

Brussels, 6 November 2007

Implementing the renewed consensus on enlargement

Today the Commission adopted its annual strategy paper for the EU's enlargement policy. It shows how the renewed consensus, agreed by EU leaders at their December 2006 Summit, is implemented. A carefully managed enlargement process continued in 2007. The Commission also reviewed the progress achieved in each candidate and potential candidate country¹. It concludes that there has been steady though uneven progress in the Western Balkans and the region continues to face major challenges. Turkey's accession process is on track, while there is a need to revitalise the reforms.

Enlargement is one of the EU's most powerful policy tools. It serves the EU's strategic interests in enhancing peace, security, liberty, democracy and conflict prevention. It has helped to increase prosperity and growth opportunities, and to secure vital transport and energy routes.

The renewed consensus on enlargement defined by the December 2006 European Council 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. The present enlargement agenda covers the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Presenting the reports Commissioner for Enlargement Olli Rehn said: "In 2007 there has been steady but uneven progress in the Western Balkans. We still need to face major challenges, such as the Kosovo status process, Serbia's democratic development and state building in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I expect that in 2008 conditions will be fulfilled and thus we will be able to complete Stabilisation and Association Agreements with all countries in the region."

"In Turkey democracy prevailed over the political crisis. The new momentum should now be used to re-launch the reforms to improve fundamental freedoms, particularly the freedom of expression and religious freedom, so that they prevail in all corners of the country and in all walks of life." – added Commissioner Rehn.

The pull of the EU is contributing to stability and encouraging important political and economic reforms. It is crucial to maintain the visibility and credibility of the accession prospects, as well as support for enlargement in the member states.

Communication therefore is a cornerstone of the EU's enlargement policy. It is important to listen to citizens and to respond to their concerns by providing clear, factual information. Member states are best placed to take the lead in communicating enlargement. The Commission will continue to play its part together with the European Parliament, national, regional and local authorities and civil society.

Accession negotiations with **Croatia** are advancing well and entering a decisive phase. This demonstrates to the region as a whole that the European perspective is

¹ See MEMO and MEMO

concrete and tangible. The Commission expects substantial progress in the accession negotiations with Croatia in the course of the year ahead, provided that the country maintains the necessary reform momentum and meets the conditions.

Clarity needs to be reached as rapidly as possible on the status of **Kosovo**². There is a need for a sustainable solution that will ensure a democratic and multi-ethnic Kosovo and contribute to regional stability.

Better governance in the **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania and Montenegro**, state building with local ownership in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and **Serbia's** European course are the major challenges for these countries in the coming year. The region as a whole needs to move forward in building modern democracies and further develop a political culture of dialogue and tolerance.

Early in 2008, the Commission will take stock of developments and point the way forward in following up the EU's agenda for the **Western Balkans region**. Attention will be given to promoting people to people contacts. The Commission will initiate a dialogue on visa liberalisation.

In 2007 **Turkey** has overcome a political crisis in full respect of democracy. Turkey now needs to renew the momentum of its political reforms, in particular those related to fundamental freedoms as well as its efforts to comply with its international obligations. The Commission expects progress in the accession negotiations with Turkey in the course of the coming year.

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² Under UN Security Council Resolution 1244