


# The Treaty of Accession and ratifications

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## The Treaty of Accession and ratifications

Negotiations with the ten candidate countries were completed at the Copenhagen European Council, held on 12–13 December 2002. The Treaty still had to be finalised and adopted. It was a weighty document running to some 4 900 pages, drafted in the 20 official languages of the future Union, setting out the terms of accession and the transitional arrangements for each of the candidate countries, now referred to as ‘acceding countries’. The European Commission gave its backing in February 2003. It was then the turn of the European Parliament to approve the text by an absolute majority of its Members, delivering an opinion on each acceding country, which it did on 9 April, with very few dissenting votes or abstentions. Finally, the Treaty of Accession was formally signed on 16 April in Athens, at the foot of the Acropolis. It entered into force on 1 May 2004.

Ratifications were to be carried out in two different ways: by referendum in the acceding countries in order to involve the people in this crucial choice, and by parliamentary procedure in the case of the existing Member States. The referendums, some of which were held even before the Treaty was signed, produced very favourable results everywhere.

Admittedly, the 10 states that had recently regained their sovereignty following the collapse of the Communist bloc and of the Soviet Union found it difficult to envisage now sharing that sovereignty with the Member States of the European Union, where they feared that they would remain second-tier countries for a long time, particularly since the conditions for enlargement left those who had hoped for a more generous welcome with feelings of frustration. However, the vast majority wished to join the Union, and there were no nasty surprises, even though the proportion of ‘No’ votes was high in Malta.

### Accession referendums

Country	Date	Turnout	Yes	No
Malta	8 March 2003	91 %	53.6 %	46.3 %
Slovenia	23 March 2003		55 %	89.7 % 10.3 %
Hungary	12 April 2003	45.6 %	83.7 %	16.2 %
Lithuania	10–11 May 2003	65 %	89.9 %	10.1 %
Slovakia	16–17 May 2003	52 %	92.4 %	6.2 %
Poland	7–8 June 2003	59 %	77.4 %	22.5 %
Czech Republic	13–14 June 2003		55 %	77.3 % 22.7 %
Estonia	14 Sept 2003	63 %	67 %	33 %
Latvia	20 Sept 2003	72.5 %	67%	32 %

The European Union had hoped that the reunification of Cyprus could be completed before its accession. The island had been divided into two political entities on account of the Turkish military presence in the north since 1974 and the proclamation of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, a country recognised by Turkey alone. The Commission had agreed not to make reunification a precondition for the accession of the Greek part, it being understood that the Cypriot Government would make every effort to find a solution. The Cypriot Government subsequently declared its support for the peace plan proposed by Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General, which envisaged the constitution of two federated states following a referendum to be held in each part of the island on 24 April 2004, shortly before the enlargement of the Union. However, the Greek Cypriot President, Tassos Papadopoulos, campaigned for the rejection of the plan on the ground that it effectively legitimised the partition of the island and the Turkish settlements in the north. Consequently, the plan was rejected by 75.8 % of voters in the Greek part (population 625 000), whilst it was accepted in the Turkish part (population 200 000), with 69.4 % voting ‘Yes’.

The Cypriot Government’s position was heavily criticised in the European Union and in the United States. The European Commission believed that it had been cheated. The Ministers for Foreign Affairs — with the exception of the Greek Minister — expressed their disappointment. Even though the whole island was acceding to the Union, only the Greek part would apply the Community *acquis*, and the status of the Turkish part would remain unclear pending a possible resolution of the situation. The Council of Ministers therefore

decided, without recognising the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, to grant it financial assistance to allow its economy to catch up with the Greek part. So it is now within the European Union that a solution to the Cyprus problem must be found, the ultimate objective remaining the reunification of the island.

For the Fifteen, the parliamentary ratifications of enlargement went off without any major difficulties. However, the governments did not really undertake any information campaigns and, now that enthusiasm over the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of a divided Europe had waned, public opinion became sensitive to the risks involved in a Union of 25 or more Member States. For example, there were fears over unfair competition from low-wage countries, the entry of immigrants onto the job market whilst unemployment was still an issue, and increased crime and various forms of trafficking. Financially, the countries and regions benefiting from the Structural Funds feared that they would bear the brunt of the requisite allocation of part of those funds to new Member States which had greater need. Whilst such fears were excessive, the fact remained that the Union's new size would make it more heterogeneous and raise the problem of its effective operation and its economic and, even more so, political, integration.