2004 Enlargement of the EU

Context, impact, and Spain's position

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Introduction

- The EU was founded to foster peace, cooperation, and economic integration.
- Before 2004, the EU had 15 member states, primarily Western European countries.
- The 2004 enlargement was the largest expansion in EU history.
- It marked a major step toward integrating post-communist countries into the EU.

New Members

On May 1, 2004, ten countries became EU members:

- Cyprus (Greek part only)
- Czech Republic
- Estonia
- Hungary
- Latvia
- Lithuania
- Malta
- Poland
- Slovakia
- Slovenia

This marked the first time many Central and Eastern European countries joined, following the collapse of communist regimes in the early 1990s.

Context

This enlargement was more than an expansion. It symbolized the reunification of Europe after decades of division during the Cold War. It helped stabilize the former Eastern bloc by bringing them closer to Western democratic institutions.

- Economic gaps: New members needed financial support to catch up with existing EU economies
- Labor market: Concerns over migration led some countries to limit worker access temporarily
- Institutional complexity: More members made EU governance more complex, prompting reform

The Copenhagen Criteria

A set of conditions that a country must meet to join the EU. The European Council defined them in 1993, and grouped them in three main áreas:

Political Criteria	Economic Criteria	Legal-Administrative Criteria
• Stable democratic institutions • The rule of law • Protection of human rights and minorities	• Functioning market economy • Ability to cope with competition and market forces	• (Acquis criterion) • Adopt and implement EU's laws and regulations • Public institutions that support those rules

Goals and motivations of the EU

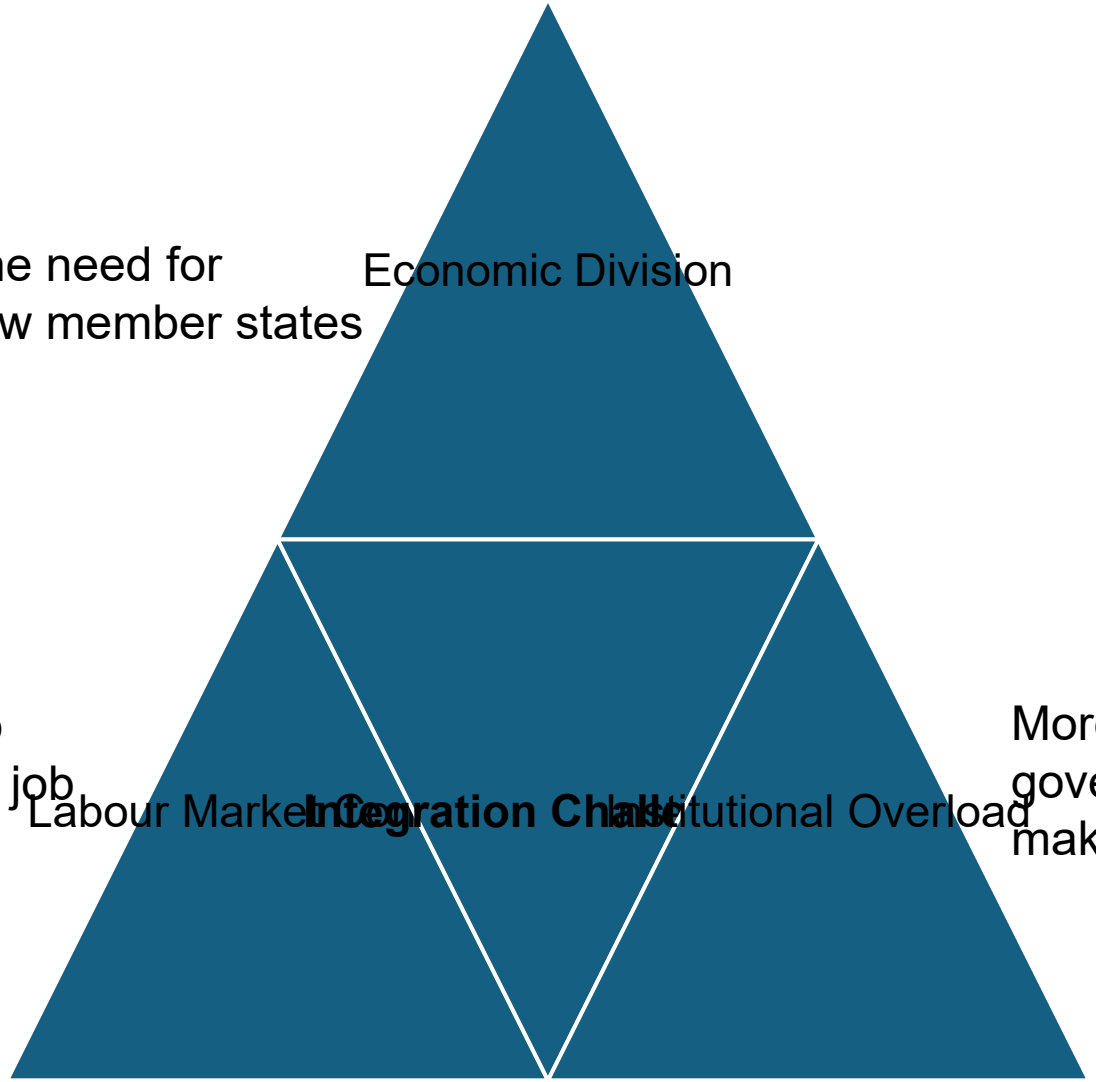
Promote peace and stability in post-communist Europe

Support democratic and economic reforms in Central and Eastern Europe

Expand the single market and boost economic growth

Strengthen the EU's role on the global stage

Main challenges of integration



Economic gaps and the need for financial support in new member states

Led some countries to restrict access to their job markets

More members made EU governance and decisión-making more complex

Impact on the EU

Larger Market

- Trade
- Invesment
- Mobility

More Diversity

- Variety of cultures
- Languages

Institutional Pressure

- Shift in political balance
- New voting dinamics

Spain’s position and interest

- Strong advocate for Eastern enlargement, rooted in solidarity
- Saw its own 1986 EU entry as a model for post-communist nations
- Viewed expansion as key to long-term EU stability and influence
- Actively supported new members through political backing and cooperation

Other enlargements

2007 enlargement

- Bulgaria and Romania
- Partial entry in the Schengen Area in 2024 and still no Euro
- Cyrillic became the third official alphabet

2013 enlargemen

- Croatia
- Complication because of Border issues with Slovenia
- 2023 adopted Euro and joined Shengen Area

Potential enlargements

There are currently nine candidates for EU membership: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine

Since 2016, Turkey's accession negotiatio stalled due to accusations of human rights déficits in the rule of law

Kosovo is recognised as a potential candidate, but under much controversy as it is not recognised as independent by 5 EU members and Serbia

Special process for the Balkans

Stabilization and Association Process (SAP)

Countries from the Western Balkans follow a particular enlargement process

It brings economic and political measures to support the stabilisation process

It ultimately aims to prepare the Western Balkans for accession

- Providing economic funds
- Easing access to EU markets
- Advocating for partnership relations

Video resource

Thanks for your attention!

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