



Workshop on
Preparing for an Enlarged EU:
Cities, regions and the debate on EU reforms

European Week of Regions and Cities

Tuesday, 14 October 2025, 11:30-12:30

Brussels, Jacques Delors building, JDE 63

Background note

1. Context and timeline

- October 2023, [Granada Declaration](#): mandate by the European Council to the European Commission to prepare for pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews. It stressed the need for both the EU and any future member states to be ready for enlargement, ensuring a smooth and effective integration process;
- March 2024, European Commission: [Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews](#);
- June 2024, European Council, [Roadmap for future work on internal reforms](#): the Council identified as priority areas for pre-enlargement policy reviews those of competitiveness and the single market, the common agricultural policy (CAP), cohesion policy, European defence and security and freedom, security and justice.
- July 2024, European Commission: [Political Guidelines for 2024-2029](#) : enlargement is indicated as a catalyst for progress in terms of the Union's capacity to act, its policies and spending programmes.
- February 2025, European Commission: the [2025 work programme](#) announced for spring 2025 a non-legislative initiative on "An EU fit for enlargement: policy reviews and reforms". The publication has been delayed and it is now expected on 29 October, on the same day of the publication of the 2025 Enlargement Package.
- The European Parliament (Committee for Constitutional Affairs - AFCO) is preparing a [report on the institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations](#) (2025/2041(INI)), rapporteur Sandro Gozi (renew Europe), vote scheduled in the October plenary session.
- July and September 2025, the European Commission published its proposals for the [Multiannual Financial Framework \(MFF\) 2028-2024](#):



- The communication on [A dynamic EU Budget for the priorities of the future - The Multiannual Financial Framework 2028-2034](#) includes enlargement among the main challenges and opportunities ahead, noting that enlargement *"is a political and geostrategic imperative"* and *"a key investment in long-term security, peace, stability and sustainable prosperity in Europe"*. Whereas it is quite likely that most candidate countries will not be ready to join the Union during the 2028-2034 MFF, the latter provides a strong basis to "deliver on enlargement", as [Commissioner Kos](#) said. However, there is no mention of pre-enlargement policy reviews in the above-mentioned communication, as opposed to what one could expect on the possibility that the MFF proposals could include also indications on how to accommodate policies such as the Common Agricultural Policy and Cohesion Policy to the entry of new member States¹.
- According to the Commission's proposals on the MFF, all funding matters relevant to enlargement will be consolidated within one of the four main pillars of the new MFF, dedicated to "Global Europe". With a planned budget of €200 billion, this pillar includes programmes and funds aimed at projecting the EU's influence globally. Of that total, around €43 billion is earmarked for the budget line "Enlargement, Eastern Neighbourhood, and Rest of Europe". [According to Enlargement Commissioner Marta Kos](#), this represents a 37% increase compared to the outgoing framework.
- Aid for Ukraine's reconstruction will be channelled through a dedicated €100 billion fund, which is financed separately from the "Global Europe" budget and constitutes additional, standalone financing. Enlargement funds will continue to follow the conditionality principles already established.
- Since the rule of law is a core priority of the entire MFF, it is expected that the same principle will apply to enlargement – clearly signalling a continuation of value-based funding.
- Finally, the proposed new MFF provides for the possibility of revision of the proposals in the event that new countries join the EU, demonstrating flexibility and a readiness to adapt the financial framework to future enlargement, if need be.

¹ EPRS briefing on [EU enlargement and the post-2027 Multi-Annual Financial Framework](#), October 2024. See also the chapter on Budget of the Communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews in March 2024.



- On 2 September a [special Eurobarometer](#) dedicated to Enlargement & Perception surveys in candidate and potential candidate countries was published. The [section on Attitudes towards enlargement](#) shows that 56% of EU citizens are in favour of further EU enlargement, with a particularly high agreement among young people. A majority (56%) also believe their own country would benefit from future enlargement, due to advantages such as stronger global influence, a larger market for EU businesses, more job opportunities and greater solidarity and security. At the same time, the survey shows concerns of the respondents related to migration, corruption and crime, and the financial cost of enlargement.
- The [State of the Union speech](#) (SOTEU) and the letter of intent of the President of the European Commission on 10 September did not feature new information on the pre-enlargement policy reviews. However, it is worth noting that the SOTEU reaffirmed the EU commitment towards the speed of a merits-based process of enlargement. It also highlighted that *"only a united – and a reunited – Europe can be an independent Europe"* and that *"a larger and stronger Union is a security guarantee for all of us"*. Concerning EU reforms, the right of initiative of the Parliament and the need to move to qualified majority in some areas, for example in foreign policy, were mentioned.

2. The CoR and the preparation to enlargement: key messages

- The CoR opinion on [Active subsidiarity: a key principle of the EU better regulation agenda](#), adopted in June 2024, noted that the Commission's communication on pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews indicated the prospect of enlargement as an opportunity to simplify EU rules and better apply the subsidiarity and proportionality principles, including by identifying what could be better addressed at national level. However, the communication failed to recognise the potential that strengthening active subsidiarity and better involvement of the sub-national level.
- Overall, when it comes to reforms concerning the governance of the Union, the opinion reiterated that a greater involvement of the CoR and the regions in all phases of the European legislative process and in strategic policy processes could ensure more efficient decision-making and implementation of EU policies.
- The CoR [opinion on the 2024 Enlargement Package \(Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia\)](#), adopted in April 2025, noted that the CoR looks forward to providing input on the upcoming pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews, especially by reflecting on the regional and local perspective of EU policies in areas where



a strong territorial dimension is present – Cohesion, CAP, the completion of the TEN-T core and extended network.

- The study on [Preparing for the enlargement from a territorial perspective – Governance, policies and investments to ensure the role and means of LRAs in an enlarged EU](#), commissioned by the CIVEX commission of the CoR and published in October 2024:
 - Stressed the key role of local and regional authorities (LRAs) and of the CoR in supporting enlargement by raising awareness on the importance of the process both towards EU citizens and working with LRAs in partner countries. The study noted indeed that it is critical to foster public support for enlargement also in the current Member States.
 - Highlighted that the protection of the subsidiarity principle is a paramount issue for LRAs both in current and future EU Member States. In this regard, the existing cooperation between LRAs of the EU-27 and of the partners in the enlargement countries is critical and needs to be developed and deepened.
 - Suggested to analyse the impact of enlargement at the regional and not just state level, showing that different regions within individual Member States would be impacted by enlargement to a different degree. Therefore, any decision to redistribute funds among different regions within countries should be coordinated and monitored on the EU level, and *"should stem from a careful ex-ante analysis of the impacts of the enlargement (that would take into consideration different enlargement scenarios) that should be periodically reviewed"*.
 - Elaborated conclusions and recommendations concerning policy areas likely to be impacted by enlargement, such as cohesion policy and common agricultural policy.

3. Possible questions for debate

- a) How can enlargement be seized as an opportunity to reform and "upgrade" the EU, notably in the current challenging global environment?
- b) What is the main expected impact of enlargement and linked reforms/ policy reviews on cities and regions?
- c) Which reforms and/ or policy areas should be tackled as a priority?



- d) How can the EU's local and regional authorities contribute to, and benefit from the process of pre-enlargement reforms and policy reviews?
 - e) The special Eurobarometer dedicated to enlargement and perception shows a mixed attitude of EU citizens towards the process, with both awareness of the opportunities but also concerns. How could local and regional authorities contribute to communicating enlargement in a reassuring and clear way to the citizens?
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Speakers:

- Mafalda Batalha, Researcher, Department of Economics, European University Institute, Florence
- Corina Stratulat, Associate Director and Head of the European Politics and Institutions Programme, European Policy Centre, Brussels
- Manuel Palazuelos Martínez, Team Leader Global Place-based Innovation Strategies for Sustainable Development - Smart specialisation and innovation ecosystems in the EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Region, Joint Research Centre of the European Commission

Moderator:

Béatrice Taulegne, Director, Directorate Legislative Work I, European Committee of the Regions

Brussels, 12 September 2025