

## **Non-paper on a more efficient Enlargement Process – suggestions for technical amendments to the Enlargement Methodology**

In March 2020, the EU adopted the Revised Enlargement Methodology, which contains concrete proposals to strengthen the accession process by making it more predictable, credible and dynamic, and subject to stronger political governance based on objective criteria and strict positive and negative conditionality and reversibility.

The new geopolitical context has accelerated the reflection and work on the future enlargement of the EU. The EU has pledged that the future of the Western Balkans as well as Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia and their citizens lies in the EU. There is also a heightened awareness of a new window of opportunity for enlargement, which is a geostrategic imperative and the EU's strongest stabilization process. Both the EU and the future Member States must get prepared for enlargement.

The Revised Enlargement Methodology is now applied to the four negotiating countries: Montenegro, Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia. It should also apply to the other candidates once they start the negotiation process.

In the Revised Enlargement Methodology, the negotiating chapters have been grouped into six thematic clusters: fundamentals, internal market, competitiveness and inclusive growth, green agenda and sustainable connectivity, resources, agriculture and cohesion, and external relations. All chapters on a given thematic cluster will be opened simultaneously. The "fundamentals" thematic cluster opens first and closes last, thus determining the overall pace of the negotiations.

In line with the European Council's call for accelerated accession process, and taking into account the demands for more efficient decision-making and a credible European perspective for candidate and potential candidate countries, we should explore the possibilities of empowering the Council to decide by qualified majority with regard to certain (technical) interim steps of the enlargement process:

- As before, the Council agrees by unanimity on granting the EU candidate status and on adopting the negotiation framework for the accession negotiations with each candidate country;
- The opening of negotiating clusters (incl. OBARs) should then be decided by qualified majority in the Council<sup>1</sup>
- The closing of the negotiating chapters, however, will continue to be approved by unanimity in the Council;
- The final decision on the actual accession of a Member State remains to be taken by unanimity of all Member States in the Council and with national ratifications of the accession treaty.

In order to reinvigorate the enlargement process and to make the EU ready for enlargement, the European Council should take a decision on the use of QMV in the above mentioned steps of enlargement process as soon as possible.

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<sup>1</sup> analogue to Article 16 para. 4 of the Treaty on European Union / Article 238 para. 3 lit. (a) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;