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# Impact of Western Balkan Accession on the European Parliament:

## Projecting Seat Allocation and Power Dynamics

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The European Parliament (EP) has long positioned itself as one of the most vocal advocates of EU enlargement. Although its official role remains limited throughout the accession process, members of this institution play an important role in shaping the enlargement debate, informing EU citizens, and influencing decision-makers in their home countries. Moreover, the EP has also formally supported *gradual institutional integration* – an idea introduced by the Staged Accession Model<sup>1</sup> – favouring the merit-based and progressive inclusion of candidate countries in the Union’s institutions, including the Parliament itself, prior to membership.<sup>2</sup> While it continues to be a champion of enlargement – framing it as a means of strengthening the EU’s credibility and increasing its geopolitical weight – its 2025 *Resolution on institutional consequences of the enlargement negotiations* highlighted the necessity to “address the implications of enlargement for the composition of Parliament” to ensure EU’s efficiency as it enlarges.<sup>3</sup> With several candidate countries on track to acquire membership in coming years, the questions of institutional consequences of enlargement now warrant more systematic scrutiny – not just regarding the impact on the redistribution of seats but also on the balance of power between parliamentary groups. Providing answers to these questions is especially relevant in an era of increasingly fragmented majorities, where even modest changes can influence legislative bargaining and voting outcomes.



1 Milena Mihajlović, Steven Blockmans, Strahinja Subotić, and Michael Emerson. [Template 2.0 for Staged Accession to the EU](#), European Policy Centre (CEP) and Centre for European Policy Studies (CEPS), August 2023; and Strahinja Subotić, [Enabling gradual access to EU institutions with the Staged accession model](#), European Policy Centre (CEP), July 2023.

2 European Parliament, [New Strategy for Enlargement](#), November 2022, point 1w; European Parliament, [Resolution of 29 February 2024 on Deepening EU Integration in View of Future Enlargement](#), February 2024, article 24; and European Parliament, [Institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations](#), October 2025, article 8.

3 European Parliament, [Institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations](#), October 2025, points 8-9.

With such pertinent questions at hand, this paper examines how the hypothetical concurrent accession of all Western Balkan countries (WB6) would shape the EP. First, it estimates the *implications for the allocation of seats* by simulating two scenarios: 1) a short-term scenario in which temporary derogations from the treaty-based numerical cap are used to ensure immediate representation during the ongoing parliamentary term, and 2) a longer-term scenario in which seats are reallocated within existing treaty limits for the subsequent legislature. Second, the paper assesses the potential *impact on parliamentary power dynamics* if enlargement were to happen during the current term. It does so by mapping national party representation onto European political groups and proportionally translating domestic parliamentary strength into hypothetical EP seat distributions. Overall, the paper argues that, given the relatively small population size of the WB6, their accession would require only limited institutional adjustment of the EP’s composition while leading to a moderate reconfiguration of the EP’s political balance. Acknowledging that stable majorities across EP dossiers are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain, the paper further suggests that the gradual involvement of candidate-country parliamentarians in the EP’s work could help support its post-enlargement cohesion and effectiveness.

## 1. Impact of Enlargement on Seat Allocation

### From Temporary Derogations...

Based on population size, the WB6 would together be entitled to an estimated 62 seats if they were to join during the ongoing 2024-2029 parliamentary term. As shown in Table 1, seat projections are calculated by comparing the population of each country with that of EU member states of similar size under the current seat distribution. Serbia, as the most populous country in the region, with a population comparable to Bulgaria’s, would receive the largest share, with 17 seats. Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, whose populations are closest to Lithuania’s, would each be allocated 11 seats. North Macedonia would be entitled to 9 seats, in line with Latvia, while Kosovo would receive 8 seats, falling between Estonia and Latvia in population terms. Montenegro, given its small population, would receive the treaty-mandated minimum of six seats, comparable to Luxembourg. Taken together, this would correspond to an increase of approximately 8.6% relative to the EP’s current composition of 720 Members, well below the scale of the 2004 “big-bang” enlargement. Taken all together, these figures show that even under a maximalist enlargement scenario involving the concurrent accession of WB6 countries, the resulting change to the overall size of the EP would remain limited.

Table 1 - Projection of seats in the EP – going above the cap

WB6 Country	Population (in millions)	Projected EP Seats	Comparable EU Member State	Population (in millions)	EP Seats
Serbia	6.66	17	Bulgaria	6.44	17
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3.21	11	Lithuania	2.88	11
Albania	2.79	11			
North Macedonia	1.83	9	Latvia	1.86	9
Kosovo	1.6	8	Estonia	1.37	7
Montenegro	0.63	6	Luxembourg	0.65	6

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Despite the region's small size, the hypothetical concurrent accession of all its countries would cause the EP to exceed its treaty-regulated seat limits. This outcome stems from the rigid numerical constraints embedded in the Union's primary law, which were designed to balance institutional efficiency with democratic representation. Namely, under Article 14(2)<sup>4</sup> of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), the size of the EP may not exceed 751 seats (750 members plus the President). At present, however, the EP is composed of 720 members – a figure explained by the legacy of Brexit. Following the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the Union in January 2020, 27 of its 73 seats were redistributed among other member states in order to improve degressive proportionality, while the remaining 46 were deliberately left unallocated and placed “in reserve” for potential future enlargements.<sup>5</sup> In the absence of any accession prior to the 2024–29 parliamentary term, the Union subsequently decided to make partial use of this reserve by allocating 15 additional seats to 12 member states, bringing the total number of MEPs to its current level. Accounting for this adjustment, adding the estimated 62 seats to the current composition would raise the total number of members to 782, thereby exceeding the treaty ceiling by 31 seats.<sup>6</sup>

In such a scenario, Acts of Accession would be used to provide for a temporary derogation from the treaty-based cap. Previously, the Acts of Accession of Bulgaria and Romania<sup>7</sup> and Croatia<sup>8</sup> authorised time-limited increases in the number of MEPs, in order to ensure the immediate representation of the new member states upon accession. The accession of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 added 18 and 35 seats respectively, to the previous distribution. This addition surpassed the Nice Treaty cap of 732, raising the total to 785 for the remainder of the 2004–2009 parliamentary term.<sup>9</sup> Similarly, when Croatia joined in 2013, 12 seats were added for the period from the day of accession to the end of the 2009–2014 term. As the EP's composition immediately prior to 2013 enlargement had already exceeded the Lisbon Treaty cap due to transitional arrangements – comprising 754 MEPs – the addition of Croatia's seats temporarily raised the total to 766. These precedents support the conclusion that, were a concurrent WB6 accession to take place at present, the numerical cap set by Article 14(2) TEU could again be temporarily exceeded, but only until the end of the current parliamentary term in 2029. Therefore, temporarily expanding the EP due to the WB6 accession would be a matter of applying a well-established institutional practice.

### ...to Composition Adjustment

Looking at the 2029-2034 term, the only way existing member states could preserve their current number of seats upon WB accession would be through a treaty change which would redefine numerical caps. However, this outcome appears unlikely given the member states' well-documented reluctance to reopen the Treaties. For instance, back in 2022, 13 member states went as far as to issue a non-paper in which they clearly stated that they “[did] not support unconsidered and premature attempts to launch a process towards Treaty change”, adding that they would entail “a serious risk” of drawing political energy away from tasks they deemed more important for citizens.<sup>10</sup> Despite the EP's traditionally greater openness to treaty change compared to member states, sitting MEPs,

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4 European Union. [Consolidated Version of the Treaty on European Union](#), May 2008.

5 European Parliament. [Redistribution of Seats in the European Parliament after Brexit](#), January 2020.

6 However, if one imagines Montenegro and Albania, candidates currently most likely to join during this institutional cycle, the ceiling would be more than enough, without impacting the allocation for other member states.

7 European Union. [Act of Accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union](#). Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations, November 2006.

8 European Union. [Act concerning the conditions of accession of the Republic of Croatia and the adjustments to the Treaty on European Union, the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community](#), April 2012.

9 CVCE – Centre for European Studies. [Number and distribution of seats](#).

10 Sweden in EU [@SwedeninEU], “[Non-paper by Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and Sweden on the outcome of and follow-up to the Conference on the Future of Europe](#),” X, May 2022.

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likewise, show little appetite for permanently expanding its size.<sup>11</sup> This was reflected in the 2023 resolution on proposals for the amendment of the Treaties, where only one of the EP's proposals focused on its size, suggesting the composition of the EP to become its own competence, subject to the Council's consent.<sup>12</sup> Some experts have further argued that a permanent increase in the size of the EP would be even inadvisable as the EP is already among the largest democratic assemblies worldwide, and further expansion could critically undermine its functional efficiency.<sup>13</sup> With the expansion of the EP through treaty change politically implausible, the reallocation of seats within the existing numerical cap emerges as the only realistic pathway for accommodating future enlargement.

This course of action would align with the Union's previous efforts to reconcile enlargement with the EP's institutional set-up. In this respect, the adjustment of the EP's composition for the 2014–2019 term – following Croatia's accession in 2013 – offers a clear reference point for how such a process would unfold. Ahead of the 2014 elections, the EP issued a proposal for a decision of the European Council establishing the parliamentary composition in March 2013,<sup>14</sup> which the European Council approved three months later.<sup>15</sup> To restore compliance after Croatia's accession had breached the cap, Germany's representation was reduced to a maximum of 96 seats and one seat was removed from twelve other member states, with no state gaining additional seats.<sup>16</sup> Fast forward to September 2023, the European Council adopted a decision in which it stated that “sufficiently far in advance of the beginning of the 2029–2034 parliamentary term, and if possible by the end of 2027, the European Parliament shall submit to the European Council, in accordance with Article 14(2) TEU, a proposal for an updated allocation of seats in the European Parliament”.<sup>17</sup> In case of a hypothetical concurrent WB6 accession during this term, the outlined procedure would be followed to ensure the reallocation takes place within the cap limit. Such past and ongoing developments show that making adjustments linked to enlargement is a matter of institutional routine rather than an exceptional measure.

What is not, however, a matter of routine is agreeing on a single allocation formula that would apply across different terms. Within the current legal framework, seat allocation in the EP is based on the principle of degressive proportionality, meaning that more populous member states have more MEPs, but each represents more citizens than their peers from smaller states.<sup>18</sup> The minimum number of MEPs per member state is six, while the maximum is 96. Although designed to increase the representativeness of smaller member states, this also results in electoral inequalities as votes cast in smaller states have a greater impact on the overall distribution of seats.<sup>19</sup> With enlargement, the issue of properly applying degressive proportionality gains further weight.<sup>20</sup> The difficulty here lies in the fact that there are “an infinite number of ways

11 Andrew Duff, *In Search of a Methodical Approach to Seat Apportionment in the European Parliament*, Verfassungsblog, February 2024

12 European Parliament, *Proposals of the European Parliament for the Amendment of the Treaties*, European Parliament resolution of 22 November 2023, July 2024.

13 Manuel Müller, *A Permanent System for Seat Allocation in the EP: Reconciling Degressive Proportionality and Electoral Equality through Proportional Completion*, European Parliament, February 2024.

14 European Parliament, *European Parliament resolution of 13 March 2013 on the composition of the European Parliament with a view to the 2014 elections*, March 2013.

15 European Council, *European Council Decision (EU) 2013/312 of 28 June 2013 establishing the composition of the European Parliament*, June 2013, pp. 57–58

16 European Parliament, *Report by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs on the Composition of the European Parliament with a View to the 2014 Elections*, February 2013.

17 European Council, *European Council Decision (EU) 2023/2061 of 22 September 2023 establishing the composition of the European Parliament*, September 2023.

18 European Union. *Summary of: Article 14 of the Treaty on European Union; Articles 223–234 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union – Role, Composition and Functioning of the European Parliament: Act concerning the Election of Members of the European Parliament by Direct Universal Suffrage; Decision (EU, Euratom) 2018/994 amending the Act concerning the Election of Members of the European Parliament by Direct Universal Suffrage*. EUR-Lex – Access to European Union law.

19 Manuel Müller, *A Permanent System for Seat Allocation in the EP: Reconciling Degressive Proportionality and Electoral Equality through Proportional Completion*, February 2024.

20 Ibid.

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to organise a degressive-proportional allocation of seats” – depending on how flat or steep the curve from the smallest to the largest member state is drawn.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, in the light of changing population figures and member states’ determination not to forgo any seats, the composition of the EP in the wake of enlargement will ultimately come down to *political bargaining*.

## Simulating the Redistribution of Seats under the 2029-34 Term

Even if it is impossible to predict the exact future allocation of seats in the wake of enlargement, it remains possible to simulate what a result of bargaining could look like for the 2029-2034 term. Accordingly, a simple and pragmatic approach is outlined based on a set of assumptions. Firstly, member states that received a share of the 15 extra seats in the wake of Brexit are assumed to forfeit the same number of seats.<sup>22</sup> This would result in a remainder of 47 unallocated WB seats. Further reductions would fall primarily on larger and mid-sized member states, as additional cuts to smaller member states would significantly hurt their representativeness. In addition, for member states forming a larger cluster with the same number of seats, reductions are confined to those positioned at the margins of the cluster in terms of population size, in order to avoid cascading reallocations across the entire group. Finally, consistent with the principle of degressive proportionality, political negotiations are expected to affect the number of seats of the WB6 as well – resulting in reductions for some compared to the original estimations under the scenario with temporary derogations. In the absence of a binding mathematical formula, the simulation is intended as a flexible and pragmatic “thought experiment” to allow MEPs and policymakers to better grasp the impact of enlargement.

The resulting seat distribution indicates that the impact of enlargement on existing member states would be limited and unevenly distributed (see Table 2). Seat reductions are concentrated primarily among the largest member states, including Germany, France, Italy, Spain and Poland, each losing between two and three seats, while medium-sized member states experience smaller adjustments, typically limited to one or two seats. By contrast, many smaller member states remain unaffected, particularly those close to the minimum threshold of six seats, highlighting the continued cushioning effect of degressive proportionality. At the same time, the cluster of five member states with identical seat allocations was largely preserved, with only marginal adjustments at their edges, thereby avoiding broader redistributive spillovers. For the newcomers, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Serbia would each be allocated one seat fewer than under temporary derogations which allow the breaching of the cap. Overall, the projection suggests that the accession of the WB6 could be accommodated without placing any single member state at a systemic disadvantage relative to others. As the disruptive effect of enlargement would be mitigated by the relatively small number of seats requiring reallocation, the estimated outcome instead points to a pattern of moderate and broadly shared adjustments.

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21 Manuel Müller, [Degrressive Proportionality: EU Enlargement Will Increase European Electoral Inequality – but the Problem Can Be Solved](#), *Der (europäische) Föderalist*, February 2024.

22 European Parliament, [2024 European Elections: 15 Additional Seats Divided Between 12 Countries](#), press release, 13 September 2023. This included: Belgium (-1), Denmark (-1), Ireland (-1), Spain (-2), France (-2), Latvia (-1), the Netherlands (-2), Austria (-1), Poland (-1), Finland (-1), Slovenia (-1), and Slovakia (-1).

Table 2 – Simulated seat distribution per country within the existing cap

State	Seats 2024 (721)	Seats after WB6 accession	Δ
Germany	96	94	-2
France	81	78	-3
Italy	76	73	-3
Spain	61	58	-3
Poland	53	50	-3
Romania	33	31	-2
Netherlands	31	29	-2
Belgium	22	21	-1
Greece	21	21	0
Czech Republic	21	21	0
Hungary	21	21	0
Portugal	21	21	0
Sweden	21	20	-1
Austria	20	19	-1
Bulgaria	17	16	-1
<b>Serbia</b>	—	<b>16</b>	<b>+16</b>
Denmark	15	14	-1
Finland	15	14	-1
Slovakia	15	14	-1
Ireland	14	13	-1
Croatia	12	12	0
<b>Bosnia &amp; Herzegovina</b>	—	<b>11</b>	<b>+11</b>
Lithuania	11	11	0
<b>Albania</b>	—	<b>11</b>	<b>+11</b>
<b>North Macedonia</b>	—	<b>8</b>	<b>+8</b>
Latvia	9	8	-1
Slovenia	9	8	-1
<b>Kosovo</b>	—	<b>7</b>	<b>+7</b>
Estonia	7	7	0
Cyprus	6	6	0
Luxembourg	6	6	0
Malta	6	6	0
<b>Montenegro</b>	—	<b>6</b>	<b>+6</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>751</b>	<b>30</b>

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## 2. Impact of Enlargement on the Power Balance in the European Parliament

Every enlargement represents an opportunity for political groups to increase in size. In the context of the WB6, this dynamic is particularly pronounced, as many political parties in the region already maintain structured relationships with different Europarties, often holding some form of affiliation within them. Upon their countries' accession to the EU, these parties would be expected to integrate relatively seamlessly into the corresponding political groups in the EP, thereby directly contributing to their numerical strength and political leverage. Enlargement would therefore not take place in a partisan vacuum; rather, it would formalise and institutionalise pre-existing alliances into post-accession partnership. At the same time, accession to the EU would provide an opportunity for parties with no current ties to Europarties to begin negotiations and seek participation within the EP's political structure in order to maximise influence, access resources and secure committee representation. Ultimately, enlargement to the WB6 would amount to more than an increase in numbers; it would entail a measurable adjustment of power dynamics.

To better grasp the impact of the WB6 on the EP's power dynamics, the paper models a scenario of hypothetical concurrent accession of WB6 during the ongoing 2024–29 term. This does not imply that such an enlargement is anticipated within this institutional cycle; rather, it serves as an illustrative exercise designed to estimate how parties' current shares of power in their domestic political arenas would translate into influence at the EP level. Examining the 2029–34 term would offer limited policy relevance, as future domestic power configurations in the WB6 remain inherently uncertain, as do electoral outcomes for different Europarties. Accordingly, the analysis adopts a scenario of temporary derogation through the respective Acts of Accession, allowing the EP's 751-seat cap to be exceeded for the remainder of the term. This approach assumes that existing power balances in both the WB6 and the EU27 remain constant and applies the seat allocations per new member state as calculated in the previous section.

Following those assumptions, the simulation consists of several steps. To assess the power dynamics under this temporary derogation scenario, the research first identifies WB6 political parties with established affiliations to Europarties. Then, using current national parliamentary compositions as a baseline, it proportionally converts national MPs into an equivalent number of MEPs allocated to respective political groups. Although election results at the European election would likely be somewhat different from the national election - due to differences in the electoral systems<sup>23</sup> and voter behaviour<sup>24</sup> - the simulation still provides a structured and policy-relevant approximation. Parties entering parliament via minority lists were included, provided they secured at least 2 per cent of the vote, in line with the minimum threshold for the EP elections. Each

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23 (In)famously, there is no uniform electoral system for EP elections. Each member state chooses its own model, including varying degrees of minimal thresholds. These particularities for EP elections may differ from the way national elections are held. For instance, Germany, Italy and Poland use different electoral systems for national and European elections, leading to different results. In the case of WB6 accession, it could be assumed that the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina would have a similar approach. Currently, elections for the House of Representatives of Bosnia and Herzegovina are held under a system of proportional representation in two territorial constituencies: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and Republika Srpska (RS). In the case of EP elections, the system might change in a matter that MEPs are elected from one constituency. All this [reaffirms](#) the fact that “electoral institutions might shape political representation”.

24 In literature, this phenomenon is often referred to as “second-order effects”. It can be described as follows: “Because European Parliament elections do not lead to the formation of a government, these contests are far less important for voters, the media and national politicians than are elections for national parliaments. The standard ‘second-order national elections’ model consequently posits that European Parliament elections are relatively low salience contests, fought in the shadow of the contest for the main (first-order) national election by the same parties as contest national elections”.

Hix, Simon, and Michael Marsh. “[Second-order Effects plus Pan-European Political Swings: An Analysis of European Parliament Elections across Time](#)”, *Electoral Studies* 30, no. 1, 2011: 4–15.

party was assigned to its recognised European political family, while those without such affiliations were classified as Non-Inscrits. The temporary composition of the EP is then simulated by calculating each party's share of seats in its national parliament and applying the same proportions to the number of seats the respective country would hold in the EP upon enlargement. In short, the simulation projects current domestic power structures onto the EP level to assess how enlargement could shift coalition balances and alter the relative strength of its political groups.

## From Country-to-country Analysis...

### ALBANIA

Albania, currently considered as a frontrunner that is on track to achieve membership in the foreseeable future, pairs a highly fragmented party system with broad affiliations with EU counterparts. A total of 53 political parties participated in the 2025 elections, either independently or as part of electoral coalitions, reflecting the country's highly fragmented political landscape. Despite this large number of active parties, only several major ones maintain affiliations with European counterparts (see Table 3). The ruling Socialist Party of Prime Minister Edi Rama is an associate member of the Party of European Socialists (PES), while the main opposition, the Democratic Party, is an associate member of the European People's Party (EPP). The Party of the Greens of Albania is linked to the European Green Party, while the Republican Party is recognised as a global partner of the European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR), making it the only party in the WB6 with ties to this group. Additionally, the Macedonian Alliance for European Integration (the primary political party representing the ethnic Macedonian minority in Albania) is a member of the European Free Alliance (EFA), further diversifying Albania's European connections. These extensive affiliations mean that Albanian parties have established links across almost the entire spectrum of major European political families.

Table 3 - Main political parties in Albania and their affiliation with European parties<sup>25</sup>

National Party	European Affiliate
Socialist Party	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Democratic Party	European Political Party (EPP)
Party of the Greens of Albania	European Green Party
Republican Party	European Conservatives and Reformists (ECR)
Macedonian Alliance for European Integration	European Free Alliance

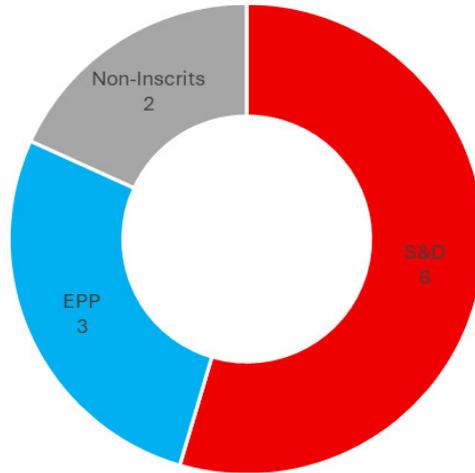
Although Albania has the potential to reinforce all dominant groups, the current composition of the Albanian parliament shows that its accession would only benefit the two largest EP groups (See Figure 1). In the 2025 national elections, six political lists secured representation in the Albanian Parliament. The Socialist Party, which won 82 of the 140 seats, would translate into six MEPs for the Socialists and Democrats group (S&D)<sup>26</sup>, thereby securing more than half of Albania's 11 EP seats. The main opposition, the Democratic Party, with 42 seats, would contribute three MEPs to the EPP. The Freedom Party, with four national parliamentary seats, and the Social Democratic Party of Albania, with three, would each secure one MEP classified as Non-Inscrits. By contrast, the Republican Party, which holds only one seat in the national parliament, would not be allocated any MEPs. Despite sharing a coalition with the Socialist Party, the Macedonian Alliance for European Integra-

<sup>25</sup> Colours in the table represent the typical colours associated with the European parties in question.

<sup>26</sup> The parliamentary group of the Party of European Socialists (PES) in the European Parliament is named Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, short Socialists and Democrats (S&D).

tion would similarly not receive representation. Overall, given the dominant position of the Socialist Party, Albanian seats would disproportionately strengthen the S&D group in the EP and, though to a lesser extent, the EPP. As other parties with national parliamentary representation would gain at most one seat, if any, their impact on the broader balance of power within the EP would be negligible.

Figure 1 - Projected of Albanian seats distribution under the temporary derogation



## BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The analysis of the party system in Bosnia and Herzegovina suggests a different pattern of party affiliation than in the rest of the region. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the links between national and European politics were established in line with ethnic and confederate entity composition of the country (see Table 4)<sup>27</sup>. Thus, among the parties likely to contest seats in the EP, the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Croatian Democratic Union BiH (HDZ BiH), the Croatian Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990), and the Party of Democratic Progress (PDP) are all affiliated with the EPP either as associates or observers. In contrast, the Social Democratic Party (SDP) is aligned with the Party of European Socialists (PES), while Our Party would affiliate with the liberal Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE). These highlight the unique nature of Bosnian politics, which is consequently reflected in the fact that one Europarty found four partners in BiH (see Table 4). However, the space remains for other European parties to have the same level of alliances, which could potentially strengthen their number to a small extent, bearing in mind that BiH would get 11 seats in the case of temporary derogation scenario.

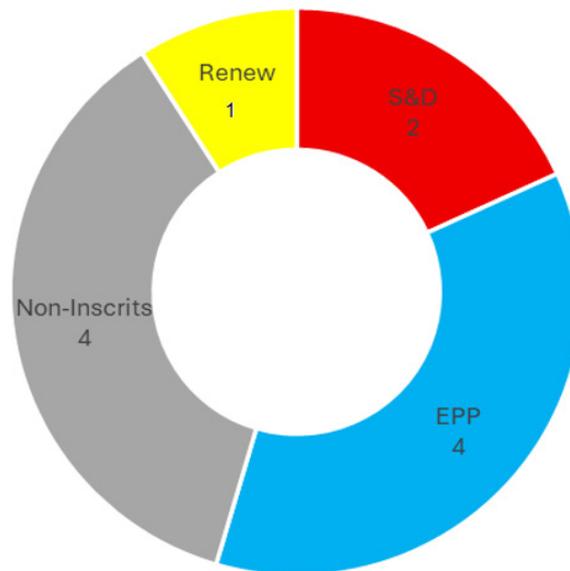
Table 4 Main political parties in BiH and their affiliation with European parties

National Party	European Affiliate
Party of Democratic Action	European Political Party (EPP)
Croat Democratic Union BiH (HDZ BiH)	European Political Party (EPP)
Croat Democratic Union 1990 (HDZ 1990)	European Political Party (EPP)
Party of Democratic Progress (PDP)	European Political Party (EPP)
Social Democratic party (SDS)	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Our Party	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

<sup>27</sup> As per the Dayton agreement. Bosnia and Herzegovina consists of three constitutive nations – Bosniaks, Serbs and Croats. Ethnic Serbs mostly live in the Republica Srpska confederate entity, while Bosniaks and Croats live in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Brčko District is a third confederate entity and represents a condominium between the main entities.

Despite the dominance of certain parties affiliated with the EPP, the allocation of Bosnia and Herzegovina’s seats in the EP would highlight the ethnic- and entity-divided nature of its political system. For this analysis, only the House of Representatives, the lower chamber of the bicameral Parliamentary Assembly comprising 42 members, is considered, as it most closely reflects the distribution of political forces relevant to the EP. The last elections for the House of Representatives<sup>28</sup> were held in 2022. Based on the House of Representative’s composition, the SDA, with eight seats, would translate into two EPP MEPs (see Figure 2). The Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD), holding six seats, would provide two MEPs classified as Non-Inscrits. The Social Democratic Party (SDP), with five seats, would contribute two members to the Party of European Socialists (S&D). Smaller parties would also gain representation: HDZ BiH and the PDP would each contribute one EPP MEP, Our Party would gain one member for Renew,<sup>29</sup> and People and Justice and the Democratic Front would each secure one Non-Inscrits MEP. In total, mirroring the House of Representative’s composition would lead to a total of 7 parties entering the EP, with the EPP and independent MEPs being the biggest beneficiaries.

Figure 2 - Projected Bosnia-Herzegovina seats distribution under the temporary derogation



## KOSOVO

Out of all WB countries, Kosovo has the lowest level of integration into European political families, with only three parties maintaining formal connections (see Table 5). Among those with established affiliations, the Self-Determination Movement (LVV) aligns with the PES as an associate member, the Democratic Party of Kosovo is associated with the ALDE, and the Democratic League of Kosovo maintains ties with the EPP. The remainder of Kosovo’s party system lacks any formal links to European political parties, highlighting the limited penetration of European party networks in the country. This limited engagement means that the three largest and most influential European party groups would dominate Kosovo’s representation in the EP upon accession, while other smaller parties are likely to remain unaligned. At the same time, the absence of broader affiliations provides an opportunity for other European political families to establish partnerships with emerging or less dominant parties, potentially expanding their influence in Kosovo over time.

<sup>28</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina has a bicameral parliament consisting of the House of Representatives elected by the people and consisting of 42 members - 28 members are elected from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 14 from Republika Srpska elected and the House of the Peoples – 15 members (5 from each constitutive nations) delegated by confederate entity parliaments).

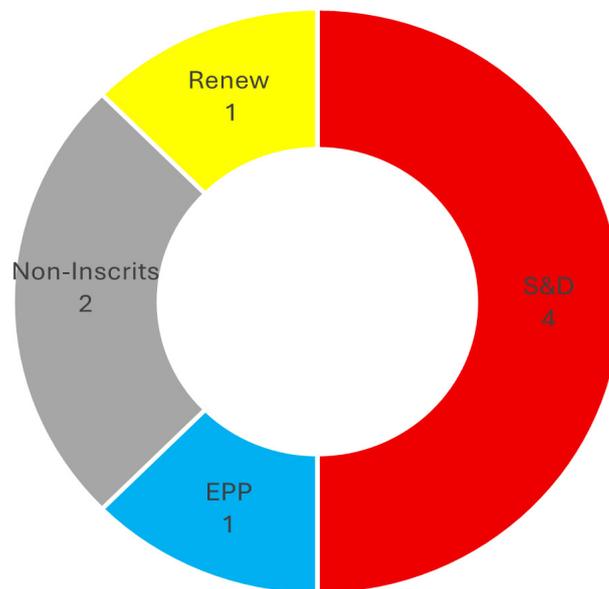
<sup>29</sup> Renew Europe (short Renew) is a political group of the EP consisting of ALDE and the European Democratic Party.

Table 5 - Main political parties in Kosovo and their affiliation with European parties

National Party	European Affiliate
Self-Determination Movement (LVV)	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	European Political Party (EPP)
Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)

Kosovo’s prospective representation in the EP would reflect its highly concentrated party system, where only a handful of political actors dominate both domestic politics and established relations with European party families. Following the most recent elections held in December 2025, Kosovo’s national parliament of 120 members would translate into eight EP seats (see Figure 3). The Self-Determination Movement (LVV), currently the largest force with 57 seats, would secure four MEPs for the S&D political group. The Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK), holding 22 parliamentary seats, would give one MEP to the Renew, the same number the Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK) would give to EPP with its 15 seats. In addition, the Non-Inscrit group would get two seats, one from the Serb List, representing the Serbian minority and holding nine parliamentary seats, and the second from the Alliance for the Future of Kosovo with 6 MPs. Taken together, this distribution highlights that Kosovo’s delegation, though small in size, would predominantly reinforce the PES and EPP, with a slight advantage in favour of the former. However, given that Kosovo would only get eight seats, its accession would not significantly alter the overall balance of power in the European Parliament.

Figure 3 - Projected Kosovo seats distribution under the temporary derogation



## MONTENEGRO

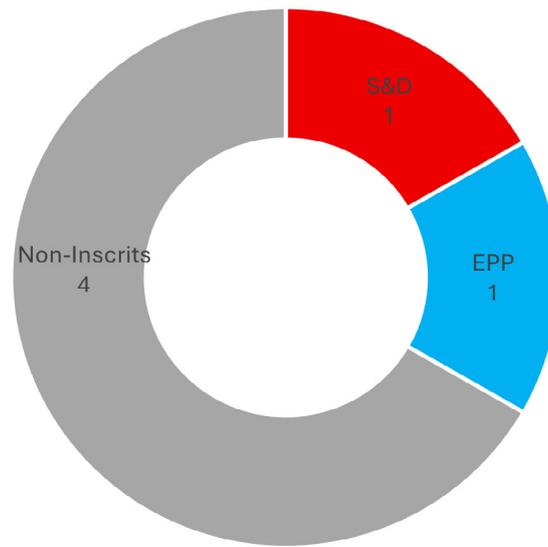
Of all the WB6 countries, the prospects of Montenegro’s contribution to the EP gain most relevance, as it is the closest to obtaining EU membership. Six Montenegrin political parties have established cooperation with counterparts at the European level, yet the country’s most prominent political force remains outside any formal affiliation (see Table 6). In the 2023 snap parliamentary elections, 15 party lists and coalitions contested seats. Among those with established ties, the Bosniak Party is an associate member of the EPP, while both the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) and the Social Democratic Party (SDP) are aligned with the PES. The Liberal Party of Montenegro maintains a link with Renew Europe through its membership in the ALDE, whereas the Civic Movement URA has aligned with the European Greens. However, the Europe Now Movement (Pokret Evropa Sad! - PES – not to be confused with the Party of European Socialists), which emerged as the strongest party in recent elections, has yet to affiliate with any European political group. No matter the considerable space for competition among the established European families to secure Europe Now’s allegiance, overall benefits would be limited due to minimal allocation of MEP seats for Montenegro.

*Table 6 - Political parties in Montenegro with affiliation with European parties*

National Party	European Affiliate
Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Social Democratic Party (SDP)	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Bosniak Party	European Political Party (EPP)
Civil Movement URA	European Green Party

As the smallest prospective EU member, Montenegro would have limited representation in the EP, with a minimum of six seats allocated (see Figure 4). This inevitably means that only a handful of parties would be in a position to secure MEPs, leaving many parliamentary actors without a presence in Brussels and Strasbourg. Based on the current distribution of the 81 parliamentary seats, the Europe Now Movement with 20 MPs would secure two MEPs, but, given its lack of affiliation with any European political family, these members would remain among the Non-Inscrits. The Democratic Party of Socialists, holding 16 seats in the national assembly, would be allocated one MEP for the S&D. New Serb Democracy with nine MPs and Democratic Montenegro, with seven seats, would also gain one MEP each; yet, like Europe Now, they would not join any established European group and would therefore fall under the Non-Inscrits. The Bosniak Party, with six seats, would contribute one MEP to the European EPP, while URA (four seats), the Social Democrats (three), and the Liberal Party would not secure any representation. Overall, Montenegro’s as it is the case with the rest of the region, exhibits a similar affiliation pattern, with some Montenegrin parties having established links with main European parties, with room for others to join some European party family.

Figure 4 - Projected Montenegrin seats distribution under the temporary derogation



## NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonia exhibits a case of affiliation between most dominant Macedonian and European political parties, similar to the rest of the region (see Table 7). VMRO–DPMNE, one of the country’s largest and most influential parties, has established ties with EPP as an associate member, reflecting its long-standing positioning on the centre-right. On the centre-left, the governing Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) is an associate member of the PES, thereby ensuring representation within one of the European Parliament’s two dominant groups. Smaller parties have also sought connections with European counterparts. The Liberal Democratic Party maintains observer status with the ALDE, providing North Macedonia’s contribution to the liberal family within the European Parliament. Meanwhile, the Democratic Renewal of Macedonia is linked to the European Greens, providing a voice for environmental and progressive politics within the country’s European trajectory. This diversity of affiliations illustrates that the mainstream European groups have already secured important partners in North Macedonia. Overall, the country shows the same pattern as the rest of the region, with much room for those non-aligned parties to join some European political family.

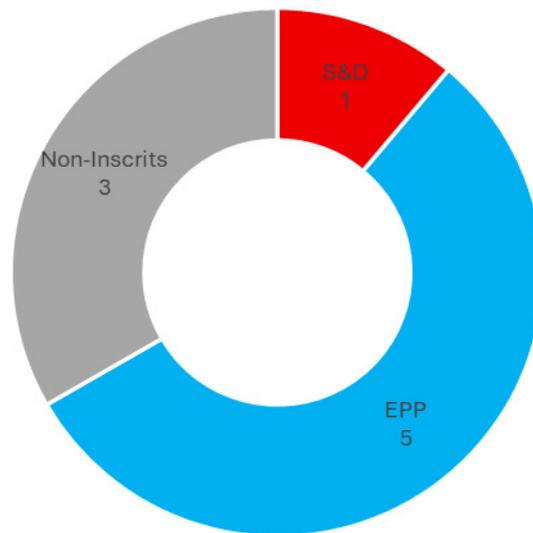
Table 7 - Main political parties in North Macedonia and their affiliation with European parties

National Party	European Affiliate
VMRO-DPMNE	European Political Party (EPP)
Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Liberal Democratic Party	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
Democratic Renewal of Macedonia	European Free Alliance

The current political landscape in North Macedonia would, to a large extent, benefit only one European political group (see Figure 5). According to the current balance of power, following the 2024 elections, the distribution of seats would significantly favour the EPP due to the dominance of VMRO–DPMNE, which currently holds 55 out of 120 parliamentary seats. This would

translate into five MEPs, firmly positioning the EPP as the main beneficiary of North Macedonia's accession. By contrast, the opposition Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), with 15 seats in parliament, would secure only one representative for the S&D. Other parties with smaller shares of the national vote would also obtain representation, though they lack affiliation with European party families. The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), with ten seats, alongside ZNAM and For Our Macedonia, each with six, would each gain one MEP, all of whom would sit as Non-Inscrits. The Liberal Democratic Party, affiliated with Renew Europe, and the Democratic Renewal of Macedonia, linked to the European Greens, would not secure any MEPs. Overall, with the EPP as the clear beneficiary, no other country in the region displays such a disproportionate advantage for a single European political family as North Macedonia.

Figure 5 - Projected North Macedonian seats distribution under the temporary derogation



## SERBIA

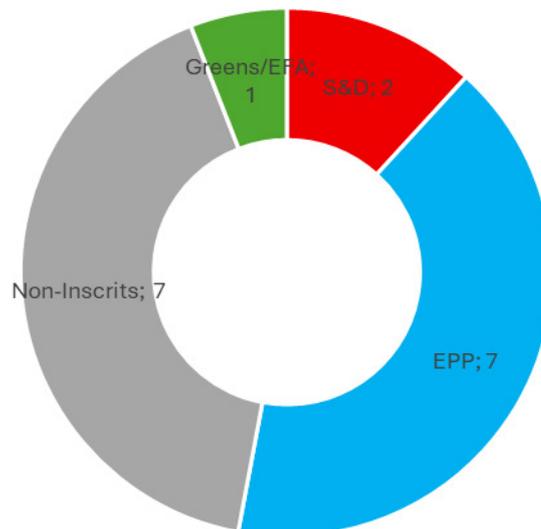
Serbia stands out among the WB6 as the country with the widest range of political parties associated with European political families (see Table 8). The ruling Serbian Progressive Party (SNS), the dominant force in national politics, is an associate member of the EPP. It is joined in this group by the Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians, which also maintains associate status within the EPP. On the centre-left, the Freedom and Justice Party and the Democratic Party – once a major political player – both made association with the Party of European Socialists (PES). Liberal and progressive representation is also ensured, as the Free Citizens Movement is a member of ALDE and would thus benefit the Renew Europe group, while the Green–Left Front is aligned with the European Greens. In addition, Solidarnost is affiliated with the European Left as a partner, and the League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina has ties with the European Free Alliance, highlighting Serbia's political diversity. This breadth of affiliations indicates that many European groups could benefit to some degree from Serbia's future membership, reflecting both the pluralism and fragmentation of its party system.

Table 8 - Main political parties in Serbia and their affiliation with European parties

National Party	European Affiliate
Serbian Progressive Party	European Political Party (EPP)
Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians	European Political Party (EPP)
Freedom and Justice Party	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Democratic Party	Party of European Socialists (PES)
Free Citizens Movement	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE)
Green-Left Front	European Free Alliance
League of Social Democrats of Vojvodina	European Free Alliance
Solidarnost	The Left

Given the country’s fragmented political landscape and the results of the most recent elections to its 250-member national assembly, the allocation of 17 foreseen MEP seats would be dispersed across a wide spectrum of parties, many of which would secure only a single MEP (see Figure 6). The SNS, which dominates the Serbian parliament with 105 MPs, would bring seven MEPs to the EPP. The Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS), holding 11 seats, would gain one MEP, but as it lacks a European affiliation, this representative would sit with the Non-Inscrits. The opposition Freedom and Justice Party (SSP), with 12 seats, would contribute one MEP to the S&D, while the Democratic Party (DS), with eight, would also secure one S&D representative. The Green–Left Front would provide one MEP for the Greens/EFA. A range of smaller parties—including Srce, NPS, NDSS, We – Voice of the People, POKS, and SDPS—would each win one MEP, all categorised as Non-Inscrits. The Alliance of Vojvodina Hungarians would remain under the 2% electoral threshold required in EP elections. Overall, the EPP would gain most, while Non-Inscrits would become the second-largest Serbian contingent. Due to the SNS’s strong position, the EPP would at the moment be the largest beneficiary of Serbia’s EU membership. However, as the country approaches the EU, those now non-aligned are likely to enter some European political group, potentially making Serbia’s contribution to the EP quite diverse.

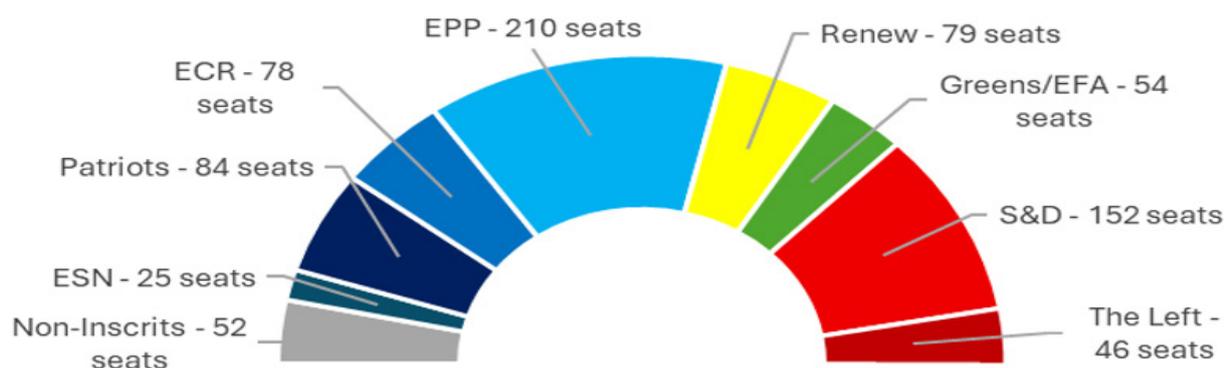
Figure 6- Projected Serbian seats distribution under the temporary derogation



## ... to Overall Assessment

Considering all the individual cases, the analysis shows that the accession of the WB6 to the EU would not benefit political groups in the EP equally. However, due to the fact that the entire region would only bring 62 MEPs, this would lead to a minor impact on the overall balance of power within the EP (see Annex and Figure 7). Based on current national party strength, the EPP would emerge as the principal beneficiary, gaining 22 additional MEPs, thereby increasing its representation from 188 to 210 members. The S&D would also see a moderate boost, with 16 new MEPs, bringing its total to 152. In contrast, Renew Europe would experience a much smaller increase, gaining two new representatives and rising to a total of 79 MEPs. The European Greens would add only one member due to Serbia's Green-Left Front, resulting in a total of 54 MEPs. Meanwhile, the Non-Inscrits group would grow considerably in relative terms, gaining 20 new seats and reaching a total of 48 MEPs, largely due to the fragmented and unaffiliated nature of parties within the region. Overall, although the WB6's entry would introduce a modest number of new MEPs, it would reinforce the foothold of the two largest political groups – the EPP and the S&D – with marginal impact for the liberals and greens to no impact for the right political spectrum. At the same time, the relatively high number of Non-Inscrits can be understood as a transitional feature of enlargement, as past accessions indicate that gradual alignment with established political groups is likely.

Figure 7 - Projected balance of power in the EP following temporary derogation to accommodate WB6



Despite their limited number, the introduction of new MEPs can have a disproportionate effect on legislative outcomes. As the EP has become increasingly characterised by narrow and fragmented majorities, the weight of individual votes has grown, particularly on politically sensitive or highly contested dossiers. For instance, an analysis of voting patterns in 2025 shows that the traditional EPP–S&D–Renew coalition has struggled to maintain cohesion, notably as centre-right to far-right forces have gained greater influence, often to the detriment of centre-left and progressive parties.<sup>30</sup> Even when this coalition formally votes together, maintaining intra-group discipline has proven challenging. For example, most recently, small but pivotal segments of party groups broke ranks to support the freezing of EU–Mercosur free trade agreement and the referral of the case to the Court of Justice of the EU.<sup>31</sup> Against this backdrop, the influence of MEPs from the WB6 is likely to be most visible during periods of political crisis or heightened polarisation, when traditional alliances are less stable. Consequently, the earlier political groups invest in building ties and trust with their counterparts from the region, the greater the likelihood of securing alignment and loyalty following accession. Likewise, the sooner polit-

30 Nicolai von Ondarza, *EU Analytics – December 2025 Review: The Change of Guards at the European Parliament Is Picking Up Speed*, *Der (europäische) Föderalist*, January 2026.

31 Vincenzo Genovese, Peggy Corlin, *European Parliament Freezes Mercosur Deal, Referring It to EU Court of Justice*, Euronews, January 2026.

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ical parties from the region start reaching out and making their case to their EU counterparts, the more likely they are to smoothly transition into a desired political group upon accession.

### 3. Gradual Institutional Participation as a Win-Win Strategy for Post-Accession Cohesion

The findings presented in this paper suggest that while the impact of WB6 accession on the EP's size will be limited, the quality of their integration into the EP's power dynamics will hinge upon the extent of cooperation between MEPs and their WB counterparts prior to accession. Against that backdrop, *gradual institutional participation*, as proposed by the Staged Accession Model, offers a mutually beneficial pathway to smoother post-accession integration by providing avenues for cooperation well before full membership.<sup>32</sup> At its core, the Model envisages a sequenced and conditional deepening of institutional involvement, whereby candidate countries progressively gain access to EU institutions as they meet predefined benchmarks. In the parliamentary domain, this would translate into the gradual inclusion of candidate country parliamentarians in the work of the EP. The premise is that opening the doors would contribute to the effectiveness of the accession process by incentivising reforms and facilitating early socialisation. This paper goes further by positing that the creation of a continuum of participation and fostering durable cross-party linkages ahead of accession could help ensure the EP functions cohesively after enlargement.

For candidate countries, pre-accession participation in EP plenary sessions and committees would serve as an early socialisation and positioning mechanism. It would allow future members to internalise parliamentary procedures, understand coalition dynamics, and build working relationships with political group coordinators and other relevant parliamentarians. More structured and prompt engagement with their European counterparts through policy coordination would help national parties demonstrate credibility and ideological compatibility in advance. In turn, this would reduce the risk, upon accession, of spending an initial term on the margins or facing marginalisation as Non-Inscrits. At the same time, though intensified engagement, parties and parliamentary staff from candidate countries would be able to develop internal capacity, including policy expertise – allowing them to fully and effectively assume their roles upon accession. These developments would improve their chances of securing favourable committee placements, rapporteurships, and leadership roles once they transition from MPs to MEPs in the future. Ultimately, such integration would help candidate country parties achieve immediate influence while shortening the adjustment period upon accession.

For the EU side, gradual parliamentary participation would provide MEPs with an early mechanism to evaluate whether their future colleagues from the Western Balkans are likely to act as reliable and disciplined partners within the EP's group-based system. Even in an observer or associate capacity, sustained exposure to committee work, intergroup cooperation, and party family coordination would generate valuable behavioural signals regarding partners' willingness to engage, learn parliamentary routines, and build durable working relationships. While such participation would not reveal formal voting behaviour – as that is beyond reach both during the accession talks and the ratification period – it would nonetheless reduce key informational asymmetries that typically accompany enlargement. Making the right call on whom to accept as a member of a political group upon accession is becoming increasingly critical in light of the growing incidence of intra-group dissent and the broader fragmentation of political behaviour in the EP. Again, the Mercosur free-trade agreement vote is a case in point, as it would certainly have been adopted by now had the political groups in favour of it demonstrated a higher level of intra-group cohesion. Essentially,

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32 Strahinja Subotić, [Enabling gradual access to EU institutions with the Staged accession model](#), European Policy Centre (CEP), July 2023.

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this form of early integration would help the EP, at a time of accession, absorb new members more smoothly while reducing cohesion-related risks as political groups' membership expands.

While the EP seems to recognise the added value of gradually involving the candidates in its work, further steps have yet to be taken to operationalise this idea. In fact, the EP has on several occasions indicated that it is willing to explore opportunities for closer cooperation with parliamentary representatives from future member states. In 2022, it adopted a Resolution that briefly stated that “the opportunities for candidate countries to participate in and observe the work of the EU institutions” should be extended.<sup>33</sup> Two years later, it concretised this notion, by suggesting in a resolution that observer status be granted “until the accession treaties have been signed”, on the basis of temporary arrangements if negotiations are sufficiently advanced” – in particular with regard to the clusters on fundamentals and external relations.<sup>34</sup> Most recently, in 2025, it restated in a Resolution that “the enlargement process should be supported by the early and close involvement of candidate countries in the functioning of the EU institutions, e.g. through observer status”.<sup>35</sup> To translate this ambition into practice, the EP would either need to amend its Rules of Procedure (as they currently allow for observer status only once an Act of Accession is signed) or rely more heavily on the possibility of inviting third-country representatives for occasional exchanges of views in EP committees.<sup>36</sup> Either way, the sooner some form of gradual institutional participation is operationalised, the better. It would not only provide additional incentives for candidate countries during the pre-accession period but also lay the groundwork for the durable cross-party linkages underpinning post-accession cohesion in the EU's most democratic institution.



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33 European Parliament, [New Strategy for Enlargement](#), 23 November 2022, point 1w.

34 European Parliament, [Resolution of 29 February 2024 on Deepening EU Integration in View of Future Enlargement \(P9\\_TA\(2024\)0120\)](#), February 2024, article 24.

35 European Parliament, [Institutional consequences of the EU enlargement negotiations](#), October 2025, article 8.

36 Strahinja Subotić, [Enabling gradual access to EU institutions with the Staged accession model](#), European Policy Centre (CEP), July 2023.

**ANNEX - Hypothetical contribution to the EP groups by WB6 parties under the temporary derogation scenario**

European Parliament Group	National Party	Country	Number of Seats
European Political Party (EPP)	Democratic Party	Albania	3
	Party of Democratic Action (SDA)	BiH	2
	Croat Democratic Union BiH (HDZ BiH)	BiH	1
	Party of Democratic Progress (PDP)	BiH	1
	Democratic League of Kosovo (LDK)	Kosovo	1
	Bosniak Party	Montenegro	1
	VMRO-DPMNE	North Macedonia	5
	Serbian Progressive Party	Serbia	7
			Total:22
Progressive Alliance of Democrats and Socialists (S&D)	Socialist Party	Albania	6
	Social Democratic Party (SDS)	BiH	2
	Self-Determination Movement (LVV)	Kosovo	4
	Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS)	Montenegro	1
	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)	North Macedonia	1
	Freedom and Justice Party	Serbia	1
	Democratic Party	Serbia	1
			Total: 16
Renew Europe	Our Party	BiH	1
	Democratic Party of Kosovo (PDK)	Kosovo	1
			Total: 2
European Greens/ European Free Alliance	Green-Left Front	Serbia	1
			Total: 1

Non-Inscrits (Non-Aligned)	Freedom Party	Albania	1
	Social Democratic Party of Albania	Albania	1
	Alliance of Independent Social Democrats (SNSD)	BiH	2
	People and Justice	BiH	1
	Democratic Front	BiH	1
	Serb List	Kosovo	1
	Alliance for the Future of Kosovo	Kosovo	1
	Europe Now Movement	Montenegro	2
	Democratic Montenegro	Montenegro	1
	New Serb Democracy	Montenegro	1
	Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)	North Macedonia	1
	For Our Macedonia	North Macedonia	1
	ZNAM	North Macedonia	1
	Socialist Party of Serbia	Serbia	1
	Srce	Serbia	1
	NPS	Serbia	1
	NDSS	Serbia	1
	We-Voice of the People	Serbia	1
	POKS	Serbia	1
SDPS	Serbia	1	
		Total: 20	

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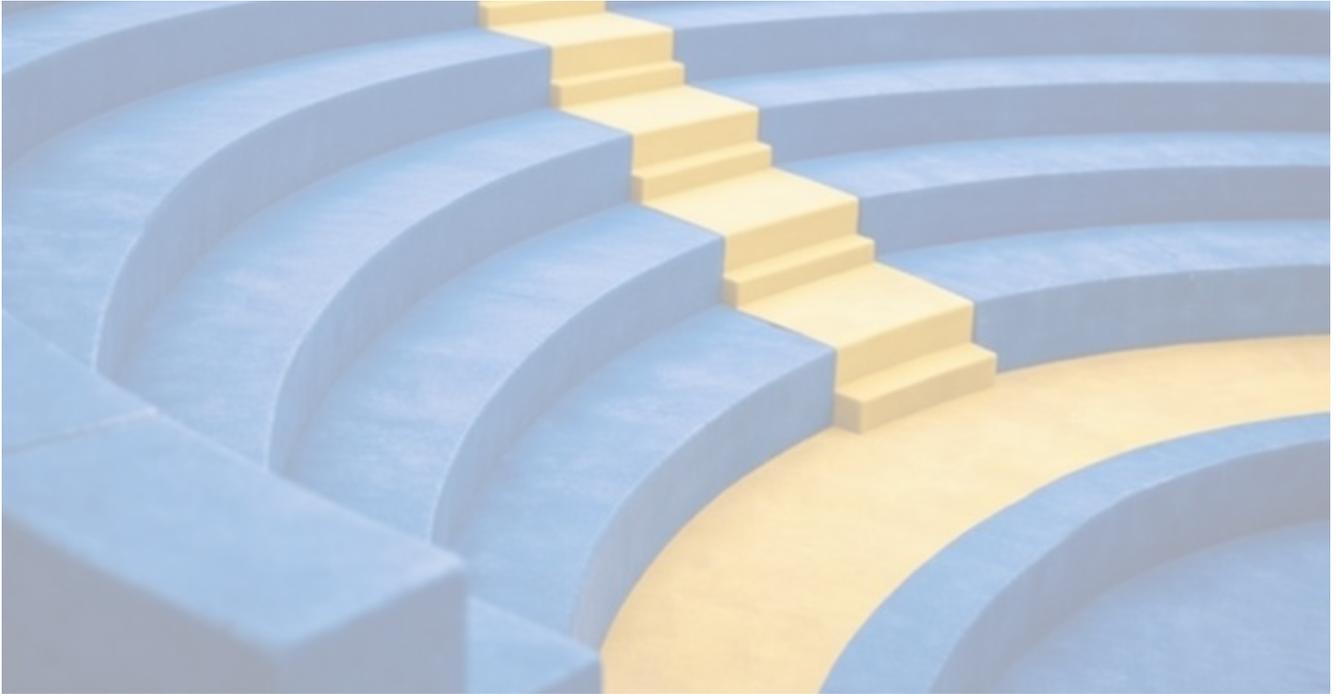
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