



Written by [Angeline Tan](#) on September 17, 2023

## EU Plans to Expand to 30 Members, Centralize Decision-making Process

European Commission (EC) President Ursula von der Leyen has declared that the European Union (EU) must ready itself to expand to at least 30 members, stating a key series of policy reviews to ensure that the 27-nation bloc can operate even as it grows in the future.

Pressure has been mounting on the EU to purportedly counter Russia's clout in the Western Balkans, particularly in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

"History is now calling us to work on completing our union," von der Leyen told EU lawmakers in Strasbourg on September 13. "In a world where size and weight matters, [the enlargement] is clearly in Europe's strategic interest. We need to look closer at each policy and see how they would be affected."

If the EU grows, the EU chief executive declared, the commission's reviews would assess how the EU would have to adapt in the economic, energy, agricultural, and migration sectors.

"We will need to think about how our institutions would work — how the [European] Parliament and the commission would look. We need to discuss the future of our budget — in terms of what it finances, how it finances it, and how it is financed," she elaborated.

Regarding Ukraine, which has insisted on joining the bloc on many occasions, von der Leyen said Kyiv has made "great strides" toward membership since obtaining candidate status in 2022, but more has to be done.

While the bloc deliberated whether to formally invite Kyiv to start EU membership negotiations at a summit in December, von der Leyen told lawmakers, "We know this is not an easy road. Accession is merit-based ... it takes hard work and leadership. But there is already a lot of progress. We have seen the great strides Ukraine has already made."

The debate to increase the number of members in the EU will be at the forefront of the bloc's foreign policy agenda until the end of the year.

On September 14, the European Parliament's plenary session [adopted](#) a report to limit the European Council's legislative powers and prevent member states from exercising their veto rights, while boosting the powers of the Parliament itself. The [package](#) would also give voting rights to "mobile EU citizens" and reduce the voting age to 16 across the entire EU.

Alin Mituța, the liberal Renew group's co-rapporteur on the proposal, backed attempts to reform the



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EU's entire decision-making process:

We send a clear message to upgrade our democracy—a new EU Agora that involves citizens in European democratic life, the right for the European Parliament to initiate laws, and an end to unanimity in the European Council.

The report — already submitted to the council and the commission for deliberation — passed with 316 votes in favor, 137 against, and 47 abstentions. The two conservative groups, ID and ECR, were the only ones to unanimously oppose the report. Most members of Parliament in all other parties, including the center-right EPP, voted to back the final resolution.

The [report](#) has three main components, each with various different proposals. Under “Parliamentarism,” the report urged giving the “direct right of legislative initiative” to the European Parliament (EP) to “lay down the strategic priorities of the [EU’s] legislative agenda” and to recalibrate working dynamics between the Parliament and the council by turning the two into a “genuine bicameral legislative system.” What this implies is that power would be taken from EU member states and given to the EP.

Additionally, the text lobbied for a fundamental overhaul of the European Council by substituting unanimity with qualified majority voting “permanently by means of Treaty change,” which would remove member states’ individual veto rights and thus considerably undermine their sovereignty. As Mituța posited in a recent [opinion piece](#), ditching the system of the rotating presidency and substituting it with a permanent official would stop conservative countries such as Hungary from ever assuming power.

Also, the report suggested that a “European citizenship” system be set up, thus guaranteeing that “mobile EU citizens” can vote and run for office in any country they are residing in. The report also suggested rendering EU citizenship accessible to third-country nationals (such as asylum seekers), introducing EU-wide referendums, and establishing a single, standardized voting age limit by reducing it to 16 in every member state.

Greens MEP Niklas Nienass, the other co-rapporteur of the report, championed the aforementioned measures as the means to “give our parliamentary democracy an update—to be prepared for a more global, digital, fast-moving world.”

Ironically, the report has to be deliberated in and authorized by the European Council, the very institution it eventually hopes to undermine.

Predictably, EU member states almost unanimously dismissed any effort to jeopardize existing powers and authority.

German MEP Gunnar Beck (ID), who voted against the proposal in the subcommittee where it was initially presented, divulged to the [The European Conservative](#):

[The report] portrays the EU-wide referendum and the abolishment of unanimity in the Council as pillars of democracy. The opposite is true. Unanimity guarantees that no decision is made at [the] European level without the consent of all member states. No taxation without representation is a vital pillar of a true democracy. Also, there is no European *demos*; therefore, there is no European democracy; therefore, referendums can only be local, regional, or national. Moreover, the report pleads for a general right of legislative



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initiative for the European Parliament. I strongly believe that the European Union is a union of free states. Therefore, the member states within the Council ought to be the sole law-giver[s] in the Union.

Meanwhile, a new video produced by the Swedish public broadcaster Utbildningsradion (UR) portraying Hungary as anti-democratic has incited massive fury in Hungary, prompting cautions from high-level government officials that such provocative content could hinder Sweden's NATO accession bid.

The 10-minute clip, titled "The EU and Democracy," is part of a four-part series on the European Union that, among other things, backs actions taken against Hungary by various EU institutions on the pretext of "democratic values" and what they term as "the rule of law."

In turn, Hungarian Foreign Minister Péter Szijjártó wrote a letter to Sweden's Tobias Billström on September 16. In the letter, Szijjártó stated that he had talked with Billström about "biased, negative, and unjust" remarks by Swedish politicians about the state of democracy in Hungary.

Furthermore, the Hungarian foreign minister included in the letter to Billström that Hungarian legislators had discovered reports insinuating that "as part of your school curriculum ... serious accusations and fake information are being spread to the students in the schools of Sweden suggesting that democracy has been on a backslide in Hungary in recent years."

"You urge our parliamentarians to ratify your accession to NATO while you continue to accuse them of destroying democracy in Hungary," Szijjártó wrote. "This contradiction ... definitely does not help your continuously raised demand to be fulfilled," the minister added, alluding to Sweden's attempt to join NATO, which Hungary has not ratified.

Sweden first applied to join NATO along with Finland following the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict in February 2022. While Finland became a NATO member in April this year, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has primarily stalled Sweden's bid to join the group.

Other high-level officials in the Hungarian government, including Balázs Orbán, a member of parliament, and Gergely Gulyás, a senior Fidesz MP, among others, backed Szijjártó's stance.

"Shocking Swedish government-approved educational video attacking Hungary! How do we convince Hungarian MPs to support Sweden's [NATO] membership when our democracy is repeatedly questioned, insulting both our voters and the entire country? Actions like this will definitely make negotiations more challenging," Balázs Orbán posted on X (formerly Twitter) with a link to the video clip.

Gulyás, the minister who oversees the Prime Minister's Office, gave his take on the matter, saying: "If the film is played in state schools, it means that Sweden is doing everything to prevent Hungary from ratifying its accession to NATO."

"The educational film is obviously an accusation without any basis and an unjustified insult to Hungary, and if this is the case, I will suggest to group leader Mate Kocsis that we view it at the beginning of our parliamentary group meeting," he [stated](#).

Swedish journalist Erik Almqvist chimed in on the new video on [social media](#). As a Swede, Almqvist announced, this "is highly embarrassing for me. But unfortunately this is how the Swedish state media operates: False accusations and blunt lies against any country where people don't vote liberal."



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