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Canada - the new member state of the EU? - Rules and history of EU memberships

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Canada – the new member state of the EU? – Rules and History of EU Memberships

Roland Brandtjen

ABSTRACT:

This paper investigates the theoretical feasibility and implications of Canadian accession to the European Union (EU), a scenario that challenges conventional geographic and political boundaries of EU enlargement. Prompted by recent shifts in global geopolitics and Canadian public opinion, the study evaluates whether Canada meets the legal, political, and economic criteria for EU membership as outlined in Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union and the Copenhagen criteria. Drawing on comparative data across democracy, human rights, economic competitiveness, and institutional capacity, the analysis demonstrates that Canada aligns closely with EU standards and, in many cases, surpasses existing member states. The paper also explores the legal ambiguity of defining a "European state," the potential institutional impact of Canadian membership, and the compatibility of Canada's existing international obligations with EU law. While full membership would entail significant legal and political adjustments, including treaty renegotiations and institutional restructuring, the study concludes that Canadian EU accession is theoretically plausible and politically contingent. Alternative integration models, such as EFTA membership or enhanced association agreements, are also considered as viable pathways for deepening EU-Canada relations.

KEYWORDS:

Canada-EU Relations, European Union Enlargement, Geopolitical Integration, Copenhagen Criteria, Effects of US Policies

AUTHOR



Prof. Dr. Roland Brandtjen is professor at IU international University GmbH. As a European Studies scholar, his expertise lies in collective identities and their influence on politics. His focus is on the European integration process of regions of Germany, Spain, France, Italy and the UK, as well as all recognised micronations of Europe in relation to the concept of independence. He has studied and worked in Europe at home and abroad. He completed his doctorate at the RWTH in Aachen.

Introduction

The prospect of Canadian accession to the European Union (EU) represents a novel and geopolitically significant development in the discourse on EU enlargement. Traditionally confined to the European continent, the EU has nonetheless demonstrated flexibility in its interpretation of what constitutes a "European state" under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). This paper explores the theoretical and practical dimensions of Canada's potential EU membership, prompted by shifting geopolitical dynamics, particularly in relation to U.S. foreign policy and trade relations.

Recent public opinion data from Canada indicate a growing affinity toward the EU, with a notable portion of the population expressing support for EU membership. This sentiment is reinforced by Canada's longstanding cultural, political, and economic ties to Europe, as well as its alignment with core EU values such as democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The EU, while not formally considering Canadian membership, has acknowledged these developments with interest, and several European political figures have voiced support for deeper integration.

This study systematically examines the legal, political, and economic criteria for EU accession, as outlined in the Copenhagen criteria and the *acquis communautaire* and evaluates Canada's eligibility against these benchmarks. It also considers the broader implications of such an unprecedented enlargement, including institutional, legal, and geopolitical challenges. By analysing historical precedents, current EU-Canada relations, and comparative data across multiple indices, this paper aims to assess the feasibility and desirability of Canadian EU membership within the existing legal and political framework of the Union.

What has happened and what might need to happen?

... *European Union, Europäische Union, Europska Unija, Europäasche Union, Europäiske Union, Union Européenne, Europæiske Union, Europeesk Unjuun, Evropiska samveldið, Uniaon Ûropéaune, Unión Europea, Unnaneyn Europeeanagh, Europamiut peqatigiinnerat, Union Europèa, Unió Europea, Europeiska Unionen, Euroopan Unioni, Xunió Europea, Europar Batasuna, Uniun Européyène, Union Eropèèna, Unioun Uropéienne, Unvaniezh Europa, Union Uropeyenne, Union Oueuropæinne, Europäisch Union, Europäische Üunion, Union d'l'Urope, Europäesch Unioun, Unione Europea, Union Europea, Union Uropéyine, Europeise Unie, Üunion eropéin, Aonadh Eòrpach, Undeb Ewropeaidd, Aontas Eorpach, Unyans Europek, Aunione Airopea, Bashkimi Evropian, Unioni Europea, Ευρωπαϊκή Ένωση, Union Europeane, Uniun Europeica, Unión Európe, Unioun Europea, Uniünne se ló state se l'Éúrópe, Uniune Uropea, Uniune Europea, Evropska unija, Europeische Union, Europska unija, ...*

These are just a selection of EU language versions. Their motto 'Unified in diversity' stands in stark contrast to current US policy and shows EUs divers integration. This extreme US policy involves tariffs, or assimilation claims by sovereign states and autonomous regions that have a negative impact on all those involved. Canada allegedly wants to become a US federal state, Greenland too, if necessary, even by military force, and finally the Panama Canal is to be placed under US control once again. (Starcevic, 2025; Sanchez Vera & Ashraf, 2025; Tawfeeq, 2025; Weissert, 2025) Due to US economic and political pressure, there have been some changes in the perception of the USA among the population of these areas. In Canada, it has resulted in very positive images of the EU, including greater support for Canadian EU membership.

The latter is based on a survey of 1,500 participants conducted by the Canadian opinion research agency Abacus Data in February 2025. According to their publication, a total of 68% have a very positive or mostly positive impression of the EU. It is just behind the United Kingdom with 72% of this impression, but ahead of Mexico with a total of 55% and, above all, ahead of Canada's neighbour the USA with only 34%. Even though, according to the participants, the EU ranks second among Canada's current most important partners with 43% approval, behind the USA with 55%, it ranks first among the most important partners in the next 3-5 years with 52% approval, far ahead of the USA with only 38%. Finally, the survey culminated in the question *"Given the recent tariff threats and the musings of Canada becoming the 51st U.S. state by the Trump administration. Should the Canadian Government look into joining the European Union as a member?"*. (Ayrle & Coletto, 2025) Figure 1 shows the results of this question. 44% of respondents were in favour of Canadian EU membership, 33% were against and 23% were not sure or did not know how to answer.

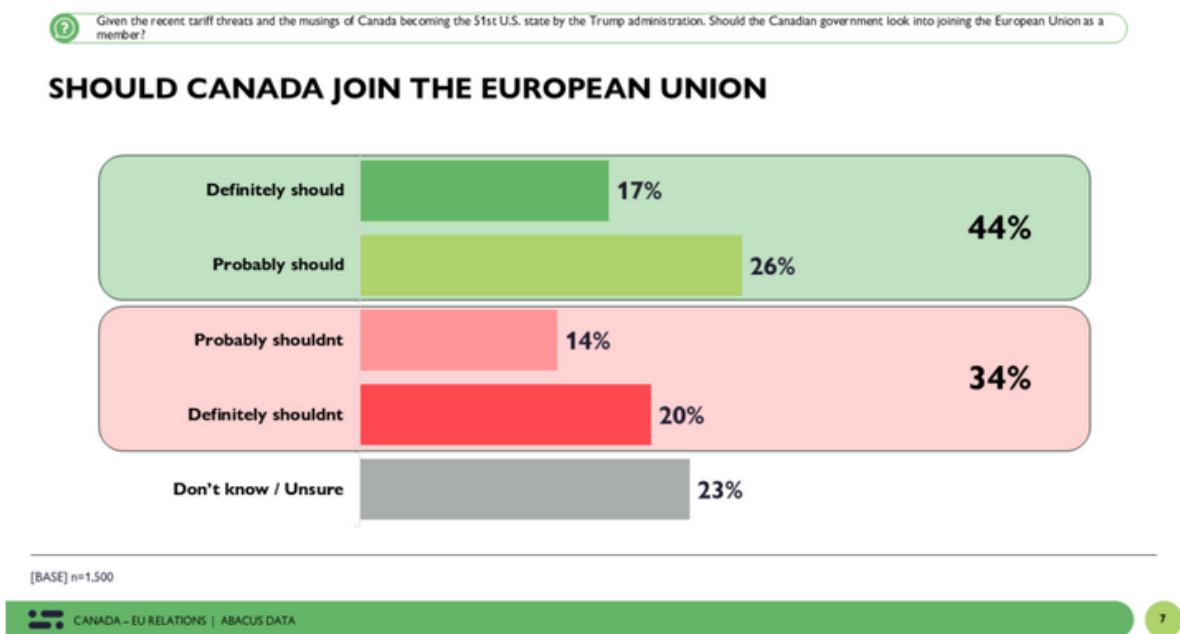


Figure 1: Question and Results of the Abacus Data Survey - Should Canada join the European Union? (Ayrle & Coletto, 2025)

The EU, through its spokesperson, felt very honoured by this. As no application for membership has yet been submitted, no official comments are being made on the possibility of Canadian membership of the EU. However, a number of politicians, including former German Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel and former Belgian Prime Minister Guy Verhofstadt, have responded in favour of Canadian membership. (The Munich Eye, 2025; Körömi, 2025; Verhofstadt, 2025; Parulava, 2025)

The question is to what extent this is even possible. Therefore, we will first describe the general requirements for EU membership. In addition, it will be shown what forms of approximation to EU membership there have been and still are. All with the aim of then applying this to the possible case of Canada.

CRITERIA TO BECOME A MEMBER STATE

The admission criteria can be found in Article 2 and Article 49 of the Treaty of the European Union (TEU). These criteria are categorised into 3 groups: European State, the so-called Copenhagen criteria and additional criteria. The wording of Article 49 reflects these:

“Any European State which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The European Parliament and national Parliaments shall be notified of this application. The applicant State shall address its application to the Council, which shall act unanimously after consulting the Commission and after receiving the consent of the European Parliament, which shall act by a majority of its component members.

The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account. The conditions of admission and the adjustments to the Treaties on which the Union is founded, which such admission entails, shall be the subject of an agreement between the Member States and the applicant State. This agreement shall be submitted for ratification by all the contracting States in accordance with their respective constitutional requirements.” (European Union, 2012; Ranacher & Staudigl, 2010)

CRITERION: EUROPEAN STATE

Already in the first words of Art 49 TEU, the first requirement on the applicant state is mentioned. It needs to be a European state. (European Union, 2012) What is a European state? This criterion consists of 2 parts ‘European’ and ‘State’.

“European” could be understood as geographically, culturally or politically and leave space for political evaluation. (Margedant, 2005; European Parliament, 1998; Paál, 2024) European is the adjective of Europe, which means that if you define Europe, you understand better what European means. (Brandtjen, Europe vs. EU - What extent does their synonymy have?, 2024)

WHAT MEANS EUROPEAN?

The concept of Europe is multifaceted and can be understood through several different perspectives. Geographically, Europe is described as a continent with specific physical boundaries. According to the widely used definition based on Philip Johan von Strahlenberg, Europe's eastern boundary is marked by the Ural Mountains and Ural River, with other borders including the Caspian Sea, the Black Sea, the Dardanelles, the Aegean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean. This definition excludes territories such as Cyprus, the Canary Islands, parts of Iceland, and Svalbard. (Schneider & Toyka-Seid, 2024; Giese, 1987; Sagona, 2015)

Culturally and ideologically, Europe is a region characterized by significant diversity but also by shared values such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, freedom, equality, and human dignity. These common values form the basis of the European identity. However, the boundaries in this regard are fluid and less clearly defined, often described as "floating" or "unclear," reflecting the continent's rich and varied cultural and ideological landscape. (Odendahl, 2015; Dziedzic, 2022; Ivic, 2019; European Union, 2024)

Historically, the term "Europe" originated with the Greeks in the 7th century BC, initially marking a territory distinguished from Asia and Africa. Over time, it expanded to include territories around the Mediterranean and, through historical developments such as medieval political entities and the Roman Empire, it progressively grew. The legacy of this history continues to influence contemporary ideas about what constitutes Europe. (Franz, 2004)

From a political and legal perspective, Europe includes a recognition of about 49 states, alongside various political organizations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe, and the OSCE. Membership in these organizations varies, and some territories geographically located on other continents are considered part of Europe either politically or legally. The boundaries in this domain are complex and often overlapping, reflecting formal memberships, international agreements, and political considerations. (Council of Europe, 2024; Brandtjen, Europe vs. EU - What extent does their synonymy have?, 2024)

Economically, Europe is characterized by integration through various agreements like the European Single Market, the European Customs Union, and the Eurozone. These agreements create a shared economic space that extends beyond geographical borders, emphasizing cooperation, economic interconnectedness, and integration among many European countries and regions. (Barker E. , 2024; Brandtjen, 2021; Hansen & Schröder, 2001; Meier-Pesti & Kirchler, 2003)

In summary, Europe, and therefore European as well, is a complex and layered concept that combines geographical boundaries, shared cultural and ideological values, historical legacy, political structures, and economic integration. Its precise boundaries and definitions are often fluid and depend heavily on context, which underscores the diversity and interconnectedness of the continent. For each state, it must be checked whether it could be considered as European. (Breuss, 2011)

WHAT IS A STATE?

The "state" is a fundamental concept in political sciences, public law and sociology. Depending on the point of view, the state can be defined in multifarious ways. It is an amalgamation of polity, politics and policy and their interdependences in a community. The 3-Elements-theory by Georg Jellinek defines a state in political and legal terms. (Schmidt, 2010; Hailbronner & Kau, 2010)

According to the three-element theory, a state is defined by possessing three essential elements: national territory, people, and state power. National territory refers to a defined geographical area that is distinguishable from other states, including airspace, coastal, and territorial waters within a 12 nautical mile zone. The territory does not need to be contiguous and includes all exclaves. It must be a natural part of a continental shelf and have consistent borders recognized as restrictions of legal order rather than geographical limits. (Wahl, 2005; Brandtjen, 2024; Lorenzmeier & Rohde, 2003; Ipsen, 2004; Hailbronner & Kau, 2010)

The people element refers to the totality of individuals bound by the state's legal powers. The population must be connected under these legal powers on a continuous basis, meaning the populace is able to persist. Characteristics like ethnicity, religion, and language are not considered essential; rather, the effective link to the state, often recognized by official citizenship, is sufficient. (Duursma, 1996; Herdegen, 2006; Ipsen, 2004; Lorenzmeier & Rohde, 2003)

State power is defined as the coercive power enabled by the state's own legislation towards its citizens. It includes the structure of the separation of powers into the executive, judiciary, and legislature. State power is characterized by sovereignty, legitimacy, and marketability. Sovereignty operates in two directions: inner sovereignty (independence to create and administrate one's own system) and outer sovereignty (power to act independently on the international scene). (Chandler, 2010; Henders, 2010; Kahn, 2011; Hägel, 2006; Nohlen, 2011)

Additionally, the Montevideo Convention on Rights and Duties of States (1933) added a fourth criterion: capacity to enter into relations with other states. This criterion emphasizes the importance of international recognition and the ability to engage in diplomatic relations. Considering the growing importance of international recognition – particularly through the UN-system –, it can almost be considered a fifth criterion. (Herdegen, 2006; Nohlen, 2011; Hailbronner & Kau, 2010)

These elements collectively define a state in international law and political science, ensuring it has a defined territory, a permanent population, and the ability to exercise state power both internally and externally as well as being able to act internationally and being recognized as state.

THE COPENHAGEN CRITERIA

The Copenhagen European Council, in 1993, decided the so-called Copenhagen criteria for becoming a full member state. It included a political, an economic and a legal requirement for accession. (Steppacher, 2005; Breuss, 2011) The first of these is today laid down in Art. 2 TEU: among others, democracy, rule of law, respect of human rights and protection of minorities. Additionally, Art 49 TEU claims explicitly the promotion of those union's values. This criterion should be fulfilled at the time of application. (Streinz, Ohler, Herrmann, & Kruis, 2010; Breuss, 2011; McGowan & Phinnemore, 2006) Secondly, the state must prove that it inheres a functioning market economy, which is capable of competing. (Zandonella, 2009; McGowan & Phinnemore, 2006) The aim is to reach a homogenous functioning internal market. Other as to the first one there is no time limit set for the existence of this criterion. Therefore, there has been in the past flexible solutions and different agreements on reaching it. One might think that smaller states would therefore have difficulties to be accepted as members because of the size of their economy. Even though, looking at Luxembourg – being small, but possessing a strong economic business capable to compete into the internal market – and at the legal absence of per se rejection of micro-systems underlines the importance of this criterion. (Breuss, 2011) Finally, the legal requirement on the state in question is the ability to handle the obligations included in being a member of this political, economic and monetary union and its goals. Essentially for this is that the applicant adopts the complete *acquis communautaire*. (European Commission, 2016; Breuss, 2011) The so-called fourth criterion is the EU's ability for amendment. Since short time the focus on this has increased. The question is whether the EU still stays politically, financially and institutionally capable of acting, and at the same time amending the new member. (Breuss, 2011)

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA

“[...] The conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council shall be taken into account.”
(European Union, 2012)

The Lisbon treaty includes, due to this wording, the possibility of additional criteria. It is probably depending on the changes in policy of amendment and therefore also on the fourth Copenhagen criterion – EU's ability for amendment. In 1997 the Luxembourg European Council decided already the additional criterion of respecting the system of international public law and the commitment of peaceful mediation. (Breuss, 2011)

After fulfilling these criteria (Ranacher & Staudigl, 2010), to become finally a full member state, the European parliament and each current member state need to ratify and therefore to except the accession of the new member. Nevertheless Art. 49 TEU only gives the right to apply for membership but not the pure right for accession. (Streinz, Ohler, Herrmann, & Kruis, 2010)

ADDITIONAL OBLIGATIONS

Membership of the European Union also includes some additional memberships and requirements of other agreements. This is of course negotiable during the admission process and can be regulated with a possible opt-out.

The *raison d'être* of the EU is to establish and maintain peace. To achieve this, economic harmonisation acts as a tool. To this end, the EU has introduced the European Single Market and the single currency. With the exception of Denmark, which has an opt-out, the Lisbon Treaty - Preamble, Art. 3 TEU & Art. 3, 5, 119, 133, 136- 140, 143, 282-284, 321 TFEU - stipulates that every EU member state must adopt the euro as its common currency as soon as it fulfils the requirements. (Brandtjen, 2024; Große Hüttmann, 2020; Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2009) The European Single Market, on the other hand, is based in principle on the Single European Act of 1986. It introduced a guideline to enable the abolition of invisible trade barriers between EU members, which makes the EU a biggest actor on the continent. (Barker E. , 2024; Brandtjen, The Valley and the Rock: Europeanized Separatism and Iberian Micro-Nations, 2021) Even though the four freedoms already led to fairly broad access to all member states' markets when the EU was founded, the measures of the Single European Act were the first to create a truly single European market. It provided a framework for the abolition of regulations on goods, de-bureaucratisation, border formalities, VAT harmonisation and common technical standards, among other things. In the same way, the factor market was Europeanised. As a result, trade transaction costs were greatly reduced, and intra-European trade was strongly promoted. All companies and organisations outside the European Single Market and the European Customs Union cannot benefit from its advantages. (Hansen & Schröder, 2001; Higgott, 1998; Baldwin & Wyplosz, 2009; McGowan & Phinnemore, 2006; Tussie, 1998) So, an EU member state must become part of the European Customs Union

The European Atomic Energy Community, also known as Euratom, was founded on 25 March 1957 by France, Italy, the Benelux countries and the Federal Republic of Germany under the Treaty of Rome and still exists almost unchanged today. From 1965 to 30 November 2009, it was one of the European Communities alongside the European Coal and Steel Community, which expired on 23 July 2002, and the European Economic Community (later the European Community), which was also founded by the Treaty of Rome. With the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Community merged into the European Union. This left only Euratom as an independent organisation and so-called European Community, although its structures are fully integrated into the EU. This means that every EU member is also a member of Euratom. Switzerland and the United Kingdom are also part of this organisation.

With Brexit on 31 January 2020, the United Kingdom not only left the EU, but also Euratom. However, as part of the Brexit agreement, it was agreed that the UK would continue to participate in Euratom as an associate member. The Euratom Treaty aims to improve the standard of living in member states through the development of nuclear industries and to promote relations with other countries. The chapters of the Treaty cover topics such as research, knowledge transfer, health protection, investment, joint undertakings, supply of nuclear materials, safeguards and external relations. Chapter 3 focuses on the health protection of the population. Article 35 prescribes the continuous monitoring of soil, air and water for radioactivity, with the data collected being fed into the central EU database (EURDEP). Article 37 obliges Member States to submit information on the release of radioactive substances to the European Commission before projects such as the construction or dismantling of nuclear power plants can begin. There is no legal obligation to become a member of Euratom by participating in the EU. Nevertheless, the Euratom Treaty can be seen as an external part of the *acquis communautaire* with the aim of creating and consolidating a single European market. (Bohnert, 2021; Barker & Beesley, 2017; Deschamps, 2016)

The Schengen Area consists of 29 European countries that have eliminated border controls at their mutual borders, functioning as a single jurisdiction with a common visa policy for international travel. It is part of the EU's Area of Freedom, Security, and Justice (AFSJ) policy. Named after the 1985 Schengen Agreement and the 1990 Schengen Convention, the area includes 25 of the 27 EU member states, with Cyprus and Ireland being exceptions. Cyprus plans to join by the end of 2025, while Ireland maintains its own visa policy. Additionally, all European Free Trade Association (EFTA) members (Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland) are part of the Schengen Area through association agreements. The microstates of Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City are also de facto included due to their small size. The Schengen Area covers over 4.5 million km² and has a population exceeding 450 million. It facilitates significant cross-border commuting and trade, with 1.3 billion border crossings in 2015, including 57 million for goods transport valued at €2.8 trillion. The reduction in trade costs due to Schengen varies from 0.42% to 1.59%, benefiting both Schengen and non-Schengen countries. Schengen states have reinforced border controls with non-Schengen countries. (Karakas, 2016; Gröschl, Steinwachs, & Felbermayr, 2016; Felbermayr, Gröschl, & Steinwachs, 2017; Bond, Korteweg, & Mortera-Martinez, 2016) In the event that a new member state does not opt out, like Ireland, or has a similarly challenging situation as Cyprus, Schengen membership is necessary. Not least in order to achieve the goal of a single European market and equal trade advantages.

Article 351 TFEU also states that international treaties concluded by a Member State with a third country after 1 January 1958 or after accession or which are incompatible with the Lisbon Treaties are invalid. The reason for this is that member states are an integral part of the Union and thus inseparable from the common institutions, including their conferred competences and the benefits of all members. (Kellerbauer & Klamert, 2019)

RESUMEE: HOW TO BECOME A MEMBER OF THE EU

This scientific summary captures the essential criteria and obligations for EU membership, highlighting the comprehensive and integrated approach required for accession.

The criteria for becoming a member state of the European Union (EU) are multifaceted, encompassing geographical, cultural, ideological, historical, political, legal, and economic dimensions. A European state is defined by physical boundaries such as the Ural Mountains and various seas, shared values like democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, historical evolution from Greek definitions, recognition of about 49 states and various political organizations, and economic integration through agreements like the European Single Market and the Eurozone.

A state must possess national territory, including airspace and territorial waters, a population bound by the state's legal powers, and coercive power through legislation characterized by sovereignty and legitimacy. Additionally, the ability to engage in diplomatic relations, as emphasized by the Montevideo Convention, is crucial.

The Copenhagen criteria, established by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, include political requirements such as democracy, rule of law, human rights, and protection of minorities; economic requirements like a functioning market economy capable of competition; and legal requirements to adopt the *acquis communautaire* and fulfill EU obligations. The EU's capacity for amendment ensures it can integrate new members without losing functionality.

Additional obligations for EU membership include adopting the euro as the common currency, except for members with opt-outs like Denmark, and participating in the European Single Market, which involves abolishing trade barriers and harmonizing regulations. Joining the Schengen Area, which eliminates internal border controls, further reduces transaction costs. Membership in the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom) focuses on developing nuclear industries and health protection.

Pre-statutes, resignations and applications without success

In the past, there have been various forms of admission. Some led to membership, others did not. Still others led to a kind of withdrawal from the EU. This section briefly describes these as well as countries with no current chances of joining.

CANDIDATE STATUS

In order to take over the introduction of the complex set of *acquis communitaires*, to conduct further accession negotiations and to fulfil criteria, the status of an accession candidate country was concluded by means of an association agreement for the period following the accepted application for accession and actual membership. So far, 9 countries have candidate status: Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine. (European Union, 2025) It is the practice of the European Union to first conclude a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with countries seeking membership of the EU. This harmonises the legal and economic foundations of the respective state with the standards of the European Union. The aim of the agreement is to achieve the necessary stability in the interstate relationship, which is a prerequisite for the start of accession talks. The agreement is intended to avoid 'unpleasant surprises', such as economic shocks regarding future market integration with the European internal market or economic or political setbacks in the associated states. (Marwedel, 2012)

Albania has been engaged in the European Union enlargement process since its application for membership on 28 April 2009. It achieved official candidate status in June 2014. Despite the Council of

the European Union's decision in March 2020 to initiate accession negotiations, progress was delayed due to Albania's candidacy being linked to that of North Macedonia, which faced a veto from Bulgaria. The impasse was resolved in June 2022 when Bulgaria lifted its veto, followed by North Macedonia's approval of a revised proposal in July 2022. Consequently, formal negotiations with both countries commenced on 19 July 2022. As of October 2024, Albania has set a target to be prepared for EU accession by 2030, a goal described by Prime Minister Edi Rama as highly ambitious. (Dimitrievska, 2022; RFE / RL's Balkan Service, 2020; Tidey, 2024; ar / kb (AP, dpa), 2022; European Council, 2025)

The accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union represents a strategic objective in the bilateral relations between the two entities. The country has been officially recognized as a candidate for EU membership since the European Council's decision in December 2022. This development places Bosnia and Herzegovina within the framework of the EU's ongoing enlargement agenda. Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the Stabilisation and Association Process, with trade relations governed by an Interim Agreement. The formal application for EU membership was submitted on 15 February 2016, following extensive constitutional reforms and adherence to the Dayton Peace Agreement. Prior to this, unresolved issues—particularly concerning the closure of the Office of the High Representative (OHR), state and military property ownership, and constitutional reform—had delayed the application process. On 12 March 2024, the European Commission recommended the initiation of accession negotiations. This recommendation was endorsed in principle by all 27 EU member states on 21 March 2024. However, the commencement of formal negotiations remains conditional upon Bosnia and Herzegovina fulfilling all criteria outlined by the Commission. (Sito-Sucic, 2024; Gwyn Jones, European Union leaders approve opening accession talk with Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2024; European Council, 2025)

Georgia's accession to the European Union has progressed significantly since its formal application in March 2022. The EU recognized Georgia as a potential candidate, and on 8 November 2023, the European Commission recommended granting candidate status, which was confirmed on 14 December 2023. The foundation for deeper EU-Georgia relations was laid through the negotiation and eventual signing of an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. Negotiations for the AA began prior to 2013, with European Commissioner Stefan Füle indicating a target completion by November 2013. Georgia explicitly rejected alignment with the Eurasian Economic Union during this period, affirming its European integration trajectory. The Association Agreement was initialled on 29 November 2013 and formally signed on 27 June 2014. It required ratification by the EU, Euratom, all member states, and Georgia. A supplementary agreement on Georgia's participation in EU crisis management operations was also concluded. The European Parliament ratified the Association Agreement on 18 December 2014, with the agreement entering into full force on 1 July 2016. The Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area, a core component of the Association Agreement, established the removal of most import duties and enabled broad mutual access to services markets between the EU and Georgia. This agreement marked a significant step in Georgia's economic and political alignment with the EU. (European Council, 2016; European Council, 2025; Kirtzkhalia, 2013; Civil.ge, 2023; Civil.ge, 2012)

Moldova's pursuit of European Union membership has become a central pillar of its foreign and domestic policy. After submitting its application in March 2022, Moldova was granted candidate status on 23 June 2022, alongside Ukraine. This milestone marked the beginning of a structured reform

process aimed at aligning the country with EU standards. Moldova has set an ambitious target of joining the EU by 2030. On 14 December 2023, the European Council formally approved the opening of accession negotiations, reinforcing the EU's commitment to Moldova's integration. The accession process is contingent upon Moldova's implementation of comprehensive structural reforms. These reforms focus on enhancing economic efficiency, combating corruption, strengthening the enforcement of property rights, reducing the influence of state-owned enterprises, improving energy efficiency, and reforming the labour market. These measures are designed to bring Moldova's institutional and economic frameworks in line with EU norms. Political support for Moldova's EU aspirations has been strong. In her 2023 State of the European Union address, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen affirmed that Moldova's future lies within the Union. This sentiment was echoed in domestic developments, most notably in the 20 October 2024 referendum, where Moldovan citizens narrowly voted in favour of amending the national constitution to enshrine EU membership as a strategic national objective. In conclusion, Moldova's EU accession trajectory reflects a determined shift toward European integration, underpinned by political will and structural transformation. While the 2030 target remains ambitious, it is attainable with sustained reform efforts and continued support from EU institutions. (European Council, 2024; Ernst, 2023; Parker & Kirby, 2023; European Council, 2024; Gwyn Jones, 2024)

Montenegro's accession to the European Union (EU) is part of the EU's broader enlargement strategy. Following its declaration of independence from the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in May 2006, Montenegro initiated the EU integration process by negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which was signed in October 2007 and entered into force on 1 May 2010 after ratification by all EU member states. Montenegro formally applied for EU membership on 15 December 2008. The European Commission responded by issuing a questionnaire in July 2009 to assess the country's readiness. Montenegro submitted its responses in December 2009. In 2010, the Commission issued a favourable opinion, identifying seven key priorities to be addressed before accession negotiations could commence. Formal accession negotiations began on 29 June 2012. As of 2024, Montenegro aims to achieve full EU membership by 2028. The accession process involves comprehensive reforms in political, economic, and legal domains, in line with EU standards and values. The SAA framework facilitates these reforms by offering benefits such as tariff-free access to EU markets and technical and financial assistance in exchange for progress in areas such as governance, human rights, and the rule of law. (European Council, 2025; Kajosevic, 2021; Marinova & Mihaleva, 2024; European Council, 2016)

North Macedonia's accession to the European Union (EU) has been a prolonged and complex process, initiated with its official candidacy in 2005 following its application in 2004. A major impediment to progress was the protracted naming dispute with Greece, which lasted from 1991 to 2019 and resulted in a Greek veto on EU and NATO accession. The resolution of this dispute enabled the EU to formally approve accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania in March 2020. However, a new obstacle emerged in November 2020 when Bulgaria blocked the start of negotiations, citing concerns over the implementation of the 2017 bilateral friendship treaty, issues of hate speech, and historical-cultural disputes. This veto was lifted by the Bulgarian parliament on 24 June 2022, and North Macedonia's Assembly approved a revised French proposal on 16 July 2022, leading to the official launch of accession negotiations on 19 July 2022. Despite EU support, including from the EU Ambassador in Skopje, further progress is contingent upon constitutional amendments to recognize the Bulgarian

minority. These amendments have faced consistent opposition within North Macedonia's parliament, posing a significant challenge to the continuation of the accession process. (RFE / RL's Balkan Service, 2020; ar / kb (AP, dpa), 2022; Dimitrievska, 2022; European Council, 2025; Kolekevski, 2025; Samardjiev, 2022)

Serbia formally applied for membership in the European Union on 22 December 2009 and was granted candidate status on 1 March 2012, following recommendations by the European Commission in October 2011 and the Council of the EU in February 2012. Accession negotiations officially began in 2014. As the largest country in Southeast Europe currently seeking EU membership, Serbia plays a significant role in the region's integration process. A key development in Serbia–EU relations was the initiation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement on 7 November 2007, which entered into force on 1 September 2013, establishing a formal framework for political and economic cooperation. Despite these advancements, Serbia's accession process faces several persistent challenges. One of the most critical issues is the unresolved status of Kosovo, as the EU requires Serbia to normalize relations and recognize Kosovo's statehood. Additionally, Serbia's foreign policy alignment with Russia has raised concerns within the EU, particularly in the context of broader geopolitical tensions. Internally, Serbia has experienced democratic backsliding, with allegations of electoral fraud in the December 2023 elections, and ongoing concerns regarding the rule of law and media freedom. These issues are central to the EU's accession criteria and have slowed the pace of negotiations. Between its application and the year 2020, Serbia received approximately €2.9 billion in developmental aid through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance, a funding mechanism designed to support institutional reforms and alignment with EU standards. (European Council, 2025; Milovančević, 2023; Barber, 2023; Sorgi, 2023)

Turkey's efforts to join the European Union trace back to its application for full membership in the European Economic Community (EEC), the EU's predecessor, on 14 April 1987. Earlier, Turkey had become the 13th member of the Council of Europe in 1950, shortly after the organization's founding. In 1963, Turkey signed the Ankara Agreement, establishing associate membership with the EEC. It also held associate membership in the Western European Union from 1992 until the union's dissolution in 2011. A significant milestone was reached in 1995 when Turkey entered into a Customs Union agreement with the EU. Subsequently, at the Helsinki European Council on 12 December 1999, Turkey was officially recognized as a candidate for full EU membership. Formal accession negotiations commenced on 3 October 2005. However, progress was limited; by May 2016, only 16 of the 35 negotiation chapters had been opened, and just one had been provisionally closed. A refugee agreement between Turkey and the EU in early 2016 aimed to reinvigorate the process and facilitate visa-free travel for Turkish citizens within the EU. Despite this, negotiations stalled from 2016 onward, largely due to EU concerns over human rights violations, erosion of the rule of law, and democratic backsliding in Turkey. The 2017 constitutional referendum, which significantly expanded presidential powers, was viewed by EU officials as incompatible with the Copenhagen criteria for membership eligibility. On 20 February 2019, a European Parliament committee voted to suspend accession talks, a move that was met with criticism from the Turkish government. As a result, the accession process effectively came to a halt, with no further chapters being opened or closed and no progress anticipated on modernizing the EU-Turkey Customs Union. Nevertheless, on 30 January 2023, Turkey's main opposition alliance, the Table of Six, issued a memorandum of understanding reaffirming their commitment to EU accession if elected. Özgür Özel, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP) and

the main opposition figure, declared that under his leadership, Turkey would swiftly resume negotiations and pursue full EU membership as a priority. (European Council, 2025; Kingsley & Rankin, 2016; Toksabay & Gumrukcu, 2017; Tarihi, 2024; Phinnemore & İçener, 2016)

In response to the Russian invasion on 24 February 2022, Ukraine formally submitted its application for European Union membership on 28 February 2022. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy requested immediate admission through a special procedure; a move supported by eight EU member states. European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen expressed support for Ukraine's accession but emphasized that the process would require time. On 10 March 2022, the Council of the EU requested the Commission's opinion on the application. Ukraine completed and submitted the legislative questionnaire by 9 May 2022. Subsequently, on 17 June 2022, the European Commission recommended granting Ukraine candidate status, contingent upon the implementation of seven key reforms. These reforms included the restructuring of the Constitutional Court, continuation of judicial reforms, anti-corruption measures including the appointment of the head of the Specialized Anti-Corruption Prosecutor's Office (SAPO), anti-money laundering initiatives, enforcement of anti-oligarchic legislation in line with Venice Commission recommendations, harmonization of media legislation with EU standards, and legislative changes concerning national minorities. On 23 June 2022, both the European Parliament and the European Council endorsed Ukraine's candidate status, marking a significant step in the accession process. The political landscape within the EU revealed varying levels of support. While countries like Germany, France, Italy, and Romania advocated for immediate candidate status, others such as the Netherlands and Denmark expressed reservations or proposed conditional support. To bolster its candidacy, Ukraine launched a communication campaign titled "Embrace Ukraine. Strengthen the Union" in May 2022. High-level diplomatic visits, including those by the leaders of Germany, France, Italy, and Romania, aimed to foster consensus within the EU. Ukraine committed to fulfilling the seven reform criteria by autumn 2022. Independent monitoring efforts, such as the Candidate Check initiative, assessed Ukraine's progress, with scores improving from 4.7 out of 10 in late 2022 to 8.1 out of 10 by September 2023. The European Commission's 2023 enlargement report confirmed that four of the seven criteria had been completed. On 14 December 2023, the European Council decided to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, and formal negotiations commenced on 25 June 2024, alongside Moldova. Ukraine's pursuit of EU membership represents a strategic geopolitical shift toward Western institutions and a deliberate effort to reduce Russian influence. If successful, Ukraine would become the fourth former Soviet republic to join the EU, following Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which acceded in 2004. (European Council, 2025; Brzozowski, 2022; Sydorenko, 2022; Сидоренко, 2022; Rauhala, Suliman, & Ariès, 2022; Rettman, 2022; New Europe Center, 2023)

POTENTIAL CANDIDATES

Armenia has developed increasingly close relations with the European Union, primarily through the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which was signed in 2017. This agreement has served as a foundation for deepening political, economic, and sectoral cooperation. Former Armenian Foreign Minister Eduard Nalbandyan described the agreement as a turning point that would "open a new page" in EU–Armenia relations. Similarly, in 2019, the then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Federica Mogherini, characterized the relationship as

being at an "excellent" level. In 2024, Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan indicated that Armenia might apply for EU membership in the future. This intention was further supported by a resolution passed by the European Parliament, which confirmed that Armenia meets the requirements of Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union, thereby qualifying it to apply for membership. A public petition calling for a referendum on EU membership, endorsed by Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, successfully reached the threshold of 50,000 signatures, allowing it to be submitted to the National Assembly. Subsequently, on 12 February 2025, Armenia's parliament approved a bill officially endorsing the country's accession to the EU. Should neighbouring countries such as Georgia or Turkey join the EU, Armenia would gain a direct border with the Union, enhancing its geopolitical integration. (European Council, 2025; Smith, 2011; Shahverdyan, 2024; Ghazanchyan, 2024; Ohanyan, 2024; Mejlumyan, 2021)

Kosovo, meanwhile, is recognized by the EU as a potential candidate for membership, although its 2008 declaration of independence from Serbia remains unrecognized by five EU member states. As a result, the EU refers to Kosovo with an asterisk and a neutrality clause, reflecting its cautious stance on Kosovo's status. Despite this, Kosovo has continued its integration efforts through mechanisms such as the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), signed in 2016, and the earlier Stabilisation Tracking Mechanism (STM), which aims to align Kosovo's legal, economic, and social systems with EU standards. The European Union also supports governance and legal reforms in Kosovo through the European Union Rule of Law Mission (EULEX), operating under the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK). Kosovo formally submitted its application for EU membership on 15 December 2022. However, it faces significant challenges, including the lack of unanimous recognition within the EU, ongoing issues related to the rule of law, corruption, and minority rights, as well as political concerns that Serbia could veto its accession if admitted earlier. The EU's Western Balkans Strategy, reaffirmed at the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 and in subsequent communications, provides a framework for Kosovo's eventual accession, contingent on meeting specific political and institutional criteria. The European Commission has consistently emphasized a shared and concrete European perspective for all six Western Balkan partners, including Kosovo, each progressing at its own pace and under distinct conditions. (European Council, 2025; AFP, 2008; Dimitrov, 2018; Bytyci, 2018; Reuters, 2008; De Kuijer, 2008)

As of 2022, the five European microstates—Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City—maintain various forms of association with the European Union, although none are full members. In contrast, Luxembourg and Malta, despite their small size, are full EU members. Among the microstates, Andorra is the most populous, with approximately 85,500 residents. Several of these microstates use the euro as their official currency through formal monetary agreements with the EU. Andorra, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City are permitted to issue a limited number of euro coins, a privilege granted due to their historical use of eurozone-linked currencies. Liechtenstein, however, uses the Swiss franc. In terms of customs integration, Monaco is part of the EU customs territory via an agreement with France, while Andorra and San Marino are in customs unions with the EU. Liechtenstein, as a member of the European Economic Area (EEA) through the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), participates in the EU Single Market and applies certain EU laws. Regarding border control and Schengen Area integration, Liechtenstein is a full member of the Schengen Agreement. Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican City maintain open borders with neighbouring Schengen countries and are treated as de facto members. Andorra, while not formally part of Schengen, has no systematic

border checks with Schengen countries. None of the microstates have airports, though all possess heliports. Monaco is the only one with a seaport. Institutionally, all five microstates, except Vatican City, are members of the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Liechtenstein also participates in the Dublin Regulation on asylum and the Prüm Decisions on cross-border cooperation. Efforts to deepen integration with the EU have been ongoing. In 2012, the European Commission evaluated the fragmented nature of existing agreements and proposed four models for further integration: sectoral agreements by policy area, a comprehensive multilateral Framework Association Agreement (FAA), EEA membership, and full EU membership. The Commission dismissed the sectoral approach as inefficient and full EU membership as institutionally unfeasible in the near term. It recommended pursuing either EEA membership or a comprehensive FAA. However, EEA membership is currently limited to EU or EFTA members, and concerns were raised by Norway and Liechtenstein about the administrative capacity of the microstates and the suitability of EEA mechanisms for such small entities. In 2013, the Commission concluded that EEA membership was not viable due to political and institutional constraints, and recommended Association Agreements as a more feasible alternative. Negotiations for such an agreement began in 2015. By December 2023, the EU had concluded negotiations on a new Association Agreement with Andorra and San Marino, while talks with Monaco were suspended due to disagreements over financial regulation. In April 2024, the European Commission proposed that the Council of the EU adopt decisions to sign and conclude the agreement. Although Andorra had hoped the agreement would include provisions for Schengen association, the final text did not. Nevertheless, in May 2024, the Council authorized the opening of negotiations for separate agreements with Andorra and San Marino to establish a legal basis for the absence of border controls with the Schengen Area. (European Council, 2024; European Council, 2011; Nationen.No, 2011; Aalberg Undheim, 2012; European Commission, 2023; Brenton, 2023; Bajon, 2018; Carpenter, 2023)

INTERNAL ENLARGEMENT SCENARIOS

Internal enlargement refers to the emergence of new states from the dissolution of existing EU member states, a process that presents significant legal and political challenges. The European Union currently lacks clear treaties or precedents to address whether such newly formed entities would retain EU membership or need to reapply. The central legal ambiguity lies in whether one of the resulting states would be considered the successor state, thereby maintaining EU membership, while the other becomes a new applicant, or whether both would be treated as new states requiring full accession procedures. (Matas, González, Jaria, & Román, 2011; Athanassiou & Laulhé Shaelou, 2014)

This issue has gained prominence due to independence movements in regions such as Scotland and Catalonia, both of which held referendums in the 2010s with the intention of becoming independent states within the EU. However, EU officials, including former Commission Presidents Jean-Claude Juncker and José Manuel Barroso, have consistently stated that seceding regions would not automatically retain EU membership. Instead, they would need to apply for membership and negotiate terms, a process that requires unanimous approval from all existing member states. This unanimity requirement introduces a political dimension, as member states with internal separatist movements—such as Spain—may be inclined to veto such applications to discourage similar movements within their

own borders. (Henley, 2017; European Commission, 2017; BBC British Broadcasting Corporation, 2012; Holehouse, 2014; Nielsen, 2013; Brandtjen, 2024)

Catalonia's 2017 independence referendum, declared illegal by Spain's Constitutional Court, further complicated the issue. The EU supported Spain's constitutional framework and did not recognize Catalonia's claim to independence, reinforcing the position that unrecognized states cannot independently join the EU. In contrast, Scotland's situation was somewhat different, as its referendum was legally sanctioned by the UK government. Nevertheless, Barroso warned that even a legally independent Scotland would face significant hurdles in rejoining the EU, particularly due to potential opposition from Spain. (Johnson, 2013; Murray, 2012; Teffer, 2017)

Other regions with active nationalist movements include the Basque Country, Corsica, Flanders, Sardinia, and Veneto. The Basque nationalist movement is pro-European and envisions potential independence under various territorial configurations. Corsica's nationalist movement, though electorally successful, has limited support for full independence and promotes a vision of EU integration as part of a broader European identity. In Belgium, the Flemish independence movement raises questions about the future status of Brussels, with proposals ranging from remaining with Belgium to becoming a separate political entity. (Fourquet, Kraus, & Bourguine, 2016; Corsica Libera, 2015; Van Parijs, 2007; Feki, 2007)

Sardinia exhibits strong nationalist sentiment, with a significant portion of the population favouring independence within the EU. Concerns among Sardinian nationalists include environmental degradation from military activities, economic exploitation, lack of political representation, and cultural erosion. Similarly, Veneto has demonstrated high support for autonomy and independence. A controversial 2014 online poll showed overwhelming support for independence, and a 2017 referendum led to negotiations with the Italian government for greater autonomy. The region's leading party, Liga Veneta, has historically promoted a pro-European stance, although some factions have adopted more Eurosceptic views in recent years. (Hechter, 1992; Demuro, Ruggiu, & Mola, 2013; Ruggiu, 2014; Hepburn, 2014)

In conclusion, the EU's legal and political framework remains ill-equipped to handle internal enlargement scenarios. The lack of clarity, combined with the political sensitivities surrounding secessionist movements, makes the path to EU membership for newly independent regions highly uncertain and contentious.

“WITHDRAWALS” FROM THE EU

The withdrawal of a member state is now the subject of much discussion, and many people only think of the experience of Brexit, i.e. the withdrawal of the United Kingdom from the EU. However, there have also been other exits, albeit not of full member states. This section briefly mentions the cases of Algeria, Greenland and the United Kingdom.

ALGERIA'S INDEPENDENCE CONSEQUENCE

During its incorporation into the French Republic, Algeria was considered an integral part of Metropolitan France and, as such, was included within the framework of the European Economic Community (EEC) established by the 1957 Treaty of Rome. At that time, Algeria was referred to as

L'Algérie Française. Following Algeria's independence in 1962, the legal status of its association with the EEC remained ambiguous, as the Treaty of Rome continued to list Algeria as an overseas territory of France to which the treaty provisions applied. This ambiguity persisted until 1976, when the EEC and Algeria formalized their bilateral relationship through a treaty recognizing Algeria as a neighbouring third country. (Brown, 2022; Barbieux & Bouris, 2024; Whitefield, 2001)

GREENLAND'S CHANGE OF STATUS

Greenland, an autonomous territory within the Kingdom of Denmark—which also includes metropolitan Denmark and the Faroe Islands—is classified as one of the Overseas Countries and Territories associated with the European Union. Greenland initially joined the European Communities (EC) in 1973 alongside Denmark. However, following the establishment of home rule in 1979, Greenland held a referendum in 1982 and subsequently withdrew from the EC in 1985. The primary motivation for this withdrawal was opposition to the Common Fisheries Policy and a desire to regain control over Greenlandic fishery resources. Despite its withdrawal, Greenland maintains a special association with the EU, receiving funding for sustainable development and engaging in cooperative agreements. Citizens of the Kingdom of Denmark residing in Greenland retain EU citizenship, granting them freedom of movement and residence within the EU. (de la Blaume, 2016; Fulgsang Holm, 2024; Brandtjen, 2021; Gruner & Woyke, 2007)

THE UNITED KINGDOM AND THE BREXIT

The United Kingdom (UK) formally exited the European Union (EU) at 23:00 GMT on 31 January 2020, an event commonly referred to as "Brexit" (a portmanteau of "Britain" and "Exit"). The UK had joined the European Communities on 1 January 1973 and remains the only sovereign state to have withdrawn from the EU. Notably, Greenland (1985) and Algeria (1976) had previously left the EC due to changes in their political status. Post-Brexit, EU law and the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union ceased to apply in the UK. However, the UK remains bound by international treaties, including those with the EU and its member states. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 incorporated relevant EU law into domestic legislation, allowing for future amendments or repeals by the UK Parliament. (Sturm, 2017; Brandtjen, 2021)

Throughout its membership, the UK experienced persistent Euroscepticism. A national referendum on continued EC membership was held in 1975 under Prime Minister Harold Wilson, resulting in a 67.2% vote to remain. Despite increasing political resistance to deeper European integration, no further referendums were held until 2016. Rising support for the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and internal party pressures led Prime Minister David Cameron to pledge a referendum on EU membership, which was held on 23 June 2016 following the Conservative Party's electoral victory in 2015. The referendum resulted in a 51.9% majority in favour of leaving the EU. England and Wales (excluding London) voted predominantly to leave, while Scotland and Northern Ireland voted to remain. The outcome prompted Cameron's resignation and the succession of Theresa May, followed by Boris Johnson. The withdrawal process was marked by political instability, including two general elections (2017 and 2019), and significant parliamentary opposition to proposed withdrawal agreements. A final withdrawal deal was ratified in January 2020, initiating an 11-month transition period during which the UK remained aligned with many EU structures. (Parker & Stacey, 2014; Erlanger, 2016; The Electoral Commission, 2019)

On 30 December 2020, the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement was signed, provisionally entering into force on 1 January 2021 and formally enacted on 1 May 2021. This agreement governs the post-Brexit relationship between the UK and the EU. Since the referendum, public opinion in the UK has shown a gradual shift, with increasing support for rejoining the EU or reintegrating into the European single market, as indicated by various public opinion polls. (Stone, 2023; Brandtjen, 2024; Davis, 2023; Sykes, 2023; Mitchell, 2024)

RESUME

The history of withdrawals from the European Union and its predecessors reveals varied legal and political dynamics. Algeria, once part of Metropolitan France, was included in the European Economic Community (EEC) under the 1957 Treaty of Rome. After gaining independence in 1962, its status remained unclear until a 1976 treaty formally recognized Algeria as a third country. This case highlights the legal ambiguities that can arise from geopolitical shifts.

Greenland, an autonomous territory within Denmark, joined the EC in 1973 but withdrew in 1985 following a 1982 referendum. The main reason was opposition to the Common Fisheries Policy. Despite leaving, Greenland maintains a special relationship with the EU, and its residents retain EU citizenship through Denmark. This example shows that partial withdrawals are possible and can be managed through tailored agreements.

The United Kingdom is the only sovereign state to have left the EU, officially exiting on 31 January 2020 after a 2016 referendum. The process was marked by political turmoil, legal reforms, and a transition period. The post-Brexit relationship is governed by the EU–UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement. Since then, public opinion has shifted, with growing support for closer ties with the EU.

These cases suggest that future withdrawals will involve complex legal adjustments, especially for territories with unique political identities. Economic interests, such as control over resources, often drive such decisions. Referendums can legitimize withdrawal but also deepen political divisions. The EU has shown flexibility in managing exits, indicating that future arrangements may include more nuanced or intermediate forms of association.

APPLICATIONS WHICH DID NOT RESULT IN MEMBERSHIP

Four states have applied for membership in the past, which did not result in membership. These are Morocco, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland. The reasons for the application and the unsuccessful outcome are presented in this report.

In October 1983, King Hassan II of Morocco expressed his intention to join the European Economic Community (EEC) to French President François Mitterrand. This led to a formal application process, including a letter to the European Council in June 1984 and a public announcement in November 1984. The formal application was submitted in July 1987 and referred to the European Commission. However, the application was rejected because Morocco did not meet the geographic criteria for membership, as it was not considered a "European country." Despite King Hassan II's significant diplomatic efforts, the geographic limitations of the membership criteria ultimately led to the application's rejection. (Sutour, Bourzai, Humbert, & Morin-Desailly, 2013; Reuters, 1987; Hassan II, Roi du Maroc, 1987; Veuthey, 2023)

Iceland initiated its application to join the European Union on 16 July 2009, prompted by an economic collapse. Formal accession negotiations commenced on 27 July 2010 but were suspended on 13 September 2013 following a governmental shift. Despite this suspension, public support for EU membership has remained consistently stable, leading to renewed advocacy for a referendum on resuming negotiations. Between 2009 and 2013, Iceland engaged in active accession negotiations. However, the political landscape shifted with the election of a coalition government formed by the Progressive Party and Independence Party in 2013, resulting in the suspension of negotiations. The formal withdrawal of the application occurred in March 2015. Opinion polls since March 2022 have indicated stable support for Iceland's EU membership. In September 2022, calls for a referendum on resuming EU membership negotiations were renewed. Following the 2024 parliamentary election, a coalition government comprising the Social Democratic Alliance, Viðreisn, and People's Party committed to holding a referendum on resuming negotiations by 2027. The suspension of Iceland's EU membership application was primarily influenced by political changes and contentious issues related to fisheries. Despite these challenges, public support for EU membership has remained stable, prompting renewed political efforts to resume negotiations. Iceland's trajectory towards EU membership has been characterized by significant political shifts and evolving public opinion. The forthcoming referendum in 2027 will be pivotal in determining the future of Iceland's relationship with the EU. (Kleineberg, 2022; Kulali Martin, 2017; Thorhallsson, 2023; Hilmarsson, 2017; Lawless, 2017; Valdimarsson & Christie, 2013; Kyzer, 2022; Totaro, 2009)

Norway has twice completed EU membership negotiations, in 1972 and 1994, but both times, membership was rejected in referendums. The application remains frozen but not withdrawn. Norway, a founding member of the European Free Trade Association in 1960, considered joining the European Economic Community and the European Union but declined after referendums. As of 2018, 73.6% of Norwegians would vote 'No' to EU membership. Key issues include Norway's significant fishing resources, high GNP per capita, and limited agriculture, which would result in high membership fees and minimal economic support from the EU. Despite this, Norway participates in many EU projects through the European Economic Area agreement, contributing 2.4% of the overall EU programme budget. The EU membership debate cuts across traditional political lines. The Centre Party strongly opposes membership, while the Conservative and Labour parties support it but allow internal opposition. The issue has historically caused political splits, such as the Liberal Party's division in 1972. Since the Labour Party's decline, Norwegian governments have been coalitions, avoiding the EU membership debate to prevent coalition breakdowns. Public opinion has generally opposed EU membership, with around 55% against it since 2022. However, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has shifted some opinions, with 63% of Norwegians now supporting another referendum on EU membership. The debate remains divisive, with both pro- and anti-EU elements in government coalitions. Anti-EU parties often include "suicide paragraphs" in coalition agreements to prevent new debates on EU membership. (Mission of Norway to the European Union, 2022; McGee, 2020; Williamson, 2022; Amundsen, 2023; Chalániová, 2010; Fossum, 2019; Rieker, 2024)

Switzerland applied for EU membership in 1992 but froze its application following a referendum that rejected EEA membership. The application was formally withdrawn in 2016. Switzerland is a member of the European Free Trade Association and participated in negotiating the EEA agreement with the EU, signing it on 2 May 1992. However, the Swiss referendum on 6 December 1992 rejected EEA membership

by a narrow margin, leading the government to suspend EU membership negotiations. This decision highlighted a cultural divide between German- and French-speaking cantons. Subsequent referendums in 1997 and 2001 also rejected initiatives to negotiate EU membership. Despite initial aspirations for EU membership, the Swiss Federal Council downgraded this goal to an "option" in 2006, and the application was withdrawn in 2016. Concerns about neutrality and sovereignty were significant factors against membership. A 2018 survey indicated strong support for continuing bilateral agreements with the EU, with minimal support for full EU membership. Over the years, Switzerland has signed various bilateral agreements with the EU, including those on freedom of movement and tax evasion. The Swiss population approved participation in the Schengen Agreement in 2008. However, the 2014 referendum on immigration led to tensions with the EU, affecting Switzerland's participation in programs like Erasmus+. In 2016, Switzerland and the EU signed a treaty extending the free movement of people to Croatia, allowing Switzerland to rejoin Horizon 2020. A 2022 poll showed increased support for EEA participation and adopting EU laws, though the Federal Council considered existing treaties more beneficial. (Linder & Mueller, 2021; Schimmelfennig, 2019; Christin & Trechsel, 2002; Karsanova & Volgin, 2018; Schimmelfennig, 2024; The Local, 2016; Goulard, 2016)

EUROPEAN STATES WHICH MIGHT NOT BE ABLE TO BECOME A MEMBER

Some European countries are present in the European media but currently have no chance of becoming members of the EU. The reasons lie primarily in the criteria of democratic principles and respect for human rights. The latter are fundamentally the same as the European human rights of the Council of Europe. Therefore, some information regarding the Council of Europe in relation to these states will be also highlighted. These 3 states are the Vatican City, Belarus and the Russian Federation.

The Vatican City, recognized as the smallest sovereign state globally, operates as an ecclesiastical or sacerdotal-monarchical entity. Due to its unique governance structure, it lacks the democratic qualifications required for European Union membership as stipulated by Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU). The Vatican's economy is characterized by its non-commercial nature, further distinguishing it from typical economic models. The primary mission of the Vatican City state, intrinsically linked to the mission of the Holy See, diverges significantly from the objectives outlined in the EU Treaty. Consequently, discussions regarding EU membership for the Vatican City are not pursued, despite its geographical encirclement by an EU member state. (Kochenov, 2007; CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025; Vatican City State, 2019)

Belarus has faced challenges in becoming a full member of the Council of Europe due to authoritarian governments and disregard for European human rights. Belarus applied for full membership on 12 March 1993, and its parliament held special guest status with the Parliamentary Assembly from September 1992 to January 1997. This status was suspended following the November 1996 constitutional referendum upholding the death penalty and undemocratic parliament by-elections, along with enforced limits on democratic freedoms under President Alexander Lukashenko. A second change to the Belarus constitution in October 2004 did not respect minimum democratic standards and violated principles of separation of powers and the rule of law. In June 2009, the Parliamentary Assembly decided that the suspension of Belarusian parliament's special guest status would only be lifted if the government imposed a moratorium on the death penalty, a condition unmet as of May 2013. The European Economic Commission recognized Belarusian independence in 1991, and Belarus is part

of several bilateral and multilateral treaties with the European Union. In 1995, Belarus and the European Union signed a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, but it was not ratified by the EU. Belarus is a member of trade relations agreements based on the EU Generalized System of Preferences and the Most favoured nation and is part of the EU's Eastern Partnership. Belarus-EU relationships began to worsen after the election of Alexander Lukashenko in 1994, with Belarus excluded from the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy due to the establishment of an authoritarian regime. The deterioration continued in the 21st century, with the European Union imposing sanctions against Belarusian officials, businessmen, and several government-owned companies following political repression during the 2010 presidential elections. There have been notes of improvement in Belarus-EU relations, with Belarus not supporting Russia in its aggression towards Ukraine and releasing several political prisoners. In 2015, the EU suspended most sanctions against Belarusian officials, and in 2016, the travel ban on Lukashenko was lifted. Despite this, further improvement has slowed due to ongoing human rights violations and suppression of political opposition. In 2019, Lukashenko made his first official visit to the European Union since sanctions ended, discussing the EU's Eastern Partnership program and further economic initiatives with Austria's Sebastian Kurz. In 2016, two opposition candidates were elected to Belarus' parliament, marked as a step towards democratization by several EU officials. The visa system between the EU and Belarus requires Schengen visas for Belarusians entering the European Union, while Belarus introduced visa-free entry for citizens of 70 countries including the EU in 2017. In 2019, the EU announced simplified requirements for obtaining Schengen visas for Belarusians. Belarus-EU relations are complicated by stronger Belarusian ties with Russia, who emerged as an active EU critic after the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Belarus is part of the Belarus-Russia Union State and the Eurasian Economic Union, a customs union including both countries and several other CIS-members. Belarus-Russia integration is mostly economic, with free trade and free movement zones established, but Russia is seen as demanding deeper political and administrative integration. In 2021, Ryanair Flight 4978 from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Minsk by the Belarusian Air Force, leading to the arrest of journalist Roman Protasevich and his girlfriend Sofia Sapega. EU members condemned the action and banned Belarusian airliners from flying over EU airspace and using EU airports. Later in 2021, Belarusian athlete Krystsina Tsimanouskaya applied for asylum in several EU countries after Belarusian officials tried to force her onto a plane at Tokyo's airport. She was able to fly to Poland after receiving a humanitarian visa. The EU suspended the visa facilitation agreement with Belarus in November 2021. In February 2022, Belarus permitted Russian forces to use its territory for the invasion of Ukraine, leading the European Commission to implement a series of sanction measures against Belarus. On August 3, the Commission extended specific restrictive measures aimed at both Russia and Belarus, intensifying limitations on exports to Belarus and enforcing additional prohibitions on the export of firearms, ammunition, and goods and technology applicable in aviation and space industries. (European Council, 2024; Human Rights Watch, 2016; Liszkowska, 2024; Korosteleva, 2015; Luhn, 2016; Bloomberg, 2019; Karnaukhova, 2023; Januzi, 2019; Casert & Dapkus, 2021; Martin, 2022)

Russia was a member of the Council of Europe from 1996 to 2022. Despite not meeting membership requirements at the time of accession, it was believed that joining would help improve its democracy and human rights record. However, Russia showed persistent disregard for the Council's values, including occupying other member states, sponsoring separatist movements, and ignoring European

Court of Human Rights judgments. Russia was suspended from voting rights multiple times, including from 2000 to 2001 due to the Second Chechen War. After the annexation of Crimea and invasion of Donbas, PACE condemned Russia's actions and suspended some of its voting privileges. To avoid exclusion, Russia's delegation did not attend from 2016 to 2018 and withheld membership dues. In 2019, the suspension was dropped. Human rights activists argued against Russia's expulsion to preserve the right to petition the ECtHR. On 25 February 2022, following the invasion of Ukraine, 42 of 47 member states voted to suspend Russia's voting privileges. On 15 March, Russia filed a notice of voluntary withdrawal, but the Committee of Ministers expelled Russia on 16 March. After the expulsion, Dmitry Medvedev endorsed restoring the death penalty in Russia. Russia-EU relations, which were significant in trade and energy, deteriorated following the invasion of Ukraine, leading to EU sanctions and Russia listing EU member states as "unfriendly countries". The EU sent military aid to Ukraine, froze Russian assets, and suspended direct flights. On 23 November 2022, the European Parliament declared Russia a state sponsor of terrorism. (European Council, 2025; Arbatova, 2021; Asllani, 2023; Dzehtsiarou & Coffey, 2019; Busygina & Kahn, 2020; Weidenfeld & Wessels, 2019; Nelaeva, Khabarova, & Sidorova, 2020)

RESUMEE: PRE-STATUTES, RESIGNATIONS AND APPLICATIONS WITHOUT SUCCESS

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of various forms of admission to the European Union (EU), including successful memberships, withdrawals, and applications that did not result in membership. It discusses the status of candidate countries, detailing their progress and challenges in the accession process. Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine are highlighted as current candidate countries, each with unique political and economic contexts influencing their EU integration trajectories. The document also examines potential candidates like Armenia and Kosovo, noting their efforts and obstacles in aligning with EU standards. Additionally, it explores the status of European microstates and their varying degrees of association with the EU, emphasizing the complexities of their integration due to size and political structures.

The implications for potential new member states are significant. The accession process involves extensive reforms in political, economic, and legal domains to meet EU standards. For candidate countries, achieving stability and harmonizing legal and economic foundations with the EU is crucial. The document underscores the importance of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, which aims to avoid economic shocks and political setbacks during integration. Countries like Albania and North Macedonia face challenges linked to regional political dynamics, such as vetoes from existing member states. Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession is contingent upon fulfilling criteria outlined by the European Commission, reflecting the rigorous demands of the process.

For potential candidates like Armenia and Kosovo, the path to EU membership is fraught with political and legal hurdles. Armenia's future application is supported by a resolution confirming its eligibility, while Kosovo's status is complicated by lack of recognition from some EU member states. The document highlights the need for comprehensive structural reforms in Moldova, focusing on economic efficiency, anti-corruption measures, and labour market improvements. Moldova's ambitious target of joining the EU by 2030 illustrates the transformative impact of the accession process.

The document also addresses internal enlargement scenarios, where new states emerge from the dissolution of existing EU member states. This presents legal and political challenges, as the EU lacks clear treaties or precedents to address whether newly formed entities would retain EU membership or need to reapply. The independence movements in regions like Scotland and Catalonia exemplify these complexities, with EU officials emphasizing that seceding regions would need to negotiate membership terms.

Withdrawals from the EU, such as Brexit, Greenland, and Algeria, are discussed, highlighting the varied legal and political dynamics involved. The document suggests that future withdrawals will involve complex legal adjustments, especially for territories with unique political identities. Economic interests, such as control over resources, often drive such decisions. Referendums can legitimize withdrawal but also deepen political divisions. The EU has shown flexibility in managing exits, indicating that future arrangements may include more nuanced or intermediate forms of association.

Applications that did not result in membership, including Morocco, Iceland, Norway, and Switzerland, are examined. The reasons for their unsuccessful outcomes range from geographic criteria to political shifts and economic considerations. Iceland's trajectory towards EU membership has been characterized by significant political shifts and evolving public opinion, with a forthcoming referendum in 2027 being pivotal. Norway's application remains frozen, influenced by its significant fishing resources and high GNP per capita. Switzerland's application was withdrawn due to concerns about neutrality and sovereignty, with bilateral agreements continuing to shape its relationship with the EU.

The document concludes by discussing European states with no current chances of becoming members, such as the Vatican City, Belarus, and the Russian Federation. The Vatican's unique governance structure and non-commercial economy disqualify it from EU membership. Belarus faces challenges due to authoritarian governments and disregard for human rights, while Russia's expulsion from the Council of Europe and deteriorating relations with the EU following the invasion of Ukraine highlight the geopolitical complexities involved.

Figure 2 illustrates the different forms of membership applications, categorizing countries based on their status as full members, former parts of the EU, withdrawn applications, denied applications, candidate status, and those with no possibility to apply. This visual representation underscores the diverse and dynamic nature of EU enlargement and integration processes.

Canada- the new member?

Canada is a fascinating country. In order to analyze Canada's accession to the EU, some of the country's data is listed first. This is followed by information on the current EU-Canada relationship. Finally, the admission criteria are presented, additional commitments and further possible concepts conclude this chapter.

GENERAL DATA ABOUT CANADA

Canada is located in North America and borders the USA to the south and west, Greenland to the east, and thus the Kingdom of Denmark, and Saint-Pierre and Miquelon, and thus France, and the Arctic Ocean to the north. It is a federal parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy consisting of 10 provinces and 3 territories. The monarch is King Charles III with the title 'by the Grace of God King

of Canada and His other Realms and Territories, Head of the Commonwealth’ in English and ‘*par la grâce de Dieu Roi du Canada et de ses autres royaumes et territoires, Chef du Commonwealth*’ in French. In addition to the Indigenous minority languages, English and French are spoken throughout Canada, with the latter two being official languages. Even though its population of 38,794,813 is comparable to that of Spain and Poland, it is the 3rd largest country in the world in terms of area. This means that Canada is more than twice the size of the entire EU in terms of area. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025)

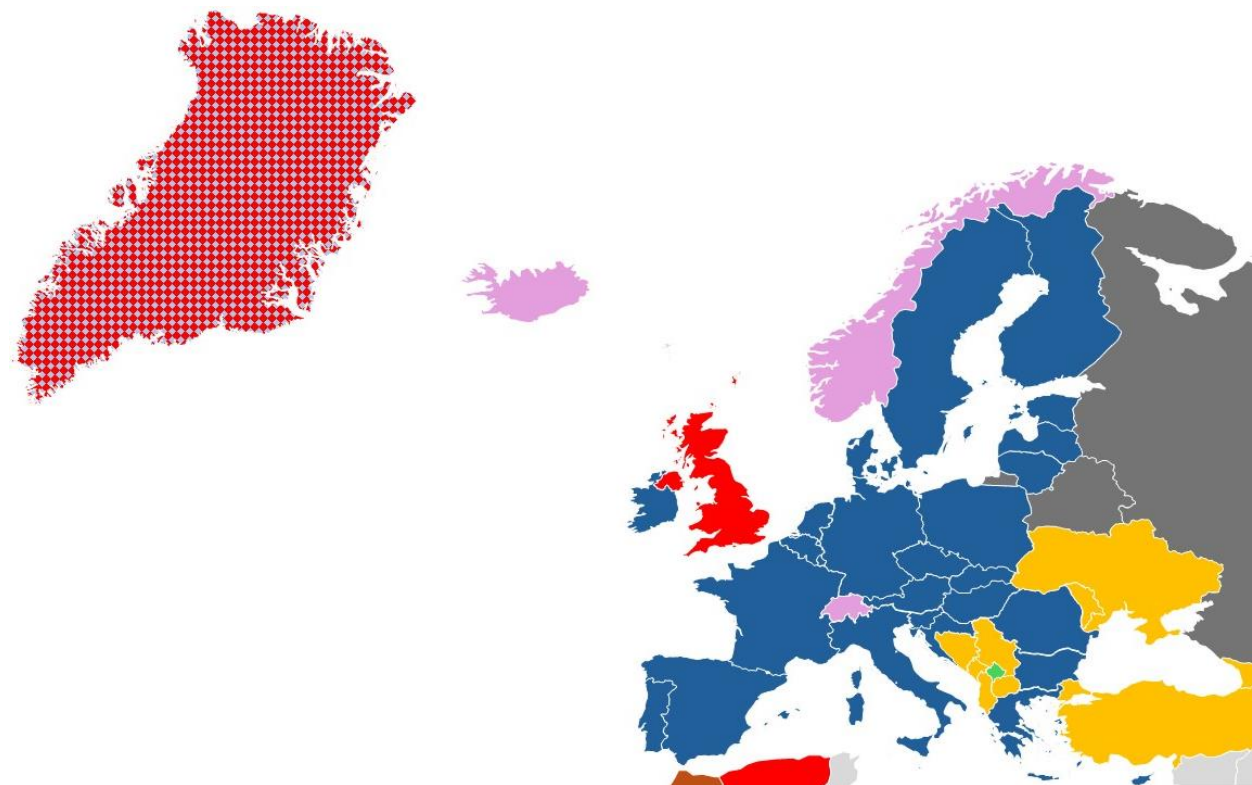


Figure 2: Different forms of membership applications (Blue = Full Member / Red = former part of EU [Greenland = former integral part, now associated territory] / purple = withdrawn membership application / brown = denied application / yellow = candidate status / black = currently no possibility to apply)

CURRENT RELATION BETWEEN EU & CANADA

Contemporary relations between Canada and the European Union trace back to the 1950s, rooted in both economic and political cooperation. Canada's bilingualism in English and French reflects its European linguistic heritage, and the EU recognizes Canada as a global strategic and trusted partner. Geographically, Canada shares proximity and borders with EU territories such as Greenland and Saint Pierre and Miquelon, reinforcing its strategic relevance. Historically, Canada's ties to Europe stem from colonization by Vikings, France, Britain, and Spain, with the UK maintaining especially close relations due to shared Commonwealth membership, although it exited the EU in 2020. Canada's engagement with Europe evolved through multilateral institutions like the UN and NATO and formalized economically with the 1976 Framework Agreement with the European Economic Community—the first of its kind with an industrialized third country. This was followed by the 1990 Declaration on Transatlantic Relations and the 1996 Ottawa Summit's Political Declaration and Action Plan. The 2016

Strategic Partnership Agreement further deepened cooperation in areas such as human rights, security, and sustainable development, entering provisional force in 2017. Efforts toward a free trade agreement began in 2007, culminating in the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), provisionally applied since 2017. Ceta creates a trade zone for about 488 million people (about 449.4 million from the EU27, 39.4 million from Canada), which is equivalent to about 20% of global GDP. between 2016 and 2022, it has increased EU-Canadian trade by 66% on goods and 62% on services. In total, approximately 694,000 jobs are based on EU-Canada trade. Despite progress, tensions persist over issues like the EU's seal product ban and past Canadian visa requirements for Romanian and Bulgarian citizens, which were lifted in 2017. In 2023, the Canada-EU Green Alliance was established to promote joint renewable energy development and climate cooperation. Canada and EU member states have also experienced bilateral disputes, including maritime boundaries and Arctic claims. As of January 2025, Canadian citizens can travel visa-free to the Schengen Area for short stays, though a visa waiver via ETIAS will be required starting mid-2025, mirroring Canada's eTA requirement for EU citizens. According to the 2020 Migrant Integration Policy Index, Canada scored highly overall, particularly in anti-discrimination, though political participation was rated lower. The EU states were assessed individually in the same index. (EEAS - The Diplomatic Service of the European Union, 2023; Solano & Huddleston, 2020; Germanovna Chuvakhina, 2018; Sülün, Yildiz, & Çamyamaç, 2021; European Council, 2025)

CRITERIA TO AMMEND CANADA

In this section, it must first be clarified whether Canada fulfils the aforementioned criteria at all. We start with the question of whether Canada is a 'European state'. Then comes the question of the so-called Copenhagen criteria, which are divided into political, economic and legal requirements and the question of whether the EU would be capable of enlargement. Finally, it concludes with the possible 'additional criteria'.

IS CANADA AN EUROPEAN STATE?

According to the 3-element theory, Canada is a state if it has a population in the sense of a community of destiny, a territory and state power. As previously mentioned, approximately 39 million people live in Canada. Of these, approx. 1.7% claim to belong to the First Nations, i.e. the indigenous population. Regardless of their sense of belonging, religion or language, Canadians have Canadian citizenship. They are therefore united under the legal authority of the Canadian state. There is therefore one population. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025)

The territory of Canada exists on the basis of international treaties and regulations. Canada's borders extend from the Arctic Ocean to the USA in the south, from Alaska in the west to Greenland in the east and to Saint Pierre and Miquelon in the Southeast. Canada has a clearly defined border with the United States. This clarity is the result of over two centuries of treaties, surveys, and bilateral agreements that have progressively resolved disputes and established a well-maintained boundary. One strong argument supporting this is the existence and ongoing work of the International Boundary Commission, which was made permanent in 1925. This body is responsible for maintaining the physical markers, clearing a 6-meter-wide "border vista," and ensuring the accuracy of the boundary line. Additionally, modern surveying techniques and legal agreements—such as the 1908 treaty and the Boundary Waters Treaty of 1909—have reinforced the precision and mutual recognition of the border.

In 1973, Canada and Denmark ratified a treaty establishing maritime boundaries in the Arctic, though it left the status of Hans Island unresolved. Tensions escalated in 1984 when the Danish Minister for Greenland raised a flag on the island, and again in 2005 when the Canadian Defence Minister visited the territory, prompting diplomatic protests and the deployment of Canadian naval vessels. Despite these symbolic acts of sovereignty, both nations initiated a cooperative process in 2009 to resolve the dispute. Although a 2012 border agreement did not address Hans Island, negotiations continued. In June 2022, a bilateral agreement was reached to divide the island between Canada's Nunavut territory and Denmark's Greenland, formally concluding the long-standing territorial disagreement. The border between Canada and France is clearly defined because it pertains to the maritime boundary between Canada and the French overseas territory of Saint-Pierre and Miquelon. This boundary is established through international agreements and maritime law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which governs territorial waters and exclusive economic zones. The clarity of this border is essential for managing fishing rights, resource exploration, and sovereignty, and it has been the subject of arbitration and diplomatic negotiation to ensure mutual recognition and legal precision. Therefore, Canada has a territory. (Thomas, 1997; Carroll, 2001; Sage, 1946; McManus, 2005; Commager, 1927; Moens & Gabler, 2012; Byers, 2009)

Finally, the question of state power is a complex one, but it can be shortened somewhat. Canada is a full member of more than 80 international organizations, including many UN organizations, the Organization of American States, the OECD, the OSCE and the Commonwealth. It has diplomatic relations with 190 countries. For ease of verification, acceptance of sovereignty by other states and international organizations is listed as confirmation of Canada's sovereignty. Canada therefore also has the 3rd element. (Gabrys & Soroka, 2017)

Canada fulfils the 3 elements theory and is therefore a state.

However, it is more difficult to determine whether Canada is also 'European'. As we have seen, the term 'European' is blurred and can be divided into geographical, historical, political, cultural-religious and economic categories. Starting with the geographical view, it is clear that Canada is located on the North American continent. If one adopts the argumentation as in the case of Morocco, then Canada is not a European state. However, this need not be an obstacle to EU membership. Cyprus is also not geographically located in Europe but is politically and culturally recognised as European. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025) Historically, Canada is closely linked to the European continent, not least because of the large number of European immigrants. Like Malta and Cyprus, Canada has a colonial connection to the United Kingdom, France and Spain. If you go back even further, it is clear that Canada was unsuccessfully colonised by the Vikings and thus even has a Scandinavian connection. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025; Hinrichs, 2014; Todd, 2017) Therefore, Canada can be historically seen as being kind of European. Of course, this reference has a great influence on the cultural and religious organisation of Canadian society. The main official languages, English and French, are European languages, which again reflects the colonial reference. In addition, over 50 per cent of the population claim to belong to one of the Christian communities. Canadian culture is thus a mixture of British, French, Indigenous cultures and traditions influenced by African, Caribbean and Asian nations. Culturally and religiously, Canada can be seen as very similar to Europe. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025; Magocsi, 2002). From a political perspective, Canada's membership in European organisations should be noted. Canada is a member of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation

in Europe, NATO and has observer status in the Council of Europe. The latter in particular takes into account European human rights. Furthermore, Canada has strong political relations with Europe through other international organisations such as the UN, the OECD, the Commonwealth and the International Criminal Court in The Hague. Political values such as democracy, the rule of law and human rights bind Europe to Canada. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025) Politically, and also in the pursuit of their own interests, the two countries are therefore very close. Even though, before the current right-wing populist US presidency, Canada's previous trading partner was the USA, Canada and the EU are, as already mentioned, growing closer together economically through the CETA agreement. This also includes a certain degree of economic policy harmonisation in terms of product safety and manufacturing standards. Canada could also be considered quite European in economic terms.

Thanks to the vagueness of the term 'European', Canada could be considered European. If you want to find arguments against this, then stick to the purely geographical aspect. Canada is definitely a state. It is therefore up to the EU politicians to decide which view to take in order to regard Canada as a European state. If this is done, Canada would have a right to apply for membership and would have to fulfil the admission criteria.

THE FULLFILMENT OF THE COPENHAGEN CRITERIA

The criteria for admission can be categorised into political, economic and legal criteria and the EU's admission capacity. To check the criteria, data from international indices are used and compared with Europe or the EU27 (if available), Germany, France and Italy as the largest EU member states and Spain and Poland as member states comparable to Canada in terms of population.

Starting with the political requirements relating to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, the Democracy Index, the Human Freedom Index, the Corruption Perceptions Index and the Human Development Index are used.

DOES CANADA FULLFILL THE POLITICAL CRITERION?

The Democracy Index, shown in Figure 3 and developed by the Economist Intelligence Unit (2006–2024), quantitatively assesses the state of democracy in countries worldwide. It is based on expert evaluations and integrates multiple dimensions of democratic governance. These include the integrity of electoral processes, the protection of civil liberties, public preference for democratic governance, political participation, and the effectiveness of government institutions in representing citizens' interests. The index is scored on a scale from 0 to 10, with higher values indicating greater levels of democracy. (Our World in Data, 2025)

It shows that Canada consistently scores very high on the Democracy Index, maintaining values above 9.0 until 2020, after which there is a slight decline to around 8.69 by 2024. In contrast, European countries show more variability and generally lower scores. Germany is the closest to Canada, with scores around 8.6–8.8, while France, Italy, Poland, and Spain range between 6.6 and 8.3. Canada clearly leads in democratic performance, although the recent decline suggests a narrowing gap.

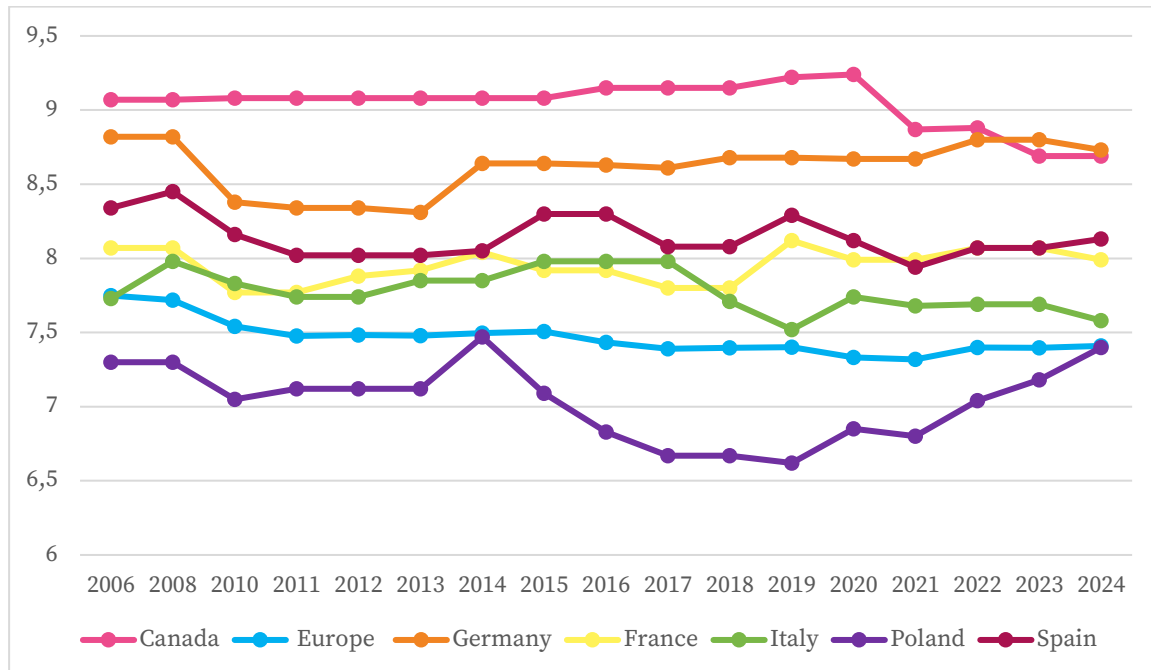


Figure 3: Democracy Index comparison of the years 2006 – 2024 (Our World in Data, 2025)

The Human Freedom Index in figure 4 is a global measure designed to evaluate the state of human freedom across a wide range of countries and territories. It is developed collaboratively by the Cato Institute, the Fraser Institute, and the Liberales Institut at the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom. The index covers 165 countries and territories, representing nearly the entire global population. This index combines 86 indicators that reflect various dimensions of freedom, which are grouped into twelve overarching categories. These include aspects such as the rule of law, security, freedom of movement, religious freedom, freedom of expression, civil society, personal relationships, government size, legal rights, monetary access, international trade, and regulatory environment. Each indicator is scored on a scale from zero to ten, where ten denotes the highest level of freedom. These scores are then aggregated into two main components: personal freedom and economic freedom. The final Human Freedom score for each country is derived by averaging these two components. The Human Freedom Index not only serves as a benchmark for comparing freedom across nations but also provides a foundation for further research into how freedom interacts with political systems, economic development, and overall human well-being. (Vásquez, McMahon, Murphy, & Sutter Schneider, 2023)

Canada again ranks highest among the countries compared, with scores ranging from 8.47 to 8.85. Germany and Spain follow closely, while France, Italy, and Poland trail behind. Notably, Canada experienced a dip in 2022 but recovered slightly in 2023. This indicates that Canada maintains a strong position in terms of personal, civil, and economic freedoms.

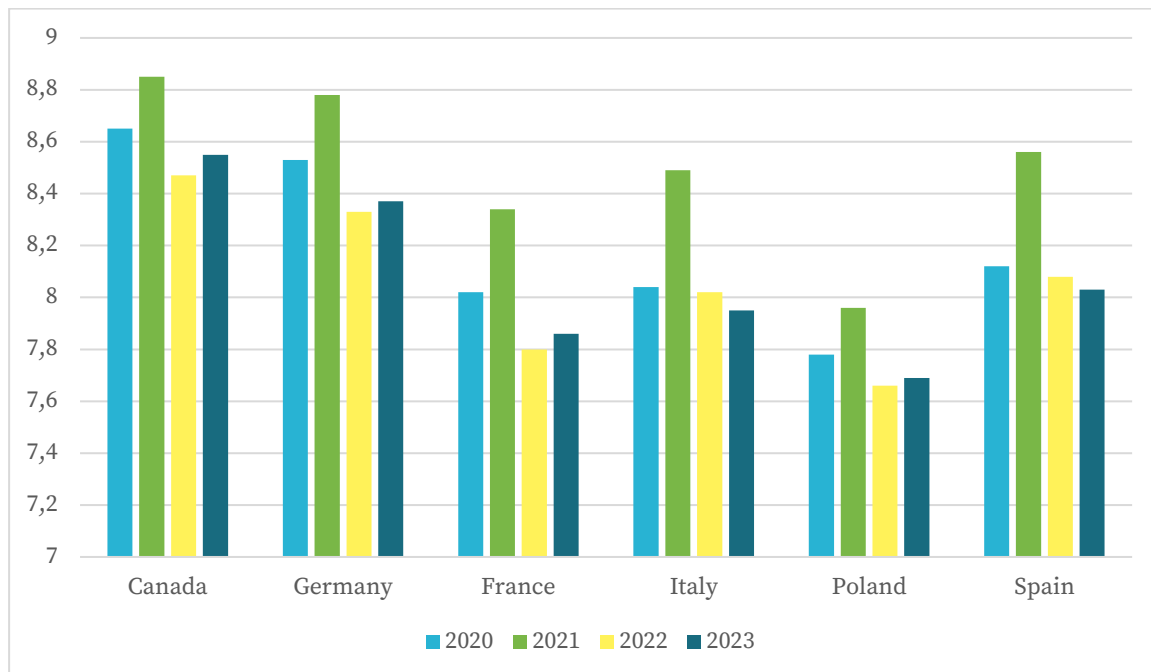


Figure 4: Human Freedom Index comparison of the years 2020 – 2023 (Vásquez, McMahon, Murphy, & Sutter Schneider, 2023)

The Corruption Perceptions Index is a global indicator developed and published annually by Transparency International since 1995 and evaluates 180 countries in 2024. It measures perceived levels of public sector corruption in countries and territories around the world, based on expert assessments and business surveys. Corruption, in this context, is broadly defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Since 2012, this index has used a scale from 0 to 100, where 0 indicates a high level of perceived corruption and 100 represents a very clean public sector. Prior to this, the scale ranged from 0 to 10. In order to be able to compare the data over time, the data from 2012 onwards is also calculated on a scale of 0-10. It can be found in Figure 5. Despite its widespread use, the Corruption Perceptions Index has limitations. It does not differentiate between various forms of corruption, and it relies on perceptions, which may not always reflect actual corruption levels. Therefore, it is recommended to use this index in conjunction with other tools and assessments for a more comprehensive understanding. Additionally, because perceptions evolve gradually, the Corruption Perceptions Index is more effective for analyzing long-term trends rather than short-term changes. (Transparency International, 2025)

Canada shows a high and stable performance, with values consistently above 8.0, peaking around 9.2 in the early 2010s and slightly declining to 7.5 by 2024. EU 27 countries show more fluctuation and generally lower scores. Germany is the closest comparator, maintaining values around 7.5–8.1. France, Italy, Poland, and Spain show significantly lower and more volatile scores, indicating higher perceived corruption. Canada's long-term trend suggests strong institutional integrity, though the recent decline may warrant attention.

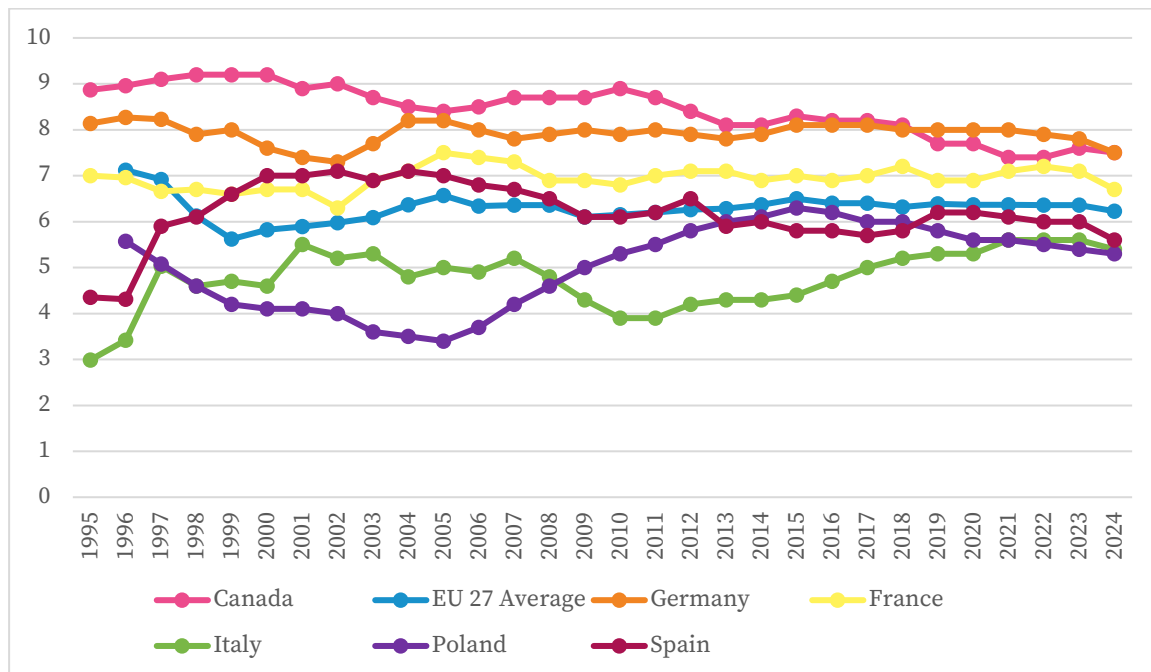


Figure 5: Corruption perceptions index comparison of the years 1995 – 2024 (Transparency International, 2025)

The Human Development Index is a summary measure created by the United Nations to evaluate a country's progress in three key areas: health, education, and income. Health is measured by life expectancy at birth. Education is assessed through the average years of schooling for adults and the expected years of schooling for children. Income is measured by gross national income per person, adjusted logarithmically to reflect that additional income has less impact at higher levels. These three indicators are combined using a geometric means to produce a single HDI score. This score allows comparisons between countries and can highlight how nations with similar income levels may achieve different outcomes in health and education, prompting discussions about policy effectiveness. However, the HDI does not capture all aspects of human development. It overlooks inequality, poverty, and other social factors. To address this, the UN provides additional indices that offer a broader view of development. For a complete understanding, the HDI should be considered alongside these other indicators. (UNDP - United Nations Development Programme, 2025)

Canada consistently scores above 0.9, indicating very high human development. It outperforms all European countries in this index. Germany and France follow, with scores approaching 0.95 in recent years. Italy, Poland, and Spain show steady improvement but remain below Canada's level. This underscores Canada's strong performance in health, education, and income dimensions.

Canada consistently ranks at or near the top across all indices, reflecting strong democratic institutions, high levels of freedom, low corruption, and advanced human development. While Germany is the most comparable European country, Canada generally maintains a lead. However, recent years show slight declines in some indicators (notably democracy and corruption perception), suggesting areas for vigilance. In conclusion, Canada clearly fulfills the political criterion. It demonstrates strong democratic governance, high levels of freedom, low perceived corruption, and excellent human development outcomes. While some recent trends suggest areas for vigilance, the overall picture confirms Canada's alignment with the highest standards of political and institutional performance.

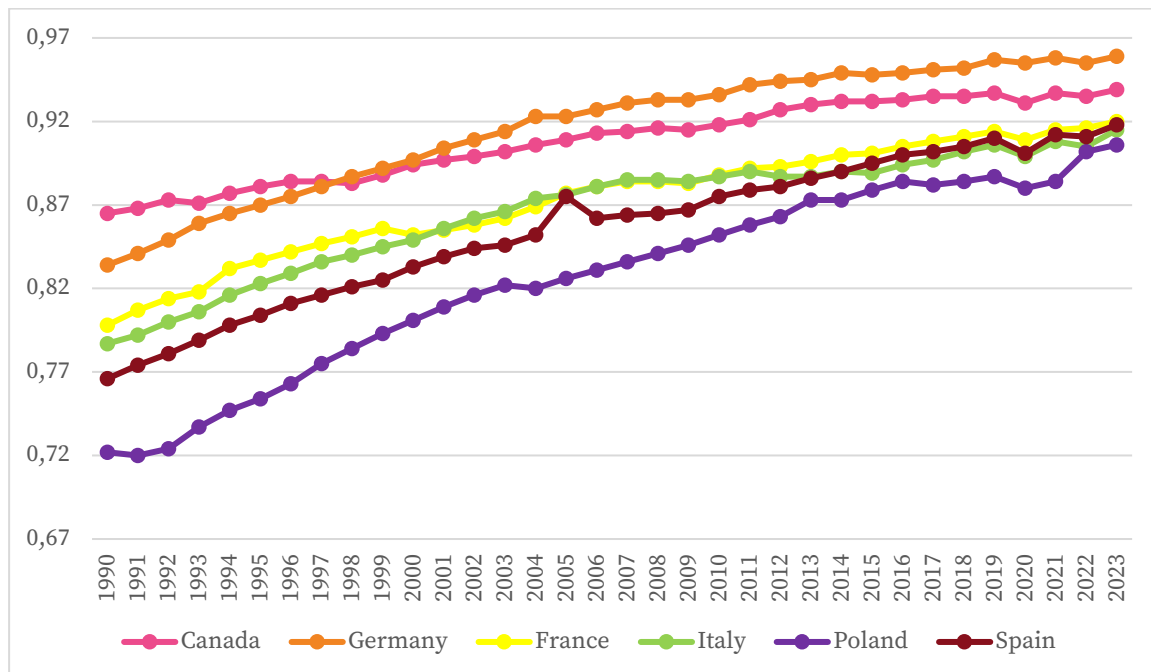


Figure 6: Human development index comparison of the years 1990 – 2023 (UNDP - United Nations Development Programme, 2025)

DOES CANADA FULLFILL THE ECONOMIC CRITERION?

Economically Canada needs to prove that it has a functioning market economy to compete in the European Single Market. The Canadian economic system is based on a liberal market economy similar to the UK. (CIA - Central Intelligence Agency, 2025) The analysis of the economic criterion presents two key economic indicators for the previous mentioned countries—Canada, Germany, France, Italy, Poland, and Spain—over a long historical period: Gross domestic product (GDP) per capita in current US dollars from 1960 to 2023, and World Competitiveness Rankings from 2020 to 2024.

GDP per capita, shown in figure 7, is a standard measure of a country's economic output per person and is often used as an indicator of living standards. GDP consists of domestic consumption, investment - including foreign direct investment and foreign portfolio investment - , public spending and the difference between exports and imports, the so-called net exports. (Mankiw & Taylor, 2012; Krugman & Wells, 2010)

Over the observed period, all countries show a general upward trend in GDP per capita, reflecting global economic growth, technological advancement, and increased productivity. Canada's GDP per capita rose from approximately \$2,265 in 1960 to over \$53,000 in 2023. This growth trajectory is consistent with that of other advanced economies, such as Germany and France. However, Canada consistently maintained a higher GDP per capita than most European counterparts, particularly Italy, Spain, and Poland. For instance, in 2023, Canada's GDP per capita was about \$53,431, compared to Germany's \$54,343, France's \$44,691, Italy's \$39,003, Poland's \$15,987, and Spain's \$33,509. This places Canada among the top performers in this group, closely trailing Germany and ahead of the rest.

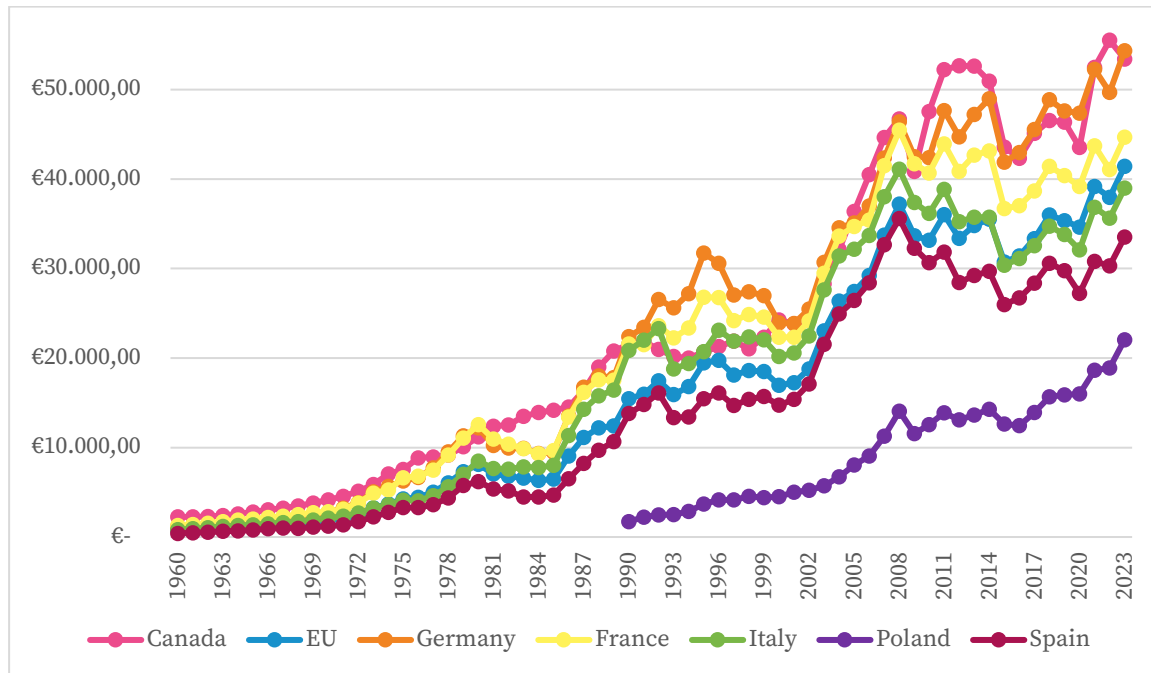


Figure 7: GDP per Capita (current US\$) (World Bank Group, 2025)

The IMD World Competitiveness Ranking evaluates how well countries manage their resources and competencies to achieve long-term value creation. A lower numerical rank indicates higher competitiveness. It is based on 333 competitiveness criteria selected as a result of comprehensive research using economic literature, international, national and regional sources, and feedback from the Business community and government agencies. This ranking is provided by the International Institute for Management Development. (IMD - International Institute for Management Development, 2006-2025) Figure 8 shows the IMD World Competitiveness Ranking from 2020-to 2024.

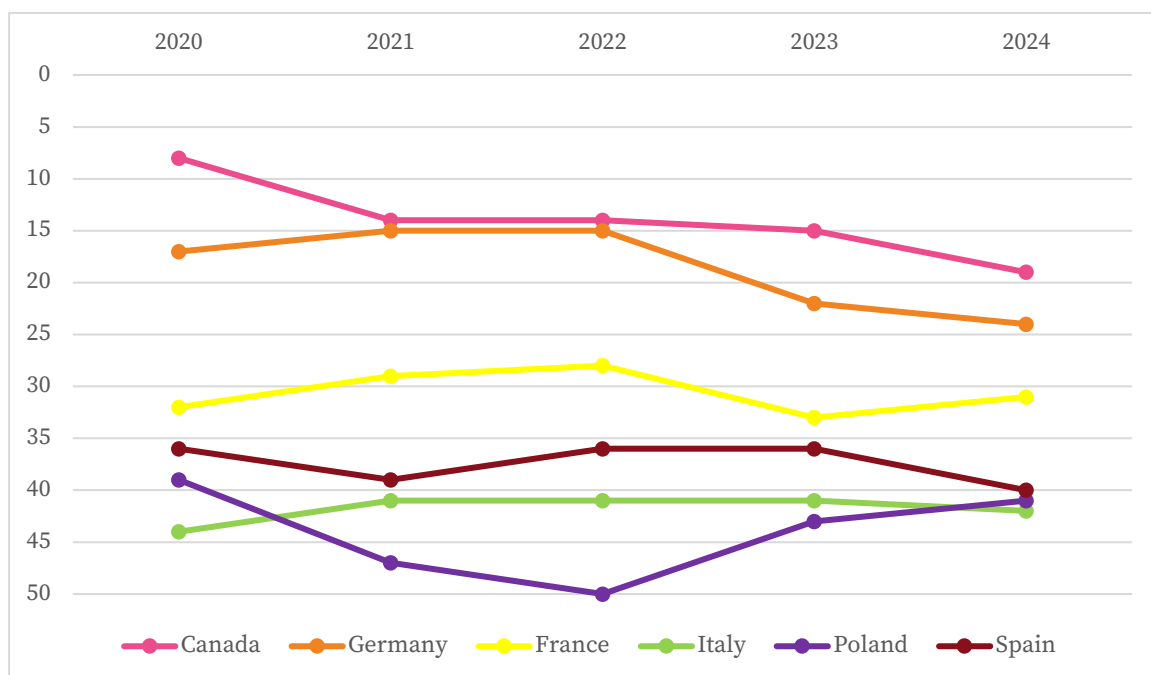


Figure 8: World Competitiveness Ranking comparison of the years 2020 – 2024 (IMD - International Institute for Management Development, 2006-2025)

Canada's rankings were 8th in 2020, then declined to 14th in 2021 and 2022, and slightly worsened to 15th in 2023 and 19th in 2024. This trend suggests a relative decline in competitiveness, possibly due to structural economic challenges, policy shifts, or global market dynamics.

In comparison, Germany showed a fluctuating but generally improving trend, moving from 17th in 2020 to 24th in 2024. France remained relatively stable but lower-ranked, ranging from 28th to 33rd. Italy consistently ranked in the 40s, indicating lower competitiveness. Poland improved significantly from 39th in 2020 to 41st in 2024, peaking at 43rd in 2023. Spain remained in the mid-30s to 40s, showing modest competitiveness. Despite the recent decline, Canada remains one of the most competitive economies in this group, second only to Germany in most years. Its high GDP per capita and relatively strong competitiveness ranking underscore its position as a leading economy among the countries analysed. In conclusion, despite a recent dip in competitiveness rankings, Canada fulfils the economic criterion of having a functioning market economy. Its high GDP per capita and relatively strong competitiveness underscore its capacity to compete within the European Single Market.

DOES CANADA FULLFILL THE LEGAL CRITERION?

Canada would also have to fulfil the legal criterion. It consists of the incorporation of the entire *acquis communautaire*. The Community *acquis*, also known as the *acquis communautaire* or EU *acquis*, refers to the comprehensive body of common rights and obligations that bind all European Union (EU) member states. It encompasses the accumulated legislation, legal acts, and court decisions that have developed since the EU's formal establishment in 1993. The term originates from French, with "*acquis*" meaning "that which has been acquired" and "*communautaire*" meaning "of the community." The *acquis* serves as the foundation of EU law and is a central element in the accession process for new member states.

During accession negotiations, particularly starting with Croatia's accession process (which culminated in its EU membership in 2013), the *acquis* was reorganized into 35 chapters. This restructuring aimed to streamline negotiations by balancing the complexity of topics across chapters—splitting more challenging areas into separate chapters, consolidating simpler ones, and adjusting the categorization and naming of certain policies. These chapters cover a wide range of policy areas, including the free movement of goods, workers, services, and capital; public procurement; company and intellectual property law; competition and financial services; agriculture, fisheries, and food safety; transport, energy, and taxation; social policy, education, environment, and consumer protection; as well as justice, foreign policy, and institutional matters.

Accession negotiations typically involve transitional arrangements, allowing candidate countries time to align their national laws with the *acquis* and to gradually assume the rights and obligations of EU membership. This ensures a structured and manageable integration into the Union's legal and institutional framework.

In the case of Iceland or another EFTA state and thus part of the European Economic Area, this criterion would not be a major obstacle, as these states have already adopted a large part of the *acquis* due to the common regulations. In the case of Canada, however, it could be more complex and therefore take longer. Unlike Turkey, Canada will certainly face fewer challenges in adopting the *acquis*. However, the *acquis* already contained around 85,000 pages in 2004. (Eichholz, 2013) 20 years later, this volume will

not have decreased. As this is a very large volume that has to be converted into national law via democratic and parliamentary processes or national law has to be adapted, it will certainly take some time. The percentage to which Canada fulfils this criterion requires further precise legal analysis.

IS THE EU CAPABLE TO GROW?

The European Union's capacity to admit new members is a crucial factor in the enlargement process, currently exemplified by discussions surrounding Turkey's potential accession. However, this requirement is not a condition imposed on candidate countries but rather an internal political consideration for the EU itself. This internal dimension becomes particularly significant when contemplating the hypothetical accession of large states such as Russia. Due to its vast size, Russia would pose substantial challenges to the EU's institutional and political framework, making integration practically unfeasible. Moreover, Russia's invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022 renders its accession theoretically invalid, and it is referenced here solely for illustrative purposes. Despite these challenges, historical precedents show that large or complex entities have, in certain contexts, been integrated into or associated with the EU. Examples include former colonial empires during the early European Community era, territories like Greenland linked to Denmark, and Northern Ireland's evolving status post-Brexit. These cases highlight the EU's flexible approach to enlargement and association, shaped by both political will and institutional adaptability. In the case of Canada, it would be comparable to Poland or Spain joining the EU in terms of population size. Economically strong and far more compliant with political and democratic values than many current member states.

ADDITIONAL CRITERIA FOR CANADA?

Additional political criteria are also possible. However, these cannot be examined at this point, as they would be purely hypothetical and unpredictable.

Other criteria, on the other hand, are mandatory. The obligation to terminate international treaties with third countries after accession or those that are not compatible with the Lisbon Treaties could have an effect on the North American Free Trade Agreement between the USA, Mexico and Canada. After all, Canadian accession to the EU would also mean Canadian accession to the European single market, which is duty-free and harmonised. A free trade area between the US, Mexico and the EU only exists through other treaties that do not allow complete free trade. Canada would therefore have to abandon this agreement.

Canada would also have to cede its trade and policy competences to the EU level. This means that decisions in the international arena would then always have to be made in coordination with the EU level.

Accession to Euratom, the Schengen Agreement, the EMU and thus the euro would also be mandatory or part of complex negotiations with an opt-out option, similar to Ireland and Denmark.

WOULD CANADA ACCEPT THE ADDITIONAL OBLIGATIONS?

It is questionable whether Canada can positively balance the advantages of joining the EU against the challenges. The aforementioned withdrawal from the North American Free Trade Agreement is certainly very negative, as the US and Mexico are important Canadian trading partners. (CIA - Central

Intelligence Agency, 2025) Due to current US trade policy, the termination of the free trade agreement seems certain. Paradoxically, closer ties to the EU would compensate for this disadvantage. Access to EU funds should also be mentioned here. These are financed by EU membership payments. The latter consist of a percentage of VAT and EU customs revenues. Due to Canada's high level of prosperity, a high payment amount is certain. It is questionable how much Canada would receive through development funds. Certainly, the large distances are an opportunity to promote peripheral regions and culture. However, there seems to be a high chance of becoming a so-called net payer.

The adoption of the euro as the Canadian currency would certainly be an identity and social challenge. However, this does not appear to be a significant challenge, as an opt-out could be negotiated, as was the case with the UK at the time and with Denmark today.

Similarly, the Schengen Agreement is helpful in promoting the European single market, but, as in the case of Ireland, it is not mandatory. Accession to this market and the EU customs union, on the other hand, are not negotiable. The impact on Euratom accession is not clear and requires further research.

A greater challenge would certainly be the distribution of representation in EU institutions such as the European Parliament. Depending on the population of a member state, with a favourable trend the smaller the state, there is a number of national members in the European Parliament. Germany, with around 84 million inhabitants, has 96 MEPs, while Cyprus, Luxembourg and Malta each have 6 MEPs. Canada's population size is between that of Spain, with 61 MEPs, and Poland, with 53 MEPs. This would mean between 53 and 61 Canadian members of parliament. Considering the economic prosperity and exemplary political and social data already outlined, which are comparatively greater than European values and even those of Germany, it would be questionable why Canada should be inclined to seek a possible majority in the European institutions. Given its current performance, Canada could feel underrepresented. (Brandtjen, 2019)

In addition, Canada would have to share its exclusive economic zone and thus its fishing stocks with its European partners without hindrance. As in the so-called Turbot Wars, Spain had a conflict with Canada on this issue. It is questionable whether this is what the Canadian population wants. (Springer, 1997)

Current border conflicts, such as the territorial claims in the Arctic and the Canada-France maritime border cases, could be eased and calmed with Canada's accession to the EU, similar to the conflict in Northern Ireland with the UK's EU membership. (Carlson, Hubach, Long, Minter, & Young, 2013; Charney, Colson, & Smith, 2005)

OTHER POSSIBLE CONCEPTS

If all these challenges cannot be resolved in negotiations, if the Canadian population or government is not in favour of accession, or if Canada is ultimately not recognised as 'European', then other options for greater integration into Europe could be explored. Some examples of this have already been mentioned in the text. One possibility would be to seek membership of EFTA and thus move closer to the European Economic Area. There is no obligation to be a European state. However, it is an international treaty to which all current members agree to admit a new member. The extent to which this would be possible requires separate analysis. (Butler, 2025)

Apart from that, association agreements between Canada and the EU would be comparable to those between the EU and small European states such as Andorra or San Marino. This would possibly require renegotiation of the CETA agreement. Whether this would be realistic is unclear.

Conclusion

The possibility of Canada joining the European Union (EU) represents a novel and complex scenario in the context of EU enlargement. While Canada is geographically situated in North America, the definition of a "European state" under Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union allows for a broader interpretation that includes political, cultural, historical, and economic dimensions. Canada's deep historical ties to Europe, its bilingualism in English and French, and its alignment with European democratic values and institutions provide a compelling case for its potential classification as a European state in a non-geographical sense.

Canada demonstrates strong compatibility with the EU's political and institutional standards. It consistently ranks among the highest globally in indices measuring democracy, human rights, rule of law, and governance, often outperforming many current EU member states. Economically, Canada possesses a robust and competitive market economy, with a high GDP per capita and a strong trade relationship with the EU, particularly through the Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA). These factors indicate that Canada is well-positioned to integrate into the EU Single Market. Legally, while Canada has not yet adopted the *acquis communautaire*, its legal and institutional frameworks are highly compatible with EU norms, suggesting that the process of legal harmonization, though extensive, would be feasible.

Public sentiment in Canada has shown increasing support for EU membership, particularly in response to recent geopolitical tensions and trade disputes with the United States. This shift in public opinion, combined with Canada's strategic interest in diversifying its international partnerships, strengthens the case for exploring EU accession. Furthermore, the EU has demonstrated flexibility in its enlargement policy, having previously admitted geographically non-European territories and maintaining association agreements with distant partners, which sets a precedent for accommodating a country like Canada.

However, several significant challenges must be acknowledged. The most immediate is the geographical and legal ambiguity of Canada's status as a "European" state. While the EU has interpreted this term flexibly in the past, it remains a potential legal and political hurdle. Institutional and political challenges also arise from Canada's size and economic weight, which could disrupt the balance of power within EU institutions such as the European Parliament and the Council. Additionally, Canada would need to withdraw from or renegotiate existing international agreements, such as the USMCA, which could entail substantial political and economic costs. The adoption of the euro, participation in the Schengen Area, and the ceding of certain sovereign powers to EU institutions may also face domestic resistance.

Despite these obstacles, the overall alignment between Canada and the EU in terms of values, governance, and economic systems suggests that Canadian membership is theoretically feasible. However, this would require a high degree of political will, both within Canada and among existing EU

member states. It would also necessitate a carefully negotiated accession process that addresses institutional representation, treaty compatibility, and public support.

Several areas require further investigation before any formal steps toward membership could be considered. These include a detailed legal analysis of whether Canada can be recognized as a European state under EU law, an assessment of the institutional impact of Canadian membership on EU governance structures, and a comprehensive review of the compatibility of Canada's existing international treaties with EU obligations. Additionally, sustained public and political support within Canada must be monitored, and alternative models of integration, such as enhanced association agreements or EFTA membership, should be explored as potential pathways if full membership proves unviable.

In conclusion, while Canada's accession to the EU is unprecedented and fraught with legal, political, and logistical complexities, it is not beyond the realm of possibility. The decision ultimately hinges on political interpretation, mutual interest, and the capacity of both Canada and the EU to navigate the challenges of such a transformative partnership.

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