

Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper

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The Council held an exchange of views and adopted the following conclusions:

- In line with the enlargement strategy agreed by the December 2006 European Council and the Council conclusions of 11 December 2006, the Council welcomes the Commission's communication on the enlargement strategy and main challenges 2007-2008 of 6 November and takes good note of the analysis and recommendations contained therein. The renewed consensus on enlargement, which is based on **consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and better communication**, together with the **capacity to integrate new members**, continues to form the basis of the EU's enlargement strategy. An improved quality of the enlargement process will ensure that enlargement continues to foster peace, democracy and stability throughout the continent and to bring concrete benefits in terms of increased trade, investment and economic growth. 2008 will be a particularly crucial year for supporting the transition process in the Western Balkans. The Council recalls that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union.

The Council reaffirms that the pace of the negotiations depends notably on the negotiating countries' progress in addressing opening and closing benchmarks as well as the requirements of the Negotiating Frameworks, including the implementation of the Accession Partnerships, currently in course of revision, with each country being judged on its own merits. The Council recalls that chapters for which technical preparations have been completed will be opened in accordance with established procedures, in line with the Negotiating Frameworks. In this context, the Council looks forward to the Intergovernmental Conferences with Turkey and Croatia later this month. It is also essential that the enlargement policy maintains fair and rigorous conditionality at all stages of the negotiations.

In this regard, the Council welcomes the Commission's intention to continue enhancing the quality of the enlargement process by tackling key priorities in areas of **public administration and judicial reform** and the **fight against corruption** at an early stage.

The Council then returned to the situation in Turkey (see [INI/2007/2269](#)) and in Croatia (see [INI/2007/2267](#)).