



EUROPEAN POLICY ANALYSIS

The impact of enlargement on the balance of power in the Council

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Summary

With enlargement firmly back on the EU's agenda, there are many questions about its impact on decision-making in the Union. This paper assesses the effects of three enlargement scenarios on the balance of power between old and new, big and small, Eastern and Western, and Northern and Southern member states, using a new online tool – the EU30+ voting calculator – to model Council votes under four voting rules. While this analysis does not evaluate the likelihood of countries voting together, it identifies which coalitions could adopt or block decisions.

Enlargement would shift influence towards small, new, Eastern and Southern member states, reducing the relative power of old, large, Northern and Western members. Founding members, large states, eurozone members, Mediterranean and post-communist states would be able to block Council decisions under all three enlargement scenarios.

Enlargement would increase the pressure to abandon unanimity in the Council. However, meaningful reform of Council decision-making depends on large states offering incentives to smaller ones, such as adjusting the qualified majority, introducing supermajority requirements or enabling differentiated integration. Without compelling offers to smaller states, significant reform of voting rules remains unlikely, and widening may proceed without deepening, given that treaty revision is not a prerequisite for further enlargement.

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1. Introduction

The reinvigoration of the EU's enlargement policy, spurred by Russia's blatant aggression in Ukraine, has reignited debates about institutional issues in the EU. These debates focus on the anticipated impact of various enlargement scenarios on the balance of power and decision-making processes in EU institutions, as well as the question of whether and what kind of institutional reforms are needed to prepare the EU for enlargement. Various proposals have been made, ranging from modest institutional and procedural adjustments to ambitious calls for full-scale treaty reform.

Of particular interest in this context is the impact of enlargement on decision-making in the Council, the EU's intergovernmental arm and one of the two main legislative bodies; it votes on EU laws and the budget. The vast majority of the Council's legislative decisions are taken by qualified majority voting (QMV): a proposal is adopted if 55% of member states, representing at least 65% of the total EU population, vote in favour. While most decisions in the Council are made without a formal vote, given the strong consensus culture of this multi-level intergovernmental body, QMV structures negotiations and bargaining in the Council, as the participants monitor and assess the formation of coalitions with the potential to adopt or block decisions (Heisenberg 2005, Smeets 2015, Van Aken 2012). Thus, attaining qualified majority is key to pressurizing consensus in the Council (Novak 2013). The prospective accession of up to 10 countries, especially populous countries such as Ukraine or possibly Turkey, would have profound implications for the power balances that shape voting, negotiations and bargaining in the Council.

The aim of this paper is to stimulate discussion about the impact of prospective EU enlargement on the balance of power and decision-making in the Council. Nine countries have been granted candidate country status, including five Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia), the so-called Association Trio (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) and Turkey (although accession talks with

Turkey have been frozen since 2019). In addition, Kosovo is recognized as a potential candidate country. While the timing, scope and sequence of accession remain unknown, this paper focuses on the following three enlargement scenarios:

- accession of the Association Trio, consisting of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (EU30);
- accession of six Western Balkan countries (EU33); and
- accession of nine countries, including six Western Balkan countries and the Association Trio (EU36).

Changes in the power balance in the Council will be analysed in terms of the relative weight of big and small, old and new, Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern member states, as well as Eurozone Ins and Outs under various enlargement scenarios (EU30, EU33, EU36). While none of these categories are clear-cut, thus leaving room for various definitions, these divides are often invoked in the analysis of voting patterns in the Council (e.g. Hosli 1995, Johansson et al. 2023, Mattila 2008). In this context, it is important to emphasize that the analysis in this paper focuses on the formal weights that different groups of countries would have in the Council. It does not attempt to evaluate the likelihood that the given groups would have similar preferences or would actually vote together, thus acknowledging that coalitions in the Council may be volatile and issue-specific.

The analysis used the EU30+ voting calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023), an interactive online tool which allows users to model Council votes for all possible accession scenarios involving up to 10 prospective member states across four different voting rules used in the Council.¹

The remainder of this paper is structured as follows. After surveying the evolution of Council voting systems and summarizing evidence on the impact of past enlargements, the consequences of three different enlargement scenarios (EU30, EU33 and

¹ The EU30+ voting calculator was built with support from the Government Office of Estonia and from the European Union in the framework of the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence "Rejuvenating Democracy in the EU" (REPAIR) at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies, University of Tartu (*grant agreement 101085795*).

EU36) on the balance of power in the Council are analysed, focusing on the relative weight of big and small, old and new, Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern member states, as well as Eurozone Ins and Outs. The concluding section summarizes the findings and evaluates various proposals for reforming decision-making in the Council.

2. Decision-making in the Council

The Council is one of the two main decision-making bodies in the EU. An intergovernmental institution that serves as the voice of member state governments, the Council negotiates and adopts EU laws and the budget. In addition to acting as a legislator, the Council plays a pivotal role in coordinating EU policies across diverse domains. It also shapes and enacts the EU's foreign and security policies and concludes international agreements on behalf of the Union.

While the Council is a single legal entity, it meets in 10 different 'configurations' of national ministers from all 27 member states, depending on the subject being discussed.² Around 70 to 80 ministerial-level Council meetings are held every year, mostly in Brussels. The presidency of the Council rotates among the EU member states every six months. The role of the presidency is both administrative and political. The presiding government sets the agenda, chairs meetings at all levels of the Council and mediates among member state governments. Only the Foreign Affairs Council has a permanent chair – the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

The vast majority of significant EU legislative acts are adopted jointly by the Council and the European Parliament (EP) under the ordinary legislative procedure (OLP), formerly known as co-decision. Introduced by the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, co-decision became the main legislative procedure of the EU's decision-making system with the Lisbon Treaty, which took effect in 2009. In OLP, a proposal submitted by the European Commission must be approved by both the

Council and the EP in order to become law. Co-decision is used for policy areas where the EU has exclusive or shared competence with the member states. There can be up to three readings before the two bodies agree on or reject a legislative proposal. However, with heavy reliance on trilateral meetings between representatives of the EP, Council and Commission, known as trilogues, the vast majority (more than 85%) of OLP acts are now adopted at the first reading (European Parliament 2024). To facilitate agreement between the co-legislators, the Council may also adopt a political agreement pending the first reading position of the Parliament, known as a 'general approach'.

At each reading, legislative proposals pass through three levels at the Council: working party, Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper) and the Council configuration. Proposals submitted by the Commission are first examined at the technical level by experts in one of the 150 working parties, which consist of officials from all member states. Second, the proposal is discussed in Coreper, the Council's main preparatory body, where the Brussels-based permanent representatives and their deputies combine technical expertise with political considerations. All items to be included in the Council's agenda must first be examined by Coreper. Finally, ministers deliberate on the proposal in the relevant Council configuration and take a decision. If the permanent representatives were able to come to an agreement, a proposal becomes an 'A' item on the Council agenda, which means that agreement is expected without debate. 'B' items include proposals upon which no agreement was reached in Coreper or at the working-party level, as well as issues that are deemed politically sensitive. Around two-thirds of the items on the Council agenda are 'A' items and are generally adopted without debate and a formal vote (Håge 2008).

In the Council, voting takes place only at the ministerial level meetings. The Council has a number of voting rules, with qualified majority as the default.

² The 10 configurations include General Affairs; Foreign Affairs; Economic and Financial Affairs; Justice and Home Affairs; Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs; Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research and Space); Transport, Telecommunications and Energy; Agriculture and Fisheries; Environment; Education, Youth, Culture and Sport.

Under **qualified majority voting (QMV)**, a decision is adopted if at least 55% of member states (15 out of 27 in the EU) representing at least 65% of the union's population vote in favour. This rule is also known as the 'double majority rule'. QMV is the most commonly used voting method in the Council, applying to about 80%–90% of the Council's work in which it adopts legislation jointly with the European Parliament. QMV is also used when the Council makes decisions about negotiating and adopting international agreements in areas where the EU has exclusive competency.

Under **unanimity voting**, a decision is adopted if no member state votes against (abstention does not prevent decision-making). Unanimity applies to a limited number of matters which the member states consider to be sensitive, including the common foreign and security policy, EU citizenship, EU finances, indirect taxation and admission of new members. Unanimity is also used when the Council makes decisions about negotiating and adopting international agreements in areas where the EU shares competency with the member states.

Under **reinforced QMV**, a decision is adopted if at least 72% of member states (20 out of 27) representing at least 65% of the union's population vote in favour. Reinforced QMV is used when the Council makes decisions not based on proposals from the European Commission or the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Under **simple majority voting**, a decision is adopted if more than half of the member states vote in favour (14 out of 27 in the EU) and is mainly used for procedural and technical decisions.

In the case of both QMV and reinforced QMV, **a blocking minority** consists of at least four countries representing more than 35% of the union's population. When the threshold of four Council members for the blocking minority is not reached, qualified majority is deemed to have been attained, even if the member states voting in favour account for less than 65% of the total population.

When analysing voting patterns in the Council, it is essential to bear in mind that, in practice, the Council strives for consensus, and most decisions are made without a formal vote (Heisenberg 2005,

Novak 2013, Smeets 2015, Van Aken 2012). Votes in the Council are seen as a 'last resort', used to overcome stalemate. The concept of 'shadow voting' has emerged in the pursuit of consensus (Miller 2013, p. 5). When a country anticipates being outvoted, it tends to align with the majority, and member states often express reservations or provide clarifications instead of voting against proposals outright. However, the consensus culture may be in decline, as indicated by the greater incidence of contestation in recent years (Pircher and Farjam 2021, p. 480).

When they do occur, negative votes are often interpreted as signals to the domestic audience. However, Finke (2017) offers an alternative explanation and suggests that negative votes are linked to veto threats made by ministers during negotiations preceding the final vote: at times, threats must be carried out to remain credible in the future. The level of oppositional voting in the Council varies by policy area and appears to be related to levels of politicization (Pircher and Farjam 2021, Roos 2019).

Even when the Council does not vote, the voting rules, especially QMV, play a central role in negotiations and bargaining, as the participants monitor and assess the formation of coalitions with the potential to adopt or block decisions. Thus, attaining a qualified majority is key to pressurizing consensus in the Council – not only at the ministerial but also at the lower levels (Novak 2013). As the large member states are key to attaining the population criterion in QMV, they can undermine decisions and break deals, as exemplified by Germany's last-minute veto on phasing out combustion engines in 2023 and its unexpected abstention from a vote on the proposed corporate due diligence law in 2024 (Zimmermann and von der Burchard 2024).

3. The evolution of QMV, past enlargements and Brexit

Since the creation of the European Communities in 1958, there have been seven rounds of enlargement (see Table 1); most of these were preceded by treaty reforms designed to make the Union 'fit for enlargement'. From 1958 to 1 November 2014, voting in the Council was based on a system of voting weights which allocated votes to member

Table 1. Past EU enlargements and the evolution of qualified majority voting in the Council

Enlarge-ment round	Year	Countries joining	Num-ber of MS	Popu-lation increase (%)	Total votes	Qualified majority	Qualified majority as % of the vote	Blocking minority	Blocking minority as % of the vote
First	1973	DK, IE, UK	9	33.41	58	41	70.6	18	31.0
Second	1981	EL	10	3.72	63	45	71.4	19	30.1
Third	1986	ES, PT	12	17.78	76	54	71.1	23	30.2
Fourth	1995	AT, FI, SE	15	6.4	87	62	71	26	29.8
Fifth	2004	CY, CZ, EE, LV, LT, HU, MT, PO, SI, SK	25	19.57	124 (as of 01.05.2004) 321 (as of 01.11.2004)	88 232	70.9 72.2	37 90	29.8 28
Sixth	2007	BG, RO	27	6.48	345	255	73.9	91	26.4
Seventh	2013	HR	28	0.85	352	260	73.9	93	26.4

Source: Population data from Eurostat (2024); data on voting rules from Centre virtuel de la connaissance sur l'Europe (2016).

states based on population size. The original system of voting weights for the six founding member states, defined in the Treaty of Rome, was France, Germany and Italy had four votes; Belgium and the Netherlands had two votes; while Luxembourg had one vote in the Council. The QMV quota for adopting a decision was 12 votes out of a total of 17 (70.6%).

With each wave of enlargement and with each successive treaty reform, voting weights were redefined and reallocated (see Table 1), with the total number of votes increasing from 17 in 1958 to 352 in 2013. The successive adjustments aggravated disproportionality and put large member states increasingly at a disadvantage³ (Peters 2020, p. 375). This occurred in a context where the use of QMV had become increasingly prevalent, as each major treaty reform expanded the use of QMV to new policy areas.

The risk of legislative gridlock in the Council due to its high voting threshold had been a concern since the 1980s, and the Eastern enlargement was expected to raise this risk even further (Warntjen 2017, p. 964). Group-based voting weights had to be redefined, with each round of enlargement, however small, necessitating complex negotiations and treaty changes. The reforms of the Nice

Treaty prepared the Council for enlargement but were widely seen as insufficient (Kóczy 2012). Disproportionality between voting weights and population size was growing. In this context, the proposal to replace voting weights with a simple double majority began to gain traction. Germany was a key advocate of the new system, using arguments about democracy based on the equality of states and of citizens to justify their push for a more privileged position for Germany in the Council (Peters 2020). The reforms were negotiated at Intergovernmental Conferences over the course of 12 years (1995–2007). The Lisbon Treaty, signed in 2007 after the failure of the Constitutional Treaty, extended QMV to a range of new policy areas and redefined ‘qualified majority’ in terms of a simple double majority. Under the new system, a decision is adopted if at least 55% of member states, representing at least 65% of the EU population, vote in favour. Abstention counts as a vote against. To block a decision, at least four member states, comprising at least 35% of EU population, must vote against.

The new definition of QMV, with its explicit emphasis on countries’ demographic weight, benefitted the largest member states (Germany, France, the UK and Italy), while the influence of medium-sized and smaller member states was

³ One way to compensate larger member states for this was to introduce a population criterion in the Nice Treaty, according to which the majority, upon request, would also need to represent at least 62% of the total EU population.

reduced (FleishmanHillard 2014). The new system enhanced Germany's voting power vis-à-vis all other members states (Hosli 1995; Peters 2020). However, the durability of informal rules, including the consensus culture, was expected to soften the impact of the rule changes (Thomson 2013). To secure the agreement of reluctant member states to the Lisbon Treaty, the implementation of the double majority system was postponed for five years, taking effect only on 1 November 2014. Thus, all previous seven enlargements of the EU, including the accession of Croatia in 2013, have taken place under the old system of voting weights as opposed to the 'double majority' system currently used in the Council.

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Studies examining the impact of enlargements on EU decision-making have concluded that rather than disrupting the work of EU institutions, enlargement has helped improve the EU's decision-making capacities by promoting treaty reforms and other changes that have made processes more efficient (Nugent 2016). Concerns that the accession of 10 new countries in 2004 would lead to legislative gridlock and loss of decision-making capacity proved to be unfounded (Warntjen 2017). Voting patterns in the Council did not change in any major way, the share of acts adopted by consensus did not decrease and contestation occurred in mostly in the same policy sectors as before enlargement (Mattila 2009). However, there is some evidence that enlargement has had an impact on interaction and bargaining in the Council. Enlargement made Council meetings at all levels considerably longer and more formal: pre-negotiation talks intensified and actors facilitating negotiations, such as the Commission or Council

presidency, have had to step up their brokering efforts (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007, pp. 2–3).

The effect of Brexit deserves special attention because it represents the only change in the EU, and hence, in the Council composition that has occurred since the implementation of Lisbon voting rules. The United Kingdom's exit from the European Union in January 2020 had a profound impact on the balance of power in the Council. With a population of 67 million in 2020, the UK was the third most populous member state after Germany and France. It was the most outvoted member state in the Council, opposing EU policies especially on budget, foreign policy and foreign aid issues (Hix, Hagemann and Frantescu 2016). It had close allies in the Council, including Sweden, the Netherlands and Denmark, which lost an important partner with Brexit. Studies examining the impact of Brexit have concluded that Brexit increased the power of the largest members while decreasing the influence of the smallest ones, as well as resulting in a significant improvement in the Council's power to act (Kóczy 2021). France emerged as the main benefactor in terms of gaining a posteriori power while Poland lost substantive power in several areas (Grech 2021). An analysis relying on Banzhaf indices (Gábor 2020) demonstrated that Brexit made the strongest stronger and the weakest weaker: about 90% of the UK's voting power in the Council was distributed between Germany, France, Spain, Poland and Italy.

4. Prospective enlargement: state of play

For nearly a decade after Croatia's accession in 2013, EU enlargement policy was widely seen as stagnating. Membership negotiations with Turkey were at standstill since 2016 and were officially suspended in 2019, and reform progress in the Western Balkan countries had been, overall, slow. The lack of progress in the Western Balkans has been variously attributed to the EU's lack of commitment, enlargement fatigue, bilateral disputes, the appeal of visions of multi-tier Europe and demand-side factors, including lack of leadership, state capture, de-democratization and disgruntled publics (Bechev 2022).

Russia's full-scale war on Ukraine has put EU enlargement firmly back on the agenda. Russia's

Table 2. **Enlargement state of play**

Country	Population*	AA/SAA entry into force**	Membership application	EU candidate status	Decision to open accession negotiations	Status of accession negotiations, Sept 2024
Turkey (TR)	85 279 553	1964	1987	1999	2004	Negotiations suspended in 2019
North Macedonia (MK)	1 829 954	2004	2004	2005	2020	Initial phase (screening) completed in 2023
Montenegro (ME)	616 695	2010	2008	2010	2012	Advanced
Serbia (RS)	6 641 197	2013	2009	2012	2013	Partly advanced
Albania (AL)	2 761 785	2009	2009	2014	2020	Initial phase (screening) completed in 2023
Bosnia and Herzegovina (BA)	3 441 194	2015	2016	2022	2024	Negotiations have not been opened
Ukraine (UA)	40 997 698	2017	2022	2022	2023	Initial phase (screening)
Moldova (MD)	2 512 758	2016	2022	2022	2023	Initial phase (screening)
Georgia (GE)	3 736 357	2016	2022	2023	—	Accession process suspended in 2024
Kosovo (XK)***	1 798 188	2016	2022	—	—	Negotiations have not been opened

Note: Countries are ordered according to the year in which they obtained EU candidate status.

Source: European Commission (2024a), population data from Eurostat (2024).

* Population figures for 2023, except for Ukraine (2022) and Kosovo (2021).

** The EU has concluded Association Agreements (AA) with Turkey, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia; and Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA) with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Kosovo.

*** Kosovo has not been granted candidate status and is designated a potential candidate.

military aggression in Ukraine has transformed the EU into a ‘geopolitical union’ and renewed interest in enlargement, while underscoring the importance of security, stability and solidarity with neighbours. Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia submitted membership applications in 2022 and were granted candidate status shortly thereafter. In 2023, accession negotiations were opened with Ukraine and Moldova. Following the Georgian government’s approval of a controversial ‘foreign agents’ law, the European Council declared in June 2024 that this action has de facto put Georgia’s accession on hold (European Council 2024). The validity of the results of the Georgian parliamentary elections in October 2024 was rejected by the European Parliament, and in November 2024, the prime minister of Georgia, Irakli Kobakhidze, announced a suspension of Georgia’s membership application process until the end of 2028 (Davalou and Naughtie 2024).

Table 2 presents an overview of the enlargement state of play, for which a detailed overview, including findings and recommendations on each country, is provided in the 2024 EU enlargement package (European Commission 2024b).

The timing and scope of further enlargement remains unknown and depends on a plethora of factors, including reform progress made by candidate states, domestic political developments in the EU and in candidate countries, as well as the duration and outcomes of the Russia-Ukraine war. EU officials have indicated that enlargement would take place sometime after 2030 (Michel 2023). While single country accessions have occurred in the past (Greece in 1981 and Croatia in 2013), group accessions appear to be the preferred mode. With Western Balkan countries at very different stages of the accession process (see Table 2), it is likely that enlargement will take place in smaller groups, rather than a group of six. While the Russia-Ukraine war expedited the recognition of the Association Trio (Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia) as candidate countries, the road to accession is likely to be long and complicated due to multiple external and domestic challenges, including the prolonged military conflict in Ukraine, the apparent lack of political will among the recently re-elected government in Georgia and fragile majorities in favour of EU accession in Moldova. Furthermore, considering

the three countries' state of relations with Russia, EU membership does not appear to be feasible without some form of Western security guarantees. The resumption of accession talks with Turkey is currently not in sight, considering the continued autocratization of the country (Freedom House 2024).

Aside from Turkey and Ukraine, the current candidate countries are small states in terms of population size (see Table 2). The accession of six Western Balkan countries (scenario EU33) would increase EU population by only 3.5%. The accession of the Association Trio, consisting of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (EU30), would add about 47 million inhabitants to the EU – an increase of 10.6%. The accession of both Western Balkan countries and the Association Trio (EU36) would bring the EU population to about 513 million. This would be comparable to the 2004 enlargement in terms of the number of countries added, although the associated population increase (14%) would be less than that of the Eastern enlargement (19.6%).

5. Potential reforms of Council decision-making ahead of enlargement

The return of enlargement to the centre of the EU's policy agenda has reinvigorated political and legal debates about the link between widening and deepening. Specifically, the question of treaty reform is back on the table, spurred by the prospect of enlargement, geopolitical shifts, a series of transnational crises as well as internal challenges.

With regard to Council decision-making, voices demanding reform have focused specifically on the need to abandon the unanimity requirement in foreign and security policy decision-making, as well as the need to transition to QMV or some form of supermajority voting (e.g. European Parliament 2023; Pomorska and Wessel 2021). Efforts to sanction Russia for its war of aggression put the problems of unanimity voting on full display, as decisions were delayed or watered down to placate member states prioritizing their specific interests. It has been argued that a union of 30+ members

cannot be an effective foreign policy actor if all members retain the right of veto. While switching to QMV in most areas of common foreign and security policy can be done by unanimous vote in the European Council without changing the treaties (Article 31(3) TEU), a consensus on such a reform is not in sight. Many member states – especially small and new members – fear being outvoted on matters of vital interest and do not want to give up their veto rights.

Treaty reform would open up more possibilities for reforming Council decision-making, including replacing unanimity voting with new types of supermajority voting. However, many actors are apprehensive about treaty reform due to its potential to open a Pandora's box of contentious issues, lead to long and complex negotiations, and trigger domestic referenda that could ultimately doom the proposed treaty, as exemplified by the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by the French and Dutch publics.⁴

'With regard to Council decision-making, voices demanding reform have focused specifically on the need to abandon the unanimity requirement in foreign and security policy decision-making [...].'

A Franco-German expert group paper 'Sailing on High Seas: Reforming and Enlarging the EU for the 21st Century', published in September 2023, proposed a series of additional reforms focusing on the Council, including replacing the 'trio' system for the rotating presidency with 'quintets,' transferring all remaining policy decisions from unanimity to QMV, extending co-decision to new policy domains and adopting measures designed to make QMV more acceptable to smaller member states, including rebalancing voting shares and creating an opt-out mechanism (Costa, Schwarzer et al. 2023). The report discusses four options for treaty changes, along with nine principles that

⁴ See, for instance, a non-paper by nine member state governments on the outcome of and follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe, 9 May 2022, available at: https://www.movimentoeuropeo.it/images/Documenti/Non-paper_9.5.2022.pdf

Table 3. Definition of majorities in EU27 and under three different enlargement scenarios

	EU27	Association Trio (EU30)	Western Balkans (EU33)	Full enlargement (EU36)
Simple majority	14 MS	16 MS	17 MS	19 MS
Qualified majority	At least 15 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population	At least 17 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population	At least 19 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population	At least 20 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population
Reinforced qualified majority	At least 20 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population	At least 22 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population	At least 24 MS, comprising at least 65% of the EU population	At least 26 MS, comprising at least 65% of the population

Note: MS, member states.

should guide enlargement. Not knowing whether and how Council voting rules could be changed in the future – and considering that treaty revision is not a legal precondition for further enlargement – it is reasonable to model the effects of enlargement based on the assumption that the voting rules defined in the Lisbon Treaty remain unchanged.

6. Assessing the impact of enlargement on balance of power in the Council

This analysis uses the EU30+ Voting Calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023) to assess changes in the balance of power in the Council following prospective enlargements. This online calculator can be used to simulate the voting system of the Council of the EU after the accession of current candidate countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine) and potential candidate countries (Kosovo). The calculator emulates the calculator available on the Council website, which covers 27 current member states (Council of the EU 2024), while expanding the number of countries that can be included in the analysis to 37. The interactive calculator allows users to model Council voting in case of various enlargement scenarios and across four different voting rules, including QMV, reinforced QMV, simple majority and unanimity. The calculator relies on the following input data: population figures for EU member states, candidate countries and potential candidate countries as of 1 January 2023, based on Eurostat data, and voting rules according to the Lisbon Treaty. The analysis below focuses on the following three enlargement scenarios:

- accession of the Association Trio, consisting of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (EU30);

- accession of six Western Balkan countries (EU33); and
- accession of nine countries, including six Western Balkan countries and the Association Trio (EU36).

Considering that Turkey’s membership remains a distant prospect, the impact of Turkey’s accession is not analysed in this paper.

A definition of the majorities under different enlargement scenarios is provided in Table 3, assuming no change in voting rules. The definition of unanimity (no member states vote against) and that of a blocking minority (at least four countries representing at least 35% of the EU population) does not depend on the number of countries joining.

The following analysis focuses on the impact of enlargement on the balance between old and new, big and small, Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern member states, as well as Eurozone Ins and Outs under three different enlargement scenarios (EU30, EU33, EU36) across the four voting rules used in the Council (QMV, reinforced QMV, simple majority, unanimity).

6.1 New and Old

If ‘new’ refers to countries that joined in 2004 or later, EU27 has 13 new member states (48.15% of all member states), which account for 22.67% of the union’s population. In EU36, the ‘new and very new’ member states (22 countries) would constitute 61.11% of all member states, comprising a third of the union’s population. Table 5 provides further information and categorizes countries based on their year of accession to the EU.

Table 4. **New and Old: Comparing EU27, EU30, EU33 and EU36**

	EU27	Association Trio (EU30)	Western Balkans (EU33)	Full enlargement (EU36)
Founding members (6): FR, DE, IT, NL, BE, LU	22.22% of MS 53.86% of pop.	20% of MS 48.78% of pop.	18.18% of MS 51.88% of pop.	16.67% of MS 47.1% of pop.
Countries that joined 1973–1995 (8): IE, DK, EL, ES, PT, AT, SE, FI	29.63% of MS 23.47% of pop.	26.67% of MS 21.23% of pop.	24.24% of MS 21.61% of pop.	22.22% of MS 20.52% of pop.
Countries that joined 2004–2013 (13): BG, EE, HR, CY, LT, LV, MT, PL, RO, SK, SI, CZ, HU	48.15% of MS 22.67% of pop.	43.33% of MS 20.51% of pop.	39.39% of MS 21.83% of pop.	36.11% of MS 19.82% of pop.
Association Trio (3): UA, MD, GE	—	10% of MS 9.53% of pop.	—	8.33% of MS 9.21% of pop.
Western Balkans (6): AL, BA, ME, MK, RS, XK	—	—	18.18% of MS 3.69% of pop.	16.67% of MS 3.35% of pop.
Association Trio and Western Balkans (9)	—	—	—	25% of MS 12.56% of pop.

Note: Cells shaded red: criteria for a blocking minority are met; MS, member states.
Source: Calculations based on the EU30+ voting calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023).

The population share of founding members decreases significantly with any enlargement scenario that entails the accession of Ukraine (see Table 4). However, the founding members retain the ability to block decision in the case of all three enlargement scenarios (as their combined share of the EU population exceeds 35%). To meet the QMV country share criterion, the six founding countries need 14 partners in EU36 (compared to 9 in EU27). To meet the QMV population criterion, they require a minimum of three partners in EU36 (e.g. Poland, Ukraine and Romania), compared to two in EU27.

Under all three enlargement scenarios, countries that joined between 2004 and 2013 lose the ability to block decisions. In EU27, they constituted 48.15% of all member states, and without their participation, the QMV country criterion (at least 55%) could not be met. To form a blocking minority under any of the enlargement scenarios, they need at least two populous coalition partners (e.g. Ukraine and Spain). ‘New and very new’ member states can block decisions in EU36, considering their share of all member states (61.11%). A group consisting of all the ‘very new’ member states requires a minimum of two (highly populous) coalition partners (e.g. France and Italy) to form a blocking minority in EU36.

6.2 Small and Large

Table 5 illustrates the changes in the number and proportion of large and small states for the three enlargement scenarios. In the absence of an agreed-upon cut-off point for small and large, the table classifies countries into five groups (below 5 million, 5–10 million, 10–15 million, 15–20 million and over 20 million). With one exception (Ukraine), the candidate countries are small states (six have a population of less than 3 million, Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina have 3–4 million and Serbia has 6.7 million inhabitants).

Enlargement would dramatically increase the number of small countries in the Union. Countries with fewer than 10 million inhabitants would constitute 63.89% of all member states in EU36 (compared to 55.56% in EU27). However, their population accounts for only 16.55% of EU36’s total population. To meet the QMV population criterion, countries in the ‘under 10 million club’ would need a minimum of four additional coalition partners (e.g. Germany, France, Italy and Spain or Ukraine), while to form a blocking minority, these countries need at least two partners (e.g. Germany and Portugal).

Countries with fewer than 15 million inhabitants would make up 77.78% of all member states in EU36, representing 27.07% of the union’s population (compared to 74.07% and 25.75% in

Table 5. **Small and Large: Comparing EU27, EU30, EU33, and EU36**

	EU27	Association Trio (EU30)	Western Balkans (EU33)	Full enlargement (EU36)
Below 5 million:	8 MS	10 MS	13 MS	15 MS
EU27 (8): MT, LU, CY, EE, LV, LT, SI, HR	29.63% of MS 3.17% of pop.	33.33% of MS 4.13% of pop.	39.39% of MS 5.3% of pop.	41.67% of MS 6.03% of pop.
EU30 (+2): GE, MD				
EU33 (+5): AL, BA, ME, MK, XK				
EU36 (+7): GE, MD, AL, BA, ME, MK, XK				
5-10 million:	7 MS	7 MS	8 MS	8 MS
EU27 (7): IE, SK, FI, DK, BG, AT, HU	25.93% of MS 10.54% of pop.	23.33% of MS 9.54% of pop.	24.24% of MS 11.58% of pop.	22.22% of MS 10.52% of pop.
EU33, EU36 (+1): RS				
10-15 million:	5 MS	5 MS	5 MS	5 MS
EU27 (5): EL, PT, SE, CZ, BE	18.52% of MS	16.67% of MS	15.15% of MS	13.89% of MS
EU30, EU33, EU36 (+0)	12.04% of pop.	10.89% of pop.	11.59% of pop.	10.52% of pop.
15-20 million:	2 MS	2 MS	2 MS	2 MS
EU27 (2): NL, RO	7.41% of MS	6.67% of MS	6.06% of MS	5.56% of MS
EU30, EU33, EU36 (+0)	8.22% of pop.	7.44% of pop.	7.92% of pop.	7.19% of pop.
Over 20 million:	5 MS	6 MS	5 MS	6 MS
EU27 (5): DE, IT, FR, PL, ES	18.52% of MS	20% of MS	15.15% of MS	16.67% of MS
EU30, EU36 (+1): UA	66.04% of pop.	68.01% of pop.	63.6% of pop.	65.74% of pop.
EU33 (+0)				

Note: MS, member states. Cells shaded yellow: QMV criteria are partially met: the population share requirement (at least 65% of the EU population) is met, while the country proportion requirement (at least 55% of member states) is not. The criteria for a blocking minority are also met. Cells shaded red: criteria for a blocking minority are met.

Source: Calculations based on the EU30+ voting calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023).

EU27, respectively). This group fulfils the country proportion criterion of reinforced QMV in both EU27 and in the case of all three enlargement scenarios. To meet the population criterion (65%), a minimum of three additional coalition partners is required in EU36 (e.g. Germany, France and Spain). For a blocking minority in EU36, the group must be supported by at least one country with a population comparable to that of Ukraine.

The combined population share of the three largest countries (Germany, Italy, France) in EU36 is 41.2% (compared to 47.12% in EU27). They would still need at least one additional coalition partner of any population size to form a blocking minority. To meet the QMV population criterion (65%), a minimum of three additional coalition partners is required (e.g. Spain, Ukraine and Poland). However, to fulfil the country share criterion, the coalition must have at least 20 members (compared to 15 in EU27). The number of countries with over 20 million inhabitants would change from five to six following Ukraine’s

accession. In EU27, such countries comprise 18.52% of all member states and 66.04% of EU population. In EU27 and in EU30 and EU36, this group meets the QMV population criterion but does not satisfy the share-of-member-states criterion. This group can block decisions under all three enlargement scenarios.

6.3 East and West

Because ‘East’ and ‘West’ are geopolitical rather than geographical terms, Table 6 provides data on the number and share of post-communist countries, former Soviet republics and countries that share a land border with the Russian Federation or its ally, the Republic of Belarus.

Enlargement would substantially increase the weight of post-communist countries in the EU. This group would gain the ability to block decisions under all three enlargement scenarios (by denying other member states the ability to meet the QMV country proportion requirement). In EU33 and EU36, post-communist countries would constitute

Table 6. East and West: Comparing EU27, EU30, EU33 and EU36

	EU27	Association Trio (EU30)	Western Balkans (EU33)	Full enlargement (EU36)
Post-communist countries:	11 MS	14 MS	17 MS	20 MS
EU27 (11): BG, EE, HR, LT, LV, PL, RO, SK, SI, CZ, HU	40.74% of MS	46.67% of MS	51.52% of MS	55.56% of MS
EU30 (+3): UA, GE, MD	22.34% of pop.	29.75% of pop.	25.21% of pop.	32.1% of pop.
EU33 (+6): AL, BA, ME, MK, RS, XK				
EU36 (+9): UA, GE, MD, AL, BA, ME, MK, RS, XK				
Former Soviet republics:	3 MS	6 MS	3 MS	6 MS
EU27 (3): EE, LV, LT	11.11% of MS	20% of MS	9.09% of MS	16.67% of MS
EU30 (+3): UA, GE, MD	1.36% of pop.	10.76% of pop.	1.31% of pop.	10.4% of pop.
EU33 (+0)				
EU36 (+3): UA, GE, MD				
Countries sharing a land border with Russia or Belarus:	5 MS	7 MS	5 MS	7 MS
EU27(5): EE, LV, LT, FI, PL	18.52% of MS	23.33% of MS	15.15% of MS	19.44% of MS
EU30 (+2): UA, GE	10.8% of pop.	18.8% of pop.	10.4% of pop.	18.17% of pop.
EU33 (+0)				
EU36 (+2): UA, GE				

Note: MS, member states. Cells shaded yellow: QMV criteria are partially met: the country proportion requirement (at least 55% of member states) is met, the population share criterion (comprising at least 65% of EU population) is not met; the criteria for a blocking minority are also met. Cells shaded red: Criteria for a blocking minority are met.

Source: Calculations based on the EU30+ voting calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023).

a majority of all member states, thus commanding a simple majority. In EU36, the post-communist group would meet the QMV country proportion requirement (at least 55% of member states) but not the population requirement. To meet the QMV population criterion, a minimum of three coalition partners are needed (e.g. Germany, Italy and Spain).

The accession of the Association Trio would double the number of member states that were once part of the Soviet Union. In EU30, former Soviet republics would constitute a fifth of all member states, and the proportion of member states sharing a land border with Russia or Belarus would rise to almost a quarter. In EU36, countries bordering Russia or Belarus would need a minimum of two additional coalition partners (e.g. Germany and Croatia) to form a blocking minority.

6.4 North and South

The boundary between ‘North’ and ‘South’ in Europe is debatable. Table 7 presents data for six different groups of countries.

As a result of enlargement, the share of Northern European, Baltic-Nordic and Baltic Sea countries would decrease significantly both in terms of the share of countries and population. In EU27 as well

as under all three enlargement scenarios, Baltic Sea countries have significant potential for forming a blocking minority, as this group includes both Germany and Poland. The minimum number of additional partners required for the formation of a blocking minority is one.

With the accession of Western Balkans, the share of Southern European countries among all member states increases substantially (from 29.6% in EU27 to 42.4% in EU33) but changes in the South’s share of EU population remain insignificant, especially if Ukraine joins (see Table 7). The number of Mediterranean countries increases by three if Western Balkan countries join, but their share of the EU population decreases by four percentage points under the EU36 scenario (compared to EU27). The Mediterranean countries group fulfils the requirements for a blocking minority in EU27 as well as under all three enlargement scenarios. The weight of Black Sea countries would increase significantly with the accession of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova; in EU36, Black Sea countries would constitute 13.89% of member states and 14.19% of the EU population. To form a blocking minority in EU30 or EU36, a minimum of two additional, populous coalition partners are needed (e.g. France and Spain).

Table 7. North and South: Comparing EU27, EU30, EU33 and EU36

	EU27	Association Trio (EU30)	Western Balkans (EU33)	Full enlargement (EU36)
Northern Europe:*	7 MS	7 MS	7 MS	7 MS
EU27(7): EE, LV, LT, IE, SE, FI, DK	25.93% of MS	23.33% of MS	21.21% of MS	19.44% of MS
EU30, EU33, EU36 (+0)	7.43% of pop.	6.72% of pop.	7.16% of pop.	6.5% of pop.
Southern Europe:*	8 MS	8 MS	14 MS	14 MS
EU27(8): ES, HR, IT, EL, CY, MT, PT, SL	29.63% of MS	26.67% of MS	42.42% of MS	38.89% of MS
EU30(+0)	30.15% of	27.28% of pop.	32.73% of pop.	29.71% of pop.
EU33, EU36(+6): AL, BA, ME, MK, RS, XK	pop.			
Baltic Sea countries:	8 MS	8 MS	8 MS	8 MS
EU27(8): EE, LV, LT, SE, FI, DK, DE, PL	29.63% of MS	26.67% of MS	24.24% of MS	22.22% of MS
EU30, EU33, EU36 (+0)	33.28% of	30.11% of pop.	32.06% of pop.	29.1% of pop.
	pop.			
Mediterranean countries:	8 MS	8 MS	11 MS	11 MS
EU27(8): ES, HR, FR, IT, EL, CY, MT, SL	29.63% of MS	26.67% of MS	33.33% of MS	30.56% of MS
EU30(+0)	43% of pop.	38.9% of pop.	42.89% of pop.	38.94% of pop.
EU33, EU36(+3): AL, BA, ME				
Black Sea countries:	2 MS	5 MS	2 MS	5 MS
EU27(2): BG, RO	7.41% of MS	16.67% of MS	6.06% of MS	13.89% of MS
EU30, EU36(+3): UA, GE, MD	5.69% of pop.	14.68% of pop.	5.48% of pop.	14.19% of pop.
EU33(+0)				

* Classification based on the United Nations geoscheme (United Nations 2024), with Kosovo added to the group of Southern European countries.

Note: MS, member states. Cells shaded red: Criteria for a blocking minority are met.

Source: Calculations based on the EU30+ voting calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023).

Table 8. Eurozone Ins and Outs: Comparing EU27, EU30, EU33 and EU36

	EU27	Association Trio (EU30)	Western Balkans (EU33)	Full enlargement (EU36)
Eurozone Ins:	20 MS	20 MS	22 MS	22 MS
EU27 (20): FR, DE, IT, NL, BE, LU, IE, EL, ES, PT, AT, FI, EE, LV, LT, MT, CY, SK, SI, HR	74.07% of MS	66.67% of MS	66.67% of MS	61.11% of MS
EU30 (+0)	77.89% of pop.	70.47% of pop.	75.54% of pop.	68.58% of pop.
EU33, EU36 (+2): + ME; XK				
Eurozone Outs:	7 MS	10 MS	11 MS	14 MS
EU27: DK, SE, PO, BG, RO, CZ, HU	25.93% of MS	33.33% of MS	33.33% of MS	38.89% of MS
EU30 (+3): UA, GE, MD	22.11% of pop.	29.53% of pop.	24.46% of pop.	31.42% of pop.
EU33 (+4): AL, BA, MK, RS				
EU36(+7): UA, GE, MD, AL, BA, MK, RS				

Note: MS, member states. Cells shared green: both the country and population requirements of QMV are met; criteria for a blocking minority and for simple majority are also met. In the case of EU27, requirements for reinforced qualified majority are also met.

Source: Calculations based on the EU30+ voting calculator (Ehin and Eelma 2023).

6.5 Eurozone Ins and Outs

As of January 2025, 20 member states have adopted the common currency and are thus part of the Eurozone (Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain). Seven countries (Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Poland, Romania

and Sweden) continue to use their national currencies. With the exception of Denmark, which has an opt-out from the common currency, all of the non-eurozone countries are obliged to join once they meet the convergence criteria. Among the current and potential candidate countries, Montenegro and Kosovo have unilaterally adopted the euro and used it as legal tender since 2002. They are not, however, represented in any

eurozone institution. The analysis below rests on the following highly tentative assumptions: (a) that none of the seven non-eurozone EU27 member states will adopt the euro prior to or at the time as any prospective EU enlargement, and (b) among the candidate and potential candidate countries, only Kosovo and Montenegro would become members of the eurozone “soon” after accession. It should be noted, however, that both countries still have to fulfil the convergence criteria and that it is not currently possible to predict when they will be able to do so. The distinction between Eurozone Ins and Outs presented in the table below is thus largely hypothetical.

Under the scenario described above, the share of eurozone countries among member states would drop from 74.1% in EU27 to 61.1% in EU36. Under all three enlargement scenarios, the group of eurozone countries would continue to fully meet the QMV requirements. In EU27, the eurozone Ins also meet the requirements for reinforced QMV; after enlargement, they no longer would.

7. Conclusions

Focusing on decision-making in the Council in the context of enlargement, this paper provided an overview of past enlargements and the historical evolution of Council voting rules. It then assessed the impact of possible future EU enlargements on the balance of power between small and big, old and new, Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern member states, as well as the Eurozone Ins and Outs. The analysis focused on three enlargement scenarios, premised on the accession of the Association Trio (EU30), the Western Balkan applicants (EU33) and a combination of the two (EU36).

It is important to emphasize that the analysis focused on formal weights that different groups of countries would have in the Council. It did not attempt to evaluate the likelihood that the given groups would have similar preferences or would actually vote together. On the one hand, existing studies have shown that member states’ cooperative relations are relatively stable over time, are generally stronger with neighbouring states and reflect similarities in politico-economic systems (Johansson et al. 2023). However, given that ideological similarities have been also shown to matter, the growing polarization of domestic

politics, reflected in potentially dramatic electoral swings, can be expected to reduce the stability of intergovernmental coalitions in the Council. The fact that member states continue to be differentially affected by both Europeanization as well as various crises is likely to make Council coalitions more volatile and issue-specific (see also Høyland and Hansen 2014). This conclusion thus refrains from discussing the policy implications of the findings. The main contribution of this study was to show which groups of member states, defined based on prominent cleavages in the Union, have the *capacity* to adopt or block decisions, if they so desire, under existing voting rules and under three different enlargement scenarios.

7.1 Balance of power

The main findings regarding the shifting balance of power are outlined below.

- **All three enlargement scenarios increase the weight of small member states in the EU.** Countries with fewer than 10 million inhabitants would constitute almost two-thirds of member states in EU36 (compared to about 56% in EU27). However, their population accounts for less than 17% the total population of EU36. To meet QMV requirements, small states would depend on partnerships with more populous countries.
- **The most populous countries (Germany, France and Italy) lose weight in the Council** but would continue to meet the population share requirement (at least 35%) for a blocking minority under all three enlargement scenarios. Because a blocking minority must have at least four members, the three largest countries would need just one partner, however small, to be able to block Council decisions. To meet QMV requirements in EU36, the three largest member states would need the support of 17 other Council members (compared to 12 in EU27). Thus, while the biggest members can easily block decisions, they would need the support of many smaller states to pass legislation.
- **Any enlargement that involves the accession of Ukraine (EU30, EU36) would significantly increase the weight of Eastern member states in the Council.** The number of member states with a population above 20 million would

increase to six, with Poland and Ukraine accounting for a third of the large member states and between the two, about 15% of the population of EU36.

- While the weight of the EU's founding members diminishes with enlargement, **the Original Six retain the ability to block decisions** under all three enlargement scenarios.
- Under all three enlargement scenarios, **countries that joined the EU between 2004 and 2013 lose the ability to block decisions.** However, teaming up with 'very new' member states would allow them to block proposals.
- Enlargement would substantially increase the weight of post-communist countries in the EU. **In EU33 and EU36, post-communist countries would constitute the majority of all member states.** This group is not able to block decisions in EU27; however, it would gain the ability to do so under all three enlargement scenarios.
- **The accession of the Association Trio would double the number of post-Soviet countries in the EU** and amplify the weight of countries that border Russia or Belarus.
- **Enlargement would decrease the weight of Northern European countries while increasing the power of Southern member states.** The role of Baltic Sea countries would be diminished, while the accession of the Western Balkans would strengthen the Mediterranean bloc, and the accession of the Association Trio would boost the representation of Black Sea countries. The Mediterranean grouping is able to block decisions both in EU27 as well as under all three enlargement scenarios.
- Assuming that the only two countries that join the Eurozone 'soon' after enlargement are Kosovo and Montenegro, which have already unilaterally adopted the euro, **enlargement would reduce the weight of Eurozone members in the Council.** Eurozone Ins, however, continue to meet both QMV requirements under all three enlargement scenarios and can thus adopt legislation with or without the approval of Eurozone Outs.

7.2 Voting rules in the Council

The main conclusions concerning the four voting rules used in the Council are:

- Achieving unanimity becomes significantly more challenging in a 36-member union compared to a 27-member union, considering not only the number of members but also their increased diversity. **Enlargement increases the pressure to abandon unanimity,** especially in foreign and security policy matters, as the effectiveness of the expanded Union's foreign policy is at stake.
- **A number of country groupings in EU36 meet the requirements for a simple majority.** These include countries with fewer than 10 million inhabitants (23 countries), those that joined in 2004 or later (22 countries) and post-communist countries (20 countries), as well as Eurozone members (22 countries). However, this does not matter much, as a simple majority is used mostly for procedural decision-making.
- Regarding QMV, there will be continued and growing demand for large countries as coalition partners because coalitions formed solely by small countries do not meet the QMV population criterion. Coalitions of small countries would need to woo populous ones to reach the coveted 65% threshold. However, large countries will also need small partners to meet the QMV country share criterion. **For the three largest countries, forming coalitions for QMV is potentially easier in EU36 than in EU27 because of the broader range of potential partners available** (33 instead of 24).
- **Enlargement would boost the ability of large countries to form blocking minorities.** Various coalitions of three large countries, including Germany and either France or Italy (e.g. Germany, Italy and Ukraine), meet the population requirement for a blocking minority. To block decisions, such groups of three need to secure the support of just one additional member state, however small. The choice of potential partners for the blocking minority is broader in a bigger Union.
- **The threshold for reinforced QMV, as defined in the Treaty of Lisbon, is very high.** Of the various country groupings analysed in this paper,

only Eurozone members in EU27 meet the requirements for a reinforced qualified majority. Obviously, achieving this threshold requires broad-based coalitions.

The analysis presented in this paper suggests that the question of how to secure the support of small and medium-sized countries in the context where any treaty change requires the unanimous decision of all member states is central to debates about the possible reforms of Council decision-making. Large countries advocating the abolition of unanimity voting in the Council may have to offer rewards

and guarantees to smaller member states, including rebalancing the qualified majority, introducing a supermajority requirement in the most sensitive policy areas, changing the definition of the blocking minority, improving arrangements for differentiated integration and allowing for opt-outs (see also Costa, Schwarzer et al. 2023). Without compelling offers to smaller member states, significant reform of Council voting rules remains improbable, and enlargement may proceed without deeper integration – particularly given that, from a legal standpoint, treaty revision is not a prerequisite for further enlargement.

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