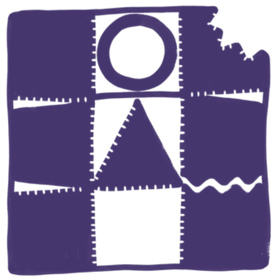
Will there ever be a United States of Europe?

No one knows – but for the first time in decades it is a live political question, not a debating-club one.



What changed, what would have to happen, and the path it would most likely take if it happens at all.

Why the question came back

For half a century, "United States of Europe" was a phrase for anniversary speeches. Three pressures dragged it back into working politics. A war on the continent, with intelligence services openly discussing when Russia could be ready to test NATO. An American ally whose commitment now has to be periodically re-verified. And competitors – the US, China, India – who all operate at continental scale while Europe negotiates itself.

The mood shows up in the data: 90 % of Europeans tell Eurobarometer the member states should be more united; 81 % want a common defence policy. And in the discourse: when the Czech president – of a country with a eurosceptic reputation – calls deeper union "almost inevitable" and his own government publicly disagrees, the idea has left the seminar room.

The formal path, and where it's stuck

On paper the route exists. The European Parliament voted in November 2023 to trigger treaty change: more majority voting, real defense competence, a stronger parliament. The member governments' Council has simply declined to move the request forward – a quiet veto by inaction. Even if a convention convened, the result would need unanimous agreement and 27 ratifications, several by referendum. One "no" – and referendums on Europe have a record – stops everything. Anyone promising a founding moment, a Philadelphia 1787 for Europe, is describing the least likely scenario.

The likelier path: layers

Europe has never integrated by grand design; it integrates by welded seams. The euro grew from 11 members to 21 – Bulgaria joined this January – without a constitutional convention. The pandemic produced joint borrowing that was "impossible" the year before. The war has produced a rearmament program and, at The Hague, a binding-ish spending commitment that were unthinkable in 2021.

The current seams being welded: a European defense pillar inside NATO, a genuine capital market, and enlargement – Ukraine opened its first negotiating cluster in June 2026, and absorbing a country of forty million makes today's unanimity rules arithmetically unworkable. "Reform before enlargement" is now official language in Brussels. Nobody calls any of this federation. That is usually how it happens.

What could stop it

A bad peace that lets the urgency drain away. Nationalist governments in enough capitals at once. An enlargement botched into paralysis instead of reform. Or simply the old comfort: the half-built house is livable most days, and roofs are expensive.

An honest prognosis

If a United States of Europe ever exists, it will most likely be recognized in hindsight – the moment historians pick, decades from now, when the layers had quietly added up to a federation nobody voted for in one dramatic night. Whether that happens is not fated either way. It is decided continuously, in budget votes and coalition talks and elections, including the ones this year.

All questions →

FREQUENTLY ASKED

Is anyone actually proposing a United States of Europe now?

Sitting politicians are saying it aloud again – the Czech president called deeper union “almost inevitable” in 2026 – and the European Parliament formally requested treaty change in November 2023. Governments remain far more cautious.

What is blocking it?

Unanimity. Treaty change needs all 27 governments to agree and every country to ratify, some by referendum. The Council has so far declined even to convene the convention Parliament requested.

Could a federation form without treaty change?

Partially. Defense cooperation, joint borrowing, capital-markets integration and enlargement reform can all deepen union by layers – the euro grew from 11 to 21 members without any constitutional moment.

Does EU enlargement make federation more or less likely?

Both, which is why it matters: adding Ukraine and others makes unanimity unworkable, forcing reform – but also makes agreement among more members harder. Reform-before-enlargement is now official EU language.

What is the realistic timeline?

No serious analyst gives a date. The likelier shape is layers, not a founding moment: a defense pillar here, a capital market there – each crisis welding another seam. Decades, not electoral cycles.

SOURCES

- European Parliament resolution triggering Article 48 treaty change (22 Nov 2023); Council inaction since
- Standard Eurobarometer Spring 2025 (90 % more united; 81 % common defence)
- Ukraine accession: first negotiating cluster opened 15 June 2026; “reverse enlargement” option rejected March 2026
- The Hague Summit Declaration 2025 (3.5 % + 1.5 % defence commitment)
- Czech public debate 2026: President Pavel vs. the Babiš government on a federal Europe