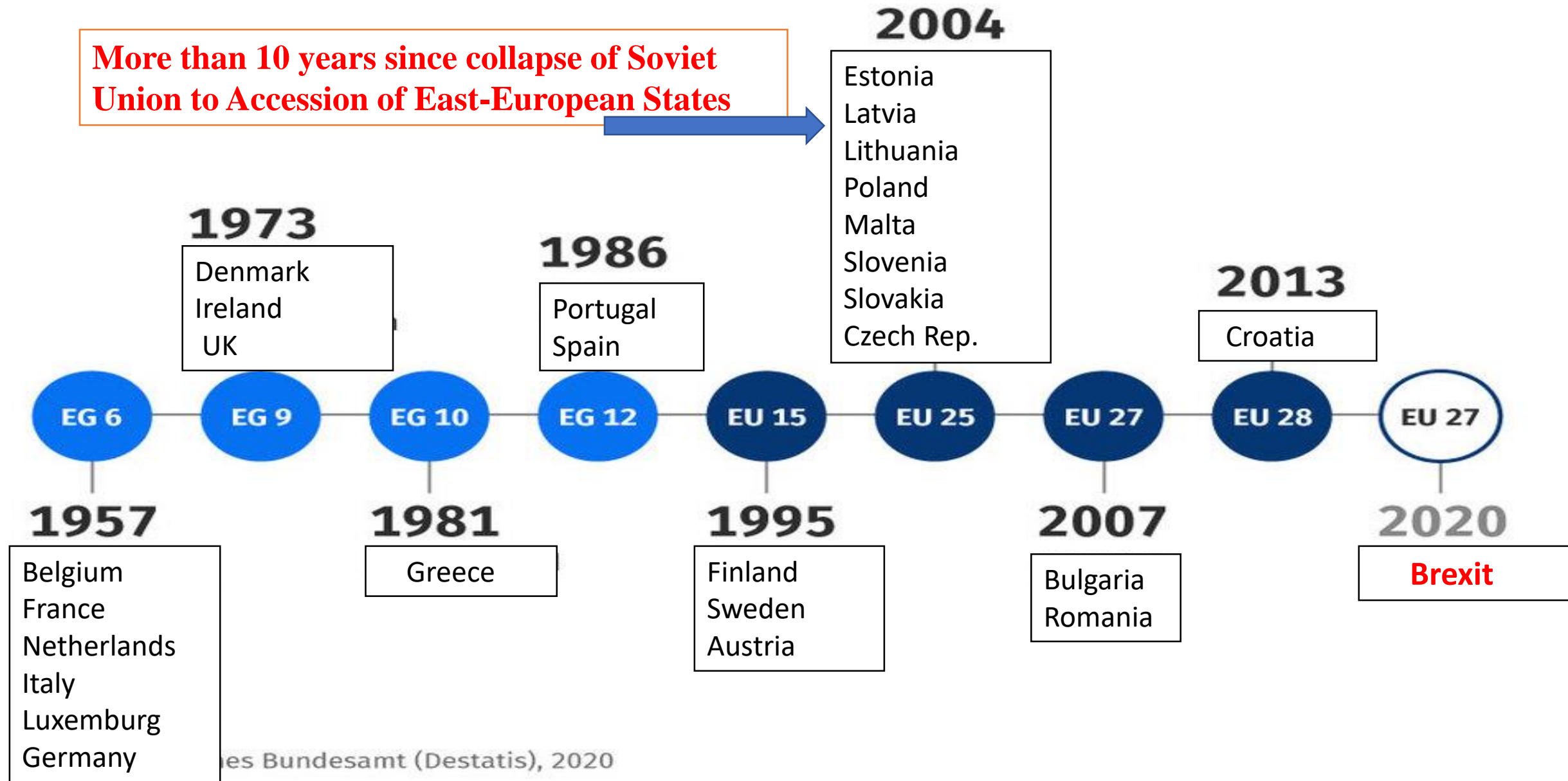


# EU's Enlargement Perspective

Consequences and problems of new membership by current candidates  
(esp. West-Balkan States, Ukraine and Türkiye)

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# Year of Entering the European Union till to-day



The question of **European Union enlargement** is more real than ever before: after the mid-December meeting of the European Council, leaders decided to open negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova and granted candidate status to Georgia. The question of the western Balkans was not however answered with the same decisiveness.

The European Commission adopted the **2023 Enlargement Package**, providing a detailed assessment of the state of the progress made by

**Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Türkiye**, and for the **first time also Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia** on their respective paths towards accession to the European Union.

In particular, the report focuses on the progress in the implementation of fundamental reforms, as well as on providing clear guidance on the reform priorities ahead. **Accession is and will remain a merit-based process, fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each country.**

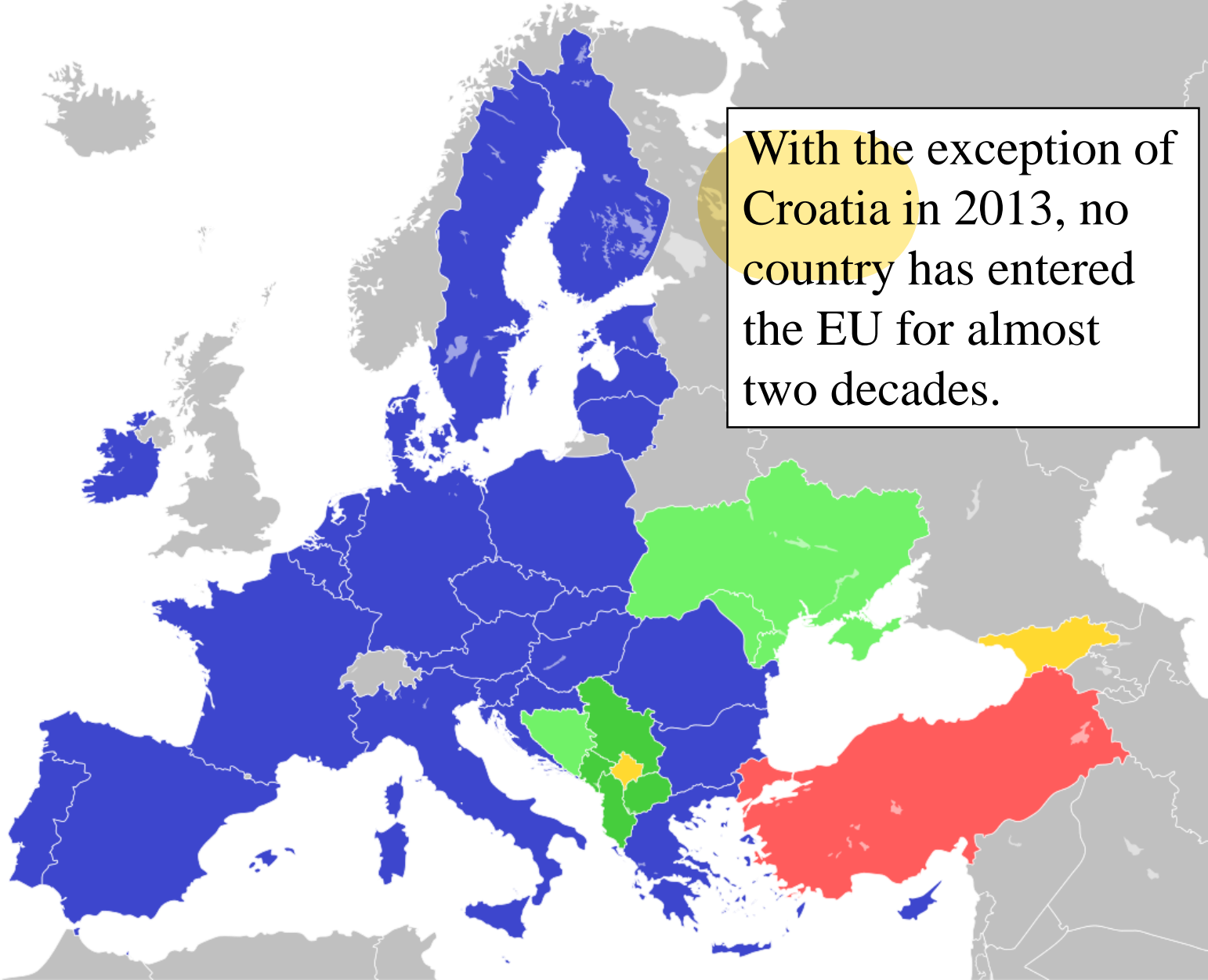
Candidates as new EU\_Member states

With the exception of Croatia in 2013, no country has entered the EU for almost two decades.

**Negotiations (since):**

**Turkey (since 1999)**  
**North Macedonia (2005)**  
**Montenegro (2010)**  
**Serbia (2012)**  
**Albania (2014)**  
**Moldova (2022)**  
**Ukraine (2022)**  
**Bosnia and Herzegovina (2022).**

**Potential candidates:**  
**Georgia and Kosovo**



# Benefits and Challenges of further EU-Enlargement

- European Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, said: “Enlargement is a vital policy for the European Union. Completing our Union is the call of history, the natural horizon of our Union. Completing our Union, also has a strong economic and geopolitical logic. Past enlargements have shown the enormous benefits both for the accession countries and the EU. We all win.”
- German Chancellor Olaf Scholz calls for a significant enlargement of the European Union with a view to its geopolitical role. "An EU with 27, 30, 36 states with more than 500 million free and equal citizens can bring its weight to bear even more in the world,"  
(<https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/scholz-kanzler-rede-eu-101.html>)
- There are **challenges** ahead: a diverse set of prospective and potential member states inevitably raises a range of questions about their effective preparation and the union's capacity for readjustment.

**Concerns exist about the EU budget, decision-making, agricultural policy, rule-of-law backsliding and the state of democracy in many of the candidates.** These are all serious issues which will need tackling.

## Criteria for Joining the EU

There are rules that define whether a country is eligible to join the European Union. Membership requires that candidate country has achieved stability of institutions **guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces** within the EU; the ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the 'acquis'), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

Any country that satisfies the conditions for membership can apply. These conditions are known as the '**Copenhagen criteria.**'

In the case of the countries of the Western Balkans additional conditions for membership, were set out in the so-called 'Stabilisation and Association process', mostly relating to regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.

# Questions and Problems

- Would the enlarged EU have more political international weight?
- Will there be more security and peace in the Balkan?
- To what extent do the candidate countries meet the Copenhagen criteria?
- What will be the financial burden on the EU budget as a result of the new membership of relatively poor countries?
- Do we need a change of the decision-making process - mainly concerning the principle of unanimity in case of 36 member states?

Overview on each candidate state



## The case of Türkiye:

An EU-Türkiye Custom Union entered into force in 1995. Accession negotiations started in 2005 but are at a standstill since 2018 in line with the decision of the European Council. The EU is Turkey's most important trading partner. Most investors come from the EU. There is cooperation in areas of common interest, mainly such as trade and migration. **Proponents of Turkey's membership argue that Turkey's geographical location will contribute to peace. The accession of Turkey would give the EU a decisive role for stability in the eastern part of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, which is clearly in the strategic interest of Europe.** Nevertheless several member states oppose the accession. Notably Austria, Germany (favoring a privileged partnership) and France (anxious at the prospect of a new wave of Muslim immigrants) oppose Turkey's membership.

After President Erdoğan's reaction to the 2016 coup d'état attempt, and Turkey's path toward autocratic rule makes progress on EU accession impossible. The country has not reversed the negative trend of moving away from the European Union, and it pursued accession related reforms to a limited degree. Members of the European the European Parliament unanimously voted for a halt to the full membership negotiations between the EU and Turkey.

## **The case of Ukraine:**

In Ukraine, the decision to grant EU candidate status created a powerful reform dynamic, despite the ongoing war, with strong support from the people of Ukraine. The Ukrainian government and Parliament demonstrated resolve in making substantial progress on meeting the steps of the European Commission Opinion on Ukraine's EU membership application. Commission president, Ursula von der Leyen said that enlargement to the east is seen as a 'geostrategic investment'. The initial reaction of member states has, however, been mixed. Finland and Lithuania, which border Russia, are supportive. Germany and some other key players prefer to offer observer status, rather than full membership, for the foreseeable future.

Others are more overtly opposed. Viktor Orbán, prime minister of Hungary, says he intends to veto any attempt to start negotiations with Ukraine in 2024. Although Orbán's stance might partly be explained by his friendliness with the Russian president, Vladimir Putin, he also opposes rules that restrict non-Ukrainian language education in Ukrainian schools. There are also concerns because Ukraine would be the poorest member state economically. That has considerable implications for the EU's budget and the functioning of the single market. Without institutional reform, Ukraine is set to become one of the EU budget's biggest beneficiaries.

(<https://www.socialeurope.eu>)

Despite these aspects, a majority of EU citizens favor Ukraine's EU membership.

## **Attitudes towards Ukraine as new EU-Memberstate**

66% of EU citizen want the Ukraine to be a member of the EU if it would fulfill the criteria

Portugal 87%

Estonia 83%

Lithuania 82%

Poland 81%

Ireland 79%

Following Eurobarometer of April 2022 71% of the EU citizen believe that Ukraine is already part of the European family

## **The case of Serbia:**

While other Balkan countries -Bosnia-Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Albania - remain at a standstill due to unresolved matters such as strong ethnic divisions, cases of institutional corruption and a lack of the rule of law, Serbia is fast becoming the most controversial candidate on the waiting list. One serious problem is that Serbia still has strong ties to Russia. Not only because of belonging to the same religion and language group but concerning economic dependence on Russian oil and gas. Furthermore, Serbia's army is highly dependent on Russian arms. Despite these close relations to Russia, Serbia claimed membership in the EU. However, further amendments will be needed to be fully in line with the EU acquis and European standards. Serbia needs to improve, as a matter of priority, its **alignment with the EU's common foreign and security policy, including restrictive measures and statements on Russia.** It is also needed to implement reforms in the area of rule of law - concerning widespread criminality structures in the whole society and corruption. And since mid-December 2023, Serbia's progress on the EU's accession requirements has taken a turn for the worse. The results of the country's general election on December 17th revealed a democracy in jeopardy. Furthermore, Serbia must fully cooperate and take all the necessary steps to ensure accountability for the violent attack on Kosovo Police of 24 September and the attack on KFOR on 29 May 2023.

## The case of **Kosovo**

The situation in the north of Kosovo has been affected by several crises, the latest one being the violent attack against Kosovo police on 24 September 2023. On the normalization of relations with Serbia, whilst an Agreement was reached in the EU-facilitated Dialogue, both Kosovo and Serbia are yet to start the implementation of their respective obligations, which are binding for the Parties and a key part of their European paths.

Kosovo remained committed to its European path. It continued to voluntarily fully align with the EU's CFSP, including on condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and to adopt restrictive measures against it. The reporting period witnessed legislative achievements, including an important electoral reform. On 1 January 2024, visa liberalization for Kosovo will enter into force.

# Western Balkans

The membership of West Balkan states could lead to **peace in the region**, which till now is often hit by military attacks from neighboring countries. Especially the Republic of Kosovo, which was once part of socialist Yugoslavia experiences a long armed conflict. Till now the region never came to rest. Kosovo's unilaterally declared independence is not accepted by and even found support by Putin, who declared the independence of Kosovo as illegal.

The last conflict happened in Sept 2023 when a Serbian combat squad and the Kosovar police fought skirmishes.

Furthermore, progress on EU accession reforms has largely stalled, as Western Balkan States have suffered from deep polarization and political instability.

Overall, progress in the accession negotiations will depend on reforms in the area of rule.

## The case of Albania

Albania continued to demonstrate its determination to implement EU reforms and to make progress in reforms under the “fundamentals cluster”. Progress has been made to continue full alignment with EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), which contributes to the EU’s objectives of preserving peace, strengthening international security, promoting international cooperation and developing and consolidating democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. **CFSP was also a strong signal of the country's strategic choice of EU accession.** Further efforts are needed on freedom of expression, minority issues and property rights, as well as in key areas of the rule of law, such as the fight against corruption and organized crime.

## The case of **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

Concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina, it, too, needs achievement of the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria to the opening of accession negotiations. This includes adopting important rule of law and judicial reforms and moving forward with constitutional and electoral reforms, which are of utmost priority to ensure equal rights for all citizens. It is also important to preserve the constitutional order of the country.

A critical problem are the secessionist and authoritarian measures introduced in the Republika Srpska entity which are not in line with the EU path. Therefore, the Commission recommends the opening of EU accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina, once the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria is achieved.



In **North Macedonia**, the authorities have consistently stated that EU accession remains their strategic goal. North Macedonia has continued to fully align with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The country has also made some progress in in the area of justice, freedom and security, including **the fight against organized crime and the management of migration**. As a negotiating country, North Macedonia needs to deliver on the implementation of EU related reforms, including in the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organized crime, public administration reform, including management of public finances, and public procurement. North Macedonia has committed to launch and achieve the relevant constitutional changes as a matter of priority, with a view to include citizens who are part of other people.

# The Case of Moldova

Moldova is a small country near to Ukraine. The citizens and government urgently wanted to enter the EU to be protected against Russian influence. Concerning the Copenhagen criteria the country performed well among others by its anti-corruption bodies and increased investigations and convictions in corruption cases. Furthermore, Moldova enhanced the participation of civil society in the decision-making process and has strengthened the protection of human rights.

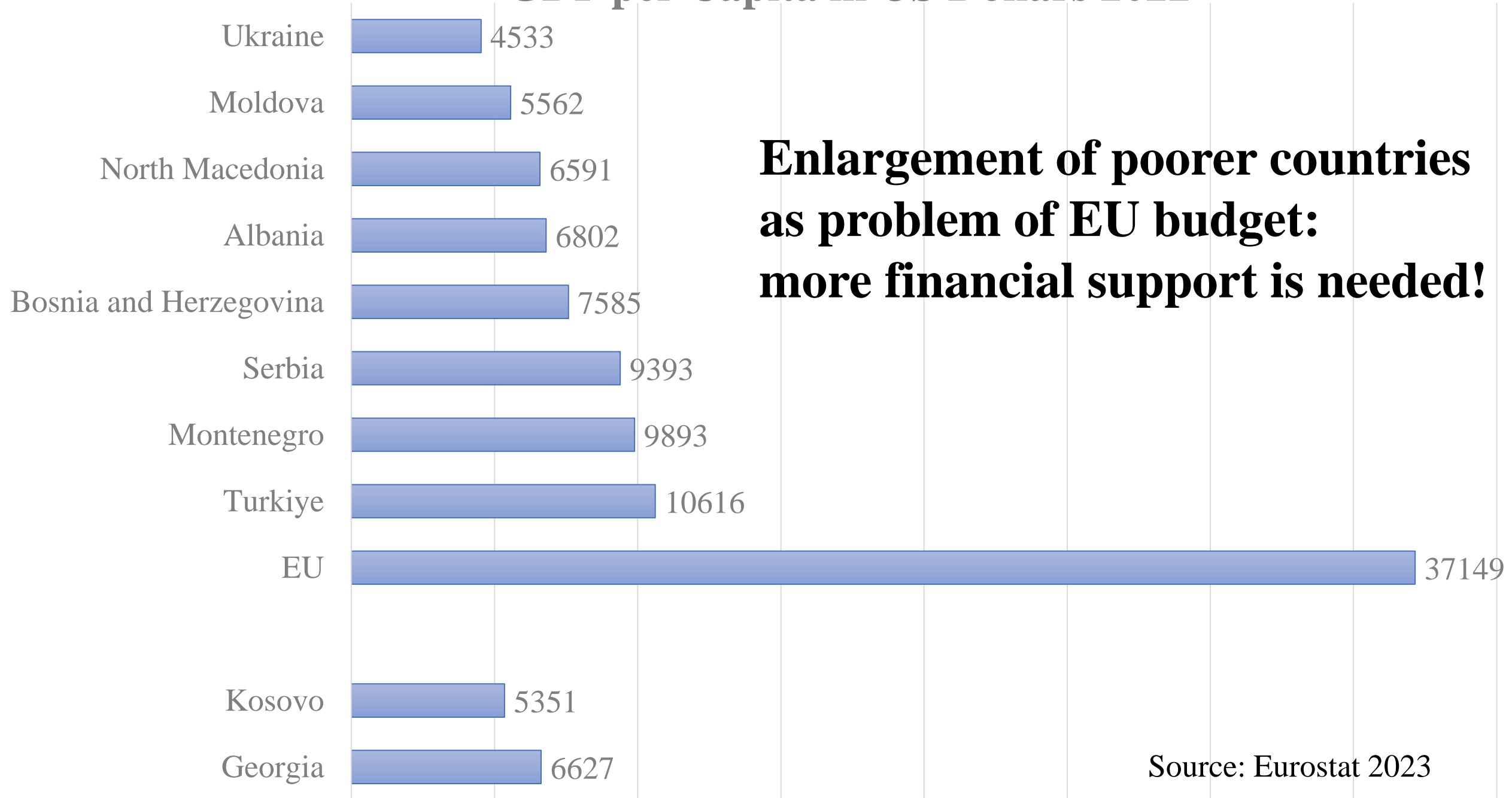
The problem is that since the 1990s the Eastern part of the country, known as Transnistria was created by secession from the Republic of Moldova. The de-facto regime is not internationally recognized but has its own government, currency, administration, and military, among other things. The area is under decisive Russian influence, for example, 1,200 to 1,500 soldiers of the Russian armed forces are stationed in Transnistria, alongside 10,000 to 15,000 paramilitaries loyal to Moscow. (<https://de.wikipedia.org>)

## **The case of Georgia**

The majority of citizens, above all the youth in Georgia is strongly orientated to the EU, fighting against the still existing influence of Russia in the Caucasus mountain states. It has taken steps to strengthen engagement with the EU and increased pace of reforms in recent years and months. Especially, Georgia has adopted legislative acts and policy actions on gender equality, on fighting violence against women and organized crime. Building a strong cross-party political consensus would contribute to addressing polarization and accelerate its European path.

# **Consequences of enlargement**

## GDP per Capita in US Dollars 2022



# **The need of reforming the decision-making process in an enlarged EU**

Coordination the EU is becoming more and more complicated. Even now, there are regular **difficulties in speaking with one voice (Unanimity principle)**. Current problems mainly concern Hungarian president Victor Orbán, who often blocks decisions of the European Council. Somehow he is perceived as Russian's "Trojan Horse in the EU", because he wants a European Union 'that would please Putin' and continuously blocks EU beginning talks with Ukraine on its eventual membership and also blocks financial support for it.

The EU has to reform its decision-making process reposing the difficult principle of unanimity when including maybe 36 members with different interests in order to remain functionable and able to act successfully. Fundamental reforms therefore are needed, so that the EU can continue to function.

In order to avoid blockades, it is necessary to "gradually move to majority decisions in foreign and also in financial policy", said German chancellor Scholz ([www.euractiv.com](http://www.euractiv.com)). The EU needs to change if it wants to remain functional. Germany and France therefore have had a proposal drawn up, which provides for far-reaching reforms.

A group of international political scientists were asked to examine what reforms are needed to make the EU fit for the next round of enlargement.

# **The reform concept**

The scientists' expert advice is clear: it will not work if important decisions have to be made unanimously as before. The fact that one country can block the progress of all others should at least be restricted. In other words, more decisions with qualified majority voting, so that countries such as Hungary (and former Polish government) cannot prevent the cooperation of the others.

The expert council of twelve renowned scientists also proposes to reduce the number of commissioners. The fact that each member state can send a commissioner to Brussels has inflated the quasi-government in Brussels - it is hard to imagine that this will still work after enlargement. The size of the European Parliament is also to be capped. After the next round of enlargement, a maximum of 751 MEPs will be able to be sent by the member states.

Last but not least: Violations of the foundations of European law are to be punished more consistently and more severely than before, with financial cuts in funding from the Brussels Community budget. Here, too, Hungary can feel addressed.

## **Geopolitical consequences of EU's Enlargement:**

Maybe, the enlargement would lead to more **democracy and peace** in the Balkan and Eastern Europe. But in case Russia would win the war the entire Europe would be put at an unprecedented risk, the more when the USA would withdraw from NATO and European security in case of Republican success (Trump!!) in the presidential election 2024.

Compared with the huge enlargement of 2004, prepared in the 1990s, the geopolitical situation is deeply troubling, from Russia to the middle east to China. Furthermore, the Western World (esp. USA) is confronted by the currently 11 **BRICS-plus states** (in Jan. 2024 enlarged by Egypt, Ethiopia, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Emirates) with authoritarian China and Russia. BRICS aim is to form a counterweight to the geopolitical and economic dominance of the West (despite these alliance states have little in common). Meanwhile 40 states have declared interest of being member of the BRICS alliance. Till now the EU ignored this group in its foreign policy. Whether the larger EU would have **more weight in the world** with its new order and enlargement therefore is an open question.



Further details about the candidate countries  
reported November 2023 see:

[https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/index\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/index_en)

Thank you!