



Volt

BIGGER AND BETTER

A practical guide on how
to create the **Union of
the future by 2030** through
enlargement and reform

*Do you sometimes get that weird feeling of emptiness in your chest?
What would you do if this emptiness continued to grow?*

Every day, one page of the calendar gets torn off and tossed away. It is a standard, unassuming ritual, just like a morning cup of coffee or a run. But today, something feels off — one of the pages is harder to rip than usual. With the sound of it tearing, you can't help but feel like this is not just about the paper, not about this morning or the ritual at large. Today, something larger than any individual mind could comprehend was destroyed.

The cup of coffee was not a successful endeavour either — you are all out of the beans that keep you fueled throughout the day. A quick stroll to the shop did not solve this problem: you are met with a grueling view of half-empty shelves closing in on you. The Italian-roasted coffee is nowhere to be found. Yet more: Mediterranean olives and citrus, Alpine dairy, and Central European root vegetables are gone too: they are stuck at a newly reinstated customs office. If they were to finally arrive, the price would double because of new import tariffs.

The Single Market is gone.

In a cruel twist of fate, the scary display in front hides something much darker from you: if the shelves had still been stacked, would you have anything to pay for it? Since you work for a multinational company, your salary is suddenly worth 20% less by lunchtime because the new national currency, printed urgently, is fluctuating wildly against the dollar. Even the remnants you still receive are virtually frozen in space because the Single Euro Payments Area system no longer exists, making even a simple bank transfer a week-long, high-fee ordeal.

The European economic system is gone.

At least you have the thing that could not be taken from you: your loved ones... or so you think. The catch is that they moved to a neighbouring country years ago. No matter if they are students or workers, their right to be there is gone. Even if they were able to stay, to see them, instead of the usual seamless drive across an invisible line, you are met with a five-kilometre tailback of cars that advances at a snail's pace. You are checked extensively by security and have to present a passport, and because there's no longer a mutual recognition of driver licenses, you need to apply for an international driving permit just to cross the border. The "borderless" life becomes a series of checkpoints and stamps that take hours.

The "Four Freedoms of Movement" are gone.

Even your identity is not safe. Big tech companies like Apple or Google no longer have to follow European rules. If a social media giant decides to sell your private data to the highest bidder, you have no one to protect you. As an individual in a small nation, you have zero leverage. Similarly, if you buy a faulty product from an online retailer based in another country, there is no longer a European Consumer Centre to help you get your money back. You don't even get to choose the clunkier and more expensive European alternatives. They have been bought up by the American giants long ago or else stopped being able to compete and gone bankrupt. It is you against global mega corporations. Good luck.

Coming back home, you finally start piecing things together: "the continent of walls" is back and is here to stay. The old nationalist rivalries are ready to reignite any moment now, consuming the whole continent in their flames. On a personal level, the sense of security is gone, replaced by deep anxiety and uncertainty in the future. The only thing keeping you company is the crumpled piece of calendar paper that once proudly said: "8th of May".

You are on your own now.

The understanding of this fact feels like a distinct sound in your head. The noise of a hostile drone flying over you, loud explosions startling children into crying is its practical consequence. You could never know for sure if this is just your imagination running wild or a grim reality finally setting in your head, but one thing you know for sure:

The European Peace Project is gone.

But it doesn't have to be like this: with Trump, Putin and Xi knocking on our door, the climate crisis accelerating, and the digital revolution reshaping economies, Europe faces a pivotal choice. Recent events show what is at stake. Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has shattered the security order in Europe and forced millions to flee. A rogue United States is destroying the international order it created itself and is picking a fight with the EU as an ideological threat. Economic fragmentation threatens to leave us behind the next industrial revolution and make everyone poorer, while extreme heatwaves have cost billions in agricultural losses. We must act now, not only to avoid being sidelined in the competition between bigger powers, but to ensure our security, prosperity, freedom and democratic values for generations. Luckily, we have all the ingredients to make Europe not just survive but thrive. A democratic powerhouse of 500 million citizens.

Now, how do we do that? Glad you asked, let's dive right in!

Executive Summary

Europe faces a critical choice between integration and fragmentation. The “Four Freedoms” and the European Peace Project at large are not guaranteed; without decisive action, they remain vulnerable targets for the world's autocrats. Citizens of smaller nations have little influence over global tech companies or volatile markets, and in today's geopolitical reality, marked by Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, **enlargement and reform must be treated as essential**, not optional. To succeed in the 2030s, the Union must recognise that its internal strength depends on external growth, making the enlargement-reform connection a top priority.

Linking enlargement to reform generates momentum. It makes essential reforms politically feasible where they were once seen as too risky. This approach uses the "regatta principle," where each candidate advances on merit, rather than a "big-bang" package that allows slower members to impede progress. A firm 2030 deadline creates the necessary pressure for Member States to address governance issues while building rule of law and democracy safeguards preventing another Orban. It also helps ensure the Union is efficient and fiscally capable as it expands to 35 or more members.

The current accession process is broken, characterised by a "veto gridlock" where some Member States block candidates over unrelated bilateral disputes. **To restore credibility, we should adopt Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) for all intermediate stages of accession.** By using the flexibility in Article 49 of the TEU or secondary law, we can eliminate over 70 such opportunities for obstruction while maintaining final sovereign control over accession treaties. **We must also formalise “Gradual” or “Staged” accession.** This "more for more" principle provides tangible economic and political benefits—such as early observer status in EU institutions, voting rights and access to specific budget lines for sectors where good progress is made, before full membership. By providing these rewards early, the Union maintains reform momentum and builds public buy-in, ensuring candidates are fireproofed against autocratic backsliding before the final treaty is signed.

Enlargement and internal reform are inseparable pillars of future European stability. **Expanding the Union without meaningful reform would lead to paralysis, while reform without enlargement would fail to stabilise our neighbourhood.** We must regain momentum from a stalled bureaucracy, as the Commission's "pre-enlargement policy reviews" have missed deadlines for nearly two years. Adopting an "Agenda 2030" framework would address this by setting out a two-stage strategy for institutional readiness:

- **Stage 1** focuses on optimisation, maximising the current legal framework through secondary law and inter-institutional agreements. These reforms are essential precursors to constitutional changes. The clearly defined quantitative Rule of Law grading system serves as a key tool, providing a trigger that automatically unlocks or blocks pre-accession funds and Growth-and-Reform plan benefits, eliminating the ambiguity that previously allowed democratic backsliding. The key reforms proposed in this stage include:
 - Activate "passerelle clauses" to extend QMV to CFSP sanctions and human rights.
 - Reorganise the College of Commissioners to a maximum of two-thirds of Member States. Assign portfolios based on merit instead of national quotas.
 - Establish a "European Agora," a permanent mechanism for participatory democracy, to address the "legitimacy gap."

- Empower the proposed Global Europe instrument in the next MFF by establishing a dedicated €75 billion Enlargement Adjustment Facility to support new and existing members during the transition.
- As the Union grows to over 35 members, temporary solutions will no longer suffice; a fundamental restructuring is needed. **Stage 2** involves a constitutional overhaul that transforms the EU into a bicameral parliamentary democracy. The European Commission would become a true "EU Government," led by a Prime Minister elected by Parliament, who would appoint a cabinet by majority. The Council would become a "European Senate" with equal representation for each Member State, ensuring that smaller nations are not overruled by the executive. Stage 2 also provides the strategic capacity needed for independence through:
 - Establishing a central fiscal authority empowered to levy EU taxes and issue common debt. Set a target of a permanent fiscal capacity equal to 10% of EU GNI.
 - Creating a comprehensive Defence Union with joint forces that offers a credible security guarantee. Enable the EU to act independently, separable but not separate from NATO.
 - Elevating the CJEU to a full Constitutional Court status to uphold the Charter of Fundamental Rights and adjudicate Article 7 violations.
 - Enlargement is a security imperative. Integrating Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans creates a "democratic belt" from the Baltic to the Black Sea, limiting Russian influence.

This expansion is not just political, but an economic and sovereign opportunity. Projections show it will add 80 million citizens, increase EU GDP by 10%, and reduce dependence on resources and technologies critical for the green and digital future. **For the average citizen, this vision delivers:**

- **Energy sovereignty**, by integrating Ukraine's renewable energy potential and Moldova's experience in rapidly building resilient and independent green grids.
- **Innovative society**, through the implementation of best practices from new member states like unified digital IDs and seamless mutual recognition of social security and healthcare.
- **Global standards**, by building a Union large enough to be a "rule-maker" rather than a "rule-taker" in the international arena, protecting your privacy, freedom and dignity.
- **Relief of cost-of-living crisis**, by integrating European markets, raising production efficiency and putting downward pressure on prices, including agricultural products.
- **Security and stability**, strengthened by Moldova's ability to counter foreign interference, Ukraine's modern and large military, and a united Western Balkans as a stabilising force.

Enlargement is not a product of reform; it is its "entry ticket". **We must act decisively now to ensure the 2030s are defined by a confident, democratic, and united continent.** The process has begun, and the Union must complete it urgently.

1. How EU enlargement and reform fit together

Enlargement is Europe's best tool for saving itself and safeguarding peace in these trying times. By accelerating accession and tightening the EU's own rule-of-law conditionality, the Union can become a bigger and better democracy while boosting its capacity to act. Although many acknowledge the need for deeper integration, strong political resistance to Treaty change remains. Because most capitals see Treaty change as politically risky, new strategies must be developed to overcome this resistance.

These could include building coalitions among like-minded Member States, implementing incremental reforms through secondary legislation or existing treaty flexibilities, and demonstrating early successes that reassure more hesitant governments. For instance, launching a pilot project allowing qualified majority voting in select areas, such as foreign policy, or trialing budgetary reforms that increase joint investment in cross-border infrastructure could showcase the benefits of pragmatic change; targeted reforms such as strengthening the European Public Prosecutor's Office to combat corruption could serve as visible milestones.

Above all, the political momentum created by enlargement, combined with practical steps such as pilot projects and targeted institutional reforms, remains the most realistic way to unlock meaningful reform.

It has always been.

Commission President Ursula von der Leyen drew that link when she asked Parliament for a second term (July 2024):

*"We need **an ambitious reform agenda** to ensure the functioning of a larger Union and to increase democratic legitimacy. While reforms were necessary before, **with enlargement they become indispensable**. We must use this as a catalyst for change. We need Treaty change where it can improve our Union."*

However, the Commission's "pre-enlargement policy reviews" have missed deadline after deadline for almost two years. And while the legal and institutional aspects of the review stalled, the key political issues of **governance, democracy, the rule of law, and the budget** need to be urgently addressed. To tackle this, we propose turning these reviews into a comprehensive Agenda 2030. Like Agenda 2000, which provided a clear framework for reforms and laid the groundwork for the 2004 enlargement, Agenda 2030 would outline specific legislative and institutional changes needed to prepare the EU for a larger membership, along a clear sequence with timelines. This new agenda is structured in two stages, offering a roadmap for both immediate improvements and deeper reforms, inspired by the successful model of Agenda 2000:

- **Stage 1 (before 2030, no Treaty change).** Use *passerelle* clauses, secondary law and inter-institutional deals to end single-state vetoes, streamline the Commission, Council and Parliament, improve participatory democracy mechanisms, expand the budget with new own resources, and admit the most advanced candidates.

- **Stage 2 (by 2030, Treaty change required).** Complete the job: scrap unanimity, create an EU Government with a bicameral Parliament, empower a Constitutional Court, create a Treasury with real fiscal competences, and anchor an EU Defence Union, so that together with new membership, the EU can thrive in the 21st century.

Making the Union accession ready by 2030 does not guarantee 35 members overnight; each candidate will still earn their place on their own merits. But creating a clear strategy gives societies in candidate countries a credible path to reform and realistic goals to achieve while the EU fixes itself.

2. Why EU enlargement matters

History is clear: every enlargement round — from Spain and Portugal to the 2004 cohort — was preceded by fundamental reforms to the Union that strengthened it. The EU itself was founded in 1992 out of that dynamic. An ambitious enlargement (with strong convergence) could raise the **EU's overall GDP by up to 24%** by 2035. On the other hand, if the EU fails to enlarge, EPRS estimates the "cost of non-enlargement" to be a loss of between \$3.4 trillion and \$10.5 trillion in potential GDP by the same deadline. **If we lose our drive, it puts the very core of European democracy in danger** — increasingly stalling negotiations with Türkiye and Serbia proved hurtful to the rule of law and democracy in these states. Alternatively, if we do act now, we can create the Union of the future: **a peaceful, stable and democratic continent of 500 million citizens who make our green, peaceful, and prosperous future a reality.**

And the power of this future is already proven: Polish GDP has tripled in the 20 years since it joined the EU; Estonia is the world's most digitised country; and Spain has become a thriving, progressive democracy after fascism. Thirty years after the end of Communism, most Central European countries are consolidated democracies. Active civil societies in candidate countries dream of future EU membership and hold governments to account on anti-corruption, democracy and the rule of law. Generations of young people strive to become future democratic leaders and model their country on the values of the Union.

Isn't this something to be proud of?

Enlargement is also the key to **unlocking Europe's potential**. Past enlargements increased the per-capita income of *existing* EU Member States by 10% on average. **By integrating candidate countries, the EU could add an estimated 80 million new citizens and increase its GDP by up to 10%**, according to recent projections. This growth will help locals grow their businesses, turn people's ideas into reality, and ensure every household has access to reliable power and supplies. For instance, access to Ukrainian critical raw materials could reduce the EU's dependence on external suppliers for key green technologies by 20 per cent and boost the competitiveness of our manufacturing sectors. Economic forecasts suggest that a democratic Georgia could open trade corridors with Central Asia worth billions of euros annually, while Moldovan agriculture could increase the EU's food supply and help lower prices for consumers across the continent. Those who see the EU from the outside are often its most enthusiastic supporters, because they know how precious democracy is. By EPRS calculations, adding all current candidate countries (excluding Türkiye) would cost between €15.7 billion and €26 billion a year—representing at most 0.2% of the

EU's GDP, which is vastly outweighed by the potential economic gains. Candidate country populations can reinvigorate Europe's sense of pride and purpose, fostering democratic resilience.

Enlargement is also an **investment in security**. Russia seeks to destroy Ukraine, attempts to subjugate European democracies like Moldova and Georgia, and fights a hybrid war against the EU. MAGA-architects in Washington openly dream about dismantling the EU and our democracies. Their efforts to stop EU enlargement illustrate that they consider it a threat to their autocratic systems, which we should consider as a badge of honour. This is also why Norway, Iceland, Greenland, and even other middle powers in this new world order, like Canada, are increasingly open to EU membership. We can learn a lot from candidate countries to make Europe safer. Moldovans fighting Russian influence can make Europe more secure against hybrid warfare; the Ukrainian military and its battlefield experiences will make European defence (and more: Ukraine ranks just behind Poland in **AI-related scientific publications and hosts a massive number of AI start-ups**) more credible; and strict rule of law in Albania will decrease regional organised crime.

Our green future also cannot sustain itself without enlargement. Candidate countries hold significant reserves of minerals essential for the green and digital transitions. Georgia, Serbia, and Ukraine offer copper, lithium, and manganese, while Bosnia and Montenegro are key producers of bauxite for aluminium. Alignment with the EU Aquis will ensure these are extracted as sustainably and responsibly as possible and not outsourced to investors with lower standards like China which also form security risks. A well-executed enlargement process is projected to lead to **lower global greenhouse gas emissions, higher living standards, and greater defence readiness for all countries involved.**

But what about one of the main concerns with enlargement: democratic backsliding? We can learn from the mistakes of past enlargement rounds. The solution is to improve the enlargement process by strengthening accountability mechanisms to ensure that new Member States have robust democracies and the rule of law both at the point of joining and after membership. Tools such as post-accession monitoring and conditionality can reassure policymakers that democratic standards will be upheld in the long term. For example, the EU could introduce regular assessments of Member States' compliance with democracy and the rule of law, along with the possibility of temporarily suspending certain rights or funding if serious violations occur. These steps will help ensure that all countries remain on the right track after joining the Union, while preserving the principle of equality.

Enlargement is a golden opportunity to strengthen the EU's rule of law, democracy, and effectiveness through fundamental reforms. But how do we get it done?

3. Reforming EU enlargement policy: “faster, fairer and fireproof”

3.1. The problems with the current process

Unlocking a larger and reformed Union within this ambitious timeline and scope is only possible if we first acknowledge that the EU enlargement process is flawed. It should be transformed to become **faster, fairer, and fireproof**: accelerating reform momentum while providing stronger safeguards for the rule of law and the EU's capacity to 'digest' new candidate countries. The best way to **strengthen the so-called 'Copenhagen Criteria'**, in particular the rule of law, is to empower active civil society in candidate countries that hold governments to account, while providing concrete financial and political benefits with strong reform conditionalities to those governments. This builds buy-in and enthusiasm for sustained reform, unlike in past cases such as Hungary, and will keep countries on the right path after accession. **The rules should be merit based and universal for all candidate countries**, without introducing exceptions and special circumstances for individual countries. None of the solutions proposed below will require treaty change, so they could be implemented directly if there is political will.

By far the biggest issue is that several EU Member States abuse **unanimity decision-making** for even the most technical steps in the accession process, such as opening new chapters. As a result, they hold candidate countries hostage over bilateral political issues that are, most of the time, not 'merit-based'. This saps enthusiasm and momentum for reform in candidate countries and makes it impossible for the EU to create predictable accession timelines, which the cases of North Macedonia and Ukraine clearly demonstrate. Thus, what is needed is a move to Qualified Majority Voting, at least for the intermediate stages of accession (the 70+ votes on e.g. opening and closing of chapters).

Beyond this reform of the formal process, candidate countries have to be integrated into the EU even before full membership. This provides tangible economic, security and political benefits to the EU and candidate countries. It can create a positive snowball effect for reform. In other words: 'more for more'. This '**gradual accession**' policy has already been tested with several “Growth and Reform” plans in Ukraine, the Western Balkans and Moldova. It has also been supported by the Commission through 'reverse enlargement', integrating sectors and combining reforms with financial support. We need to formalise and expand that approach by the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) of 2028-2034. This model also already brings tangible benefits — for example, the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) is projected to save the Western Balkans **up to €500 million a year**, with Moldova **seeing direct savings of €1.4 million** in just its first month of SEPA integration. Ukraine would save **between €70 million and €100 million each year**. However, access to EU finances and sectors in return for reforms is not enough. Candidates should also be

allowed to participate in progressively higher levels of EU institutions and budgets: the so-called 'staged accession'.

Some might have reservations about an ambitious, accelerated timeline for enlargement, given the negative experience of previous rounds, in which Member States slid back towards autocracy after accession without serious consequences. The case of Hungary showed that, beyond destroying democracy at home, an autocracy with veto powers (in this case aligned with an adversary like Russia) is problematic for any common EU action and a security risk. At the same time, some incoming Member States, particularly Ukraine, have sectors that could have a significantly disruptive effect on the EU internal market if not managed properly, at least in the short term. The good news is that this can be turned into a strength rather than a weakness. That is why we propose stronger **Rule of Law conditionalities** for incoming Member States, including close monitoring in the immediate period after accession and **longer transitional periods** of several years for the full inclusion of sectors with a significant risk of disruption, while accelerating sectors that provide benefits at low cost.

Accelerating the technical process is possible only if the capacity to implement reforms and to resist interference is sufficient, and if EU and candidate-country citizens feel informed, motivated, and empowered to support accession. After all, in many Member States referenda or parliamentary votes will be necessary to ratify accession treaties, and adversaries like Russia will not hesitate to interfere and derail those votes. That is why we propose measures to strengthen the administrative capacity of candidate countries and improve social stability, to create ambitious **awareness-raising campaigns** on the challenges and benefits of enlargement, and to upgrade the role of **civil society** in shaping the reform agenda of candidate countries and in scrutinising the governments that implement them.

Interestingly, some of the best examples of European countries with empowered civil societies, motivated pro-EU populations, and effective efforts against corruption or foreign interference are often found in candidate countries, not the EU itself. There should also be structured efforts for the **EU to learn from candidate countries** even before full accession, not just the other way around. This is particularly key for Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) and corruption.

EU membership negotiations are not simply technical and legal conversations between governments and the Union; they are expressions of collective decisions by citizens and popular will. Too often, the EU and its Member States were unable or unwilling to pressure candidate-country governments that were sliding into autocracy or moving against EU accession, despite broad popular support, as in Georgia. In Serbia, the EU has even pursued a calculated policy of 'stabilitocracy'. This must end. Accordingly, the EU should be **more assertive in supporting those living in candidate countries** where support for EU membership is broad, while pushing back against autocratic governments.

Some candidates have territories in conflict or occupied, but this should not be a barrier to effective accession. Cyprus provides one precedent, but other candidates, such as Moldova, have specific circumstances. Such conflicts should be resolved as part of the accession process, not used as permanent frozen conflicts for Russia to exploit. Finally, if citizens on both sides do not feel informed, empowered and genuinely excited about enlargement, it will not work. Russia will exploit that. We need clear timelines, a massive awareness-raising campaign, and a decisive conclusion: enlargement must stay credible, inclusive, and politically supported if it is to succeed.

3.2. Our proposals to improve the process

1. Joint pledge to be enlargement-ready

The EU-27, EU institutions and candidates should issue a joint pledge to **be enlargement-ready by 2030**, accompanied by a clear operational strategy:

- **Turn the pre-enlargement policy reviews by the European Commission into a proper ‘Agenda 2030’**, mapping not just the impact of (substantial) enlargement on the EU’s policy areas, but providing clear scenarios with reform package proposals, including those requiring treaty change, for institutions, policies, budget and democracy, to strengthen the Union;
- Introduce clear timelines and milestones through an EU Council conclusion and an EU Commission communication for the Union to accede the most advanced candidates and, through reform, be ready for substantial enlargement by 2030. Setting clear deadlines and incentives for ambitious reform agendas on the EU and candidate country sides creates a sense of urgency and ownership, and spurs healthy internal competition amongst candidate countries;
- Correspondingly, commit to clear bi-annual roadmaps for meeting the 2030 EU accession/reform timeline and milestones by each of the incoming EU Council Presidencies in its priorities, through a standardised and quantifiable methodology that can easily be monitored and built upon by each incoming Presidency;
- Agree on country-specific accession timelines at the start of negotiations with a new candidate country, and increase the frequency of candidate country progress reports to twice a year instead of once a year, while formalising civil-society co-drafting of those annual progress reports;
- Prepare for a likely new round of EU candidacy applications from countries meeting the Article 49 requirements, potentially including Iceland, Norway, Greenland, and the countries in the Caucasus;
- At the same time, deepen relations with Switzerland, the UK, and other European democracies that are not currently seeking EU membership, e.g., through security and defence, tech, and trade partnerships, while preparing for potential applications.

2. Unlocking enlargement decision-making

Currently, the start of EU accession negotiations, the opening and closing of individual negotiation chapters/clusters, the establishment of opening, interim, and closing benchmarks, and sanctioning backtracking all require unanimity, **giving rogue Member States 70+ opportunities for a veto**.

Unanimous voting should only be required at the opening of negotiations and at their final closure. TEU leaves room for interpretation in the decision-making process, since enlargement policy is an intergovernmental agreement between EU Member States and candidate countries. In legal terms, enlargement is the policy area in which QMV can be most easily introduced. To implement QMV in enlargement decisions, the most straightforward legal pathway is to revise the relevant provisions of the accession negotiation frameworks, as these frameworks are agreed by the Council and can

specify the decision-making procedures. Alternatively, the Council may adopt a unanimous decision to apply QMV to certain steps, as permitted by the flexibility under Article 49 TEU, but this would require political agreement from all Member States. If a more formalised and permanent change is desired, an amendment to the Treaties would be necessary, following the procedure outlined in Article 48 TEU, which requires agreement by all Member States. This reform can be initiated through a Commission proposal, a Council decision, or a revision of the existing negotiation frameworks with individual candidate countries. If necessary, this can be made more politically feasible through any combination of the following measures, in order of preference: **a reduction in the number of decision-making moments** rather than altering the decision-making procedures. Member States could, for example, entrust the Commission with a more substantial part of the accession negotiations, and as such lessen the number of political decision moments during which a veto can be cast;

- **A Super Qualified Majority instead of a regular qualified majority.** This would translate into 72% of the Member States, representing 65% of the population, if the proposal is not coming from the Commission or the HR/VP (Art. 238 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU);
- **A constructive abstention** inspired by the CFSP area (provided in Art. 31(1) TEU), which entails Member States abstaining from a vote taken in the Council configurations, in the interest of not blocking an EU common action/statement. The same article stipulates that the Member State abstaining in a vote may qualify its abstention by making a formal declaration. In that case, even though it is not obliged to apply the decision, the abstaining Member State will accept that the decision commits the Union. If the abstention is qualified by at least one third of the Member States comprising at least one third of the population of the Union, the decision shall not be adopted;
- An **emergency brake** or 'sovereignty safety net' procedure as in Art. 31(2) TEU, in which a Member State intending to block a certain decision needs to substantiate its position, after which the Council can reconsider the decision. This would help to substantiate whether the reasons for blocking a decision are in line with the formal Copenhagen criteria, or whether the issue should be moved up to the EUCO for a decision by unanimity;
- If some Member States still refuse to waive the veto at the intermediate stages, its use in these specific cases should become **suspensive** for a maximum of 6 months. If, over that period, the veto does not secure the support of at least three other States, the matter would be referred to the EU's Court of Justice to determine whether the dispute has a reasonable European dimension.
- Introduce an **appeals mechanism**, so candidates can challenge decisions they believe are the result of domestic politics leading to bilateralisation;
- If vetoes persist, keep building out the **“second track”** Growth Plans & Facilities so candidates draw nearer even when formal talks stall.

3. Awareness raising and citizen empowerment on both sides

Initiate a massive **awareness-raising and citizen empowerment campaign** in EU Member States and candidate countries, with the strong involvement of civil society, media, local and regional actors, trade unions, youth and different layers of government. This should be an honest and open

discussion not just about the (perceived) challenges and opportunities of enlargement, which are tailored to the specific circumstances and public debate of each country, but also on the need for reforms ahead of and in line with enlargement. Fundamentally, citizens should feel and have ownership over the process on both sides. Enlargement is not just an 'in or out' choice, but a process that delivers tangible benefits as part of reforms and conditionalities. In particular:

- The Commission makes a **clear and visual overview** of the various (e.g. political, social and economic) benefits that enlargement with each Member State would bring, meant for external communication for broader publics;
- Create a dedicated unit within DG ENEST focused on providing **tailored and country-specific awareness-raising and communication about the benefits of EU accession** for each candidate country, co-created by civil society and in close cooperation with local governments;
- **Initiation of a “coaching” duty for a candidate country, rotating together with the rotation of the Council presidency**, by organising one large-scale bilateral conference showcasing that state and its unique culture/added value to the EU, and allowing select officials and other professionals from that candidate country to “shadow” their EU Member State counterparts during the rotating Presidency;
- **Participatory instruments** should be used to prepare for enlargement, drawing lessons from the Conference on the Future of Europe. These should bring together citizens, experts, and civil society from both EU Member States and candidate countries to debate challenges, propose reforms, and submit recommendations to national and EU institutions, which must respond and follow up. This would build awareness, trust and solidarity across borders. The European Agora (elaborated in chapter 4.2) should be convened annually ahead of the Commission’s enlargement reports to assess progress and recommend reforms, with support provided to ensure inclusive participation;
- The systematic inclusion of the **European Endowment for Democracy (EED)** into the formal EU accession process would deeply change the "Fundamentals First" framework from a technocratic exercise into a bottom-up, resilient democratization model. By funding non-registered civic groups, local independent media, and grassroots watchdogs directly (especially in backsliding countries), the EED builds organic societal resilience, with the European Commission being highly effective at checking whether legislative texts match the EU *acquis* but often struggling to assess how laws are enforced on the ground.
- In the context of the Western Balkans and other specific EU candidates and regions, special attention should be paid to supporting societal and historical reconciliation and reinforcing agency, in particular through supporting education reform, cross-border economic and social mobility, and cultural projects;
- Expand the Erasmus programme with more funding and dedicated programmes for mutual exchanges between Member States and Candidate Countries.

4. Make EU accession the key tool for security and defence in Europe's neighbourhood.

For **EU candidate countries, particularly Ukraine, defending themselves from** third countries, **special flexibility should be introduced**. For example, trade liberalisation for goods as part of a policy of gradual accession to support a war-affected economy should not be cancelled unless there is evidence of serious violations of EU law, such as the rule of law or internal market regulations. Temporary negative effects on the EU's internal market should never outweigh the potential damage to the economic stability of a European democracy defending itself from aggression;

- **Introduce stronger benchmarks on security and defence** in the EU Commission's assessments by including classified defence-focused questions in the enlargement questionnaire. This would allow the EU to evaluate the candidates' readiness for a geopolitically stronger Europe and align their defence sectors;
- Introduce **bilateral defence cooperation** roadmaps between EU Member States and candidate countries, tailored to each country's specific needs. This should focus on security sector reform, standardisation and interoperability. It could essentially become an EU substitute to NATO membership tracks, particularly useful for non-NATO candidates which are aspiring to join the EU;
- **Suspend negotiations if candidate countries conclude partnerships or evade sanctions by the EU on third countries** that are at war with an EU (candidate) country;
- **Provide extended security and defence support** even before full membership, such as participation in all EU defence/industry initiatives, assistance missions to defend against FIMI, and shared planning/exercises for collective defence. Phased application of the Article 42.7 would extend an immediate EU security umbrella over vulnerable partners, deterring further revisionist aggression from hostile actors and addressing the dangerous "security vacuum" that exists during prolonged negotiation timelines;
- **Create rapid feedback structures** for candidate countries to feed into the EU and Member States' intelligence and decision-making structures, where those candidate countries have unique expertise and experience in dealing with FIMI or other security threats, particularly Ukraine and Moldova, which are often better prepared and more tested than their EU counterparts.

5. Create new tools for the EU to act more assertively in situations where a candidate country's population is majority pro-EU accession, but its government slides back into autocracy, such as in Georgia or Serbia. This should include:

- Through an intergovernmental agreement in Council, create a fast-track procedure for the European Commission's Directorate General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST) to propose **suspending candidate country participation** in EU programs and funds, subject to reverse QMV;
- Through an intergovernmental agreement in Council, provide the European External Action Service (EEAS) in advance with a standing mandate to **propose sanctions on candidate country officials breaching obligations arising from the EU acquis** (the body of EU legislation a candidate has to adopt), aligned with a more active use of the existing EU Global Human Rights Sanctions Regime;

- An official **policy of non-engagement** with officials from EU candidate countries in EU and European Political Community (EPC) formats, who have not come to power through free and fair elections according to independent international observers;
- Provide a **dedicated European Endowment for Democracy (EED) fund** to support independent media, civil society, activists and opposition leaders, covering financial penalties such as fines, legal fees and lost subsidies, alongside funded training on countering foreign interference, civic organisation, and personal safety;
- Introduce **asylum and protection mechanisms** for at-risk groups—such as ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQI+ communities, and vulnerable groups in candidate countries—through tools like the temporary protection directive and a dedicated “human rights defenders” directive offering socio-economic support and extended stay in the EU;
- **Quantify the visa liberalisation suspension report** to a 1-to-5 scoreboard, while publishing them twice a year instead of annually.

6. Strengthen administrative capacity and institutional memory in candidate countries, particularly those with ambitious reform agendas but with a limited ability to absorb funding and implement reforms. This should also help public servants, experts, and civil society become familiar with the EU's processes, politics, and networks ahead of formal accession. This should include:

- **Public administration reform**, in particular to create a more flexible, rewarding and progressive organisational culture;
- **Attracting, training and retaining (young) talent in public administration**, and, where necessary, bridging the gap between salaries offered by local and international career opportunities through direct EU financial assistance;
- **Professional training** on location tailored to local circumstances, with a transition to in-house “training of the trainer” formats as soon as possible;
- **Structured exchange programs** between candidate country officials and selected professionals and their EU (Commission) counterparts;
- **Tailored programs** for judiciary, media and civil society members, as well as youth initiatives focused on building democratic awareness, organisation and citizen empowerment.

7. Expand the successful policy of 'gradual accession', meaning more for more, less for less, where candidate countries can integrate in different EU sectors and policies even before full membership, and reforms are awarded with benefits, maintaining reform momentum. This should be reversible if governments backslide and would keep candidate countries' populations motivated while their governments and civil societies remain committed to strong reform agendas. We propose to expand this policy to “**staged accession**”, where Member States can also progressively benefit from participation in EU programs and budgets in line with advances in their reform agenda, through different stages of Membership status. This model provides a **pragmatic, operational template for a structured multi-speed Europe**. By formalizing distinct tiers of integration, the EU can accommodate a wider, geopolitically vital neighborhood without risking institutional paralysis.

It ensures that while candidate states progressively integrate into security and market structures, a **vanguard of core Member States retains the flexibility to deepen political and defense integration at a faster pace**. The landing zone is equal to everyone: full EU membership with all rights and obligations.

- **Transform the assessments of candidate country progress** by the European Commission from a qualitative into a quantitative benchmark, rated 1 to 5, which is easier to monitor and compare between different countries, based on clear, transparent and objective data. This could empower civil society in candidate countries to hold governments accountable while creating healthy competition. Scores automatically unlock or block pre-accession funds, Growth-and-Reform plan benefits and advanced-candidate status.
- Introduce a new status between candidate and member, called **advanced-candidate status**. This status can be attained if the candidate country has full CSFP alignment and has received a positive interim Benchmark Assessment Report (IBAR) for the fundamentals cluster, after which it automatically receives the status. It would be automatically reversible in the event of backsliding **and not an end in itself, but a stage toward full membership**. At first, such an advanced-candidate status can be introduced through an intergovernmental agreement with candidate countries, before a formal status is introduced, which would require treaty change.
- **Enable the full participation** of relevant levels of candidate country officials in all Council meetings, with voting rights but without a veto (for chapters the country has closed fully). It would also extend observer status to selected national parliamentarians to the European Parliament, corresponding to the number of seats the candidate would receive if it were to become a full Member. Finally, relevant technical experts from the public administration or other bodies should be able to participate in the work of EU Commission bodies and EU agencies, for those chapters the candidate has closed;
- **Advanced candidates would also be covered by Article 42.7**, as a credible security guarantee against foreign aggression, giving a country like Ukraine an alternative to NATO, at least in the short term. Finally, they would be covered by the CJEU jurisdiction and be provided access to a progressively increased percentage of the EU budget and (single market) programs;
- **Include the heads of government of advanced candidate countries as permanent observers at all European Council summits**, especially those relevant to EU enlargement, security, competitiveness, and reform. Heads of government from countries whose candidacy has been suspended are not invited;
- Introduce a permanent budget instrument in the next Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to **succeed and expand the individual “growth and reform” plans** that have so far been established for Ukraine, the Western Balkans and Moldova, through a reform of the pre-accession funds (IPA's);
- As part of growth and reform plans, **introduce special instruments focused on strengthening social cohesion**, specifically for the most disadvantaged socio-economic groups and regions, which are most vulnerable to FIMI and enlargement fatigue, as well as

for post-conflict reconstruction, reconciliation, and ethno-territorial divisions, education and infrastructure;

- **Expand career opportunities for young professionals from candidate countries to work in EU institutions and agencies**, including through dedicated traineeship and young professional programs in the European Parliament, Commission and Council, as well as sectoral agencies;
- **Rapidly apply best practices from specific types of successful sectoral gradual accession**, such as energy balancing, Schengen IT links and customs fast-lanes, which should then be generally applied for all candidate countries when possible;
- **Break the “big-bang” into a “regatta”**. Instead of a 2004-style package in which all candidate countries join at once, smaller groups should be able to join when ready, based on their own merits. The conditions are different from 20 years ago; countries like Hungary have instrumentalised their veto to block specific candidates, and some candidate countries are reforming much faster than others (or are actively backsliding).
- **Introduce special programs for the diaspora** from candidate countries residing in EU Member States, and vice versa. As we have seen in many cases, most strikingly in the recent elections in Moldova and Romania, the mobility arising from accession opportunities provides financial, political, and cultural advantages for pro-EU forces, which can create a mutually reinforcing, positive dynamic. Young people from the diaspora, who are often more mobile, play a key role in this.

8. Ensure that new Member States strengthen the Union rather than weaken it

- If necessary, **institute transition periods** for candidate country sectors that have an adverse effect on the EU single market due to accelerated accession, such as agriculture, transport, and labour in the case of Ukraine. Concretely, such candidates may join the EU before all sectors have fully joined the internal market. This could also apply to EU frameworks such as Schengen or the Euro;
- **Introduce a “confidence clause” in the accession treaty**, to prevent new Member States from blocking future accessions by reviving bilateral disputes. To prevent the EU from inheriting unresolved conflicts, candidate countries with outstanding conflicts should be required to resolve them through EU-brokered binding bilateral or multilateral agreements, which should be finalised and signed concurrently with their respective accession treaties;
- **Include candidate countries in the annual Rule of Law review** by the European Commission of EU Member States, and quantify them to a 1-to-5 scoreboard, so candidates are held to the same standards as Member States even before they join;
- Learn from and **integrate into EU policy existing civil society initiatives from candidate countries** on public transparency, accountability, and scrutiny, which are often superior to their counterparts in the EU and Member States. Ukraine, in particular, has very well-functioning examples of digitised, accessible platforms for government accountability, particularly in anti-corruption. Its Prozorro platform allows individual citizens to scrutinise public procurement procedures, and its NACP e-register of asset declarations publicly lists all assets of public officials;

- **Conflicts, including military ones involving territory occupation, should be resolved** as part of the accession process, but the latter should not be held hostage to the former. It is critical to recognise this, since it is a deliberate Russian strategy to permanently leave candidates in frozen conflicts.

3.3. Why EU reform is essential

Reform would make the EU work for its democratic majority rather than be stopped by a blocking minority. It would directly translate Europeans' preferences into decisions and turn the EU into a democratic powerhouse rather than a bloated bureaucracy. Reform would improve the EU's capacity to act. The EU, with 27 Member States, barely functions as it is; without changes, at 35 it would get completely stuck. Before being removed from power, Viktor Orbán, who ruled a country representing only 2% of the EU's population, has issued around 50% of the total vetoes cast by all Member States in recent years. This would be as if the city of Leeuwarden blocked half of all decisions on taxation, defence or foreign policy of the Netherlands. Orbán being out of power should not feel like a great relief to us, because others will try to take his place, and the veto still produces lowest common denominator decisions even amongst countries following the principle of sincere cooperation. This endangers Europe's collective security and sovereignty, preventing it from taking action to help Ukraine defend itself, make corporations pay their fair share of taxes, and sanction human rights abusers. Qualified Majority Voting, rather than Unanimity, should become the decision-making norm as quickly as possible. Meanwhile, the European Commission already has too many commissioners, even before enlargement, making their responsibilities vague, fragmented and inefficient. A future union should be one of, by, and for the people, but the European Parliament is not the institution European citizens deserve; it lacks the power to truly control the executive or to propose legislation. Under threat by Putin and Trump, the EU also needs to be able to defend itself autonomously with a real European Defence Union. Finally, the EU's budget is less than 2% of EU GNI; peanuts compared to the US or Chinese budgets. To address the many investment needs for our defence, climate and economy, we need sufficient resources at the EU level and fiscal competencies.

Reform would strengthen the EU's democracy, rule of law and transparency. Instead of having European elections run by national politicians and parties, we can create a system where you directly elect people who can hold truth to power. For example, the introduction of transnational lists would allow citizens to vote for candidates representing pan-European parties, not just national ones. Participatory mechanisms such as regular EU-wide citizens' assemblies, digital deliberative platforms, or public consultations on legislative proposals can also be established to gather input from ordinary Europeans throughout the decision-making process. Building on the best examples of participatory democracy, we can create a European Agora at EU level with a strong role in the legislative process, where randomly selected citizens from across the Union meet to discuss and propose new laws directly to the Parliament. This Agora could have an advisory or a co-legislative function, ensuring that citizens are truly in the driving seat. By empowering the Court of Justice of the EU and the EU Public Prosecutor's Office, expanding the Parliament's right of inquiry, while making all EU funding conditional on the Rule of Law, we crack down on corruption. New independent bodies can scrutinise corruption and ethical conduct within the EU institutions, making them more transparent and fairer. What is needed is a fully functioning European Parliamentary

Democracy enabling citizens to determine their future. Reform would turn enlargement into a boon rather than a burden. Enlargement, especially a substantial one involving a country as large as Ukraine, will have a significant impact on the EU's current system, particularly its agricultural and regional budgets, the internal market, and the balance of power within the institutions. By preparing for that enlargement in advance, we can instead turn it to our advantage. Think of it as urban planning: it is much easier to design livable, walkable cities in advance than to let time run its course.

4. EU Reform Stage 1 – Before 2030 (No Treaty Change)

4.1. The most urgent problems which need reforms

Europe is approaching a “traffic-jam moment”. At 27 members, the Union already spends months being held hostage by individual vetoes, inefficient institutions, and an EU budget that is too small to fund even today’s climate, defence, and innovation pledges. If we add more countries, the system will seize up just when we need it to act much faster.

1. **Governance & decision-making– the veto gridlock.** A single capital can still paralyse sanctions, tax files, or enlargement steps. The passerelle clause that would flip these to Qualified Majority Voting lies unused, while 27 Commissioners, short Council Presidencies and a weak Parliament lead to inefficient governance;
2. **Democracy & the rule of law – a legitimacy gap.** European elections are, in reality, 27 national elections; a million-signature Citizens’ Initiative may end in a polite shrug; rule-of-law tools cover only part of the budget, and the EPPO cannot yet prosecute every fraud case. Public trust bleeds away, and hostile powers exploit the vacuum;
3. **Budget – ambitions on rations.** A ceiling below 2% of EU GNI cannot fund a competitive economy, the green & digital transition, Ukraine’s reconstruction, and common defence. We need at least 3%. New own resources exist on paper (carbon border levy, minimum corporate-tax share, digital levy) but have not been fully activated, and the EU's budget is inflexible. In short, an enlarged EU can survive the 2020s if it unblocks vetoes, sharpens democratic oversight and equips itself with real money; changes that are already legally possible today, waiting for political courage rather than a grand convention.

How can we solve them without treaty change? These proposals can be delivered largely through ordinary legislation, secondary law or inter-institutional/inter-governmental agreements, and do not require treaty change. They sit within existing shared competences (social, environment, internal market) or can ride on Art. 114 TFEU (internal-market approximation) or Art. 352 (flexibility). No exclusive powers need to be added to the EU. Some changes, such as stripping autocratic backsliders of their voting rights, can already be triggered by a vote in the Council.

4.2. Our proposals for reforms

A. Governance and decision-making

- **Voting**

- **Activate i.a. the passerelle clause to extend QMV** at a minimum to CFSP sanctions and human rights, EU budgetary and fiscal decisions, and for the intermediate steps of EU enlargement;
- Through an intergovernmental agreement, pilot a “**European Council public justification**” rule, making it mandatory **for a Member State to provide a political explanation for issuing a veto in writing and publish it within 48 hours of issuing a veto.**

- **Council**

- Reform the Council Presidency: **switch from current ‘trios’ to rolling quintets** covering half a European Parliament/Commission mandate, allowing for longer-term agenda setting and coordinating across decision-making cycles, while also allowing the inclusion of incoming candidate countries in quintets. Transform into a more symbolic function, gradually transferring agenda-setting powers to the Commission.

- **Parliament**

- Keep the EP at ≤ 751 members and adopt a **permanent mathematical formula for the re-allocation of seats** before the 2029 elections;
- Enact the 2022 **European Electoral Act**, thus creating uniform electoral rules and establishing transnational lists, creating real European elections for 2029;
- Finalise an agreement on the EP's **Right of Initiative and Right of Inquiry** with true subpoena powers;
- Expand voting rights for mobile EU citizens in municipal and European elections to regional, national, and presidential elections.

- **Commission**

- Streamline the College to a **maximum number corresponding to 2/3 of the total number of Member States**;
- Portfolios allocated based on merit, not nationality;
- Formalised college hierarchy, with clear division of responsibilities and powers and a continuity of functions;
- Even out with a geographic balancing metric (e.g. certain percentages of commissioners per region of the EU);
- Use Article 17(6) to rotate portfolios mid-term, ensuring the College never exceeds two-thirds of Member States.

B. Democracy and rule of law

- Extend **EPPO jurisdiction** to all EU spending lines from the EU budget, also making it the lead prosecutor for all own-resources fraud;
- Create a **‘peer-review week’** where national judges scrutinise each other's judicial systems, including EU and candidate countries;
- Apply the existing **Rule-of-Law Conditionality Regulation** to every fund, including CAP, Cohesion and RRF, and turn it into a standing instrument to sanction any breaches of the Rule of Law and systematic breaches of the European values enshrined in Article 2 TEU;
- Upgrade the Commission’s annual rule-of-law reports to a **quantitative 1-to-5 scoreboard** that also covers candidate countries; scores automatically unlock or block pre-accession funds and Growth-and-Reform plan benefits. Strengthen the monitoring and consistent application of the reports;
- **Establish a European Agora** based on the lessons learned from the Conference on the Future of Europe, national, regional, and local citizen assemblies, and hold at least 2 thematic panels per year (topics decided by the Agora itself), whose recommendations must be debated and responded to by the co-legislators. This body would de facto act as a popular EU agenda-setting system while providing recommendations on legislative proposals;
- **Cut the European Citizen Initiative (ECI) signature threshold** to 500,000 and give every successful ECI an automatic EP plenary vote;
- **Fully implement the EU ethics body**, as established in 2024, to monitor and sanction lobbying and ethics breaches by EU officials, Members of the European Parliament, and individuals working for and with them;
- Make the **Transparency Register mandatory** and introduce a mandatory 12-month “cool-off” period for ex-officials before they can be employed for actors they previously legislated on.
- **Single European digital public accountability platforms** for citizens to monitor and scrutinise public procurement and the assets of EU and national officials, on the model of Ukraine's Prozorro and NACP.

C. Budget

- Empower the Global Europe instrument with a **€75 bn Enlargement Adjustment Facility** inside the 2028-2034 MFF financed by the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM), digital and corporate-tax own resources, to provide pre-accession support + first-year net transfers;
- Permanently fold the Recovery and Resilience Facility into the **2028-34 MFF** and triple the overall EU budget to €3 trn, partially financed by introducing **new own resources** (share of corporate-tax base and digital levy, high-net wealth tax) to cover at least 3 % of EU GNI;
- **Cap CAP pillar-I outlays, and front-load rural-development money** to help existing members adjust;

- **Reform the EU structural funds**, in particular cohesion policy, so that EDRF, CF and CFP have enough capacity to continue to provide at least the same level of socio-economic convergence between existing Member States, while adding new Member States to the mix;
- **Phase out rebates** for EU Member States from the EU budget;
- From 2034 onward, **transition to a 5-year MFF cycle instead of the current 7-year cycle**, so it more closely aligns with the EU's electoral cycle, improving political scrutiny, transparency and accountability, and introducing more flexibility in priority setting.

5. EU Reform Stage 2 – By 2030 (Treaty Change Required)

5.1. The fundamental problems which need reforms

Beyond 2030 the Union will swell to 35+ members. A new house needs new foundations; it cannot be patched with duct tape forever. Ukrainian membership, in particular, will have large implications for the EU; it should be seen as a positive opportunity for radical reform rather than a burden. Treaty change, however, should not be a precondition for Ukrainian accession. A union of such size will require streamlining the number of political actors to ensure effectiveness and accountability, with the democratic majority, rather than everyone minus one, guiding all decision-making. Consent, rather than opposition, should be the default. Three of the Union's pillars demand a constitutional refit:

- **Governance & decision-making – democratic majorities.** Clinging to the veto prevents meaningful collective sovereignty. Only the treaty can scrap it and recast the EU institutions into a bicameral parliamentary democracy: an elected Government answering to a Parliament, responsible towards Europeans, and a Senate of States.
- **Democracy & rule of law – citizen constitutionalism.** Citizens cannot meaningfully affect legislation, and the Court of Justice cannot directly defend their rights. A new treaty must grant the Parliament and the European Agora full initiative rights, while elevating the CJEU to a full Constitutional Court.
- **Budget – capacity to act.** Strategic autonomy needs muscle: a Treasury able to levy EU taxes, issue common debt of at least 3% and scalable to 10% of GNI, and a completed internal market of 500 million citizens.

History shows every enlargement coincided with a constitutional leap. The 2030 treaty is the next logical step, giving a continent-sized Union the democratic authority, decision-making speed, policy competences, and fiscal firepower to succeed in this century.

How can we solve them through treaty change? Treaty change can be achieved through any of the following options, by preference:

1. Regular Treaty Change with Convention and IGC according to Art 48 (6) TEU;
2. Reform via Accession Treaty (such as with Montenegro or another candidate);
3. Member States draft a 'framework enlargement and reform treaty';
4. Involving Convention in drafting of 'framework enlargement and reform treaty';
5. 'Supplementary reform treaty' between willing Member States.

5.2. Our proposals for reforms

A. Governance and decision-making

Voting

- **General QMV, with super QMV for specific cases** (72 % states / 65 % population), and abolish unanimity for all policy areas except for
 1. new treaties,
 2. opening and closing of accession negotiations, and
 3. foreign deployment of EU military forces; offer opt-outs to Member States for specific policy areas if necessary;
- **Recalculate QMV voting shares**, from 65% of population to 60%, and from 55% of Member States to 60%, restoring geographic balance.

Inter-institutional

- Through a European Convention, adopt a European Constitution which transforms the Council and Parliament into a **European bicameral parliamentary democracy**: a European Government Prime Minister forms a majority 'EU Government' through a democratic majority in the European Parliament (lower house), while the Council becomes the Senate (upper house).
- Election of an EU Prime Minister from the Members of the European Parliament, in place of the President of the European Commission;
- Allow the Prime Minister to propose Ministers to be confirmed by the European Parliament; each Minister will head one Ministry corresponding to a clear thematic area of responsibility and competences, replacing the Directorates-General in the European Commission. The current system of Commissioners being assigned portfolios with confusing responsibilities and hierarchies, with a varying number of DG's reporting to them, as well as the disrupting reshuffle of those portfolio's every 5 years reflecting national political bargaining, will end;
- Allow for the removal from office of any Minister, or of the European Government as a whole, through a vote of no confidence by the European Parliament at any time, thus making it accountable to European citizens;
- European Parliament and Senate confirmation hearings for Ministers;

- Geographic, linguistic and national balance, i.a. a maximum of 3 cabinet ministers can have the nationality of any given Member State, no region unrepresented (NE, WE, SE, EE, CE);
- Gender parity and diversity measures for the EU Government composition, i.a. no more than 60% of cabinet members can be of the same gender, >25% must be under the age of 45 ;
- The EU Government is consulted and can propose amendments, but voting power lies with the co-legislators: the European Parliament and the European Senate;
- The role of the European Parliament must change from merely co-deciding laws to initiating new legislation – a power that would be shared with the European Agora;
- General right of legislative initiative and inquiry for the Parliament;
- New laws can be proposed by a political group or an equivalent minimum number of individual MEPs that would be required to form a political group;
- A full European democratic space through at least half the seats in the EP made up of transnational lists.
- Transform the Council of the European Union into the European Senate, serving as the EU's second chamber.
- Equal number of senators per Member State designated by national parliaments;
- Abolish the European Council.
- Transform the EU Ethics Body into a full EU **Ethics & Transparency Authority** with its own investigative powers. Mandatory cooling-off period of 18 months for MEPs;
- **Ensure defence readiness by 2030 through a full European Defence Union**, separable but not separate from NATO, explained in detail by Volt's vision paper on European Defence;
- Transform the EEAS into a **European Ministry of Foreign Affairs**.

B. Democracy and rule of law

- CJEU upgraded to fully functional **Constitutional Court of the EU**, making it the arbiter of Article 7 violations;
- **Super-QMV** for triggering Article 7, with a set deadline for voting as soon as it is triggered (6 months), followed by automatic sanctions when adopted (12 months);
- Make the **EU Charter directly justiciable** in national courts, not only covering the implementation of the EU law;
- Make European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) rulings **automatically binding in EU law**.

C. Budget

- Create an **EU Ministry of Finance/treasury** able to issue common debt and run stabilisation transfers; permanent fiscal capacity $\geq 3\%$ of EU-GNI from the next MFF and scalable to 10 % by 2040;
- Integrate Ukraine-style **reconstruction loans** under the treasury.



STAGE I: 2027-2029

01 Eliminate the Vetoes

Activate "passerelle clauses" to replace unanimity with Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) for foreign policy sanctions, human rights, budgetary decisions, and the intermediate steps of EU enlargement.



01

02

Streamline institutions and democratic oversight

Reduce the College of Commissioners to a maximum of two-thirds of the Member States, establish transnational lists for European elections, and create a "European Agora" where randomly selected citizens can propose and debate new laws directly with the Parliament.



03 Expand the budget and admit advanced candidates

Create a €75 billion "Enlargement Adjustment Facility" within the post-2027 budget to support pre-accession and first-year transfers, while seeing the most advanced candidates like Montenegro, Moldova, and Albania officially cross the finish line into EU membership.



03

04

Overhaul the EU into a bicameral democracy

Completely abolish unanimity across the board and replace the current institutional setup with an elected EU Government led by a Prime Minister, answering to a European Parliament (lower house) and a new Senate of States (upper house).



05 Establish a true EU Treasury and a full Defence Union

Create an EU Ministry of Finance with real fiscal competences, allowing it to levy EU taxes and issue common debt worth at least 3% of the EU's Gross National Income, while simultaneously anchoring a fully equipped European Defence Union.



05

06

Upgrade the judiciary and constitutional rights

Elevate the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) to a full Constitutional Court with ex-ante treaty review powers, and ensure that European Court of Human Rights rulings are automatically binding in EU law.



STAGE II: 2027-2029

Conclusion: a 5-year marathon

Now close your eyes.

Imagine a world in which Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and the Western Balkans built a strong, democratic belt from the Baltic to the Black Sea, denied Russia a corridor of influence and furnished the Union with the people, materials and purpose it needs to succeed.

Imagine your monthly energy bill dropping because the Union has integrated Ukraine's massive renewable energy potential and Moldova's grid into a single, resilient system. Instead of relying on volatile global markets, your home is powered by a stable, internal network of wind, solar, and hydrogen.

Picture a Friday evening where you board a high-speed night train in Paris. You don't just stop in Brussels or Berlin; you wake up in a thriving, modern Kyiv for your friends' wedding, in a place where they met on an Erasmus term. Or, maybe you are exchanging views on green technology at the conference in a vibrant Sarajevo? Regardless, there are no borders, no visa queues, and no roaming charges.

The infrastructure projects that ended long ago at the old "Iron Curtain" dividing Europe have been completed. You can move for a summer job in Tbilisi or start a tech firm in Chişinău as easily as you would in Tallinn, with your social security, pension contributions, and healthcare rights following you instantly through a unified digital ID. The continent feels smaller, more accessible, and full of untapped potential. But the most important thing: people are closer to each other than they ever have been.

Imagine living in a world where you are free to pursue your dreams, ambitions, and love, regardless of your background or circumstances. In this world, "Made in Europe" becomes the undisputed global standard for both quality and ethics. Because the Union is now large enough to be entirely self-reliant in tech and defence, you aren't just a "rule-taker" from Silicon Valley or Beijing. Your voice is always heard, rather than drowned out in the loudness of autocratic whims.

But the most striking change is the European atmosphere. The "democratic belt" has replaced the anxiety of grey-zone attacks and frozen conflicts with a shared mission. You are no longer living in a museum of the glories of past empires, but in a laboratory of the green, just, and truly European future. The future every single one of us deserves.

If we get it right, we will not just survive the turbulent 2020s, but we will emerge into the 2030s as a more confident, democratic and united continent. It will require focus, courage and energy. This is a 5-year marathon, and we invite everyone to run it with us.

But to get there, we can not keep our eyes closed. We need to open them and start acting faster and with more resolve than the autocratic powers that want to see our Union fall.

Reform is thus the entry ticket to successful enlargement, not its sequel. Everything that can be done without changing the Treaties – especially triggering the passerelle clause for qualified majority voting, modernising the MFF to prepare for enlargement – must be enacted before 2030. That same deadline should see Montenegro already inside the Union and Moldova, Albania and Ukraine crossing the finish line.

So, let's get to work?