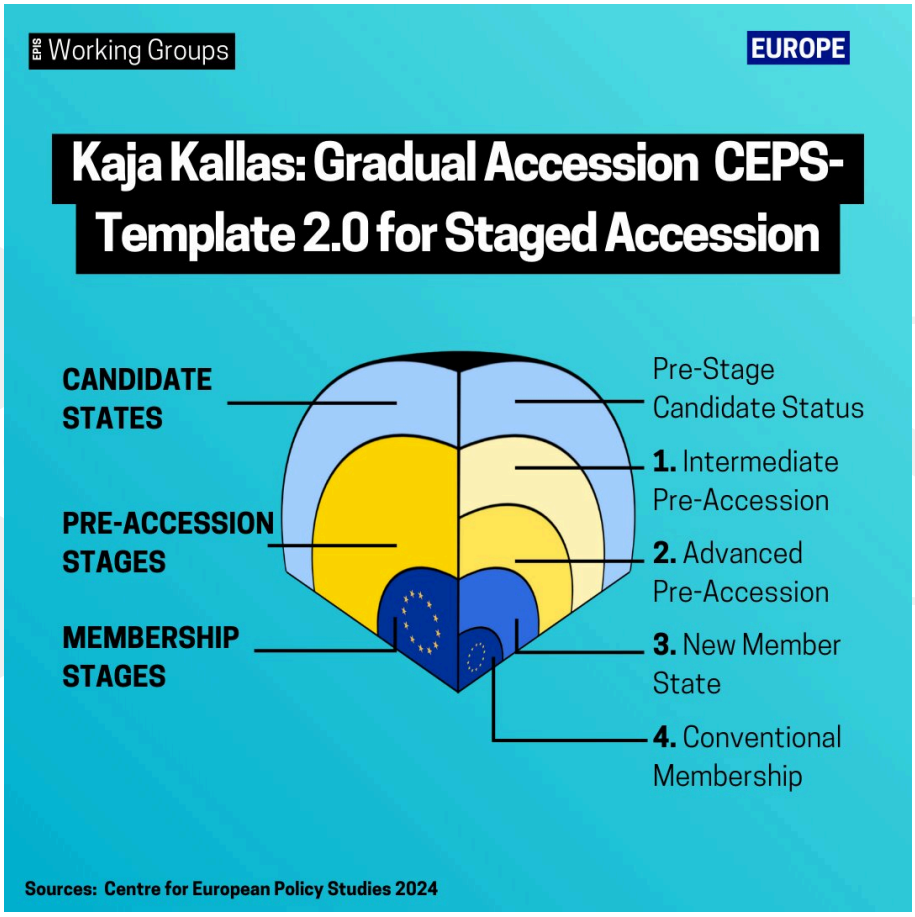
# Kaja Kallas

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20 years since the *"big bang" enlargement of 2004, the European Union's long-dormant ambition to welcome new members has seen a remarkable resurgence since the Russian attack on Ukraine. Kaja Kallas, currently Prime Minister of Estonia, will succeed Spain's Josep Borrell as the new High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). During an* address on March 3rd, Estonia's iron lady, as she is frequently portrayed, presented her focal points for Europe's foreign policy, stating that a model of gradual accession might overcome the long stagnation. Gradual "access to the single market" could be a first step, resulting in faster convergence and thereby EU membership. Kaja Kallas considers EU enlargement primarily essential for establishing Europe as a significant "geopolitical actor". Although enlarge-

ment policy is formally administered by DG NEAR, the High Representative has significant agenda-setting power.

Kaja Kallas' proposal for gradual accession dovetails with the push for "*New gradualism" in the enlargement methodology, envisioned in the* European Council conclusions of June 2022. Assuming the political will to operationalise this "New gradualism", CEPS – a Brussels based think tank – envisioned a model for staged accession. The Template 2.0 for Staged Accession to the EU in 2023 proposes a four-staged accession process, gradually awarding benefits and obligations to EU-candidate states. Gradual access to the single market is a key element.

The CEPS model for staged accession requires a "membership preparedness assessment" by the Commission of respective states for progressing to higher accession stages. The two pre-accession stages envision a gradual increase in participation in EU institutions and scale up of financial transfers in both contributions and funding. While stage 1 candidate states enjoy selective observer participation in EU institutions, stage 2 candidate states receive broader, generalised access.

When acceding the two membership stages, the "New Member States" (NMSs) share all respective obligations of conventional member states but are subjected to temporary limits. NMSs enjoy full representation and participation in all EU institutions, the single market and customs union, standard access to structural and investment funds and EU citizenship. Yet, stage 3 NMSs are subjected to a temporary suspension of veto rights in the Council of the EU, with only Stage 4 awarding the conventional membership status. Advocates for staged accession have different driving factors.

Kaja Kallas views EU enlargement first and foremost as a necessity for making Europe a serious "*geopolitical actor". 21 years after the* Thessaloniki promise, the two-decade long stagnation and lack of EU membership perspectives for the Western Balkan opened the door to external actors. Today, the EU's political, economic, and societal leverage in the region is threatened by Chinese and Turkish aspirations and successes.

This geopolitical aspect of EU enlargement adds to the economic benefits for the Union. Increased market size, labour force augmentation, more opportunities for cross-border investments and reduced risk of economic distress make an enlarged Union more attractive for the Union itself.

Nonetheless, proposals for staged accession face serious concerns. Besides concerns about its legal feasibility, critics often warn of the creation of second-class member states, an even more costly accession process and most importantly, potentially disincentivizing acceding countries to pursue conventional membership, due to solely profiting of pre-accession stage benefits.

Jospeh Borell's term in office as Europe's current High Representative for CFSP started with a Union consisting of 28 member states, and will close with 27 members, but it appears evident that Kaja Kallas, will, through various concepts of gradual enlargement, strongly support an expanded EU.