ACCESSION CRITERIA (COPENHAGEN CRITERIA)
The Treaty on European Union sets out the conditions (Article 49) and principles (Article 6(1)) to which any country wishing to become an EU member must conform. Certain criteria must be met for admission. These criteria (known as the Copenhagen criteria) were established by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993 and strengthened by the Madrid European Council in 1995. They are:

- stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the EU;
- ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the capacity to effectively implement the rules, standards and policies that make up the body of EU law (the 'acquis'), and adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

For EU accession negotiations to be launched, a country must satisfy the first criterion.

SEE ALSO
- Accession negotiations
- Acquis
- Candidate countries
- Enlargement
- Preaccession strategy