



New CER policy brief: Will EU enlargement create new models for the EU-UK relationship?

by Luigi Scazzieri, 15 April 2025

The enlargement process is pushing the EU to think creatively about how to work more closely with candidate countries before accession. The Union is increasingly embracing the notion of phased enlargement. In parallel, the EU is exploring new ways of deepening defence co-operation with candidate countries.

A joint paper by the CER and the Konrad Adenauer Stiftung: [Will EU enlargement create new models for the EU-UK relationship?](#), considers how enlargement could affect the EU-UK relationship. Specifically, it focuses on how the EU's embrace of phased accession may lead it to develop models of association for countries that do not want to become full members, or that cannot do so.

In its most ambitious form, associate membership could resemble an upgraded version of Norway's relationship to the EU. The least ambitious model for associate membership would entail a much more limited level of integration, with associate members aligning with EU law in some sectors only.

Each model would have different implications for the EU-UK relationship. The Norway+ model is unlikely to appeal to the UK so long as its red lines remain those of rejecting the single market, free movement, and the customs union. Conversely, if EU associate membership was a minimalist model, the implications for the EU-UK relationship would probably be significant.

Even if the EU does not develop a fully-fledged associate membership model, the scope for EU-UK defence co-operation could grow if the EU continues to strengthen defence co-operation with accession candidate like Ukraine. The more defence is seen as a self-contained area of co-operation, insulated from broader issues, the greater the chances of UK-EU co-operation.

Luigi Scazzieri, author of the paper said *"If the EU developed an associate membership model, the implications for UK-EU relations would depend on what the model looked like in practice. The UK is likely to be very interested in a model that allows sectoral integration. However, the EU's willingness to offer the UK such a model is highly uncertain."*

Notes for editors:

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