



Recommendation 1347 (1997)¹

Enlargement of the European Union

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Assembly notes that the European Council, at its forthcoming meeting in Luxembourg, will decide on the opening of negotiations on European Union (EU) membership with applicant states, all of which are member states of the Council of Europe.
2. The forthcoming enlargement of the EU is an event of historical importance. An enlarged EU would increase economic prosperity and strengthen political stability throughout Europe.
3. The Assembly notes that eligibility for membership has been affirmed by the EU for each of the twelve Council of Europe member states that applied for accession, namely Bulgaria, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia and Turkey.
4. The European Council, meeting in Copenhagen in June 1993, agreed on a set of economic, legislative, administrative and political criteria for membership of the EU. The political criteria require the achievement of stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.
5. According to the Treaty of Amsterdam, any European state which adheres to the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, may apply to become a member of the EU.
6. The Commission of the European Union, in its Agenda 2000 presented in July 1997, considered that the Slovak Republic and Turkey did not satisfy the political criteria for membership. It found that the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Poland and Slovenia could be in a position to satisfy all the conditions of membership in the medium term. The Commission therefore proposed to open negotiations with these five states, in addition to Cyprus, for which a decision to open negotiations had already been taken by the European Council, following a positive opinion by the Commission in July 1993.
7. The Assembly considers that membership of the Council of Europe should constitute *prima facie* evidence of compliance with the political criteria for EU membership. A final assessment of such compliance by the EU institutions should take into account the results of Council of Europe procedures - both of the Committee of Ministers and of the Assembly - for monitoring respect for obligations resulting from membership and the commitments entered into upon accession.
8. Membership of the Council of Europe, absence of conflicts with neighbouring states, and signature and ratification of the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, as well as of binding Council of Europe legal instruments for the protection of minorities, should be significant arguments in favour of admission to the European Union, and should also deserve the solidarity and mobilisation of the Council of Europe in favour of such admission.

1. See [Doc. 7955](#), report of the Political Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Woltjer. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 7 November 1997.



9. The Assembly believes that opening negotiations would in itself encourage the applicant states to continue and sustain their efforts to meet the criteria for EU membership. Consequently, the Assembly considers that negotiations should be opened with the largest possible number of applicant states which are close to meeting the political criteria, while recognising that the economic requirements of the Copenhagen criteria will play a role in the decision of the European Council.

10. The Assembly considers that the opening of EU enlargement negotiations with the largest possible number of applicant states would encourage other non-applicant countries from central and eastern Europe to strengthen their belief in and consolidate their aspiration towards membership of the EU.

11. The Assembly considers that the Treaty of Amsterdam fell short of reforming EU institutions to prepare them for the enlargement. It considers it essential that such reforms be introduced rapidly, in consultation with the applicant states, and without causing any delays in the process of enlargement.

12. The Commission of the European Union has proposed the creation of a European Conference as a body for multilateral consultations between the EU member states and applicant states on issues arising from the Common Foreign and Security Policy and Justice and Home Affairs. To avoid the proliferation of institutions, the Assembly considers that such consultations, as well as other accession-related activities, could be effectively carried out through existing mechanisms and through closer co-operation with the Council of Europe.

13. The Assembly, bringing together elected representatives from all EU member states and European countries aspiring to closer relations with the European Union, is a useful forum for parliamentary dialogue on the political criteria for EU enlargement. The Committee of Ministers could serve as a platform for intergovernmental political dialogue on this issue.

14. In this context, the Assembly notes the conclusions of the last quadripartite meeting between the Council of Europe and the European Union on 15 September 1997 in Brussels, recognising the significance of the Council of Europe's aims and activities in the compliance with the political criteria for accession to the EU.

15. The Assembly recommends that, prior to the Luxembourg meeting of the European Council, the Committee of Ministers bring to the attention of the Council of Ministers of the European Union the following considerations and proposals:

15.1. negotiations on EU membership should be opened with the largest possible number of applicant countries which are close to meeting the Copenhagen criteria. Guarantees should be provided for countries unable to participate in the first wave of negotiations that their candidatures will be reviewed at six month intervals, and a political commitment should be made by the European Council to open negotiations as soon as possible;

15.2. a commitment should be made to undertake the necessary reforms of EU institutions without causing any delays to the process of enlargement, and to consult the applicant countries on these reforms before any decision is taken;

15.3. consultations on accession-related issues as well as assessment and assistance related to the political criteria for membership should be carried out through the most effective use of existing institutions, programmes and practices, and in particular:

- a. dialogue at the level of heads of state and government in the margin of European Council meetings;
- b. political dialogue in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe;
- c. the monitoring procedures of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly;
- d. the Council of Europe's programmes and activities aimed at the strengthening of democratic institutions, the rule of law and the protection of human rights and the rights of minorities.