

Handout A: Growth of the European Union



Source: European Union, 2016.

https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/enlargement_en.pdf.

Previous enlargement

The European Union grew out of the European Coal and Steel Community, an organization designed to prevent conflict and increase economic interdependence between the states of Europe after the Second World War. As trade between the members grew, other European states that shared similar liberal and democratic values gradually joined the European Communities, which became the European Union in 1993. After the Cold War, several postcommunist states in Eastern Europe expressed the desire to “return to Europe”. Joining the EU was seen as a way of erasing the lines that had previously divided Europe, and these newly-independent countries hoped to share in the prosperity enjoyed by EU members. For its part, the EU hoped to consolidate democracy and liberty in Europe. Several Eastern European states joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. Croatia, which joined in 2013, is the newest EU member state.

The membership process

Application for membership in the EU is open to any European state that meets a set of conditions called the “Copenhagen criteria”. As stated on the European Commission’s website¹, these criteria include:

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

If a country that meets these criteria applies for EU membership, a lengthy admission process begins while the candidate gradually adopts the EU’s collected legislation (called the *acquis communautaire*) and adopts EU standards on a variety of issues. Lastly, a candidate’s admission to the EU must be approved unanimously by the other EU member states.

Integration with other EU members does not stop there. New EU member states also commit to eventually joining the Eurozone by adopting the euro as a common currency, and to joining the Schengen Area, which removes internal border controls between its member countries.

Current candidates

Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey have all been recognized by the European Union as candidates, and these countries are gradually adopting the *acquis*.

Kosovo and Bosnia and Hercegovina are recognized as being potential candidates, meaning they do not yet meet the criteria to be considered for membership, but are promised to be considered once they meet the criteria.

In addition, Iceland and Norway were once candidates, but both decided to withdraw from the membership accession process. Instead, they are members of the European Free Trade Association along with Liechtenstein and Switzerland. This allows them to join the EU’s internal market.

¹ European Commission. “European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations – Conditions for Membership”. Last updated October 12, 2015. http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/policy/conditions-membership/index_en.htm.