

Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper

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The European Parliament adopted by 534 votes to 44, with 45 abstentions a resolution on the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper.

The initiative report had been tabled for consideration in plenary by Elmar **BROK** (EPP-ED, DE) on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

In its resolution, Parliament agrees with the Commission that past enlargements have been a great success, benefiting the old as well as the new EU Member States by fostering economic growth, promoting social progress and bringing peace, stability, freedom and prosperity to the European continent. It believes that lessons can be learned from previous accessions and that further ways of improving the quality of the enlargement process must be based on the positive experiences accumulated so far.

Overall, Parliament reaffirms its **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 the Parliament, 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. It also recalls 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: Parliament considers 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, Parliament considers 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: Parliament considers 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. It is 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.

No enlargement without consolidation: Parliament takes 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. It considers 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: Parliament is 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: Parliament is 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: Parliament affirms that participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy does not constitute a substitute for membership or a stage leading necessarily to membership. It is 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: Parliament welcomes the re-launch of the "Barcelona Process: A Union for the Mediterranean". It recalls 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. It also calls 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. It also believes 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. It believes that such a multilateral framework would not only offer the countries involved the possibility of strengthening their cooperation with the EU across a wide variety of policy fields, but would also allow the EU to play a more active role in finding peaceful solutions to the region's conflicts, thus contributing positively to security in the region.

Balkans: Parliament welcomes the signing of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements with Serbia and with Bosnia-Herzegovina, which it regards as a further step in consolidating the ties between that region and the EU. It calls for the negotiations for visa liberalisation with the countries of the Western Balkans to be speeded up and, lastly, urges the Commission to come up with concrete proposals for a more diversified external relations policy towards these neighbours.