

Brussels, 8 November 2006

## Commission proposes renewed consensus on enlargement

***Today the Commission has adopted a strategy for the EU's enlargement policy, which includes a special report on the Union's integration capacity. The Commission concludes that the Union must be able to maintain and deepen its own development while pursuing its enlargement agenda. The current enlargement strategy, combined with ways and means to ensure the EU's capacity to integrate new members, form the basis for a renewed consensus on enlargement. The Commission also reviewed the progress achieved in each candidate and potential candidate country<sup>1</sup>. As regards Turkey, it concluded that the country has continued political reforms, but the pace of the reforms has slowed during the past year. As regards Turkey's obligation to fully implement the Ankara Protocol, the Commission will make relevant recommendations ahead of the European Council in December, if Turkey has not fulfilled its obligations.***

"Europe needs a stable, democratic and increasingly prosperous Turkey, in peace with its neighbours, firmly on track towards modernisation and the adoption of European values. This is why we started accession negotiations with Turkey. However, the key to the success of this process is for Turkey to continue the reforms with full determination and to fulfil its obligations. Today we decided to give a chance for the diplomatic efforts to find a solution. Turkey needs to meet its obligations related to the implementation of the Ankara Protocol. Failure to implement its obligations in full will affect the overall progress in the negotiations. The Commission will make relevant recommendations ahead of the December European Council if Turkey has not fulfilled its commitments." – said President José Manuel Barroso after the meeting of the Commission.

Significant efforts on the part of Turkey are needed in particular on freedom of expression. Further improvements are also needed on the rights of non-Muslim religious communities, women's rights, trade union rights and on civilian control of the military.

The EU's integration capacity is determined by the EU's own capacity to maintain the momentum of European integration; the candidate countries ability to fulfil rigorous conditions; and better communication on enlargement. Hence, it is a functional issue.

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<sup>1</sup> See [MEMO/06/411](#) and [MEMO/06/412](#)

Commenting today's decision Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn stated: "Enlargement is the essence of the EU's soft power to gradually extend peace, democracy and prosperity in Europe. This project needs broad support by the peoples of Europe. This is why we need to build a renewed consensus on enlargement, which recognises the strategic value of enlargement while ensuring the Union's capacity to function."

Based on the lessons learned from previous enlargements the Commission proposes to further improve the quality of the accession process with concrete measures:

- The capacity to integrate specific countries will be assessed at all key stages on the enlargement process. These assessments will include the impact on EU institutions, budget and policies, in particular, agriculture and structural policies.
- The results of economic and political dialogue will be fed into negotiations.
- More systematic use of benchmarks, providing concrete criteria for opening and closing negotiations on individual chapters<sup>2</sup> of the negotiations.
- Judicial reform, administrative capacity, fight against corruption and organised crime need to be addressed early on in the accession process.

Every key decision leading to a country's accession to the EU is taken through democratic procedures. The Union also needs to listen more and to communicate better with its citizens. This is primarily a task of the Member States, the candidate and potential candidate countries to explain and defend their choices. The Commission will complement these efforts, in particular through user-friendly information and by promoting civil society dialogue as well as people to people contacts between the member states and enlargement countries. The Commission proposes to make public key documents of the accession negotiations to bring the enlargement closer to the citizens.

Croatia made a good start in the accession negotiations. The country has taken important steps in many fields to adapt its legislation. However efforts need to be stepped up considerably to meet the main challenges, such as judicial reform, fight against corruption and economic reform

The other Western Balkans countries have made progress following the road-map put forward by the Commission last year. Each country advances on its own merits. A country's satisfactory track-record in implementing its obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreements is an essential element for the EU to consider any membership application.

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<sup>2</sup> Accession negotiations with candidate countries are conducted on the basis of the EU's legal order broken down to 35 chapters