

Enlargement and reform for the EU: a geopolitical response?

Barcelona, October 3, 2025

CIDOB, Elisabets, 12, 08001 Barcelona

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The project titled “Enlargement and reform for the EU: a geopolitical response?”, will be held in Barcelona on October 3rd. The seminar is organised by CIDOB with the support of the *Hablamos de Europa* programme. It builds on the side-event entitled “The Future of the EU: Is Institutional Reform Necessary?” held in Murcia in the margins of a General Affairs Council during the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2023.

During the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU, the European Council approved the Granada Declaration, which stated that enlargement was a geostrategic investment in peace, security, stability, and prosperity. It also asserted that, for this investment to pay off, both the European Union and its member states needed to be prepared for enlargement to become a reality—a message calling for internal EU reform.

There is no consensus on which is the main priority—enlargement or reform—or whether one can truly exist without the other. Nevertheless, various positions co-exist regarding the enlargement and reform of the EU. Some member states are willing to stretch the treaties to their limits in order to avoid reforms that could mean opening the treaties. Others believe that without deep reform, the EU cannot respond to current challenges, let alone with 30 or more members.

The new geopolitical reality has brought renewed attention to the enlargement process, though its very definition is now contested. Framing enlargement as a “geopolitical tool” marks a departure from how the process has traditionally functioned, where candidate countries were required to close negotiating chapters until the Commission deemed them ready—thus prioritizing technical criteria over political considerations. Once again, there are diverse positions regarding enlargement. Some member states would be willing to accelerate the process even if not all chapters are closed, or by involving certain candidate countries in selected EU policies. At the same time, there are member states that only envision enlargement through a strictly merit-based approach.

With the return of Donald Trump to the White House, maintaining the EU as a relevant player in global affairs has become a matter of survival and strategic interest. Both reform and enlargement could be seen as necessary conditions for achieving this. In this context, it is essential to relaunch the discussion on how to approach both processes and whether they should become priorities on the political agenda for this institutional cycle.

Various proposals coexist regarding how the EU can approach enlargement and reform. The Franco-German report sparked the discussion, but others have followed its lead. Spain is one of the countries committed to both processes; but it is argued that neither can advance without the other and maintains that enlargement can only occur if the Copenhagen criteria are met and all chapters are closed.

CIDOB seeks to build on the seminar about enlargement and reform held in Murcia during the Spanish presidency of the Council of the EU, and to analyse the current state of this

debate within the Union. To this end, CIDOB will organise a closed-door seminar with representatives of the main EU think tanks to address the following questions: How should enlargement and reform be approached? Do both processes remain a priority on the political agenda? To what extent does the new geopolitical scenario make both processes a necessary condition for strengthening the EU's global role?

16.00 – 16.05 **Welcome remarks**

Pol Morillas, Director, CIDOB (Barcelona Centre for International Affairs)

16.05 – 16.30 **Enlargement and reform: state of the art**

Juan Aristegui Laborde, Subdirector General for Institutional Affairs, Directorate General for Integration and Coordination of General Affairs of the EU, Secretariat of State for the European Union, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation

16.30 – 18.00 **Enlargement and reform: assessment, proposals and opportunities**

Funda Tekin, Director, IEP

Melchior Szczepanik, Head Brussels office, PISM

Ignacio Molina, Senior Analyst, Real Instituto Elcano

Florent Marciacq, Research Associate, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI); Deputy Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (ÖFZ)

Moderated by **Héctor Sánchez Margalef**, Research Fellow, CIDOB

18.00 – 18.30 **Coffee break**

18.30 – 20.00 **Enlargement and reform: ¿a geopolitical response?**

Saskia Hollander, Programme Lead EU and Neighbourhood, Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael

Ritsa Panagiotou, Senior Research Fellow, Eliamep

Pol Bargués, Senior Research Fellow and Research Coordinator, CIDOB

Oszkár Roginer-Hofmeister, Head of the Global Europe Programme, EUROPEUM Institute

Moderated by **Pol Morillas**, Director, CIDOB

20.30 – 22.30 **Working dinner**

List of participants

- **Juan Aristegui Laborde**, Advisor, Subdirector General for Institutional Affairs, Directorate General for Integration and Coordination of General Affairs of the EU, Secretariat of State for the European Union, Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Cooperation
- **Pol Bargués**, Senior Research Fellow and Research Coordinator, CIDOB
- **Javier Borràs**, Researcher, CIDOB
- **Víctor Burguete**, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB
- **Carme Colomina**, Senior Research Fellow, CIDOB
- **Saskia Hollander**, Programme Lead EU and Neighbourhood / Senior Research Fellow, Clingendael
- **Francesca Lupi**, Researcher, CIDOB
- **Florent Marciacq**, Research Associate, French Institute of International Relations (IFRI); Deputy Secretary General of the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (ÖFZ)
- **Ignacio Molina**, Senior Analyst, Real Instituto Elcano
- **Pol Morillas**, Director, CIDOB
- **Ritsa Panagiotou**, Senior Research Fellow, Eliamep
- **Oszkár Roginer-Hofmeister**, Head of the Global Europe Programme, EUROPEUM Institute
- **Héctor Sánchez Margalef**, Research Fellow, CIDOB
- **Melchior Szczepanik**, Head Brussels office, PISM
- **Funda Tekin**, Director, IEP