

Geopolitical aspects of the EU enlargement process: Macedonian and Ukrainian case

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Abstract

After the fall of the Berlin Wall, European integration became the primary policy focus for almost all Eastern European states. The European Union expanded to twenty-five members in 2004, added three more by 2013 and lost one in 2020. Today, the EU has twenty-seven member states, and eight European countries holding candidate status.

This paper analyses the European integration process of North Macedonia and Ukraine, both of which have recently opened accession negotiations. The significant disparity in the pace of their integration processes - remarkably slow in the case of North Macedonia (seventeen years from obtaining candidate status to the start of accession negotiation) and exceptionally fast in the case of Ukraine (one and a half year from obtaining candidate status to the to start accession negotiation) – serves as the focal point for examining the EU's approach to enlargement policy.

The study aims to examine whether the geopolitical interests of EU member states are becoming increasingly influential in shaping decisions regarding European integration, and to identify which specific geopolitical motives are most influential in a decision-making process.

To address these questions, a comparative approach is applied, analyzing the European agreements signed with both states, as well as the EU's role and interest in resolving the internal and external disputes that North Macedonia and Ukraine have encountered and continue to face.

By comparing these specific cases the study contributes to research on theories of European integration and debate on whether institutional criteria or geopolitical and strategic interest drive EU enlargement.

Keywords: European enlargement, N. Macedonia, Ukraine, geopolitics