

CHANGES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION'S NEW MEMBERS' ECONOMIES

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Abstract: The Copenhagen accession criteria have enabled the EU to encourage and monitor economic and political change in the candidate countries. The EU should not modify the list of the criteria or set them in stone by including them in a future treaty.

Since the EU Treaty gives any European country the right to apply for Union membership, any attempt to draw a final boundary around its territory which excluded European countries would not be consistent with the Treaty. Moreover, politically it would be undesirable for the EU to attempt to define its final boundaries since this would weaken the EU's ability to encourage positive change in potential candidates. Ambiguity is preferable to a definite 'no'.

The debate about absorption capacity is harmful since the term is inherently vague and is interpreted by many in the candidate countries as an excuse for closing the Union's doors. However it now seems unlikely that the debate will go away. We therefore believe that it would be best if the term was deconstructed into its individual components and considered in that light. The debate would then shift onto solid ground and focus on real issues such as budgetary capacity and institutional adjustments. "Absorption capacity" would become a to-do list for the existing Member States rather than a barrier to the candidate countries or an excuse for delaying or preventing their accession.

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