



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Federalisation of the EU - has the biggest reform in the history of the Union been launched?



The European Union is well on its way to removing long-standing internal limitations due to intense bureaucratisation in decision-making, which has weakened its global influence.

The European Parliament has initiated a process to change the essential EU paperwork, which should bring about more efficient decision-making and a greater influence of European voters on the Union's decisions.

In the proposed reform, the advocates of the supremacy of national sovereignty lose over a more powerful shared structure. The EU thus began to move from a loose community of nation-states, linked by a market and (primarily) shared foreign and security policy, to an entity much more like a federal state.

Last Wednesday, the European Parliament, having a narrow majority (305 in favour, 276 against), **launched a mechanism** for amending the EU treaties in their foundations. The change sought by the parliament is the most profound since the bloc's establishment.

The crucial part of the reforms, on which all the largest political factions in the European Parliament have agreed, regards the abolition of the consensus on making the most significant decisions and the introduction of voting by a simple majority.

## Consensus as a brake

The principle of consensus among the member states has existed since the founding of the EU as an expression of mutual tolerance and respect for Europeans who envisioned the new bloc without division into large and small, wealthy and less wealthy.

However, following multiple rounds of enlargement, the EU has become a slow, extremely bureaucratised body making confusing decisions due to the consensus procedure and never-ending decision harmonisation.

Also, the equal weight of each member state's

voice provided scope for abuse of the consensus mechanism and even an opportunity for blackmail.

National interests have prevailed over the interests of the community, often blocking the implementation of the basic principles on which it was founded.

This was accompanied by the growth of a significant bureaucratic apparatus (more than 30,000 people), which over time became an entity with its own interests and powers, often surpassing the influence of individual smaller members of the Union.

The **reform initiated by the European Parliament still** has a few more stages to be implemented, even though the parliamentarians' decision calls for acceleration and for the principle of majority, not consensual voting, to be applied in December at the European Council session (composed of representatives of member states).

If it passes this stage in December, the new manner of decision-making could take effect by the end of the current parliament's term, which expires next June.

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A new way of making decisions (by majority, not consensus of all 27 members) would provide scope for a new wave of enlargement of the European Union. Ten years have passed since the last admission of a new member (Croatia) because enlargement became very unpopular with European voters, particularly after the withdrawal of Great Britain.

However, EU leaders have been strongly advocating EU expansion since the start of Russian aggression against Ukraine because they view it as the safest way to secure the still unintegrated parts - Ukraine and the Balkans -

from Russian influence as quickly as possible.

If the new decision-making system takes effect soon, it will speed up the slow process of accepting new members. However, it will make it even more impossible for any of the members to block the individual candidates' progress.

This has been a frequent practice until now: prevent national policies from accepting new members, for example, Slovenia versus Croatia in the past or Bulgaria versus North Macedonia currently.

## Narrowing the space for blackmail

By abolishing the right of veto, the EU will remove the danger of **direct blackmail**, such as the government of Viktor Orbán resorted to, blocking last year's already adopted package of financial support to Ukraine of €18 billion and hints that it will do the same with the new planned aid package of €50 billion.

One of the victims of the principle of consensus is the unique European regime in relation to migrants and asylum seekers. It could, however, exist in the future when and if the veto powers of individual members were removed regarding quotas for the mandatory admission of migrants, for example.

Adopting decisions by a simple majority, and not by consensus as before, would directly reduce Russia's influence on decision-making in the EU through governments close to it. At the moment, it is the government in Budapest, and recently also the government of Slovakia, whose blocking of certain decisions towards Ukraine is yet to be expected. Perhaps, even the Netherlands, after the last Wednesday's election.

The reform programme adopted by the European Parliament definitely foresees the strengthening of the central EU institutions, the Commission and the Council, and their much larger political and less bureaucratic

nature.



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The commission - which would be called the "European Executive"- would be composed of individuals with "first-class" political backgrounds and high political credibility. It would represent the political balance within the European Parliament.

This is an essential step towards the federalisation of the EU at the expense of the strength of influence of national states, so in the further process of adoption, the resistance to the entire reform will be the strongest regarding this shift in the levers of power.

One of the biggest opponents will be the outgoing ruling conservative government of Poland, whose member of the European Parliament Jacek Saryusz-Wolski said of the proposed changes that they were an attempt "to hijack Europe "and to create "a dystopian super state that degrades member countries to the status of regions".

Similar views will come from Eurosceptics across Europe, but for the first time, they will have to fight for them in the formal procedure of making a significant decision, not just verbally.

One of them, MEP László Trócsányi from the party of Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán, was right when he said that the new regulations "would increase the powers of

institutions, but decrease the rights of small and medium-sized countries”.

That has been the intention of the more influential EU members, particularly France, for years. President Emmanuel Macron previously launched the idea of an EU in several zones, with different influence and reach in making shared decisions.

In this way, as proposed by the European Parliament, the EU would indeed become such, but not according to the geographical principle, but following the interest principle. The abolition of the veto would also apply to the large members of the Union, including France. However, they will definitely count on being centres of gravity in the future, to whose interests the less influential members will adapt.