EU HEADLINES

NATIONAL PERSPECTIVES OF EUROPEAN DEBATES

Go big or go home

The European Political Community summit and the informal meeting of the EU heads of state or government mark the topic of enlargement entering the highest level of the European debates amid the ongoing Russian war in Ukraine and military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh.



Silver linings

Following the 20-year impasse in the European debate, the topic of enlargement has officially entered the agenda of the highest-level of political get-togethers in Granada, notes *Helsingin Sanomat*, denoting the third European Political Community Summit and the informal meeting of the EU heads of state or governments. The President of the European Council Charles Michel, who set an "ambitious but realistic" 2030 deadline for the accession of the new members, claims it should serve as a call to action for both the eight candidate countries and the 27 EU Member States to step up the reforms of their own. The former must strengthen the rule of law, transparency, amp up the fight on corruption, among other things, to fulfill the Copenhagen criteria, while the latter need to rethink the decision-making process, institutional set-up, and financial implications of welcoming new players to the table. While no concrete decisions are expected to come out of the Granada deliberations, Michel stresses that the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine has created the unprecedented momentum for the membership negotiations, the direction of which will become clearer once the Commission publishes its reform progress reports in November.

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Gra-nada

Back in June of this year, EU Member States seemed to have agreed on an asylum and migration package; however, part of the legislative deal which had been left on the side is now causing a stir. The so-called "crisis regulation" details what should happen if a Member State suddenly experiences a new wave of refugees. Considering this exact situation happened in the island of Lampedusa a few weeks ago, Italy is leading the charge to ask for a fairer distribution of migrants across the EU Member States. Some countries, including Austria, strongly oppose it. *Kurier* explains the country's line of argumentation: Austria emphasises the already high number of refugees that it has taken in in recent years and stresses that the crisis regulation and its measures would undermine the entire asylum package. Alongside Poland and Hungary, Austria had then voted no on the crisis measure in June, while Germany abstained. In a surprising turn of events, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke out on Wednesday to say he would no longer stand in the way of the crisis regulation. Time is running out to adopt the package, as the three EU institutions need to come to an agreement before February 2024, warns the article as a conclusion.

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Putting our ducks in a row

With enlargement high on the agenda of the EPC and informal European Council summits in Granada, Ekathimerini delves into EU officials' and think tanks' assessments of what needs to happen to prepare for the accession of several new EU Member States. The article calls attention to the problem of unanimity voting in the Council of the EU for major policy areas, in that the requirement is already kneecapping the EU's efficacy with only 27 Member States. Two possible solutions are by using special "passerelle clauses", or, more substantially, to change to qualified majority voting (QMV). The EU budget would have to be restructured, as well, to account for the lower GDPs of would-be new Member States, along with the distribution of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds. Recent estimates project that all current Member States would become net payers into the EU budget — one proposed solution would be to increase the budget through new taxes or income sources. Further, especially in light of the situation with Hungary and Poland of late, it is crucial to strengthen EU mechanisms for rule of law enforcement, such as forcing a four-fifths vote in the Council within six months on whether a country is violating the rule of law, as well as imposing automatic sanctions after five years. Finally comes the debated proposal of a "multi-speed Europe," which creates four layers of European integration to account for the varied needs of different Member States. Everything is still on the table – there is little consensus on the way forward amongst EU governments. With enlargement high on the agenda of the EPC and informal European Council summits in Granada, *Ekathimerini* delves into EU officials' and think tanks' assessments of what needs to happen to prepare for the accession of several new EU Member States. The article calls attention to the problem of unanimity voting in the Council of the EU for major policy areas, in that the requirement is already kneecapping the EU's efficacy with only 27 Member States. Two possible solutions are by using special "passerelle clauses", or, more substantially, to change to qualified majority voting (QMV). The EU budget would have to be restructured, as well, to account for the lower GDPs of would-be new Member States, along with the distribution of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) funds. Recent estimates project that all current Member States would become net payers into the EU budget — one proposed solution would be to increase the budget through new taxes or income sources. Further, especially in light of the situation with Hungary and Poland of late, it is crucial to strengthen EU mechanisms for rule of law enforcement, such as forcing a four-fifths vote in the Council within six months on whether a country is violating the rule of law, as well as imposing automatic sanctions after five years. Finally comes the debated proposal of a "multi-speed Europe," which creates four layers of European integration to account for the varied needs of different Member States. Everything is still on the table – there is little consensus on the way forward amongst EU governments.

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Existential crisis

The high expectations and hopes to ease the tensions around Nagorno-Karabakh during the third European Political Community (EPC) did not come to fruition as key players – Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan – chose not to attend the meeting of the 47 nations, referencing the alleged "anti-Azerbaijani atmosphere" of the summit. This delivers a blow to the credibility of the EPC, notes *Times of Malta*, as it fails to fulfill its key purpose – improving the geopolitical stability in Europe and its neighbourhood. Nevertheless, the Caucasus conflict falling down on the EPC agenda opens space which will likely be filled by the debate on the migration, which has been pushed to the front line by the Italian Prime Minister Georgia Meloni and her British counterpart Rishi Sunak. Both unhappy with the measures currently in place, they are expected to chair a side meeting in Granada to discuss "joint action" against what Sunak's office dubbed "organised immigration crime."

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The European Movement International
Place du Luxembourg 2, 1050 Brussels, Belgium

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