

Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper

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The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own initiative report by Elmar **BROK** (EPP-ED, DE) on the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper, noting that past enlargements have fostered economic growth, promoted social progress and brought peace, stability, freedom and prosperity to the European continent. While they consider that past enlargements have generally been a great success, MEPs stress that lessons can be learned from previous accessions to improve the quality of the overall enlargement process.

MEPs reaffirm their commitment to all candidate countries with the understanding that full and rigorous compliance with all the criteria laid down in Copenhagen is imperative and that the Union must make efforts to strengthen its integration capacity. According to MEPs, the Union's Enlargement Strategy should comply with the provisions of the EU Treaty and reflect the commitments already entered into by the Union, while striking a balance between the Union's geo-strategic interests, the impact of political developments outside its borders, and the Union's integration capacity. They also recall that integration capacity is linked to the Union's ability to promote economic and social progress and a high level of employment in its Member States, to assert its identity on the international scene, to promote the rights and interests of Member States and European citizens alike, to develop an area of freedom, security and justice, and to build on its *acquis communautaire* while upholding fundamental rights and freedoms.

Integration capacity: MEPs consider that the concept of integration capacity comprises four elements:

1. accession states should contribute to and not impair the ability of the Union to maintain momentum towards the fulfilment of its political objectives;
2. the institutional framework of the Union should be able to deliver efficient and effective government;
3. the financial resources of the Union should be adequate to meet the challenges of social and economic cohesion and of the Union's common policies;
4. a comprehensive communication strategy should be in place to inform public opinion about the implications of enlargement.

Furthermore, MEPs consider that the Copenhagen criteria must be fully respected and complied with by Member States as well, in order to avoid requiring of applicant countries higher standards than those applied in some parts of the Union.

Budgetary impact of all subsequent enlargements: MEPs consider that the budgetary as well as the broader economic and social implications of further possible enlargements must be taken into due consideration during the mid-term review of the 2007-2013 multi-annual financial framework and the drafting of subsequent financial frameworks. They are also convinced that any acceding State should try to resolve its main internal problems (territorial and constitutional set-up) before it can join the Union, and the EU should assist in resolving those issues.

No enlargement without consolidation: MEPs take the view that every enlargement must be followed by adequate consolidation and political concentration, that is to say, by a serious reassessment of the Union's policies and means in order to respond to the expectations of European citizens and to **guarantee the viability of the Union as a political project**. MEPs consider that enlargement without adequate consolidation and preparation could damage the Union's internal cohesion and could have serious implications for the Union's capacity to act (weakening its institutions, making Member States more vulnerable to external pressure and undermining the Union's credibility as a global actor).

More communication: MEPs are of the view that further enlargements should be accompanied by a concerted communication policy involving all stakeholders. This communication policy should be designed to explain the political, economic, social and cultural benefits of enlargement. Furthermore, countries with European prospects should make every effort to prepare their public opinion for integration into the Union, involving civil society in this process from the outset.

Concentric circles: MEPs are convinced that the Enlargement Strategy should be flanked by a more diversified range of external contractual frameworks and that these frameworks could be structured as mutually permeable concentric circles. This means that countries would be offered the opportunity, under strict but clear internal and external conditions, to move from one status to another if they so wish and if they fulfil the criteria pertaining to each specific framework.

Strengthened Neighbourhood Policy for eastern neighbours: MEPs affirm that participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy does not constitute a substitute for membership or a stage leading necessarily to membership. They are convinced that the Commission's strengthened neighbourhood policy is not sufficient and that a specific policy should be proposed for eastern neighbours that fulfil certain democratic and economic conditions. For these countries, the Union should establish an area based on common policies covering, in particular, the rule of law, democracy and human rights, foreign and security policy cooperation, economic and financial issues, trade, energy, transport, environmental issues, justice, security, migration, visa-free movement and education. These common policies should be shaped jointly with the participating countries and be underpinned by adequate financial assistance.

Towards a European Commonwealth for southern countries: MEPs also welcome the re-launch of the "Barcelona Process: A Union for the Mediterranean". They recall that, as a first step, these relations should translate themselves into the establishment of a Free Trade Area, to be followed by closer relations along the lines of a European Commonwealth. They also call for specific measures for countries bordering the Black Sea with a view to establishing a Union for the Black Sea, which should include the EU, Turkey and all Black Sea littoral states. MEPs also believe that countries which enjoy recognised membership prospects but still have considerable ground to cover before they can achieve candidate status, could usefully participate, on a totally voluntary basis, in arrangements similar to the above-mentioned bilateral or multilateral frameworks.

Balkans: MEPs welcome the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with Serbia and with Bosnia-Herzegovina, which they regard as a further step in consolidating the ties between that region and the EU. They call for the negotiations for visa liberalisation with the countries of the Western Balkans to be speeded up and, lastly, urge the Commission to come up with concrete proposals for a more diversified external relations policy towards these neighbours.