

# 13th Mediterranean Interdisciplinary Forum on Social Sciences and Humanities

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

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# European integration process of Macedonia and Ukraine

**The significant disparity in the pace of EU integration processes:**

remarkably slow in the case of  
Macedonia  
17 years  
from obtaining candidate status  
(2005) to  
the start of accession negotiations  
(2022)

exceptionally fast in the case of  
Ukraine  
18 months  
from obtaining candidate status  
(June 2022) to  
the to start accession negotiations  
(December 2023)

# Research questions and Theoretical framework

1. Whether the individual EU members' interests exert greater influence of the accession process than the Union's common policies?
2. Which geopolitical factor has the greatest impact on the European integration process?

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1. Intergovernmentalism (states as key actors)
  2. Realism in international relations (focus on security and self-interest).

# EU relationship with both counties

## MACEDONIA

1997: Cooperation and Transport Agreement  
2001: Stabilization and Association Agreement and Ohrid Framework Agreement  
2005 Candidate status granted  
2009 : European Commission recommends negotiations  
2020 - Negotiations approved  
2022 Opened Accession Negotiations

## UKRAINE

1994: Partnership and Cooperation Agreement  
2004: Ukraine joined ENP  
2009: Eastern Partnership Initiative  
2012: Association Agreement initiated  
2013: Vilnius Summit: Ukraine refused to sign  
2014 March-June : Ukraine signed Political and Economic parts of Association Agreement  
2019: EU membership goal added to Ukrainian Constitution  
06. 2022: Ukraine granted EU candidate status  
12. 2023: EU opened accession negotiations

# Blockages and solutions

## MACEDONIA

Prolonged delays due to bilateral disputes (Greece, Bulgaria).

1991 Macedonia declared Independence  
1992 Lisbon Declaration: **Recognition only under a different name**  
1993 UN membership under name FYROM  
2009: **Greek veto**  
2018 Name changed to North Macedonia with Prespa Agreement  
2019: **France and the Netherlands block negotiations**  
2020: **Bulgaria Veto**  
2022: Bulgaria approves French proposal with four conditions:

## UKRAINE

Rapid advancement post-2022 due to war with Russia

1991: Ukraine declared independence  
1992: Joined CIS and Collective Security Treaty  
1997: Ukraine joins GUAM Consultative Group  
2004: **Orange Revolution**  
2006 formalized the aim: Euro-Atlantic cooperation and European integration  
2014: **Euromaidan protests**, Yanukovych removed; **Russia annexes Crimea**;  
2014–2015 Donbas Conflict and Minsk Agreements mediated by OSCE, France, Germany  
2022 February: Full-scale Russian invasion  
2022: Ukraine applies for EU membership  
Hungary's opposition

# Results of comparative analysis

Whether the individual EU members' interests exert greater influence of the accession process than the Union's common policies?

## MACEDONIA

- EU enlargement heavily influenced by bilateral disputes
- Member state interests (Greece, Bulgaria) played decisive roles → Individual vetoes prioritized over merit-based progress.
- Lack of EU strategic interest → passive mediation.
- The case highlights the need for stronger EU mechanisms to prevent national disputes from blocking enlargement.

## UKRAINE

- Ukraine's path is unique and geopolitical
- The war accelerated its European future
- The EU has common interest: security
- But in the case with Ukraine in which Russia is the opposite not all members have the same opinion. Hungary and Slovakia are afraid for national economy – for own interest- and believe that Ukraine accession will have negative consequences.
- EU must balance enlargement with internal unity

# Results of comparative analysis

Which geopolitical factor has the greatest impact on the European integration process?

## MACEDONIA

- Macedonia's long and difficult path to EU membership reflects how geopolitical interests can dominate over formal EU principles. Between Greece, Bulgaria and Macedonia, Macedonia has limited geopolitical value.
- Lack of EU strategic interest → passive mediation.
- Instability near EU borders — pushed the EU to revive its engagement, especially with the Western Balkans

## UKRAINE

- The **security** is fundamental factor
- EU unity strengthened by external security threat
- Rapid advancement in enlargement process post-2022 due to war with Russia
- strategic and economic interests (Ukrainian resources, defense) are critical factors → accelerated process.
- EU must balance enlargement with internal unity

# Conclusions

## Theories confirmation

### MACEDONIA

Perspective of  
Intergovernmentalism:  
states are primary actors.

### UKRAINE

Realistic perspective  
security and national interest are  
more important

Member states prioritize national security, economic interests, and strategic positioning over uniform policy application.

Macedonia's experience highlights the EU's susceptibility to internal vetoes driven by national interests, while Ukraine's case illustrates how external security threats can forge unity and drive rapid political decisions, even at the expense of traditional conditionality.



# Current Challenges

## MACEDONIA

Progress depends on constitutional amendments (French Proposal).

## UKRAINE

Ukraine: Outcome influenced by Hungary's veto and national referendum

Enlargement criteria are formally based on democratic and economic reforms. In practice, geopolitical interests and national security dominate.

The EU must better balance national interests with its own enlargement goals to maintain credibility and influence in the region.