

Why were bulgaria
and romania
accepted in the eu?



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Why were Bulgaria and Romania accepted in the EU in 2007 despite of their 'incomplete democratisation', which was acknowledged by the European Commission?

Introduction

On December 2007 Romania and Bulgaria joined the European Union. They had not been able to join in the 2004 EU expansion as they had failed to meet the EU's criteria for membership at the time. In 2007 however there still existed serious doubts as to whether Romania or Bulgaria would be able to join. Although both were democracies both nations still had major political issues relating to corruption, government accountability and their incomplete democratisation process. Why then, if the EU acknowledged that both Countries still had serious problems, were these nations accepted into the EU? This Essay will look at the circumstances leading up to Bulgaria and Romania's entry into the EU, examine why many believed they were not ready for membership and the reasons behind their acceptance by Brussels.

Background to Membership

In 2004 eight Eastern European Countries were admitted into the EU. Both Bulgaria and Romania were turned down for full membership of the EU at this point, due to their being significantly behind the other eight nations in terms of GDP, democratisation and other factors. ^[1] However both nations soon went from being candidates to being accession Countries in April 2005, as long as both nations continued to enact the necessary reforms, and in September 2006 it was confirmed that both would become full members on

January 2007. ^[2] In many ways then the final decision regarding Romanian and Bulgarian membership was not made in January 2007, but arguably as early as 2005, which then made it inevitable. Throughout this period, there were serious doubts about the Eastern European Nations ability and willingness to enact the necessary reforms, and even upon entry the EU acknowledged that there was still much work to be done.

Democratic Deficiencies

The 2004 Romanian election was said by many commentators to be proof that the Country had not yet made the transition to fully fledged democracy. There were allegations of voter irregularities, missing votes and candidates with links to the previous security apparatus of the Country. ^[3] Both nations' political systems still had aspects of authoritarian regimes, and a year after membership both were still unable to fully guarantee their citizens constitutional rights. Romania and Bulgaria's legal systems were considered by many as incompatible with a free and democratic society. ^[4] In economic terms the two ex communist nations were extremely poor, with a GDP around just 30% of the EU average. At the time of the accession process both markets had not yet made the transition into being free market economies, infrastructure was ageing and the State still had a large role in both Nations economies. The most significant problem however was the widespread corruption in the States, especially with regards to Bulgaria. The EU consistently complained about Bulgarian organised crime's links with high level Bulgarian Government officials, who have often been found siphoning EU grants meant for infrastructure to family businesses or to criminal gangs.

Such is the level of corruption that the EU saw fit to withhold 486 million Euros worth of aid in 2008. ^[5]

Reasons for Membership

Taking into account the serious problems, poverty, corruption and lack of accountability of Romania and Bulgaria, why did the EU allow them membership in January 2007? As we have already mentioned, the decision to accept Romania and Bulgaria as members was taken long before 2007. Although they were rejected as full members in 2004, from their acceptance as accession Countries in 2005 it was clear that they were on the path to full membership. The EU did place stringent conditions on full membership, to which it is debatable the pair have achieved. The EU did judge in 2006 that both Countries, although having a lot of work to do, had satisfied the criteria. Both Romania and Bulgaria had, since 2004 reformed their legislative systems, economies and political processes. ^[6] From this point on, although the EU could delay membership, it could not feasibly deny membership to the two unless there was some major breach of democratic and human rights norms.

Membership as a means to Reform

Along with the legal arguments, Brussels clearly believed that to deny membership when the nations had clearly made profound transitional steps to reform would not only be unfair but damaging to the EU, Romania and Bulgaria. The EU believed that membership would act as a motivating factor for both nations to continue reforms, whereas rejection might well have

convinced the elites of both nations to continue their corrupt and undemocratic practices. The obvious financial and political benefits that come with membership, have, as predicted by the EU, helped both nations start the economic reforms needed. [7] This essay believes that the reason Romania and Bulgaria were accepted was because the EU believed that only membership would help the Countries to successfully integrate into Europe, and that despite several problems regarding corruption and accountability, the EU was satisfied with both the existing reforms and pledges that the two nations would in future continue to meet EU expectations and demands if they were allowed membership in 2007.

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Footnotes

[1] Sangiovanni, Mette Eilstrup “ Debates on European Integration” (Palgrave Macmillan, New York, 2006, p. 125)

[2] Pridham, Geoffrey “ The Scope and Limitations of Political Conditionality: Romania’s Accession to the European Union” (Comparative European Politics, Houndsmills, Dec 2007, Vol 5, Issue 4, pp347-367)

[3] Ciobanu, Monica “ Romania’s travails with democracy and accession to the European Union” Europe-Asia Studies, 59. 8, p1444

[4] Pridham, Geoffrey “ The Scope and Limitations of Political Conditionality: Romania’s Accession to the European Union” (Comparative European Politics, Houndsmills, Dec 2007, Vol 5, Issue 4, pp347-367)

[5] Bagehot, “ Europe: Balkan Blushes; Bulgaria, Romania and the EU” (The Economist, London July 26, 2008, Vol 388, Issue 8590)

[6] Ciobanu, Monica “ Romania’s travails with democracy and accession to the European Union” Europe-Asia Studies, 59. 8, pp1429-1450

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[7] Bagehot, " Europe: Balkan Blushes; Bulgaria, Romania and the EU" (The Economist, London July 26, 2008, Vol 388, Issue 8590