

Review of: "The EU's Capacity for Enlargement: Does It Matter?"

Ilgar Mamedov

Potential competing interests: No potential competing interests to declare.

Mr. Gabrisch's research is based on a model to reconcile the size benefits and the heterogeneity costs for the EU. The author convincingly applies this model to assess the previous enlargements.

He also uses this model to evaluate the potential enlargement rounds with Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkan states. But here come some problems, and the author admits them. He states that policy papers, while not explaining enlargement capability, often limit themselves to a politically guided assessment. Enlargement capacity becomes a reason for a candidate country that may have fulfilled the eligibility criteria to get rejected for purely political reasons - as was the case with the Western Balkan states and Türkiye, as I would argue. He also underlines the ethnic and cultural fractionalization of the Western Balkan countries, Ukraine, and Moldova, which would further increase the ethnic, cultural, and ideological diversity of the EU.

The inclusion of Ukraine, with its large agricultural areas, poses a particular challenge for the countries of East-Central Europe, as evidenced by the grain conflict with Ukraine. The author states that Ukraine's accession would increase the financial pressure on the EU budget. In addition, a group of scientists appointed by the French and German governments (Group of Twelve) denies that the 27-member association of states is capable of functioning and therefore also capable of enlargement. The Group of Twelve states that the EU faces a critical juncture marked by geopolitical shifts, transnational crises, and internal complexities. For geopolitical reasons, EU enlargement is high on the political agenda, but the EU is not yet ready to welcome new members, neither institutionally nor policywise. These conclusions are absolutely crucial and deserve to be carefully taken into account, particularly in view of the fact that the EU more reminds me of the USSR. Power concentrated in Brussels whose political ambitions often run contra to the interests of some capitals.

Proceeding from these findings, the author argues that they reveal the current dilemma of enlargement policy: on the one hand, geopolitical requirements argue in favor of admitting further peripheral countries to the EU as quickly as possible in order to transfer a peace order that has already been tested in core Europe to the Balkans in particular and to set limits to the growing influence of China and Russia.

This conclusion is very doubtful and controversial, especially in relation to Ukraine and Moldova. It was a rejection of the association agreement with the EU that led to the coup d'état in Ukraine. In the same way, attempts to drag it into NATO provoked a war in Ukraine. So "admitting further peripheral countries to the EU as quickly as possible in order to transfer a peace order" did just the opposite. The argument for EU enlargement "to set limits to the growing influence of China and Russia" is simply dangerous and undermines international peace and security. Expansion of the Euro-Atlantic institutions

beyond Europe and military buildup around Taiwan is perceived by Russia and China as a direct threat to their national security. It is naïve to expect that they would not respond, unless this is the intention. The author examines data and academic research but applies political reasoning, simply because the subject is political.

In order to make political judgments, in addition to factual data, one needs to proceed from the realities being shaped on the ground. It is not clear what will be left out of Ukraine, neither do we know that the future government of Ukraine would continue its EU aspirations. As for Moldova, recently the authorities of Transnistria and Gagauzia expressed their will to closely cooperate with Russia. It is probably premature to study this subject given the prevailing geopolitical circumstances in Ukraine and Moldova.

Does enlargement capacity matter? Possibly not much at this moment. What matters is the political rationale behind the enlargement; will it bring prosperity and peace or provoke instability and conflict for those affected?