



# FINNISH PERSPECTIVE ON THE EU'S 2004 ENLARGEMENT: THE INEVITABLE TASK

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January 2025



Funded by  
the European Union

**REWEU - Finnish Institute of International Affairs | Publication #04/2025**

Finnish Perspective on the EU's 2004 Enlargement: The Inevitable Task

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This publication is a result of the CERV research project, (Re)uniting the East and West: Reflections on the 2004 EU enlargement (REWEU), funded by the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) of the European Commission. The project focuses on the commemoration of the 2004 “big bang” EU enlargement at the occasion of its 20th anniversary in May 2024.

**The project is implemented by:**

- **EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy** (Czechia)
- **Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy - ELIAMEP** (Greece)
- **Istituto Affari Internazionali** (Italy)
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## About REWEU

The project (Re)uniting the East and West: Reflections on the 2004 EU enlargement (REWEU) The project is focused on the commemoration of the 2004 "big bang" EU enlargement on the occasion of its 20th anniversary in May 2024. Through the combination of local, national and international public events, collection of historical memories and narratives, studies on impacts of 2004 enlargement, costs of non-enlargement and role of women in the process, as well as exhibitions and media articles, the project contributes to wider contemporary efforts of EU memory politics. The project focuses on eight selected EU countries, four from the older EU Member States which were part of the Union's decision-making processes leading up to the big enlargement (Belgium, Finland, Greece and Italy) and four newly acceding countries (Cyprus, Czech Republic, Latvia and Poland).

The project is funded by the European Union through the Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme (CERV) under the European Remembrance strand.

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## Introduction

“Challenging project celebrated in Dublin”, declared the title of a news piece published in Finland’s largest daily newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*, on May 1, 2004. On the same day, another article in the same paper was titled “Chaos on the cheap”, both referring to the enlargement of the European Union with ten new members. These titles illustrate the divided attitude towards the “big bang” enlargement in Finland: On one hand, Finns were concerned about the consequences and costs of this expansion. On the other hand, the conclusion was always the same: there was no alternative to the 2004 enlargement. “Or would it have been fair to leave those tormented by communism to their fate—poverty, crime, and bitterness rampant in the EU’s backyard?” the latter article asked rhetorically (HS, 1.5.2004).<sup>1</sup>

In this analysis, we delve into the Finnish memories and narratives about the EU’s 2004 enlargement by reviewing the media and political debate preceding and following the enlargement wave. The first section looks into the electoral campaigning of Finnish political parties in the 1999 European Parliament (EP) elections. By analysing the election programmes, we aim to understand how the EU’s enlargement was framed and justified by Finnish political actors, and what benefits, risks and costs were associated with it. The second section analyses the coverage of this topic in the Finnish media. It reveals some of the nuances and the practical concerns discussed in the public by politicians and experts as well as the civil society. The third section briefly presents the public support for the 2004 enlargement in Finland based on Eurobarometer data.

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<sup>1</sup> The news titles and quotes in this article were translated from Finnish or Swedish to English by the author, assisted by Microsoft Translator and Copilot.

The sources of data include the election programs of all major Finnish political parties in the 1999 EP elections.<sup>2</sup> We also take a look at the election programmes from the year 2024, when EU enlargement is again on the table, in order to discover the living memories of the 2004 enlargement. The media analysis focuses on news reportage in Finland's largest newspaper, Helsingin Sanomat, as other newspapers do not have comparable archives from 20 years ago available online.<sup>3</sup> The analysis was supported with background discussions with former Finnish state leaders who spoke about EU enlargement at two REWEU events organized in Finland.

### How did Finnish political parties view the 2004 EU enlargement?

The EP election campaigns from the year 1999 provide a snapshot of how the topic of the EU's Eastern enlargement was framed in politics and policy making in Finland at the end of the century. In the following analysis, we answer four questions in particular: first, what were the stances of Finnish political parties on enlargement in 1999; second, what, if any, were the geographical preferences of the political parties in terms of acceding states; third, how the parties justified their stance on enlargement; and fourth, what policy proposals were made to develop the EU's approach to enlargement.

Enlargement of the EU was not a particularly divisive topic in Finnish politics in 1999. Parties in the government – the Social Democratic Party (SDP), the National

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<sup>2</sup> While EU enlargement featured also in the European elections in 2004, it was already too late to campaign against the enlargement in 2004; in contrast, the campaigning in the 1999 EP elections is more revealing of the positions of political parties. EP election programmes of the Left Alliance (VAS) and the Swedish People's Party (RKP) were not publicly available online, whereby we analysed their general policy programmes from the same year/s (RKP 1999; VAS 1998).

<sup>3</sup> The search term "EU enlargement" (in Finnish) was used when discovering the Helsingin Sanomat archive. Moreover, we used the Google search engine to find articles from other media outlets with the search terms "media name" AND "EU enlargement". The results were narrowed down to the year 2004.

Coalition, the Swedish People’s Party, the Left Alliance, and the Green league – all took a positive stance on EU enlargement in their election programmes. The major opposition party, the Center party, as well as the minor opposition party Christian Democrats were also in favour of accepting new members in the Union. The right-wing Finns Party was the only one that opposed EU enlargement in 1999. The parties did not express geographic preferences: for instance, the Center Party’s election programme states that any European democratic market economy could be welcomed in the Union (Centre Party, 1999).

**Peace and stability were mentioned most often as the motivation to enlarge in the the Finnish party programmes for the 1999 EP**

Some variety emerges in terms of what conditions and criteria are emphasised. The National Coalition highlighted in its election programme that the candidates should meet the EU environmental standards (National Coalition, 1999), while

the Finnish Greens underlined that the candidates should cut nuclear power use, in addition to committing to democratic principles and human rights (Green League, 1999). The Finns Party in contrast insisted that the candidates need to have a sustainable economy and human rights situation before they can join the EU (Finns Party, 1999), while also the Christian Democrats underlined the economic criteria and human rights (Christian Democrats, 1999).

The analysis of the 1999 programmes reveals that Finnish parties were relatively unified in how they justified accepting new members. Peace and stability were mentioned most often as the motivation to enlarge: SDP positioned enlargement under the title of more peace and cooperation in Europe (Social Democratic Party of Finland, 1999), and the Center Party viewed enlargement as a step towards a more unified, secure and stable Europe. The Left Alliance noted EU enlargement would reduce the risk of war in Europe (Left Alliance, 1998), and the Swedish People’s Party believed that it would bring more peace, stability and positive

development to Europe (Swedish People's Party, 1999. The Finns party, in contrast, opposed EU enlargement in its 1999 programme as it believed that enlargement would decrease the influence of small states in the EU, and increase bureaucracy, and ineffectiveness.

In terms of policy proposals linked to EU enlargement, the 1999 election programmes focused on EU reform – just like twenty years later. The Finns Party's 1999 programme was firmest in that the EU cannot enlarge before it resolves its internal problems. This should not mean more integration, however: the Finns opposed both the deepening and the enlarging of the Union. The Social Democrats argued more vaguely that the EU should quickly prepare for enlargement, not elaborating how exactly. The National Coalition in contrast went into detail: the programme stated that both the decision-making and sectoral policies would need to be reformed, and qualified majority voting mainstreamed to enable enlargement. The programme also elaborated on the EU's agriculture reform, observing the needs of existing members and candidates as well as the limits of the EU budget. According to the National Coalition (1999), new members should be accepted in groups, based on their readiness.

The 1999 programme of the Finnish Center party was also adamant in that reform of the EU was needed to make enlargement work. The Union should be made more effective and democratic, which could include for instance decentralising powers of the Commission. The Center party underlined that the costs of the upcoming enlargement should not be paid by farmers alone. The Left Alliance was concerned about the consequences of enlargement for regions in Finland. The Greens mentioned that a period of "enhanced cooperation" should precede the accession of the candidates in the EU.

Twenty years – and nine new candidates and potential candidates – later the Finns is the only Finnish party that changed its position on enlargement: in the European

elections in 2024 all Finnish parliamentary parties were in favour of accepting new members. Another development follows a European trend of especially centre-right parties favouring some candidates specifically<sup>4</sup>: while in 1999 Finnish parties did not have geographic preferences for enlargement, in 2024, in particular the Finns but also to some extent the National Coalition seem to prioritise Ukraine (National Coalition 2024; Finns Party 2024). The justifications given for enlargement have also diversified in the 20 years: in 2024, enlargement is motivated not only by advancing peace and stability in Europe but also by the geopolitical interests of the EU and its member states (see footnote 4).

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Moreover, the 20 years' experience of enlarging – both the big bang experience as well as the following failures and successes to accept new members – featured in the 2024 campaigning as memories and lessons. The 2024 EP election programme of the Center party recalled that during previous enlargement rounds, the Union has simultaneously been reformed (Center Party 2024). The Finns Party pointed out that the previous rounds of enlargement had brought several net-recipient countries to the Union, and that not all of these countries had been successfully integrated to the political community. The changing of the position of the Finns Party to support enlargement can be considered as a concrete form of learning and remembering the successes of past enlargement rounds.

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<sup>4</sup> See Karjalainen, T. (upcoming) “EU Enlargement in the EP Election Campaigns: Comparison Between National Parties and Political Groups.” In Michael Kaeding, Alex Hoppe, Manuel Müller (eds.) *The 2024 European Elections*. Cham: Springer Nature.

Moreover, analysis of the 2024 election programmes reveals another lesson learnt from the past enlargements: while none of the 1999 programmes mentioned rule of law as a criterion, in 2024, it is the key word across Europe. In Finland, the 2024 EP election programmes of the SDP, Greens, Center, Left, Christian Democrats, and the Swedish People’s Party highlighted rule of law as a core value that needed to be protected when the Union enlarges and outlined measures that need to be taken if the member states do not comply. Only the Finns Party and the National Coalition do not directly mentioned rule of law in their 2024 EP election programmes (but both mentioned alignment with Western values as a precondition).

Enlargement in the Finnish EP election programmes in 1999	Left Alliance (1998, general programme, g.p.)	Social Democrats	Green League	Center Party	Swedish People’s Party (g.p.)	National Coalition	Christian Democrats	Finns Party
<b>Stance</b>	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	positive	negative
<b>Where to enlarge</b>	-	Countries that apply	-	Democratic market economies in Europe	-	-	European states that meet the economic criteria and respect human rights	Countries where economy and human rights are stable
<b>Justification</b>	Reduces the threat of war in Europe	Peace and cooperation in Europe	-	More unified, stable and secure Europe	peace, stability and positive development	-	-	Finland’s influence decreases, bureaucracy, costs and ineffectiveness increase
<b>Policy proposals</b>	-	Prepare EU quickly to enable enlargement	Enhanced cooperation should precede accession	Reform the EU to enable enlargement (more democratic & functional)	prepare enlargement by reforming decision-making and government	Accept members in groups; reform the EU to enable enlargement; more QMV	-	EU cannot grow before solving internal problems

Table 1. EU enlargement in the Finnish EP election programmes in 1999.

## Finnish media weighing the pros and cons of the “big bang”

In this section, we delve deeper into how the Eastern enlargement of the EU was discussed in the Finnish society in 2004. By analysing media reportage, we aim to understand what the perceived benefits and risks of accepting new members were, what concrete issues were debated and what proposals made to enhance the EU’s approach to enlargement. We identify a few key narratives – a positive narrative about peace, a negative narrative about disunity and security, and an economic narrative with both positive and negative variations. Our key finding, however, concerns a contradiction between the stance and focus regarding enlargement: while enlargement was not opposed in the media debates in 2004, the discourse was still focused on negative consequences of enlargement.

### Narratives on benefits of enlargement

An editorial in Helsingin Sanomat (13.6.2004), published just one month after the “big bang” had taken place, summarises well how Finnish media described the benefits of enlargement in 2004. In this piece, Janne Virkkunen wrote that it was necessary to extend the “peace project” to Central and Eastern Europe as it opens “doors to freedom and prosperity” for the post-communist states. In another editorial, Olli Kivinen asked who could have predicted – after decades of oppression, communism and poverty - the “spectacular transformation” to take place without bloodshed (HS 27.4.2004).

The narrative about EU enlargement advancing peace and stability – let us call it a peace narrative here – conveys specific interpretations of European history and the EU as an organisation. Several media pieces portray enlargement as a correcting move against the history of a divided Europe: accession of the previous satellite or USSR states to the Union would unify the continent that was split by the Cold War spheres of interest. The EU as an organisation is understood as a

peace project that prevents wars among its members and in Europe. This is in stark contrast to the 2024 narrative according to which the EU is a geopolitical actor and enlargement is a geostrategic move.

Under this peace narrative, more nuances emerge. In early 2004, Finnish media focused on a dispute on the extension of the EU-Russia Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) to the 10 acceding states, which Russia was threatened to object. While the dispute was resolved, the incident challenged the general peace narrative upheld in the media. Some news pieces considered EU enlargement an even bigger issue for Russia than NATO enlargement, while some other articles communicated the opposite view. An opinion piece by researcher Hiski Haukkala (8.3.2004) argued that the EU should not accept Russia's attempts to limit its right to accept new members. On the other hand, an interview with Ambassador Hannu Halinen in Turun Sanomat (22.11.2004) pondered Russia's future role in cooperation in the Baltic Sea region and argued that the EU's enlargement should not create new dividing lines.

**Enlargement was hoped to encourage older member states to conduct structural reforms necessary for economic growth.**

Another key narrative in the media concerns the economic benefits of enlarging. It focused on both the prospects of growth for the acceding states as well as on economic opportunities for the old member states. Growing internal market

was acknowledged, as well as the fact that the economies of the acceding states were some of the fastest growing and hence would benefit the EU economy. Competitiveness of the whole continent was hoped to improve: President Tarja Halonen, among others, viewed EU enlargement as an opportunity to develop the EU's competitiveness and trade (Salon Seudun Sanomat 28.10.2004). Enlargement was hoped to encourage older member states to conduct structural reforms necessary for economic growth. For instance, an Ilta-Sanomat interview with

economist Michael Heise, titled “New members force old EU countries to take on a fitness regimen” (22.6.2004), reported about pressure on the old members to reform their labour market, taxation, social benefits and pension system, among others.

The economic narrative also included an observation that the new member states presented interesting opportunities for investors from Finland and abroad. For instance, Poland’s market was quickly growing and large to start with, and its public image was improving. Some specific areas of trade were believed to benefit from the enlarging: news piece in *Ilta-Sanomat* (29.4.2004) reported that the Eastern enlargement was boosting exports in the IT sector in particular. Moreover, several articles addressed the free movement of labour from the new member states from a positive angle. Immigration was believed to bring labour where it was needed and to lessen the bureaucratic burden of hiring foreign workers. For instance, the enlargement was hoped and noted to bring more labour force to Finnish strawberry fields (HS 19.6.2004).

Finally, a few articles and opinion pieces focused on changing power dynamics in the EU. While the media narrative on EU policymaking was mostly a negative one, it was portrayed as good news to Finland that the center of gravity would move North-East after the Eastern enlargement. Several media articles discussed the relevance of EU enlargement for Nordic cooperation, usually pointing to opportunities for more cooperation.

### [Narratives on risks and negative consequences of enlargement](#)

Notably, the Finnish media narrative did not give an overly optimistic picture of enlargement. An article titled “Bazar or a brothel?” (HS 26.3.2004) declared EU enlargement a catastrophe for EU decision making and institutions. Another one called EU enlargement a trap that was set in the Maastricht Summit in 1991 (HS 29.4.2004). An interview with German scholar Josef Janning in turn concluded that

enlargement could go wrong, and dissolution of the Union could not be excluded. “EU is enlarging in a depressed mood. Doubts and fears are strengthening in the older member states”, the article reported (HS 10.4.2004). Similarly, an editorial titled “EU train is gushing” (HS 27.4.2004), reminded that no-one knows what the eventual consequences of enlargement and integration are: lack of effectiveness, nation states wanting to retake their sovereignty, and weak democracy in some member states were already evoking concerns.

Most concerns were linked to the perception that EU enlargement increases disunity in the EU. The differences between new and old member states were highlighted. Media reported about the economic gap, cultural differences, and the legacy of communism and dictatorship in the new members among other concerns. The narrative could be considered as a counter-discourse to the one about peace – however while the peace narrative was abstract and normative, the one about disunity focused on the practical challenges.

In particular, the increasing disunity was feared to paralyze or slow down decision making in the EU. It was highlighted that the new member states will pursue their national agendas in the EU just like the old

**Most concerns were linked to the perception that EU enlargement increases disunity in the EU.**

member states. Difficulties with adopting the new treaty in the EU were associated with the enlargement and considered as a demonstration of emerging challenges. Journalists were eager to outline catastrophic scenarios regarding decision-making in the growing Union: “Just imagine all the negotiation tables where the representatives of 25 member states try to bargain to have souvenirs to bring to politics back home” one article grumbled (HS 1.5.2004). “Imagine the Ministers of the Interior sitting at the table. If every minister – this is the European norm - spends ten minutes explaining what they are going to say, and then says it, the sitting exercise has already lasted more than four hours,” another article whined

(HS 26.3.2004). Many reminded that the working methods had been originally created for six members.

In particular, several articles highlighted the difficulty of accommodating 25 members in the Commission yet often came to the conclusion that there was no alternative: a commissioner was considered important for both Finland and the new member states, whose citizens and politicians needed to get to know the Union. This was also the position of the Finnish government led by Matti Vanhanen (for the debate, see e.g. HS 23.4.2004). Increasing the use of qualified majority voting was instead often proposed as a solution that Finland could accept to increase the effectiveness of the EU decision making in a growing Union.

Some opinion pieces proposed differentiated integration as a solution to disunity (e.g. Paavo Väyrynen in HS 26.1.2004). It was typically argued, however, that Finland needs to remain in the core group of EU integration. Deepening while enlarging was a more divisive topic: on the one hand, it was said that the EU should not be reduced into a single market because of increasing disunity, and on the other, it was noted that Finland is among the EU states that found enlargement as a way to prevent too much deepening.

Another negative narrative focused on the economy. Several media pieces outlined estimations of the costs of accepting ten new members – the hundreds of billions of euros making it the most expensive EU enlargement thus far – and noted that Finland which is already a net payer will pay even more because of the enlargement. It was also acknowledged that the net payers are not eager to contribute more to the EU budget. “The EU’s coffers will have ten new visitors, but there will not be much more to share”, a Helsingin Sanomat article summarised the debate (10.4.2004).

Key economic concerns included the issue of companies and industry moving to the new member states for lower costs, whereby jobs and revenues would be lost

in the old member states. The Eastern enlargement was noted to increase pressure on tax policies also because the newcomers have lower corporate taxation that older members would need to compete with.

Several articles addressed the challenge of free movement and labour incoming from the new member states. Finnish politicians seemed to disagree on whether a transition period for free movement would be needed: for instance, Helsingin Sanomat (4.6.2004) reported on a debate where an SDP candidate was in favour of the restrictions, and a candidate of the National Coalition said Finland would need more incoming labour immediately. Among others, the Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions (SAK) was reported to campaign to limit the right of the new EU citizens to move to Finland to work. Its campaigning was criticized for being in contradiction with labour shortage in Finland. Several news articles reassured that immigration from the new member states should remain modest according to studies.

Some articles pondered whether the welfare states can maintain the current level of social benefits with the increasing level of migration. Double standards for EU citizens were also discussed: Turun Sanomat (13.3.2004) brought up a concern that Estonian agency-hired labour will work in Finland with Estonian salary rates that are much lower. Finnish media also closely followed and reported about how other older member states such as the UK and other Nordics were preparing for the Eastern enlargement by introducing restrictions on immigration. It was

**It was argued that there should not be quick changes in the distribution of cohesion funds to ensure that the older member states have time to accommodate.**

acknowledged that Finnish industries and companies need to prepare for the upcoming enlargement, but for instance a news piece in Kaleva (26.7.2002) found it difficult for the companies to anticipate upcoming challenges and opportunities.

The impact of the enlargement on cohesion funds was discussed in detail. Typically, it was argued that there should not be quick changes in the distribution of cohesion funds to ensure that the older member states have time to accommodate. The EU's agricultural policy reforms were closely followed. Some articles found the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform unfair for farmers in the old member states. An *Ilta-Sanomat* article (5.7.2004) portrayed a picture of complex effects: on the one hand, the Finnish farms were becoming fewer and larger because of the EU reforms and enlargement, on the other hand, the ongoing reforms were noted to have slowed down these trends in the agriculture sector for several years.

In terms of agriculture, there were also concerns regarding quality of agricultural products. *Ilta-Sanomat* reported about food products coming from the slaughterhouses, dairies and fish processing plants of the new member states not meeting the EU standards. The entry of these food products to the EU market was postponed by the European Commission's decision. "Estonian food factories, on the other hand, survived the Commission's investigations with a clean bill", the article noted, continuing with an observation that the pre-accession cooperation with Finland, among others, could have contributed to it. (IS 15.4.2004).

Another narrative could be identified with a focus on security. The concerns discussed in the media varied from geopolitical ones – the unresolved situation in Cyprus – to more domestic ones, such as traffic safety. Most often enlargement was feared to increase organised crime, illegal labour market, and illegal immigration to the old member states. Several news pieces reported about increasing pressures and challenges for the Finnish border control. The lifting of Schengen checks between Finland and Estonia was considered both an economic opportunity and a security risk. Some articles observed the negative foreign and security political consequences for the new neighbourhood: Ukraine was believed to be marginalised, while also Belarus was reported to suffer from the situation

economically. The situation of Roma people in the acceding states was discussed on several occasions in the Finnish media, primarily from the point of view of their (lacking) rights and poor treatment. It was noted that the Roma would be the biggest minority group in Europe after the Eastern enlargement, and enlargement was hoped to improve their situation in the acceding countries (CITY 2.4.2004).

In addition to these key narratives, some specific topics were particularly discussed in the Finnish media. Surprisingly many articles addressed the effects of enlargement on language politics: for instance, an editorial titled “European Babel” (HS 13.4.2004) argued that enlargement would lead to language chaos in the EU, and pondered both the citizens’ right to get information in their mother language and the reality where the number of working languages in the EU would need to be decreased. Several other media pieces also discussed the status of the Finnish language in the EU and the increasing pressure on interpreters with additional languages to translate.

Another interesting characteristic in the debate was that the media quite often introduced critical voices from abroad to comment on EU enlargement. The Finnish media acknowledged Chancellor Gerhard Schröder’s criticism of low tax rates in the new member states, as well as the complaints of Spanish foreign minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos and French President Jacques Chirac on France’s and Spain’s declining influence in the EU.

<b>Narratives on benefits of enlargement</b>	<b>Narratives on risks and negative consequences of enlargement</b>
Peace (re-uniting Europe)	Disunity (practical challenges for the EU) Geopolitical and domestic security issues
Prosperity	Economic costs

Table 2. Media narratives on the EU’s Eastern enlargement in 2004

## Public support for the 2004 enlargement

In this final section, we present snapshots of Eurobarometer data to outline the public support for the EU's enlargement in Finland right before and after the EU's Eastern enlargement. The polls confirm what we already found in the media analysis: Finns were particularly concerned and aware of the risks of enlargement, but at the same time, they were generally happy about the EU accepting new members.

Firstly, it is important to note that while the political parties in Finland were rather aligned on enlargement, there was no consensus on it among citizens. The 1999 Eurobarometer found that Finns were more split in their views on enlargement

**The 1999 Eurobarometer found that Finns were more split in their views on enlargement than citizens from other member states.**

than citizens from other member states. The Eurobarometer 2002 shows that in particular Finns from the rural areas opposed enlargement, and also supporters of the Christian Democrats and the Center party were more likely to oppose it than others.<sup>5</sup>

However, in the big picture, Finns were in favour of the Eastern enlargement. Right before the “big bang”, only 14% of Finns opposed EU enlargement, while 51% thought that some of the candidate states should be accepted and 23% of the

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<sup>5</sup> According to a poll conducted by Suomen Gallup (ordered by Helsingin Sanomat), Finnish men see enlargement more positively than Finnish women, and those from the Helsinki region more positively than those from the rural areas. Farmers view enlargement most negatively, while those in leadership positions see it most positively. According to the poll, 40 percent of Finnish citizens have a positive perception of EU enlargement, and 15 percent have a negative stance on it. In comparison, 70 percent of politicians running in the EP elections see EU enlargement as a good thing. Supporters of the Greens see enlargement most positively, and supporters of the Center party and the Left Alliance are most sceptical. (HS 4.6.2004)

respondents thought that all willing candidates should be welcomed to the Union (Eurobarometer 2002).

The attitudes became more negative when further enlargement came into question. In 2004, only 45% of Finns were in favour of further EU enlargement in the future. This means that Finns were among the most sceptical EU citizens. However, Finns remained split: especially young people, students and unemployed thought that the EU should continue enlarging (Eurobarometer 2004). After the big bang enlargement, in 2005, 45% of Finns were still in favour of further enlarging of the Union, which is a bit less than the average in the EU (Eurobarometer 2005).

In general, Finns had more concerns than others about enlargement. Right before the big bang enlargement, in the Eurobarometer 2003, Finns were most concerned in Europe about the negative impact of enlargement on decision-making in the EU. Finns were also among the most convinced of Europeans that their country would have a less important role in Europe after the enlargement. Moreover, Finns were among the most concerned about enlargement making the EU more distant from citizens (Eurobarometer 2003). Similarly, already according the 1998 Eurobarometer, Finns were among the most convinced EU citizens that EU enlargement would lead to their country receiving less financial aid.

Despite the concerns among Finnish citizens, the Eurobarometer in 2002 shows that 60% of Finns were satisfied with the speed of EU enlargement. When asked whether they believe that the EU is well prepared to enlarge, Finns were among the most convinced in 2003 (Eurobarometer 2003). Finns were also convinced of the benefits of enlargement - according to the 2002 Eurobarometer, 70% of Finns believed EU enlargement to unify the continent. However, the 2003 Eurobarometer reveals that in comparison to other EU citizens, Finns were least convinced of a moral duty to re-unite Europe after the Cold War divisions. In 2002,

66% of Finns believed enlargement to help the acceding states to catch up in development, and 65% believed enlargement to make the EU politically stronger (Eurobarometer 2002).

Finns had slightly fewer concerns than others about immigration and unemployment. Among the EU citizens, Finns were least concerned in 2002 that enlargement would cause unemployment back home. Moreover, according to the Eurobarometer comparisons (2002 and 2003), Finns estimated enlargement to cause less immigration than what was estimated by other EU citizens. Finns doubted more than others that enlargement would make controlling illegal immigration easier, and Finns were also most convinced that enlargement would make tackling crime and drug smuggling more difficult (Eurobarometer 2003).

**The commitment of the candidates to protection of the environment was valued slightly more than their respect for EU rules or ability to contribute to the EU budget.**

In terms of accession criteria, Finns considered it most important that the acceding states are committed to fighting organized crime, and respect human rights and democracy (Eurobarometer 2002). The commitment of the candidates to protection of the environment was valued slightly more than their respect for EU

rules or ability to contribute to the EU budget. In comparison to other EU citizens, Finns were less likely to insist that the acceding states should put the interests of the EU above the interests of their own country (e. g. Eurobarometer 1999).

Finally, Finns felt they had received enough information about the EU's upcoming enlargement. According to the Eurobarometer 2002, Finns were better informed about EU enlargement than EU citizens in general and took part in the discussion about it more actively. In terms of knowledge about the candidate states, Finns knew Estonia best, while Turkey was the second-best known candidate state.

While Finns were not eager to work or study in any of the accession countries, or to develop business relations with them, most Finns had visited Estonia, and they were eager to travel to Cyprus.

## Conclusion

In this analysis, we have analysed Finnish media and political narratives surrounding the 2004 enlargement. We observed a divided attitude: on the one hand, Finns were concerned about the consequences and costs of the expansion, but on the other hand, did not oppose it. The negative narrative – increasing disunity, economic concerns, and security risks among others – was more widely spread but obviously less important than the narrative on advancing peace and prosperity in the EU. While Finnish citizens were relatively divided in their views, for the political elite, EU enlargement was not a divisive topic: analysis of the European election campaigns reveals that, within the parties studied, the then-small Finns Party was the only one that opposed EU enlargement in 1999.

Comments by the former Finnish state leaders in REWEU events support this observation: the foreign policy leadership was unified in their understanding that the Eastern enlargement was in Finland's national interests, but the public debate was focused on the practical challenges of growing as a Union. To an extent, the Finnish media was self-aware and critical of the pessimistic narrative around EU enlargement. "Basic right – but not for you", Helsingin Sanomat tiled its editorial (23.4.2004), where it criticized the prejudice against new EU citizens as well as the Finnish draft law limiting the right of citizens to move to Finland to work.

The media did portray EU enlargement as something Finland needed to actively react to. It was observed that Finland needed to be more active in seeking allies and preparing for negotiations. Some proposed a new role for Finland: now President of Finland, then MEP, Alexander Stubb (2004) suggested in an op-ed in Helsingin Sanomat that Finland could serve as a mediator between old and new

EU members, and in this way help to improve unity and effectiveness in the Union (HS 20.6.2004).

Finally, in the 2020s, the Union is preparing to enlarge again. Both the 2004 concerns and the perceived benefits of enlargement in early 2000s continue to be remembered and are reflected in the 2024 debate on enlargement, on the one hand as a success story, and on the other hand, as a cautionary tale. As a lesson learnt from the previous enlargement rounds, rule of law is the key word across Europe. At the same time, or despite it, enlargement is viewed as a successful recipe for peace and stability in Europe.

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