

Therese Liechtenstein: Which EU would I join?

Liechtenstein is, together with Norway and Iceland, member of the EEA, the European Economic Area. The EEA is a group of countries associated with the EU, concerning the four freedoms. The four freedoms are the freedom of exchange of people, goods, services and capital. Economically we are treated equal to members and need to apply all EU single market rules. However, politically we are not subject to EU rules.

What characteristics would the EU have to have in order for me to want to join?

1) An effective and honest respect for the principle of subsidiarity.

Article 5(3) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) confirms and ensures the principle of subsidiarity. Unfortunately the principle of subsidiarity has been contradicted by stepping up harmonization and increased regulation at the EU-level.

2) A working system of accountability for the EU governing bodies.

Transparency does not necessarily result in the proper accountability. Information can be hidden in an impenetrable mass of information, which is labeled as transparency. In such a small country as Liechtenstein, we are used to knowing our politicians and we are wary of not knowing who decides what on our behalf. The more subsidiarity, the closer is local government to the citizen and therefore more accountable.

3) A respect for direct democracy. Liechtenstein benefits from a strong system of direct democracy. Direct democracy has proven to be successful for us and we do not want to give it up. A considerable number of issues, especially taxation, are subject to referenda. Parts of the "acquis communautaire", the EU rules binding for all members, would in Liechtenstein be subject to referenda. A contradiction, if not approved by the people.

4) Enhancement of the four freedoms by competition between regions.

Harmonization results in the danger of compromising on the lowest common denominator, or if not, creating too high regulatory or other costs.

5) A common defense and security policy. What however is still largely done by national states and should really be carried out by the Union is the Defense and Security policy. A better coordination of foreign policy would also be necessary. Europe should regain charge of its own and its partners' defenses.

In the end I would like to stress that I DO recognize the huge merits of the EU as a European peace project. I also highly appreciate the achievement of the EU to ensure the four freedoms, although they are now limited by overregulation and unnecessary harmonization. I hope that Europe will overcome its shortcomings and find back to its success story. Liechtenstein feels very close and would like to see further success, be closely associated and contribute to the European success story. Whether a small country like Liechtenstein should fully join or remain closely associated might not make a big difference, neither to the EU nor to our country. We are all Europeans.