

# Join the club

Enlargement is a necessity which expands the single market while promoting growth and the EU should welcome Croatia into the fold, writes **Hannes Swoboda**

**F**or most of its history, EU enlargement has been perceived positively. There was belief that, as a community of democratic states, the EU should be expanded to countries wishing to join and showing their commitment to EU rules and law. But recently, the crisis and the rise of populism have changed this and strengthened voices who believe that enlargement weakens the EU's ability to take coherent decisions.

In my opinion, this is the wrong approach. EU enlargement is a necessity which can contribute to the development of the single market and to growth. It is important to help us to address soft security threats resulting from insufficient building at our borders. Moreover, to argue that new memberships dilute EU policymaking is short-sighted. Were we not able to agree on the Lisbon treaty after the largest enlargement in our history?

Based on past experience, fears of enlargement even appear irrational. The accession of central and eastern European countries in 2004 and 2007 was a success. Croatia is another example. Years of preparation have altered the country's social, political and economic landscape. The impulse for reform proves that accession prospects promote change and reconciliation. The results of the membership referendum revealed an enthusiasm for the EU that is lacking in several old member states.

Of course, supporting enlargement does not amount to being careless. Efforts in Croatia must continue, particularly regarding the judiciary and corruption, and parliament has asked to be involved in monitoring. Looking at other prospective members, it is important to be nuanced. Iceland has deep democratic roots and is already very integrated with the EU, while Turkey has numerous issues to address, not least regarding human rights. State-building efforts are required in countries of the western Balkans, who still have a long way to go to guarantee parliamentary democracy. Macedonia must also solve internal questions.

How can we ensure the enlargement process continues smoothly, without concessions which would feed populism and weaken integration, but without breaking up the talks and losing our influence? First, we need to be assertive and demand that all of our conditions be met. This needs to be done through inflexible bargaining, but also through parliamentary cooperation, the effective use of conditional funding, of the common foreign and

security policy and the common security and defence policy, as well as through diplomacy. Indeed, conditionality alone is not enough when essential state structures are lacking.

EU citizens must be involved in a debate about enlargement if future choices are not to feed resentment. The EU budget should be adapted to allow for extended cohesion policy initiatives, and we should state that the degree of compliance with our criteria will determine the date of accession.

The crisis should not distract us from other challenges. Nor should it make us inward-looking. The EU's flaws do not stem from enlargement, and will not disappear if a halt is put on the process. What is required is strict implementation of the acquis and monitoring of reforms. This is in our economic and security interests. It is also in the interests of prospective states' citizens to enjoy European values of peace, prosperity and freedom. ★



Hannes Swoboda is parliament's former rapporteur on Croatia's accession to the EU

# Candidate for success

**Charles Tannock** says Montenegro is working hard to achieve its EU accession criteria and encouraging regional cooperation in its neighbourhood

Understanding foreign policy helps to make sense of the world around. The world is more interconnected than ever before and globalisation has shrunk the planet. We are in the age of 24-hour news and social networking, with instant global communication and access to information. EU member states' foreign policy, including relations with its immediate neighbourhood, is also increasingly conducted multilaterally through the EU. The challenges all European countries and our major economic partners globally face are similar – terrorism, migration, external borders, environmental challenges, energy security, arms control, nuclear proliferation and international development aid. Gone are the days when diplomacy was just about state-to-state relations. Today, foreign policy is a broad umbrella shaped by many interests that often coincide but sometimes conflict.

EU enlargement has been a foreign policy success story as we have grown to 27 members, a population of over 500 million and an economy comparable in size to the US. Although enlargement has slowed down due to political and understandable public resistance in many countries (particularly those who accommodated large migrations). It is important to realise that EU membership in the western Balkans maintains peace and stability and drives economic and political reforms in the region.

Montenegro applied to join the EU in 2008, and in 2009 achieved visa free travel. In 2010, the stabilisation and association agreement came into force and the country became an EU accession candidate. However, the council's December summit postponed Montenegro's opening of negotiations and was a disappointment for the country. I believe the decision was political rather than anything to do with the lack of progress that Montenegro has made. Montenegro has actually worked hard to address the commission's concerns and meet the criteria and benchmarks set in the key priority areas. These are: improving the work of parliament and the electoral framework, professionalism within the administration, independence of the judiciary, fighting corruption and organised crime, media freedom and civil society cooperation.

My resolution on Montenegro's progress, which is currently before the foreign affairs committee, covers the economy, and its difficulties given the eurozone crisis. Montenegro uses the euro

although not a member of the eurozone officially which is no doubt a mixed blessing. The resolution also examines the need for pension reforms and freeing up the country from too much red tape and bureaucracy to encourage business and promote growth. Montenegro was, to its credit, admitted to the WTO in December 2011. The major political Copenhagen criteria issues, include interethnic relations – Montenegro unlike many of its neighbours is very cohesive – discrimination issues, repatriation of internally displaced persons, independence of the judiciary and freedom of the media. These are well known and are being addressed by Podgorica. There are also issues relating to the need for more transparency in energy policy and potential damage to the environment from the building of hydroelectric dams, as tourism plays a major role as Montenegro.

Montenegro is known as a champion of better regional cooperation with its neighbours, including resolving an outstanding border dispute with Croatia, and fighting organised crime. Last year, it concluded successful bilateral extradition treaties with Serbia, Macedonia and Croatia. Montenegro is a success story and it is hoped negotiations will now begin in June of 2012. ★

**Charles Tannock** is parliament's rapporteur on Montenegro's European integration process




# Part of the family?

Iceland occupies a unique accession position with few technical obstacles to EU membership, but its public remains divided over their sense of European identity, writes **Cristian Dan Preda**

Iceland is many things, but it's definitely not your typical EU candidate country. If one would play a spot-the-odd-one-out game with enlargement countries, Iceland would immediately catch the eye. Situated at the rift between the European and the North American continents, Iceland would have the smallest population in the union, it boasts the world's oldest standing parliament and its fisheries production represents more than 30 per cent of the EU total – to mention only four peculiarities of the country.

Admitted as a candidate state only one year after it submitted its application, Iceland seems to be on a fast-track to membership. For example, Iceland receives €12m through EU's pre-accession instrument. In comparison, Serbia gets double just for its Romanian border programme, and not only because Iceland is a small country. Indeed, this highlights that the country has few technical problems to solve before its EU accession. Nevertheless, although Iceland's accession to the EU might lack the drama and the implications of other ongoing enlargement processes, it is not short of challenges: starting with negotiations on fisheries, continuing with the "Icesave dispute" and ending with the public support for accession.

The ongoing dispute over mackerel quotas between the EU, Norway, Iceland and the Faroes shows us how important the fishing sector is for Reykjavík and how determined the



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Icelanders are to fight for what they perceive as their rights. Indeed, fisheries represent 40 per cent of Iceland's foreign currency earnings and roughly half of Icelandic merchandise exports. Therefore, Icelanders claim that their fisheries situation is unique and the agreement on this chapter will most probably make or break the country's EU accession.

The "Icesave" dispute with the Netherlands and the UK also remains unresolved. This issue has appeared in the wake of the bankruptcy of the three main Icelandic banks in 2008 and continued after the Icelandic president twice decided to put to referendum an agreement on the repayment terms of loans to compensate British and Dutch depositors. Although at the beginning of December, Iceland has made the first partial payments to priority creditors, amounting to almost a third of the recognised priority claims, the European free trade association surveillance authority has decided to refer Iceland to its court and the case is ongoing. Hopefully, by paying all its debt, Iceland will defuse the tension around this issue before the court verdict and allow negotiations to proceed smoothly.

What threatens to be a more acute discussion is the state of the euro. Iceland submitted its application in a period when it was feeling economically fragile and sought shelter under the euro umbrella. It was only after the EU representatives made it clear that there can be no accession to the eurozone without accession to the union per se, that the Icelanders decided to put in their application. But from the main argument, the euro is now turning into a weakness for the pro-EU camp in the country, which finds itself in the difficult situation of explaining how the EU will get out of the euro crisis.

This comes against the background of a public opinion that was always divided on EU accession. During the last seven years, only one of seventeen opinion polls on accession to the EU gave the result of a majority in favour. And, despite common perception, this was not after the Icelandic financial crisis, but before it in September 2007. Nonetheless, there has been a quite steady majority in favour of starting and then continuing negotiations, and minds might very well change as the case of Croatia has shown us. However, voter turnout in Icelandic elections is usually very high (around 90 per cent), compared to Croatia (60 per cent) and the opponents of accession seem to be better organised and represent specific interests.

Iceland has benefited from a very good start. To make sure that it keeps up the good pace, political will is the most essential ingredient. Both the politicians and the population need to engage into a public debate about the advantages and disadvantages of accession. Beyond policies and institutions, the debate will have to also have to address a question of identity. Does Iceland want to face the tempest of the globalised world by itself, or as part of the big European family? This is a question only Icelanders can answer. ★

Cristian Dan Preda  
is parliament's  
rapporteur on the  
report of Iceland's  
accession to the  
EU



# EU Enlargement



In 2003, upon the Enlargement to encompass the Eastern European countries, Gerhard Schroeder said, "With this step, the Union is overcoming the division of the European continent... The new and bigger Union will... find a place in the world as a Europe of peace, solidarity and democracy."

Today, we, as Europeans, face challenges to our economies, trials of strife from inside and outside, and ultimately challenges to our dream of what Europe can be. In 2003, Europe's destiny of being a living, breathing, growing place of peace, solidarity and democracy seemed immutable.

Every goal worth pursuing faces adversity; this should come as no surprise. The challenges facing us are large but the

dream of Europe and the necessity of its fulfillment are larger still. The European project is not complete and though the road tests our fortitude, the noble objective must not be lost. We ask that the completion of the European project not be sacrificed to the tyranny of the urgent. There are larger ideals at stake.

In the Republic of Macedonia, daily we face hurdles upon our path toward integration with the European Union and we remind ourselves of the necessity and rightness of simply continuing on. Our dedication to the reforms necessary for European Integration is unwavering.

We ask that your commitment to the ideals of Europe be equally unwavering. In the face of the storm, let us not fall

back from the great dream of a united Europe. With this in mind, we are proud that the European Commission, for three years in a row, has recognized Macedonia's readiness to enter into formal negotiations for membership. We stand ready to embrace the next step with commitment and vigor.

In closing, I would like to extend my gratitude to our friends in the European Parliament for their stalwart support and many concrete actions taken on our behalf and their work toward the completion of the dream that was born as the European Union.

Sincerely yours,

**Nikola Poposki**  
Minister for Foreign Affairs

## MACEDONIAN CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN TRAINING (MCET)

**Macedonian Centre for European Training (MCET)** is a non-governmental, non-profit, non-partisan think-tank organization established in December 2002 by 21 EU trainers, certified by InWEnt from Bonn and the Institute for European Politics from Berlin. The mission of MCET is to support the accession to the EU by the means of training, consultancy, public policy development, advocacy and lobbying for change.

Since its establishment, MCET has delivered more than 1000 days of training on various EU topics to more than 6000 representatives from the public administration, media, civil society organizations, judges and prosecutors, political party members, local government administrations etc.



In the last 3 years, MCET changed its focus from a training institute to a think-tank organization hoping to mitigate the apparent lack of expertise in the country in the field of policy-making in line with EU. Recent policy briefs published are: "Lisbon-Skopje-Thessalonica: Five Reasons Why Macedonia Should Start Negotiations", "A Council, A Bit of Money, and Lots, and Lots of Friends", "On the Way to the EU – Monitoring the Implementation of the Equal Opportunities Directives in Southeast Europe", "Following the Leader", "Former, Nameless or..."; "Sliding Promises"; "EU Accession and Poverty in Macedonia" etc.

MCET is also watching the accession process and so far it has produced 10 reports which can be downloaded from our **website. [www mcet.org.mk](http://www.mcet.org.mk)**

MCET is also working with the media to improve the coverage of Macedonia's accession process and by developing tools to help them understand the process better.



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# Waiting game

This could be an important year for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia's EU accession hopes, writes **Richard Howitt**

**W**hen I took up the role of standing rapporteur for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia I knew the position would have its ups and downs. Little did I know, however that the downs would be as bumpy and life-threatening as the emergency landing I experienced in a snowy Skopje airport last week on my way to speak at an international conference on the future of the country.

Avoiding crash landings is also a good metaphor for the work of the European parliament in relation to EU accession, and none more so than the country I was elected to steer towards EU membership when appointed rapporteur a little under a year ago.

This year saw the country given its third successive positive recommendation for the opening of accession talks by the commission, yet the longstanding dispute between Skopje and Athens over the country's name, meant that once again the Council of ministers passed over the recommendation and left the country in the waiting room.

The parliament has been clear that these negotiations must be allowed to begin or else the very credibility of the EU enlargement process is at stake.

I am signalling my own determination to achieve this by stating this as paragraph one, point one of parliament's draft report, without qualification, condition or addition of any kind.

In my report I seek to find and suggest methods that we can use to maintain momentum including for example, beginning the screening process parallel to negotiations on the name, with a strict deadline for the conclusion of both.

I welcome the fact that UN mediator Matthew Nimetz has this month visited both countries to seek progress. But with events in Greece at economic breaking point and the possible election of a new government which may be less friendly to

finding a solution, no-one can underestimate the difficulties of moving forward.

Nevertheless there is room for optimism. In 2011, the country celebrated twenty years of independence and also the tenth anniversary of the Ohrid agreement which helped halt a descent into ethnic bloodshed.

The government has put increased emphasis on economic development including recording third place globally for improvements in ease of going business according to the World Bank, and impressive improvements too in efforts to combat corruption according to Transparency International. I am also delighted that the EU



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can support this process and this month the European bank for reconstruction and development has supported the development of the private sector with a €2.5m loan to one of the leading branded food producers Vitaminka.

Yet tackling corruption at the highest level, protecting media pluralism, driving forward political decentralisation and creating an impartial civil service remain critical challenges, as they do in many of the countries of the region.

Coming from an NGO background myself, before being elected to the parliament, I have also been struck by the lack of a tradition of an independent and pluralistic civil society in the country, with polarisation of local NGOs mirroring the political differences within the country itself. I hope to bring my own personal contribution to helping change this, and have already identified the problems of Roma rights and of anti-

discrimination more generally, as ones where the experience of today's EU can help the country make social advances that are desperately needed and which can help make it part of the EU of tomorrow.

Looking forward, this could be a crunch year for the country. European enlargement commissioner Stefan Füle has stated that the positive recommendation for the country to proceed to negotiations "is not set in stone", and it is my own opinion that the status quo cannot be relied upon for ever.

I do not want the other countries of the region to be held back, but I do advocate that this cannot be at the expense of progress for all. I am also clear that we have to find an alternative to a return to violence, for decision-makers in Brussels to give this country their attention. There has to be a better way. ★

Richard Howitt is parliament's rapporteur for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia