

Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper

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PURPOSE: to present a general strategy paper on enlargement for 2007-2008.

CONTENT: the Commission presents its annual strategy paper on EU enlargement which details how the renewed consensus on enlargement, agreed by EU leaders at the December 2006 Summit, is implemented. As a reminder, this consensus is based on the **principles of consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality** and **better communication with the public**, combined with the **EU's capacity to integrate new members**.

Countries targeted by the strategy: the Commission considers that the pull of the EU is contributing to stability and encouraging important political and economic reforms in the candidate countries, which are Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – FYROM – and Turkey. The Commission also reviews the progress achieved by the so-called potential candidate countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo under international trusteeship. It concludes that there has been steady though uneven progress in the Western Balkans, and that the region continues to face major challenges. In addition, Turkey's accession to the EU is well underway, however there is a need to revitalise reforms. It is crucial to maintain the visibility and credibility of their accession prospects.

Main conclusions and recommendations of the document:

- enlargement has contributed to peace, democracy and stability throughout the continent and brought concrete benefits in terms of increased trade, investment and economic growth. The Union is now more competitive and better able to respond to the challenges of globalisation. Enlargement has enhanced the EU's weight in the world;
- the present enlargement agenda covers the Western Balkans and Turkey, which have been given the prospect of EU membership once they fulfil the necessary conditions;
- steps have been taken to improve the quality of the enlargement process: difficult reform issues are now being addressed **at the beginning of the process**; in the accession negotiations, full use is now made of benchmarks as conditions for opening and closing chapters; the negotiation process is more transparent; each country progresses from one stage to the next in its course towards the EU, when it has fulfilled the necessary conditions;
- each country will be judged on its own merits but significant effort must be made to address fundamental issues, such as state-building, rule of law, reconciliation, administrative and judicial reform, fighting corruption and organised crime and improving good neighbourly relations.

Overview of the progress made in these countries:

- **Croatia:** accession negotiations are advancing well but Croatia still needs to make further progress particularly in judicial and administrative reform, minority rights, and refugee return, as well as in restructuring of steel and shipbuilding industries;
- **Turkey:** Turkey has introduced major reforms since 1999. In 2006, Turkey went through a constitutional crisis which led to early parliamentary elections. These were free and fair, and the new parliament is representative of the country's political diversity. Democracy prevailed in civil-military relations. Turkey now needs to renew the momentum of its political reforms, particularly on freedom of expression, the rights of non-Muslim religious communities, judicial reform, the fight against corruption, strengthened rights for women, children and trade unions, cultural rights, as well as civilian oversight of the security forces. Furthermore, Turkey still has to implement the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement and normalise its relations with Cyprus;

- **Kosovo:** clarity needs to be reached as rapidly as possible on the status of Kosovo. There is a need for a sustainable solution that will ensure a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo and contribute to regional stability;
- **FYROM and other potential candidate countries:** The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia has made progress but it still needs to accelerate the pace of reforms in key areas. Albania and Montenegro have made progress in a number of areas but still face major challenges. Bosnia and Herzegovina has yet to assume full ownership of its governance and needs to move ahead in reforms, in particular of the police. Serbia has shown that it has the administrative capacity to make substantial progress towards realising its European perspective. However, Serbia still has to achieve full cooperation with the ICTY. The region as a whole needs to move forward in building modern democracies and developing a political culture of dialogue and tolerance.

As a result, in 2008 it is expected that:

- the Commission will speed up accession negotiations with Croatia, leading to several chapters being provisionally closed, provided that the country maintains the necessary reform momentum;
- the Commission will speed up accession negotiations with Turkey: the pace of negotiations depends on the results of the reforms in Turkey. Turkey's progress could gather momentum if it succeeds in meeting opening benchmarks (in particular, reform of the Turkish Penal Code concerning the freedom of expression and the implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement);
- the EU will provide further support for stability in Kosovo by making full use of its policy instruments;
- all Stabilisation and Association Agreements can be signed with all Western Balkan countries and enter into force;
- the Western Balkan countries will strengthen their regional cooperation within the framework of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process;
- efforts will be made to promote people-to-people contacts between the Western Balkans and the EU (particularly through visa liberalisation for citizens of the Western Balkan countries).

Accession Partnerships and Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA): European Partnerships should be proposed, setting out updated reform priorities for each country and focusing on state-building, governance and administrative and judicial reform. These priorities will be reflected in programming financial assistance under the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).