

#FocusFuture

The **7Ds**
for Sustainability

Debt
Decarbonisation
Defence

Democracy

IN DEPTH

Demography
De-risking Globalisation
Digitalisation



Wilfried
Martens Centre
for European Studies

The 7Ds for Sustainability - Democracy in Depth

Authors :

Federico Ottavio Reho
Adriaan Schout
Anthony Teasdale
Nikolaos Tzifakis
Nicolai Von Ondarza
Wouter Wolfs

Editors :

Federico Ottavio Reho
Klaus Welle

April 2024

Credits

The Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies is the political foundation and think tank of the European People's Party, dedicated to the promotion of Christian Democrat, conservative and like-minded political values.

Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

Rue du Commerce 20
Brussels, BE 1000

For more information, please visit www.martenscentre.eu.

Assistant Editors: Sara Pini, Senior Research Officer & Theo Larue, Editorial and Publications Officer

Cover design: Gözim Lezha, Brand and Visual Communications Officer

External editing: Communicative English bvba

Typesetting: Victoria Agency

Printed in Belgium by INNI Group

This publication receives funding from the European Parliament.

© 2024 Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies

The European Parliament and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies assume no responsibility for facts or opinions expressed in this publication or their subsequent use. Sole responsibility lies with the author of this publication.

Table of contents

Introduction	4
The European Parliament	6
The Council of the EU	8
European Political Parties	10
National Democratic Institutions	12
Subsidiarity	14
EU Enlargement	16
About the Authors	18

Table of acronyms

CJEU	Court of Justice of the European Union
CoR	European Committee of the Regions
EDA	European Defence Agency
EEAS	European External Action Service
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EP	European Parliament
EU	European Union
HR	High Representative
PSC	Political and Security Committee
QMV	Qualified Majority Voting
REFIT	The Regulatory Fitness and Performance Programme
TEU	Treaty on European Union
TFEU	Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union
VP	Vice President

Introduction

Klaus Welle and Federico Ottavio Reho

Democracy is the beating heart and core of the EU's identity, along with peace. From its inception in the aftermath of the Second World War, European integration has been open only to democratic countries that respect the rule of law and fundamental freedoms. It has also played an essential role in democratising, stabilising and integrating new countries, from Greece, Spain and Portugal in the 1970s and 1980s to the post-Communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe in the 1990s and 2000s.

Since the first direct election of the European Parliament in 1979, the EU's democratic system has developed hugely too: by increasing transparency, empowering the European Parliament, making the European Commission more accountable and even involving citizens in innovative experiments such as the Conference on the Future of Europe. As a result, the EU now has clear dual democratic legitimacy as a union of states and citizens, each represented in one of the equal co-legislators: the Council and the European Parliament respectively. Moreover, the multilevel nature of EU democracy is recognised through the direct involvement of the national parliaments in various capacities, from the ratification of mixed trade agreements to the yellow and orange card procedures which protect subsidiarity.

As a side effect of the last 15 years of successive crises, EU affairs have also become more politicised. As a result, European issues have become essential to national democratic debates, and a European public sphere has finally begun to emerge. It is important that democratic accountability does not lag behind political and institutional developments, as has at times been the case over the last decades when new rules and bodies have been created outside the EU legal framework to react to crisis situations.

As the EU acquires new powers and competences to manage new challenges in the most diverse fields, it will be necessary to improve the quality of EU democracy, the legitimacy of its institutions, and their responsiveness to the needs and preferences of the EU member states and citizens. Moreover, democratic values and institutions face new challenges, such as disinformation, polarisation and a lack of trust in political elites—all in a world of systemic rivalry.

In 2023, the Martens Centre published its *7Ds for Sustainability* strategy document. This text comprised 175 proposals for the next legislature to future-proof EU policy in the areas of debt, decarbonisation, defence, democracy, demography, de-risking globalisation, and digitalisation. Sustainability was chosen as the guiding principle to ensure that the policies reconcile the needs of both the present and the future, and systematically include the interests of the next generations.

The *7Ds* document has already inspired reflection on what to do over the next five years. These discussions are based on Christian Democrat and conservative thinking and the available in-house expertise of the Martens Centre. For the next phase of intense discussions about the programme to be implemented during the 2024–9 legislature, the Martens Centre has invited renowned external experts to put forward their own, more extensive proposals based on the original document, thereby deepening the available expertise. It is hoped that these proposals, published at the beginning of April 2024, will help to clarify the way forward at a critical juncture, when the European Parliament, the European Commission and the European Council are negotiating on and finalising their strategic priorities.

The European Parliament

Anthony Teasdale

The European Parliament (EP) is the only directly elected transnational legislative body in the world. Chosen by the public every five years in direct elections held simultaneously in the 27 EU member states, it is currently made up of 605 members (rising to 620 in July 2024) from over 200 individual national political parties, who come together to form seven political groups of differing ideological persuasions. The EP has seen its formal powers and political role grow rapidly in recent decades. Through successive EU treaty changes, introduced mainly between 1987 and 2009, the EP has progressively become a joint legislature with the Council of Ministers in most EU policy areas—other than, notably, foreign policy, security and defence—whilst also being the Union’s joint budgetary authority and the central forum in which the European Commission, the Union’s lead executive body, is held to account. The Commission president and his or her ‘college’ of 26 other commissioners, although nominated by the member states collectively, can only enter office with the explicit approval of the EP. The EP also has the power, by a super majority, to dismiss the Commission, although this has never happened so far.

The increasing centrality of the EP within EU policymaking requires a constant process of institutional updating and improvement, building on the significant progress made over the last 15 years at both the political and the administrative levels. Further reforms recommend themselves in at least three broad areas. First, action could be taken to increase the clarity and visibility of both the EP and the five-yearly elections to it, with a view to reflecting and underlining their importance as central vehicles for democratic expression and choice within the EU system. Among the ways this could be achieved are (1) clarifying and codifying the *Spitzenkandidat* or ‘lead candidate’ process, by which the outcome of EP elections influences the choice of Commission president; (2) introducing transnational lists, in parallel to the existing 27 national electoral processes, for European elections; and (3) holding a formal inauguration ceremony for the incoming president and college of commissioners outside the EP building every fifth year. Second, action could be taken to update the EU legislative process through reforms designed (1) to involve the EP in decisions on ‘Emergency Europe’ crisis spending, (2) to increase the openness of trilogues in EU law-making, and (3) to give the EP greater opportunities to engage in legislative initiative. Third, action could also be taken to give greater weight in EP committee work to the policy cycle and policy context, to help promote more coherent, resilient and forward-looking law-making within the EU system. Key to this would be mainstreaming greater discussion of (1) *ex ante* impact assessment, *ex post* evaluation and European added value; (2) risks to, and the capabilities and resilience of, the Union as a system; and (3) global trends and strategic foresight. Discussion in the latter case should include serious consideration of the potential creation of an EP Committee for the Future.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Increasing the clarity and visibility of the EP and its elections as central vehicles for democratic expression and choice within the EU system	Updating the EU legislative process by involving the EP in ‘Emergency Europe’ spending, increasing the openness of trilogues and giving greater opportunities for EP initiative	Giving greater weight in EP committee work to the policy cycle and policy context, to promote more coherent, resilient and forward-looking law-making within the EU system
Project 1	Clarify and codify the <i>Spitzenkandidat</i> or ‘lead candidate’ process, by which the outcome of EP elections influences the choice of Commission President. Agree certain common basic principles and practices among the European political parties and between the EU institutions before the 2029 contest.	Democratise ‘Emergency Europe’ through the systematic ‘budgetisation’ of new crisis-related EU spending—backed by new scrutiny structures/ mechanisms within the EP, and formal EP involvement in use of Article 122 TFEU ‘emergency clause’.	Mainstream discussion of <i>ex ante</i> impact assessment, <i>ex post</i> evaluation and European added value in the routine work of parliamentary committees. Passage of all significant legislation should start with meaningful sessions on these policy cycle issues.
Project 2	Introduce transnational lists, in parallel to the existing 27 national electoral processes, for European elections, to promote a stronger sense of continent-wide political choice. Add European party logos alongside national ones on ballot papers, and conduct EP elections over a single day of voting.	Further open up the trilogue process for negotiating EU law, <i>inter alia</i> , by giving full details of all meetings and amendments at all stages of the co-decision procedure. Publish EP successes in shaping final outcomes quickly and in detail.	Mainstream discussion of risks to, and the capabilities and resilience of, the Union as a system in the routine work of parliamentary committees. This could include an annual EP report on ‘future shocks’, building on the innovative work within the EP administration on these issues.
Project 3	Hold a formal inauguration ceremony for the incoming president and college of European commissioners outside the EP building in November of every fifth year, on the Agora Simone Veil, with an oath administered by the president of the CJEU.	Give the EP greater opportunity to exercise a measure of legislative initiative within the EU system, with automatic consideration by the Council of any formal EP proposals put forward by an absolute or super majority.	Mainstream discussion of global trends and strategic foresight in the routine work of parliamentary committees. This could include an EP report on the Commission’s annual strategic foresight report, and the potential creation of an EP Committee for the Future.

The Council of the EU

Nicolai Von Ondarza

The Council of the EU is in many ways the engine room of EU decision-making and a crucial pillar of European democracy. It is the main arena for negotiating compromises amongst the different national governments, and thus where negotiations advance from the technical to the political stage. Through direct representation of all the member state governments, it brings together the political diversity of the Union while also providing a crucial link to national democracy. Looking ahead to the challenges facing the EU in the next institutional cycle, reforms to three crucial aspects of the Council could help to streamline the EU's institutional capacity to act. All of these reforms can be implemented without treaty change.

The first challenge relates to getting the EU institutions ready for enlargement whilst strengthening the Union's capacity to act. By its nature, the Council will be particularly affected. The Council and its working groups have already been transformed from small gatherings to huge sessions of 27 countries, with less room for informality and the greater challenge of finding unanimity among 27. This calls for a wide extension of qualified-majority voting via the passerelle clause wherever possible, albeit with a mechanism to protect vital national interests in critical decisions. The Council should create a special body under its own auspices to bring together both this reform and the enlargement process itself. This could be modelled after the 'A50 Council' which helped to foster unity in the EU through the Brexit process, including close coordination with the Commission and the Parliament.

The second major task is strengthening democracy. The Council, with its direct representation of the nationally elected governments, is already a core pillar of EU democracy. This should be improved upon by transforming the Council's working methods into those of a second chamber whenever it acts in a legislative capacity together with the European Parliament. This includes enhancing transparency on Council votes and negotiated amendments to increase accountability. The negotiations themselves should retain the necessary confidentiality. The Council Presidency remains crucial for national ownership and strengthening of the link between the national and the European level. With enlargement on the horizon, it should be turned into a 'quintet' of five presidencies, planning longer legislative agendas. It could also be linked to regular citizens' assemblies in the country of the Presidency, bringing together randomly selected citizens from across the EU.

Third, the Council should become a strategic driver for security and defence policy. Alongside the creation of a commissioner for defence, a Council formation for defence ministers and the streamlining of EU external relations are needed. The Council could also provide a hub to link the EU's new initiatives in security and defence with those of close allies such as the UK, Norway and candidate countries who align with EU foreign policy, which could take part in the new Defence Council if they meet certain conditions.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Getting the Council enlargement ready and increasing its capacity to act	Strengthening the democratic actions of the EU via the Council	Turning the Council into a strategic driver for European security and defence
Project 1	Use the <i>passerelle</i> clauses for a wide extension of qualified-majority voting in the Council—albeit balanced with a ‘sovereignty safety net’ in particular in sovereignty-sensitive policy areas.	Turn the Council into a second chamber for legislative votes.	Create a separate ‘Council for defence’, prepared by the Political and Security Committee and aligning with the new role of defence commissioner.
Project 2	Reform the Council Presidency to have a ‘quintet’ of five presidencies for each half of the legislative cycle, with a pronounced joint agenda for major legislative files.	Ensure the full transparency of all votes and amendments when acting as a legislative second chamber, while maintaining the necessary room for informal negotiations.	Streamline EU external relations and rework the relationship between the High Representative, the European External Action Service, the EU Defence Agency, the Foreign Affairs Council, and the new Defence Affairs Council and defence commissioner.
Project 3	Steer the process of enlargement and reform as a core task of the next institutional cycle, including the use of a special committee modelled on the ‘A50 Council and Council Working Group’.	Improve the link between the Council’s work and citizens by hosting a citizens’ assembly once during each Presidency on one of its core projects.	Use the Foreign Affairs Council and the new Defence Affairs Council as a hub for European security. For this, invite non-EU European partners (in particular the UK, Ukraine, and Norway) to involve them in foreign, security and defence decisions, without voting rights.

European Political Parties

Wouter Wolfs

EU democracy needs stronger European political parties. This chapter proposes three programmes to strengthen their role. The first aims to create a *stable regulatory environment* that allows Europarties to develop into strong extra-parliamentary organisations. It comprises three projects. First, the ratification process of the latest proposal amending the EU Electoral Law needs to be completed to end the existing legal uncertainty. Second, a simplified registration procedure would make it easier to gain official recognition, strengthening participation and political pluralism and creating a political level playing field. A lower registration threshold could be combined with a higher threshold for funding. Third, the current rules on expenditure are too rigid. They should be reformed to make it easier to finance weaker members, run campaigns outside European Parliament elections and collaborate with national parties.

The second programme focuses on *bridging the gap with European citizens* by turning the Europarties into genuinely representative entities. The projects for this programme are the following. First, a clearer and more detailed description of European political parties as the main organisations providing democratic linkage at the EU level. That is, clarification is required as to what their core democratic functions are and how these differ from the role of the European Parliament groups and national parties. Second, Europarties should be given more opportunities to engage non-EU parties in their day-to-day functioning, among others by collecting membership fees. Especially for parties in the EU's neighbouring countries, Europarties play an important democracy-building role. Third, there should be more opportunities to involve individual members of the national parties and other citizens in the Europarties, for example by making (part of) their funding dependent on the number of individual members or by introducing citizen support as an alternative to parliamentary support to gain official recognition.

Finally, the third programme aims to *raise the electoral stakes* by giving Europarties the means to operate as genuine campaign organisations. It comprises the following projects. First, simplifying the electoral regulatory environment. The existing plethora of different national rules substantially complicates the development of a consistent EU-wide campaign. Second, introducing measures to raise the Europarties' visibility by displaying their names and logos on the electoral ballots and on the campaign materials of national parties. Third, a separate campaign grant (which should not be tied to a co-financing principle) in addition to the existing operating grant could provide Europarties with sufficient financial resources to conduct an electoral campaign.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Creating a stable regulatory environment and positioning European political parties as strong extra-parliamentary organisations	Bridging the gap with the people of Europe by making European political parties the representatives of European citizens	Raising the electoral stakes by allowing European political parties to act as campaign organisations
Project 1	Ratify the latest proposal amending EU electoral law.	Define and empower European political parties as the core democratic link organisations in EU democracy.	Harmonise national electoral and campaign finance laws, including those governing the common closing of polls, electoral periods, and spending thresholds.
Project 2	Simplify administrative procedures for the registration of European political parties to enable stronger pluralism, contestation and participation.	Allow European political parties to engage non-EU national parties in their internal organisation.	Introduce measures to increase the visibility of European political parties in electoral campaigns (compulsory display of European party name and logo on electoral ballots and national party campaign materials).
Project 3	Reform party financing and spending rules to allow more funding, and more leeway to finance weaker members and run campaigns outside European Parliament elections, on non-EU issues and at all levels.	Provide a (financial) incentive to European political parties to enlarge and engage their individual membership bases.	Introduce a separate campaign grant to provide European political parties with the required resources to conduct an electoral campaign.

National Democratic Institutions

Adriaan Schout

A strong Europe is built on strong member states. The EU is confronted with thorny challenges that require collective answers in areas that have so far been either politically sensitive or regarded as national prerogatives. Previous Commission presidents have underlined that ‘the EU must deliver’. This is partly true, but equally important are the member states and their capacities to deliver.

Debates about the future of the EU have tended to forget the national requirements and the distribution of roles between the EU institutions and the national administrations. As problems with enforcement have shown, the EU is a multilevel network system in which the weakest links can affect the legitimacy of the Union. Management deficits in EU networks have hampered, among other things, the functioning of the rule of law, the Economic and Monetary Union, and the effectiveness and accountability of the EU budget. The list of relevant national institutions that determine national competitiveness and the legitimacy of the EU as a whole is long (from legal systems to independent monitoring and enforcement mechanisms, from educational institutions to effective public administrations able to spend public funds). The quality of public-sector institutions is key to national ownership, economic convergence and mutual respect among member states.

‘Good governance’ has a long tradition in the EU. However, political interest in the subject has faded, and it is essentially considered only in relation to modernising the Commission. In fact, the EU Treaties largely shield national institutions from EU scrutiny. Arguably, some of the achievements of the good governance agenda have been reversed or forgotten. Given the fresh demands on EU spending, frustrations with enforcement and over national ownership, and preparations for enlargement, the next Commission cannot avoid ensuring the legitimacy of the EU’s multilevel administrative systems. Similarly, the recent political focus on the impact of legislation calls for a reassessment of harmonisation ambitions and the reliability of impact assessments. Politicians may prefer concrete policies over governance, but as Monnet was well aware, ‘nothing lasts without institutions’.

The table identifies three interlinked programmes: a reconsideration of good governance for the 2020s, enforcement as key to the sustainable legitimacy of the EU and multilevel institutional innovation. One underlying question relates to the nature of politics. Politicians like to discuss policies—they are much less interested in the quality of administrations. Yet, to remain legitimate in terms of delivery, how should the quality of European and national polities be safeguarded? A second fundamental question concerns the role of the European Commission if the EU is understood as a multilevel network-based system of governance.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Reconsidering good governance	Monitoring and enforcement	Innovating the institutions
Project 1	Sharpen the wording of the EU Treaties concerning the obligations of national administrations. The standards of good governance should also apply to the member states, for two reasons: (1) member states need to be sound in themselves and (2) good governance in the EU will fail if it is not grounded at the national level.	Enforce all areas of EU policymaking effectively. This is crucial for the Union's legitimacy. Lessons need to be drawn from policy areas that have been successful and from those that have not. Examples of complex and politically sensitive areas where the EU has excelled include monitoring the state of the environment and competition policy. Less successful areas have been the Economic and Monetary Union, the rule of law and budgets.	Modernise the European Commission, taking into account the current challenges and recent developments. The credibility of the Commission has to be beyond doubt. Overly ambitious targets and a risk of overregulation point to questions related to policymaking, the choice of instruments and attention for actual outputs.
Project 2	Define the essential national requirements for successful European integration in each EU policy area. Determine the added value of the role of the European Commission vis-à-vis national administrations in EU areas.	Regularly assess the quality of national enforcement systems in all relevant policy areas. The requirements of enforcement include independence, transparency, and a distinction between first-line and second-line controls.	Proactively provide more information on EU policies and implementation. Policies should be oriented towards more feasible objectives, and more attention should be paid to national enforcement. National ownership depends on the scrutiny of EU policies by the national parliaments.
Project 3	The Commission should retake the lead regarding good governance. This requires a reorganisation of its Secretariat-General, which has increasingly acquired a political status. Good governance was a European priority in the 2000s. This agenda has slipped, and politicisation has taken over at the expense of transparency and the usefulness and reliability of impact assessments.	Reconsider the role of EU agencies and their relationship with the national networks and the Commission. The politics of EU agencies has been largely—and dangerously—underestimated.	Make national supreme auditing institutions active in scrutinising EU policies at the national level (including scrutinising national expenditures of EU funds).

Subsidiarity

Federico Ottavio Reho

Respect for subsidiarity is a key precondition for the long-term political sustainability of a heterogeneous federal union such as the EU. In such a polity, legitimacy always flows upwards from the member states, regions and peoples, who share sovereignty in and rule together through common institutions, but have no vocation to ever merge into a single demos and state. At a deeper level, subsidiarity defines a specific type of federal political order that strives to preserve the diversity, spontaneity and freedom of all human communities as intrinsically worthy, and in which the higher levels of government exist to assist the lower ones and enhance their ability for self-determination. The more powers and competences the EU acquires, therefore, the more important the strong protection of subsidiarity becomes to ensure that they are exercised as close as possible to the citizens and without encroaching upon the prerogatives of the lower levels. In other words, empowering the EU and strengthening subsidiarity are two sides of the same coin and have historically progressed together.

The key pillars of subsidiarity protection under the current treaties are Article 5 and Protocols 1 and 2 TEU, which deal with the definition of the principle, the role of national parliaments in its enforcement, and the application of subsidiarity and proportionality respectively. Though helpful as broad legal-political principles, these provisions have largely failed to protect the functions of member states and regions or to mitigate the longstanding problem of ‘competence creep’, that is, the tendency to adopt EU legislation in areas in which the EU has not been conferred a specific legislative competence. Multiple and complex reasons account for this, including the fact that, while in force since 1992, the subsidiarity principle has never acquired any justiciable content. This vagueness means that the principle has never emerged as a standard for adjudicating concrete jurisdictional disputes. Another, much neglected, reason is the ‘over-constitutionalisation’ of the EU—the fact that its treaties have been turned into a *de facto* constitution by the case law of the ECJ means that European constitutional law is full of provisions that, in any regular polity, would be governed by so-called ordinary law. For example, the constitutionalised goal of establishing a common market provided a legal basis that could be used to generally undermine the competences of member states, as every national norm could be construed as an impediment. The right of complaint granted to national parliaments under the Treaty of Lisbon cannot compensate for this, as it suffers from limitations of its own. To overcome some of these difficulties, actions to reinforce the protection of subsidiarity are suggested on three fronts: the legal definition of subsidiarity and its justiciability, the institutional protection of subsidiarity and the political protection of subsidiarity. Measures range from relatively simple initiatives that would not require a treaty change to more transformative interventions that would.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Reinforcing the legal protection of subsidiarity	Reinforcing the institutional protection of subsidiarity	Reinforcing the political protection of subsidiarity
Project 1	Amend Protocol 2 TEU to establish clear guidelines on the application of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and include a detailed definition of subsidiarity in the Interinstitutional Agreement on Better Law-Making.	Reinforce national parliaments' ability to hold their governments accountable for EU matters by issuing a gold standard for the participation of national parliaments in EU legislative and political processes.	Establish a Subsidiarity Subcommittee of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs as well as a Subsidiarity Intergroup in the European Parliament. Encourage the Council working groups responsible for these matters to systematically assess whether the Commission's proposals comply with the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.
Project 2	Establish a new constituent court of the ECJ that is specialised in actions against alleged violations of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality, and is composed of former judges from the national constitutional courts.	Grant longer deadlines for national parliaments to scrutinise subsidiarity under the yellow and orange card procedures, reduce the thresholds required for both, introduce a 'green card' and a 'late card' procedure, and grant a role to subnational parliaments possessing legislative powers.	Reduce the burden and intrusiveness of EU legislation by: committing to choose the form of EU action which least interferes with national law (e.g. directives instead of regulations); limiting the use of delegated and implementing legal acts; and strictly implementing the 'one in, one out' principle.
Project 3	Reclassify all provisions of a non-constitutional nature present in the EU treaties as ordinary law (essentially, most of the TFEU) and formulate a more precise definition of shared competences under Article 4(2) TFEU.	Reinforce the role of the CoR (vertical subsidiarity) in scrutinising EU legislation when it comes up for revision (e.g. the REFIT programme and Fit for Future platform), as well as the role of the EESC (horizontal subsidiarity).	Reject on strict constitutional grounds initiatives, whether binding or not, of any EU institutions that seem to exceed EU competences and violate a rigorous application of subsidiarity, refusing to discuss their substantive merits (e.g. initiatives on, or touching upon, controversial moral disagreements).

EU Enlargement

Nikolaos Tzifakis

European integration has historically advanced as a binary process, consisting of parallel steps towards deepening and widening cooperation. More frequently than not, these two dimensions of European integration have reinforced each other. On the one hand, the successful advancement of supranational cooperation has prompted third countries to express interest in joining the European project. On the other, the accession of new members has propelled the EU to reform its institutions and extend its integration into new policy areas (e.g. cohesion policy). Managing the current poly-crisis requires the EU to, once again, move forward decisively with both dimensions of European integration. The containment of Russian aggressive revisionism renders the acceleration of the EU accession of all countries in the continent that share European norms and values a matter of strategic priority. The prospect of integrating several new member states compels the EU to seriously reflect on the efficiency of its institutions and procedures. This concerns reforms that are long overdue, such as reducing the size of the Commission and addressing the issue areas where decisions are taken by unanimity. The postponement of these reforms has put the enlargement policy on hold for some time. It has also shaken the interested countries' belief in their prospects for membership of the EU. Reforming EU institutions (deepening) and preparing (potential) candidate countries for EU accession (widening) are two processes that should run in parallel, not one at the expense of the other.

The EU enlargement policy has not worked effectively for at least the last decade. All the Western Balkan countries have witnessed democratic backsliding while claiming to be working to prepare for EU accession. The EU has used conditionality inconsistently on several occasions. In some cases, the EU has failed to reward progress owing to the tendency of member states to use the enlargement policy as a vehicle for projecting their national preferences. On other occasions (potential) candidate countries have been allowed to advance on the accession path (e.g. through the opening of negotiations on chapters of the *acquis*) despite their poor track record in implementing reforms. While the EU has established tools to sanction stagnation in reform efforts (e.g. the 'balance clause' in fundamentals, and process reversibility), it has never employed them. The EU should learn from its policy failures in the Western Balkans as it embarks on the additional and more challenging task of helping Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia prepare for EU accession. Pre-accession financial assistance has not brought about any economic convergence between the EU27 and the Western Balkans. It is insufficient in size and does not follow the methodology and logic of the EU Structural and Investment Funds. The accession prospects of Ukraine, a large country that will need vast amounts of post-war reconstruction assistance, make it imperative to increase and thoroughly review the EU budget and the Union's financial instruments for supporting (potential) candidate countries.

	Programme 1	Programme 2	Programme 3
	Reforming EU institutions, procedures and instruments in preparation for the accession of new member states	Increasing the efficiency of the EU enlargement policy to accelerate the process	Restoring the credibility of EU accession conditionality
Project 1	Review the rules that determine the composition of the European Parliament and the European Commission to avoid an open-ended increase in their size.	Introduce qualified-majority voting in all intermediate steps of the accession process, such as the opening and closing of negotiations in different chapters/clusters. Unanimity should remain the requirement at all the decisive stages: accepting an application, granting candidate status and concluding negotiations.	Adopt a European Council declaration which states unequivocally that the accession of new member states is not conditional on the completion of internal EU reforms. If candidate countries were ready to accede before the reform of EU institutions is completed, a series of transitional derogations would be introduced in those countries' accession treaties. These might concern areas such as the right to veto decisions taken with unanimity and to nominate a Commissioner.
Project 2	Extend the application of the Ordinary Legislative Procedure and qualified-majority voting in most policy areas. Decision-making by unanimity should remain in a few domains, such as the Common Security and Defence Policy and, extraordinarily, whenever a member state raises a vital interest issue.	Complement the Commission's annual progress reports with biennial reviews of the interested countries' rule of law sectors. These reviews, conducted by groups of independent analysts, would account for the causes of deficiencies in the rule of law (on the model of the Priebe Reports about Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia). The policy prescriptions in these reports would inform accession negotiations.	Introduce tangible interim rewards for interested countries registering progress in the accession process. These could include: access to EU Structural and Investment Funds; periodic participation as observers in sessions of Council meetings (discussing issues in chapters/clusters in which these countries have substantially advanced or concluded accession negotiations).
Project 3	Increase the size of the EU budget to empower the Union to face the multiple challenges of our times, including supporting the accession of (potential) candidate countries.	Increase pre-accession financial assistance and introduce the methodology and the logic of support offered to member states through the EU Structural and Investment Funds.	Operationalise the reversibility of the enlargement methodology. Democratic backsliding, prolonged stagnation in introducing reforms, and poor alignment with EU foreign policy decisions and actions should no longer be inconsequential.

About the Authors



Federico Ottavio Reho is Strategic Coordinator and Senior Research Officer at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies, as well as a part-time D.Phil. candidate in history at the University of Oxford. He holds degrees in political science and political economy from the London School of Economics, the Hertie School of Governance (Berlin) and LUISS University (Rome). Formerly, he worked in the EU institutions and for a division of the European Central Bank. He has also worked in the political section of the US Diplomatic Mission to Italy.



Adriaan Schout is a Senior Research Fellow at Clingendael. His work combines research and consultancy on European governance questions for national and European institutions. He has worked on projects addressing issues relating to the EU Presidency, EU integration and improving EU regulation, amongst others. Prior to joining Clingendael, he served as an independent expert in the field of EU governance for the European Economic and Social Committee and for the European Commission's Directorate-General for Research. He is an Honorary Fellow of the Centre for Social and Economic Research on the Global Environment at the University of East Anglia, UK. He graduated from Groningen with a master's degree in Economics and completed his Ph.D. in Political Science at Leiden University.



Anthony Teasdale is a Visiting Professor in Practice at the European Institute of the London School of Economics, where he convenes a weekly seminar on EU politics and decision-making. He is also an Adjunct Professor in the School of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University in New York. From 2013 to 2022, he was the Director General of the European Parliamentary Research Service, the in-house research centre and think tank of the European Parliament in Brussels. Additionally, Anthony has worked for the British foreign secretary, the European Parliament and the EU Council of Ministers. He holds a M.Phil. in Politics from Oxford University.



Nikolaos Tzifakis holds the Jean Monnet Chair in EU Foreign Policy and the Western Balkans and is Professor of International Relations in the Department of Political Science and International Relations at the University of the Peloponnese. He is also a Research Associate at the Wilfried Martens Centre for European Studies. He has previously taught as a visiting lecturer at the University of Athens, in the School of Humanities of the Hellenic Open University, at the Hellenic National Defence College, and at the Greek National School for Public Administration and Local Government. In 1997 he was awarded an MA with distinction in International Relations and Strategic Studies, and in 2022 he received a Ph.D. in International Relations from Lancaster University.



Nicolai Von Ondarza is the head of the EU/Europe Research Division at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP). Since 2013 he has organised the British–German Outlook Group, a yearly exchange between the SWP, Chatham House, the German Federal Foreign Office and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office. Previously he held various research positions at the European University Viadrina Frankfurt (Oder) and at the Bundeswehr Institute of Social Sciences within the multinationality/European armed forces research division.



Wouter Wolfs is a Lecturer and Senior Researcher at the Public Governance Institute of the KU Leuven. He is a Senior Fellow of the Electoral Integrity Project and principal investigator of the project Between European Values, Contestation and Survival: the Changing Law and Politics of a Geopolitical European Union (CHANGE). Wouter Wolfs holds a Ph.D in Political Science for his dissertation on the funding of European political parties, and received a postdoctoral grant from the Research Foundation Flanders to examine the capacity-building of policy support in the European Parliament. Previously he was a Fellow of the Re:Constitution Programme and has conducted research fellowships at the Party Research Institute of the Heinrich Heine University of Düsseldorf and the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in Stockholm.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

