have been several points of contention between Slovakia and the European Union: for instance, Bratislava reacted negatively to the creation of the European Financial and Stabilisation Mechanism in 2011, which contributed to greater Euroscepticism in the country. Similarly, as has been common in Central Europe, migration policies have been met with opposition – for instance,

when Slovakia refused to comply with the European Union relocation scheme in 2015. However, more recently, the European response to the COVID-19 crisis was accepted positively in Slovakia and later the country supported the coordinated EU approach to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. As the scholar Lucia Najšlová states, “Slovakia’s efforts to shape the EU’s policy have been a blend of solidarity and pragmatism”.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, despite this being the general consensus, differences among political forces persist and have been growing in recent years.

The 2023 parliamentary elections marked a turning point with the victory of the Direction-Social Democracy party (Smer-sociálna demokracia, SMER – formerly S&D and now Non-Iscredits). It is headed by three-time former prime minister Robert Fico, who formed a government with Voice-Social Democracy (Hlas-sociálna demokracia, HLAS-SD – formerly S&D and now Non-Iscredits) and the ultranationalist Slovak National Party (Slovenská národná strana, SNS – PFE), a move that proved controversial, prompting the European Socialists to expel SMER and HLAS from the EP parliamentary group and the PES party. In the 2024 presidential elections, Peter Pellegrini, from the ranks of HLAS, won in the second round. Now the ruling bloc controls both institutions.

At the beginning of his political career, Fico declared he was in favour of a vigorous defence of national and state interests, which was nevertheless to be achieved by strategic cooperation and partnership with the EU, as well as through European integration, which included the envisaged ratification of the treaty establishing a constitution for Europe.

While Bratislava officially supports the enlargement process and the European future of candidate countries, its foreign policy seems to have undergone a radical shift. SMER has adopted a more sovereignist and “multivectorial” attitude which tries

to be as open as possible towards various countries in the world regardless of their political orientation or their relations with other European partners. This pivot away from the country’s long-standing pro-western orientation is also confirmed by a constitutional change in September 2025 affirming that local laws must take precedence over European legislation in matters concerning national identity.

Moreover, the ruling party and its allies now promote, rhetorically at least, strong anti-Ukrainian and pro-Russian narratives, and advocate halting military aid to Kyiv and maintaining relations with the Kremlin, as well as opposing sanctions. SNS, for its part, usually advocates for exiting the European Union.

This approach is widening the divide between the government and the opposition, which, conversely, stands for deeper integration and backs enlargement. This is especially so for Progressive Slovakia (Progresívne Slovensko, PS – Renew Europe), which came second in the last elections. Slovakia Movement (Slovensko, S, which was known until 2023 as Obyčajní ľudia a nezávislé osobnosti, OĽANO – EPP), the Christian Democratic Movement (Kresťanskodemokratické hnutie, KDH – EPP), and Freedom and Solidarity (Sloboda a Solidarita, SaS – ECR) also share similar views. At the same time, they maintain a balanced and cautious approach by emphasising that all agreed-upon criteria must be fulfilled before accession takes place. In addition, KDH explicitly says in its programme that Turkey’s access negotiations should be halted, while PS too is sceptical about the possibility for Turkey to join the EU in the current circumstances. The For the People party (Za ľudí, ZL – EPP) frames enlargement to Ukraine as a way to strengthen continental security in the face of Russian aggression, while the Democrats (Demokrati – EPP) take a similar stance, framing, among other things, enlargement to the Western Balkans and Moldova as a way to counter “hybrid threats”.

Meanwhile, far-right parties such as Kotlebists – People’s Party Our Slovakia (Kotlebovci-Ludová strana naše Slovensko, L’SNS – Non-Inscrits) and the Republic Movement (Hnutie Republika, Republika – ESN), which originated from from L’SNS, strongly oppose European integration. Although they don’t express a position about it, it can be argued that they generally oppose enlargement too. Republika is in favour of reforming the EU in the direction of maintaining only economic integration and fully restoring the political sovereignty of members. Additionally, with regards to the Russian invasion, it holds strongly anti-Ukrainian views.

Something similar can be said for Slovak Patriot (Slovenský PATRIOT, PATRIOT – Non-Inscrits), which used to be close to L’SNS. We Are Family (Sme rodina, SR – PfE) possibly represents a partial exception since it signaled an openness to the partial integration of Ukraine and to EU enlargement to other countries. Conservative party Christian Union (Kresťanská únia, KU – ECR) advocates for a reform of the EU to restore sovereignty of the national parliament, and strongly opposes Turkey’s accession.

In general, proper discussion about overcoming the veto on QMV in Europe is yet to happen, although the majority of political forces would likely resist abandoning unanimity. However, it appears that PS and SNS could be in favour of a change. It should also be noted that KDH, as per its programme, supports establishing procedures of creative integration into EU institutions and the single market when it comes to enlargement.

SLOVENIA

All parties across the mainstream political spectrum in Slovenia are in favour of enlargement. There is no debate on this issue as it is considered a foregone priority in Slovenian politics. Slovenia asked for the enlargement portfolio in the current European Commission in order to actively push for the integration of the Western Balkans, and nominated Marta Kos of Freedom Movement (Gibanje Svoboda, GS – Renew Europe) for the post. After her designation as Slovenian candidate for the EU enlargement portfolio, MEP Matej Tonin of New Slovenia (Nova Slovenija-Krščanski demokrati, NSi – EPP) emphasised: “Marta Kos and I are politically distant but enlargement is fundamental for Slovenia”.

Unlike the Balkans, Ukraine is not a priority. If any of the Trio countries were prioritised over the Western Balkans for EU accession, Slovenia might show some resistance, though it likely would not be explicit. As a smaller country, Slovenia’s foreign policy tends to focus on regional interests, with limited emphasis on broader issues.

The support for enlargement to Western Balkan countries is due to historical, cultural, and linguistic ties. However this does rule out future tensions with Serbia over the legacies of the 1991 secession from Yugoslavia.

Part of society shows some understanding of Russian positions in the current international scenario. However, Slovenia recently banned Milorad Dodik (the pro-Russian Republika Srpska leader) from entering Slovenia, underlining a firm stance against Russian-engineered destabilisation.⁴⁹ Overall, Slovenian public opinion is concerned with the crisis of multilateralism due to ongoing international crises.

In Slovenia, the Social Democratic party (Socialni demokrati, SD – S&D), which served in the outgoing governing coalition alongside the Freedom Movement and The Left (Levica, L – GUE/NGL), generally has a unified pro-enlargement stance. Following parliamentary elections on 22 March 2026, the party engaged in negotiations to determine its role in the next formation. The SD party has an active role in the region, aiming for regional leadership (its favourable view on enlargement is focused on Western Balkan countries). For instance, in 2022 Foreign Minister Tanja Fajon (from SD) advocated granting candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina's. The SD party, in line with the S&D group in the European Parliament, believes that unanimity in decision-making should be reviewed in favour of the QMV.

All significant political groups in Slovenia currently identify as pro-European. However, a potential shift could soon take place in line with a growing trend towards Euroscepticism on both the left and right.

SPAIN

The topic of EU enlargement has never been prominent on the Spanish agenda. While the domestic political debate is highly polarised on domestic political issues (with strong disagreements between government and opposition parties), enlargement is not a topic of contention. Recently, Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez increased Spain's engagement with enlargement at the EU level, even if it remains marginal in public discussion and in parliament.

Nonetheless, Spanish public opinion is among the most pro-enlargement in the EU.⁵⁰ The positive national experience with EU integration has shaped this attitude.

The centre-right Popular Party (Partido Popular, PP – EPP) has always been a proudly pro-EU party, which has translated into a positive attitude toward enlargement. The PP considers enlargement important for stability, peace, economic development, and prosperity, if it is done under a merit-based approach and candidates meet the Copenhagen criteria. The centre-right is in fact focused on enforcing rules and on the need for the EU to have the "capacity to absorb new member states". However, it is not as enthusiastic as the Socialist Party, as it tends to be more protective of national interests. In addition, it has previously shown scepticism toward Turkey as a large country with a Muslim population. However, the PPE has remained fundamentally pro-EU.

The programme of the Socialist Workers' Party (Partido Socialista Obrero Español, PSOE – S&D) from the last European elections explicitly supports merit-based enlargement.⁵¹ It also highlights the need for internal EU institutional reform to prepare for enlargement. This aspect of internal EU reform

makes the PSOE's approach more elaborate than other parties, whose positive position on enlargement can nevertheless be vague.

The only exception is the issue of Kosovo's independence: Spain will be ready to recognise Kosovo only when the agreement with Serbia is reached. Nevertheless, while Spain does not recognise Kosovo's independence, since January 2024 it has recognised Kosovo passports for travel.⁵² Madrid does not want to take actions that might hinder the Serbia-Kosovo dialogue nor trigger more calls for independence in Catalonia and the Basque Country.

The right-wing Voice party (Vox – PñE) does not see enlargement as a prominent issue. It is against Turkey's accession, but does not have a clearly defined position. It is unlikely to accept new members without guarantees. At the same time, it could be supportive of new members that reinforce its vision of the EU as a union of sovereign nations. After the 2024 European elections, Vox moved from the ECR to the PñE group, further into Orbán's sphere of influence. Since Orbán favours EU enlargement, Vox will be increasingly influenced in this direction.

The junior government's coalition member, Sumar, composed of smaller progressive parties, divided its MEPs at the European Parliament between two main political groups: The Left-GUE/NGL and Greens/EFA. The component that split from the We Can party (Podemos – The Left-GUE/NGL), is the most progressive. Some of its members have gone as far to advocate for the recognition of Kosovo.

Indeed, some smaller regional nationalist parties that play a role in the national political scene are outspoken in their support of Kosovo as they tie their own independence to that of other nations. The Basque Nationalist Party (Euzko Alderdi Jeltzalea, EAJ – EDP/Renew) is openly in favour of

enlargement in the Balkans, advocating expansion towards the east, including Ukraine and Moldova, to bring security and prosperity to the peoples of these countries. The Catalan debate includes support for enlargement, with past discussion about Montenegro and its referendum for the secession from Yugoslavia, which is seen as a potential model for Catalonia.

Regional parties' interest in Kosovo is primarily driven by domestic political reasons, including their own independence, rather than a real interest in Kosovo's EU membership. For regionalist parties, EU enlargement is less of a popular topic, but there has not been any indication that they would oppose it.

For now, the Trio's accession is not a prominent topic in the country and is considered something that is not likely to happen in the near future. All parties in Spain are highly supportive of Ukraine in its war of defence against the Russian invasion.⁵³ Only Podemos has a pro-peace stance and suggests that the dialogue with Russia is necessary. It suggests that Ukraine should be a neutral country, warning that enlargement toward the east could be perceived as aggression toward Russia. Podemos does not necessarily contest the idea of eventual enlargement to Ukraine, but is more concerned about the EU taking a wrong turn on defence, instead of detaching from American hegemony and NATO. Podemos' programme specifically mentions the Balkans, but advocates for a "privileged relationship" based on respect for human rights, civil liberties, and rule of law (more in terms of good neighbouring relations).

SWEDEN

Most Swedish parties are in favour of EU enlargement and require that the candidate countries meet the political, economic, and legal criteria established for accession. However, the debate is limited, with domestic policy tending to dominate. Migration is a key issue in public debate, particularly in relation to non-European migrants from the Middle East and other regions.

Since Russia's full-scale invasion, Ukraine shapes how enlargement is discussed in Sweden. Security considerations dominate, and while the Western Balkans are acknowledged, the region remains less salient in public debates than the Trio and EU-Ukrainian relations. Most parties support Ukraine accession; only the right-wing Sweden Democrats (Sverigedemokraterna, SD – ECR) takes a more conditional stance, including suggesting a referendum on admitting Ukraine.⁵⁴

Centre-right and centrist parties are all pro-enlargement if candidate countries meet the criteria. The Moderate Party (Moderaterna, M – EPP) supports EU enlargement, which it considers a means to improve stability and cooperation across the continent.

The Social Democratic Party (Socialdemokraterna, S – S&D) generally agrees with most other parties that enlargement should occur whenever the agreed-on criteria for integration are met by the candidate countries. Their support for merit-based enlargement goes together with a cautious attitude about deepening their EU integration (larger budgets, and QMV). The enlargement support focuses primarily on security and sticking to the principles of the EU as a peace and democracy project. The Social Democratic Party is not generally interested in changing EU treaties at the moment. The preference

is to engage candidate countries via the single market rather than through deeper integration.

The radical Left Party (Vänsterpartiet, V – The Left-GUE/NGL) supports enlargement but is critical of the market liberalisation that it believes would accompany it. The Greens (Miljöpartiets, MP – Greens/EFA) support EU enlargement, especially if it can contribute to stability in the region.

When it comes to the right-wing Sweden Democrats (ECR), they have traditionally been very Eurosceptic and have supported Sweden's exit from the EU. Recently, they have softened this position to one that is critical of the EU but not outrightly hostile to EU enlargement. Most notably, when it comes to a country like Ukraine, they would support its accession due to shared political interests.

While the Christian Democrats (Kristdemokraterna, KD – EPP) are somewhat more cautious than the overtly pro-EU parties, they generally favour expanding the EU so long as this serves to reinforce European stability and security. Their approach to enlargement is thus more measured and pragmatic.

The Liberals (Liberalerna, L – Renew Europe) is one of the most pro-EU parties in Sweden and is strongly in favour of enlargement, especially as a means of promoting European values and cooperation. The Center Party (Centerpartiet, C – Renew Europe) also promotes enlargement, provided it contributes to deeper European cooperation and increased stability. It underlines that countries applying for integration should be prepared and meet EU standards.

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Osservatorio Balcani e Caucaso Transeuropa (OBCT) is an independent media and research center dedicated to in-depth analysis, reporting, and documentation on Southeast Europe, the Balkans, and the Caucasus. Through journalism, documentaries, and educational activities, OBCT promotes international solidarity, human rights, and peace.



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This study provides an overview of how political parties across the EU view enlargement, revealing a landscape shaped by an interplay of geopolitical pressures, perceived national interests and institutional concerns.

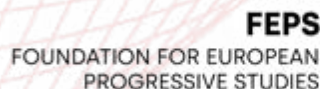
Although enlargement is a low priority across the EU27, a general consensus exists among mainstream parties that it is a geopolitical necessity for European security. However, specific priorities vary by geographic and historical positions of each country. For instance, Baltic and Nordic parties heavily prioritise Ukraine's integration, while countries with deep-rooted historical, cultural and economic ties to the Western Balkans are anxious not to leave them behind.

Across the political spectrum in the 27 member states, mainstream parties emphasise that candidate countries must fully comply with the Copenhagen criteria prior to accession. While there is clear resistance to enlargement due to fear of mass migration, financial burdens and economic competition, these concerns are generally mitigated once a strict merit-based approach is reaffirmed.

The three right-wing political families in the European Parliament differ deeply on the issue. This internal fragmentation stems from the fact that each of these right-wing groups contains member parties with distinct pro-Kremlin leanings.

Finally, a key issue shaping the debate is how a larger EU will function. Pro-European and progressive parties generally advocate for institutional reforms – specifically, replacing unanimity with qualified majority voting (QMV) – to prevent gridlock. Conversely, several smaller member states and nationalist parties view the veto power as an essential mechanism for safeguarding their national interests and sovereignty.

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