



## BRIEFING PAPER

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# Referendums on the European Union

By Vaughne Miller

**Inside:**

1. Joining the EC/EU, candidacy for membership, continued membership
2. Referendums on other matters
3. France, Austria and EU enlargement



# Contents

<b>Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Joining the EC/EU, candidacy for membership, continued membership</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Joining the EC/EU	4
1.2 Candidacy for EU membership	6
1.3 Staying in or leaving the EU	7
<b>2. Referendums on other matters</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1 Enlargement to admit UK, Denmark and Ireland	8
2.2 Single European Act	8
2.3 European Constitution	8
2.4 Treaty on European Union (Maastricht)	8
2.5 European Economic Area (EEA)	9
2.6 Treaty of Amsterdam	10
2.7 Treaty of Nice	10
2.8 Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe	10
2.9 Economic and Monetary Union	11
2.10 Treaty of Lisbon	11
2.11 Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Fiscal Compact)	12
2.12 Unified Patent Court membership	12
2.13 Greek 'bail-out'	12
2.14 Danish opt-out	13
2.15 EU-Ukraine Association Agreement	13
2.16 Swiss bi-lateral agreements with the EU	13
<b>3. France, Austria and EU enlargement</b>	<b>16</b>
3.1 France	16
3.2 Austria	17

## Summary

Referendums have been held in both candidate states and Member States on EU membership.

EU Treaty amendments, EU enlargement, Economic and Monetary Union, new treaties or new constitutional arrangements have also attracted referendums in some Member States. These may be binding, advisory or consultative.

This Note charts referendums held since 1972 on EU matters in candidate and Member States and in Switzerland on its relations with the EU, with brief details on turnout and results.

It also outlines the positions of France and Austria on holding a referendum on EU enlargement, particularly with regard to a possible Turkish accession.

# 1. Joining the EC/EU, candidacy for membership, continued membership

## 1.1 Joining the EC/EU

### **Ireland – 10 May 1972**

Turnout	71%
YES	83%
NO	17.0%

### **Denmark – 3 October 1972**

Turnout	90.1%
YES	63.3%
NO	36.7%

### **Norway**

#### **i. 26 September 1972**

Turnout	79.2%
YES	46.5%
NO	53.5%

#### **ii. 27-28 November 1994**

Turnout	88.8%
YES	47.6%
NO	52.4%

### **Austria - 12 June 1994**

Turnout	81%
YES	66.4%
NO	33.6%

### **Finland - 16 October 1994**

Turnout	74%
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## 5 Referendums on the European Union

YES	57.0%
NO	43.0%

### **Aaland Islands<sup>1</sup> – 20 November 1993**

Turnout	49%
YES	74%
NO	26%

### **Sweden - 13 November 1994**

Turnout	82.4%
YES	52.2%
NO	46.9%

### **Malta – 8 March 2003**

Turnout	91%
YES	53.6%
NO	46.4%

### **Slovenia – 23 March 2003**

Turnout	60.3%
YES	89.6%
NO	10.4%

### **Hungary – 12 April 2003**

Turnout	45.6%
YES	83.8%
NO	16.2%

### **Lithuania – 10–11 May 2003**

Turnout	63.4%
YES	91.7%
NO	8.9%

### **Slovakia – 16-17 May 2003**

Turnout	52.1%
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<sup>1</sup> The Aaland Islands are an Autonomous Province of Finland

YES	92.5%
NO	6.2%

#### **Poland – 7-8 June 2003**

Turnout	58.9%
YES	77.5%
NO	22.6%

#### **Czech Republic – 15-16 June 2003**

Turnout	55.2%
YES	77.3%
NO	22.7%

#### **Estonia – 14 September 2003**

Turnout	63.0%
YES	66.9%
NO	33.1%

#### **Latvia – 20 September 2003**

Turnout	72.5%
YES	67.0%
NO	32.3%

#### **Croatia – 22 January 2012**

Turnout	43.5%
YES	66.3%
NO	33.1%

## **1.2 Candidacy for EU membership**

### **Switzerland<sup>2</sup>**

#### **i. 8 June 1997**

Turnout	35%
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<sup>2</sup> The two Swiss referendums were on candidacy for membership, rather than membership itself. Accession negotiations have never been opened with Switzerland.

## 7 Referendums on the European Union

YES	25.9%
NO	74%

### ii. 4 March 2001

Turnout	55.1%
YES	23.2%
NO	76.7%

## 1.3 Staying in or leaving the EU

### United Kingdom

#### i. 5 June 1975<sup>3</sup>

Turnout	64%
YES	67.2%
NO	32.8%

#### ii. 23 June 2016

### Greenland – 23 February 1982<sup>4</sup>

Turnout	75%
YES	48%
NO	52%

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<sup>3</sup> The UK held a referendum on whether to remain in the EEC, based on renegotiated terms of entry. The majority voted in favour of staying in.

<sup>4</sup> Greenland voted on whether to stay in the EEC. The majority voted to withdraw from the Community.

## 2. Referendums on other matters

### 2.1 Enlargement to admit UK, Denmark and Ireland

#### France – 23 April 1972

Turnout	60%
YES	67.7%
NO	32.3%

### 2.2 Single European Act

#### Denmark – 27 February 1986

Turnout	75%
YES	56.2%
NO	43.8%

#### Ireland – 26 May 1987

Turnout	44%
YES	70%
NO	30%

### 2.3 European Constitution

#### Italy – 18 June 1989

Turnout	81%
YES	89%
NO	11%

### 2.4 Treaty on European Union (Maastricht)

#### Denmark

##### i. 2 June 1992

Turnout	82.3%
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## 9 Referendums on the European Union

YES	49.3%
NO	50.7%

### ii. 18 May 1993

Turnout	86.2%
YES	56.7%
NO	43.3%

### Ireland - 18 June 1992

Turnout	57.3%
YES	68.7%
NO	30.8%

### France - 20 September 1992

Turnout	69.7%
YES	51%
NO	49%

## 2.5 European Economic Area (EEA)

### Switzerland – 6 December 1992

Turnout	78%
YES	49.7%
NO	50.3%

### Liechtenstein

#### i. 12 December 1992

Turnout	87%
YES	55.8%
NO	44.2%

#### ii. 9 April 1995

Turnout	82.0%
YES	55.9%
NO	44.1%

## 2.6 Treaty of Amsterdam

### **Denmark – 28 May 1998**

Turnout	76%
YES	55.1%
NO	44.9%

### **Ireland – 22 May 1998**

Turnout	56%
YES	61.7%
NO	38.3%

## 2.7 Treaty of Nice

### **Ireland**

#### **i. 7 June 2001**

Turnout	35%
YES	46.1%
NO	53.9%

#### **ii. 19 October 2001**

Turnout	49.5%
YES	62.9%
NO	37.1%

## 2.8 Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe

### **Spain – 20 February 2005**

Turnout	43.3%
YES	76.7%
NO	17.2%

### **France – 29 May 2005**

Turnout	69.7%
YES	45.1%
NO	54.9%

### **Netherlands – 1 June 2005**

Turnout	63.3%
YES	38.5%
NO	61.5%

### **Luxembourg – 10 July 2005**

Turnout	87.8%
YES	56.5%
NO	43.5%

Referendums were planned but cancelled in the Czech Republic, Denmark, Ireland, Poland, Portugal and the UK following the French and Dutch rejections and the subsequent abandonment of the treaty.

## 2.9 Economic and Monetary Union

### **Denmark – 28 September 2000**

Turnout	85%
YES	46.9%
NO	53.1%

### **Sweden – 14 September 2003**

Turnout	81.2%
YES	41.8%
NO	56.2%

## 2.10 Treaty of Lisbon

### **Ireland**

- i. **12 June 2008**

Turnout	53.1%
YES	46.6%
NO	53.4%

**ii. 2 October 2009**

Turnout	58.0%
YES	67.1%
NO	32.9%

## 2.11 Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union (Fiscal Compact)

This was an intergovernmental treaty among EU Member States except the UK, the Czech Republic and Croatia (when it joined the EU).

**Ireland – 31 May 2012**

Turnout	50.5%
YES	60.4%
NO	39.6%

## 2.12 Unified Patent Court membership

**Denmark - 25 May 2014**

Turnout	55.9%
YES	62.5%
NO	37.5%

## 2.13 Greek 'bail-out'

**Greece - 5 July 2015**

Turnout	63%
YES	38.7%
NO	61.3%

## 2.14 Danish opt-out<sup>5</sup>

### Denmark - 3 December 2015

Turnout	72%
YES	46.9%
NO	53.1%

## 2.15 EU-Ukraine Association Agreement

### Netherlands – 6 April 2016

Turnout	32.3%
YES	38.2%
NO	61%

## 2.16 Swiss bi-lateral agreements with the EU

### i. 3 December 1972 (free trade agreement with EC)

Turnout	52.9%
YES	72.5%
NO	27.5%

### ii. 6 December 1992 (joining European Economic Area)

Turnout	78.7%
YES	49.7%
NO	50.3%

### iii. 8 June 1997 (federal popular initiative "negotiations on EU membership")

Requiring approval in referendum and by the Cantons to launch accession negotiations with EU (Négociations d'adhésion à l'UE : que le peuple décide!).

Turnout	35.4%
YES	25.9%

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<sup>5</sup> The vote was on whether to convert Denmark's full opt-out on home and justice matters into an opt-out with case-by-case opt-in arrangement, similar to that of the UK and Ireland.

NO 74.1%

**iv. 21 May 2000 (bilateral agreements)**

Turnout 48.3%

YES 67.2%

NO 32.8%

**v. 4 March 2001 (federal popular initiative "yes to Europe!" (Oui à l'Europe!) on opening accession negotiations with EU)**

Turnout 55.8%

YES 23.2%

NO 76.8%

**vi. 5 June 2005 (Schengen and Dublin agreements)**

Turnout 56.8%

YES 54.6%

NO 45.4%

**vii. 25 September 2005 (free movement of persons – 2004 EU enlargement)**

Turnout 54.4%

YES 56%

NO 44%

**viii. 26 November 2006 (cohesion funds for Central and Eastern European States)**

Turnout 45%

YES 53.4%

NO 46.6%

**ix. 8 February 2009 (freedom of movement Bulgaria and Romania)**

Turnout 50.9%

YES 59.6%

NO 40.4%

**x. 17 May 2009 (development of Schengen – biometric passports)**

Turnout	38%
YES	50.1%
NO	49.9%

**xi. 9 February 2014 (Swiss immigration referendum)<sup>6</sup>**

Turnout	56.6%
YES	50.3%
NO	49.7%

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<sup>6</sup> The vote was on a proposal to limit immigration through quotas.

## 3. France, Austria and EU enlargement

### 3.1 France

France held a referendum on the admission of the UK, Denmark, Ireland and Norway to the EEC in 1972 (see above).

An amendment to Article 88.5 of the French Constitution was introduced in 2005 under former President, Jacques Chirac, which required a referendum to be held on any new EU accession, and was passed just before the French referendum on the EU constitution in 2005. In April 2008 the French Government of Nicolas Sarkozy approved the removal of the 2005 obligatory referendum clause.

On 20 May 2008 the National Assembly began discussions on a constitutional reform bill, the "[Constitutional law on the Modernisation of the Institutions of the Fifth Republic](#)". The Assembly voted on 29 May 2008 by 48 votes to 21 to approve an amendment tabled by Jean-Luc Warsmann (UMP) making it compulsory for France to hold a referendum on large countries joining the EU (if the acceding country represented more than 5% of the overall EU population of about 500 million people). This was seen as targeting Turkey in particular.

On 23 June 2008, as part of the constitutional reform package, the Senate voted by 297 to 7 to remove the constitutional requirement for a referendum for new accessions,<sup>7</sup> and in July that year approved a [revised version](#) of the earlier bill, allowing the President to decide on a nationwide referendum or for Parliament to decide by means of a parliamentary vote.

The final vote by the French Congress was on 21 July 2008 and the bill was narrowly passed.<sup>8</sup> Constitution Article 88.5 now states:

[Tout projet de loi autorisant la ratification d'un traité relatif à l'adhésion d'un État à l'Union européenne et aux Communautés européennes est soumis au référendum par le Président de la République.

Toutefois, par le vote d'une motion adoptée en termes identiques par chaque assemblée à la majorité des trois cinquièmes, le Parlement peut autoriser l'adoption du projet de loi selon la procédure prévue au troisième alinéa de l'article 89].

In [translation](#):

Any Government Bill authorizing the ratification of a treaty pertaining to the accession of a state to the European Union shall be submitted to referendum by the President of the Republic.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, by passing a motion adopted in identical terms in each House by a three-fifths majority, Parliament

<sup>7</sup> See [EUObserver, 24 June 2008](#)

<sup>8</sup> It was passed as [Loi constitutionnelle n° 2008-724 of 23 July 2008](#). Full dossier is at [http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/dossiers/reforme\\_5eme.asp](http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/13/dossiers/reforme_5eme.asp)



may authorize the passing of the Bill according to the procedure provided for in paragraph three of article 89.<sup>9</sup>

### 3.2 Austria

The former Austrian Foreign Minister, Ursula Plassnik, said in August 2008 that “Coalition parties have agreed to go for a referendum if Turkey's accession talks are concluded in favour of a decision to prepare a membership agreement”.<sup>10</sup>

Elections in September 2008 brought in a new Chancellor, Werner Faymann. He said on 3 May 2011 that Austria would hold a referendum on Turkish accession to the EU.

Since November 2014 the Austrian Johannes Hahn has been the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations in the Commission of Jean Claude Juncker. He has said that Turkey is “an important partner of Europe”.<sup>11</sup> But the official position in Austria appear to be that a referendum would be required to approve Austrian membership of the EU. Chancellor Faymann has said that a referendum on Turkish membership in Austria would probably fail, and that talks between the EU and Turkey should focus instead on a “privileged partnership” with Turkey.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [Constitution of France](#), 4 October 1958 (as amended), Article 88-5. See Adam Sage, Sarkozy snatches reforms victory by a single vote”, *The Times*, 22 July 2008. The amendment bill is not made subject to a referendum when the President of the Republic decides to submit it to Parliament sitting in Congress. In this case, the revision bill is passed if it has the approval of three-fifths of the votes cast. The office of Congress is that of the National Assembly. There is also a ‘Warning’ which states: “3° The two versions of article 88-5 are not applicable to accessions that result from an Intergovernmental Conference whose meeting was decided by the European Council before July 1, 2004 by virtue of article 47 of the Constitutional Act no. 2008-724 of July 23, 2008”.

<sup>10</sup> See [EurActiv 25 August 2008](#)

<sup>11</sup> [EurActiv 1 October 2014](#).

<sup>12</sup> [Reuters, 29 November 2015](#).

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