



Referendums on the European Union

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Several EU candidate states have held a referendum on joining the EU. 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 the referendums on EU matters held in candidate and Member States since 1972, with brief details on turnout and results. It also outlines the positions of France and Austria with regard to holding a referendum on EU enlargement.

This Note updates Part B of Standard Note 2709, [European Union: treaty ratification and the use of referendums](#), 20 October 2003

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1 Referendums on joining the EEC/EC/EU, candidacy for EU membership and continued membership

1.1 Joining the EEC/EC/EU

Ireland – 10 May 1972

Turnout	71%
YES	83%
NO	17.0%

Denmark – 3 October 1972

Turnout	90.1%
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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%
YES	57.0%
NO	43.0%

Aaland Islands¹ – 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%

¹ The Aaland Islands are an Autonomous Province of Finland

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%
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

Switzerland²

² The two Swiss referendums were on candidacy for membership, rather than membership itself. Accession negotiations have never been opened with Switzerland.

i. 8 June 1997

Turnout	35%
YES	25.9%
NO	74%

ii. 4 March 2001

Turnout	55.1%
YES	23.2%
NO	76.7%

1.3 Staying in or withdrawing from the EC

United Kingdom – 5 June 1975³

Turnout	64%
YES	67.2%
NO	32.8%

Greenland – 23 February 1982⁴

Turnout	75%
YES	48%
NO	52%

2 Referendums on enlargement, Treaty amendments, European Economic Area, the Euro and bi-lateral agreements

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

³ 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.

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

Turnout	44%
YES	70%
NO	30%

2.3 EU Constitution⁵

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%
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

⁵ This was a consultative referendum on whether to transform the European Communities into a federal Union, allowing the European Parliament to draft a European Constitution to be ratified by Member States.

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 Europe⁶

Spain – 20 February 2005

Turnout	43.3%
YES	76.7%
NO	17.2%

⁶ 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.

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%

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 – inter-governmental)

Ireland – 31 May 2012

Turnout	50.5%
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YES	60.4%
NO	39.6%

2.12 Bi-lateral agreements with the EU⁷

Switzerland⁸

i. 21 May 2000 (bilateral agreements)

Turnout	48.3%
YES	67.2%
NO	32.8%

ii. 5 June 2005 (Schengen and Dublin agreements)

Turnout	56%
YES	54.6%
NO	12/23 cantons

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

Turnout	53.8%
YES	56%
NO	

iv. 26 November 2006 (cohesion funds for CEEC states)

YES	53.4%
NO	47%

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

Turnout	50.9%
YES	59.6%
NO	40.4%

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

Turnout	38%
YES	50.1%
NO	49.9

3 France, Austria and enlargement referendums

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.

⁷ Referendum data available on [Swiss Government website](#).

⁸ These were a mixture of optional and mandatory referendums.

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,⁹ 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.¹⁰ 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 may authorize the passing of the Bill according to the procedure provided for in paragraph three of article 89.¹¹

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”.¹² Elections in September 2008 brought in a new Chancellor, Werber Faymann. He said on 3 May 2011 that Austria would hold a referendum on Turkish accession to the EU. During a state visit to Austria in May

⁹ See [EUObserver, 24 June 2008](#)

¹⁰ 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

¹¹ [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”.

¹² See [EurActiv 25 August 2008](#)

2011, the Turkish President, Abdullah Gül, said Turkey would also hold a referendum on EU accession.¹³

¹³ See [EurActiv 6 May 2011](#)