# Enlargement strategy and main challenges 2006-2007: the institutional aspects of the European Union's capacity to integrate new Member States

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The European Parliament adopted an own-initiative resolution drafted by Elmar **BROK** (EPP-ED, D) on the Commission's Communication on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006–2007. It pointed out that the incentive offered by the prospect of EU membership had undeniably contributed to the promotion of reforms, the consolidation of democracy, increased respect for human rights and increasing stability in neighbouring countries. It agreed with the Commission that past enlargements had been a success, strengthening the EU by stimulating its economic growth, reinforcing its role in the world and promoting the development of new EU policies. Enlargement in general was among the most effective instruments of foreign policy and conflict prevention policies of the EU. This success derived from the widespread support for past enlargements as the fulfilment of the initial mission of European integration to reunite the European continent after the political divisions of the twentieth century.

However, lessons could be learned from past experience, notably the need to judge each candidate country on its own merits and to negotiate its accession in accordance with a timetable based on effective compliance with the Copenhagen criteria, as well as the need to avoid setting too early a date for final accession.

Parliament felt that the Union should honour its commitments to the countries which already had membership prospects, provided that those countries complied with the Copenhagen criteria. Any further commitment to enlarge would require far more in-depth scrutiny than ever before of the question of the Union's integration capacity, be it from an institutional, financial or political standpoint. Therefore, Parliament regretted the Commission's failure to provide a sufficiently in-depth analysis of the issues which need to be resolved before the Union can proceed with further enlargements.

The integration capacity of the Union rested fundamentally on three pillars:

1) its institutions and their legitimacy and ability to act and take decisions democratically and efficiently under new circumstances;

2) its financial resources and their overall contribution to economic and social cohesion;

3) the capacity of an enlarged Union to pursue its political objectives. The EU could only expect its citizens to have a positive attitude towards enlargement if they saw a Europe that delivers results, and accordingly, integration capacity could not be seen in isolation from the EU's capacity to act.

Since the Nice Treaty would not provide a basis for further enlargements, Parliament urged Member States to conclude the constitutional process by the end of 2008. The institutional reform of the Union was a need per se, regardless of further enlargements.

Parliament went on to point out that the Commission's Communication did not deal thoroughly with the financial implications of further enlargements and called on the Commission to provide clear and credible estimates of the budgetary implications before any further accession. This debate involved difficult issues which might have implications for the Union's common policies, including its cohesion policies.

Furthermore, compliance with the Copenhagen political criteria should be given greater priority than had hitherto been the case in accession negotiations. In previous enlargements progress in the fields of justice, corruption and fundamental rights did not receive enough attention in the early phases of negotiations. Parliament recalled the clear European membership prospects which the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003 offered to the western Balkan countries, and stated that it remained fully committed to these prospects. Current enlargement financial instruments must be strengthened and re-focused so as to target, as a top priority, the fight against corruption and organised crime, with particular emphasis on reforming judiciaries, reinforcing public administrative capacity and improving cross-border cooperation.

With regard to Turkey, Parliament stated that the Turkish refusal to fully comply with the terms of the Additional Protocol was seriously endangering the good progress of the accession negotiations, and it urged Turkey to cooperate in a constructive way to ensure full implementation of the Additional Protocol as soon as possible. However, Parliament deplored the fact that the efforts of the Finnish Presidency to find a solution to the current stalemate regarding the full implementation of the Additional Protocol the one hand and further alleviating the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot Community on the other were not successful.

Parliament's right of assent should apply not just after the conclusion of the negotiation process but also before the opening of membership negotiations.

Reminding Member States' governments and national parliaments that it was their responsibility to inform the public adequately about the benefits of past enlargements and the stakes involved in further enlargements, Parliament felt that they must provide the public with reasons for the decisions they take, unanimously, throughout the accession process.

As part of a reinforced Neighbourhood Strategy, and in addition to the strategies concerning relations with other countries, the Council and Commission should consider an overall EU regional policy in the wider Black Sea area in order to build stronger bilateral or multilateral economic and political relations between the EU and all the countries of this area, particularly with regard to free trade, as is the case for the Central European Free Trade Agreement, investment, energy security and migration policy. This would grant partner countries a stable long-term perspective of institutionalised relations with the EU and provide the incentive necessary to foster the internal reforms required in the countries in question.

While Russia was neither a candidate for EU membership nor part of the European Neighbourhood Policy, relations remained vital in the context of any future EU enlargement strategy. The EU must continue all attempts to develop a unique, wide-ranging partnership with Russia, encompassing trade and energy, but above all human rights and democratisation issues.