



Background Note

Session I: Europe in a Changing World Order: Security, Enlargement and the Role of Parliamentary Cooperation

As global norms are challenged and power politics return, the European Union faces mounting pressure to respond strategically. Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the destabilisation of the Western Balkans, and intensifying levels of global rivalry all point in the same direction: Europe's security is inseparable from the stability and resilience of its neighbourhood. In this context, the prospective memberships of the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine are not only a political aspiration but a strategic necessity for the safeguarding of Europe's future stability, influence and ability to defend shared interests and values.

Enlargement, Efficiency and Democratic Legitimacy

The enlargement process is based on clear criteria and merit-based progress. The core requirements are democracy, the rule of law, a functioning market economy, and the capacity to adopt and implement the EU's *acquis*. These principles protect the Union's credibility and ensure that new members live up to the high standards established in the Lisbon Treaty. At the same time, enlargement highlights a fundamental point: the EU's strength and democratic legitimacy depend on the Union's democratic institutions, including national parliaments and the European Parliament, which together anchor the EU's political decisions in democratic accountability.

Is the EU Prepared?

The prospect of enlargement raises another central question: Is the EU prepared to function effectively as a Union of thirty or more member states? Decision-making is already an issue today, and a larger Union will face greater decision-making pressures and increased levels of institutional complexity. This has renewed discussions about expanding the use of qualified majority voting in order to safeguard the EU's ability to act. Yet any institutional adjustment must preserve democratic legitimacy. In this regard, the parliamentary dimension is crucial.

To reinforce reforms and sustain pro-European engagement in candidate countries, the EU has introduced gradual integration as part of its updated enlargement methodology. This allows candidate countries to participate in EU policies and programmes on a step-by-step



basis, depending on the specific progress they have made. The aim is to deliver tangible benefits along the way while keeping the process reversible and fully merit-based.

Session I will explore how Europe can enhance its security while continuing to enlarge through close parliamentary cooperation. Discussions will focus on how national parliaments and the European Parliament can support candidate countries and help to strengthen the EU's democratic legitimacy in a larger and more complex Union.

Guiding questions for the discussion:

- How can the EU ensure that enlargement strengthens the Union's ability to act while preserving democratic legitimacy grounded in national parliaments and the European Parliament?
- Should EU decision-making procedures be adapted – for example, through the greater use of qualified majority voting – in order to maintain efficiency in a larger Union, and how can the parliamentary dimension contribute to this balance?
- How can the EU maintain strict conditionality while offering elements of gradual integration that deliver visible progress for candidate countries?
- How can the EU safeguard its fundamental values in a future Union of 30+ member states – and what role should national parliaments and the European Parliament play in this process?