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Enlargement -- the final lap

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

European Parliament

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Mr President,

Honourable Members

I am greatly moved in taking the floor to speak to the Assembly today.

When I took office I made a commitment -- in this very same place -- that the top priority of my Commission would be enlargement. My Commission would be the Commission of enlargement.

I did so because enlarging the European Union will extend an area of peace, security and democracy throughout the European continent.

Three years later I am standing here to tell you that this commitment has been honoured.

The Commission has done its job and kept its promise.

After careful study of the progress made by the candidate countries by the Commission, I can now announce the names of the countries with which we recommend the Council should conclude negotiations by the end of the year.

Allow me to read out the key points of the recommendations we adopted today.

"Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, the Slovak Republic and Slovenia fulfil the political criteria. Bearing in mind the progress achieved by these countries, the track record in implementing their commitments, and taking into account their preparatory work in progress, the Commission considers that these countries will have fulfilled the economic and acquis criteria and will be ready for membership from the beginning of 2004. The Commission therefore recommends to conclude the accession negotiations with these countries by the end of this year with the aim to sign the Accession Treaty in spring 2003."

In view of Bulgaria's and Romania's progress over the last year, the Commission notes the date -- 2007 -- that those countries have set themselves for accession. The Commission will do its utmost to ensure that this objective can be attained.

Through constitutional reform and a series of legislative packages, Turkey has made considerable progress in meeting the Copenhagen criteria. Nonetheless, further efforts are needed.

The Commission is therefore recommending that the EU give more support for Turkey's pre-accession preparations. The Commission will also propose a revised Accession Partnership and step up legislative scrutiny. Turkey is encouraged to pursue its reform process and so advance its candidacy for EU membership.

Ladies and gentleman,

Less than thirteen years ago Berlin was still divided by the wall of shame.

The wall has fallen, Germany has been reunified. Thanks to this new-found freedom we have restored the historical unity of the peoples of Europe. Our common destiny is once again to build a common future. A future built on shared fundamental values: those of peace, democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the protection of minorities.

In 1993 the Copenhagen European Council offered the Central and Eastern European countries the chance of joining the EU.

Since then these countries have come a long way. The path they have taken may truly be described as revolutionary. A huge area of our continent has moved peacefully from dictatorship to stable, participatory democracy.

Their achievements are extraordinary. In the space of a decade we have seen:

- the holding of dozens of free and fair national, regional and local elections;
- the adoption of thousands of laws and regulations to give shape to the new democracies and incorporate the *acquis communautaire* into national law;
- the training of tens of thousands of civil servants and magistrates to interpret and apply the new legislation;
- the participation of hundreds of thousands of elected officials, specialists and members of professional organisations in EU-financed training and cooperation projects in order to learn about our policies.

All twelve countries satisfy the political criteria laid down at Copenhagen and democratic institutions are stronger everywhere.

The overall performance of the economies of the ten first-wave countries is improving.

- Their growth rates are higher than ours.
- Their inflation rates and deficits are being kept under control.
- Direct foreign investment is flooding in: this proves that the markets have confidence.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

The report we adopted today also highlights the remaining deficiencies in some sectors and some countries.

These failings have to be remedied before accession: the Commission will work with the authorities of these countries to settle problems in good time.

Our concerns centre on these countries' administrative capacity and their justice systems, which are undermined by a lack of financial and, above all, human resources.

We are helping to deal with these problems through a vast 250 million-euro programme. This programme is starting to bear fruit.

Another weakness we have identified is the inadequate preparation for implementation of the *acquis* in some crucial areas:

- customs services;
- taxation;
- veterinary and plant-health controls;
- the institutions to manage and supervise agricultural policy;
- the departments in charge of managing and controlling structural funds.

I should also mention another two extremely serious problems: corruption, which, apart from a few exceptions, infects many of these countries, and the shameful trafficking in human beings.

This does not mean that nothing has been done in these fields. Much has been achieved and some countries are close to completing this work.

Our report stresses the scrupulous monitoring the Commission has undertaken to conduct up to accession. We shall publish a final evaluation six months before the date of accession.

To cope with the complexities of enlargement, the Commission will take the necessary measures to reorganise its own departments. This will take the form of reinforced monitoring and post-accession support for the new Member States, together with continued pre-accession aid for countries that will follow those in the first wave.

Mr President,

Our objective is still to sign the Accession Treaty in spring next year. We are therefore in the final stages of the process.

The Commission hopes that the Brussels European Council of 24 and 25 October will take the necessary decisions on the chapters still open, namely agriculture, financial issues and institutions. That way we can negotiate and conclude these chapters before Copenhagen.

In the case of Bulgaria and Romania, we feel that 2007, the year proposed by the countries themselves, is realistic, given that there will be an enhanced pre-accession strategy. The Commission will put forward proposals in good time for adoption by the Copenhagen Council.

For Turkey, which does not yet meet the accession criteria, the Commission will propose an enhanced pre-accession strategy with extra financial resources in the new year.

The Nice Treaty is crucial and cannot be sidestepped. So I have confidence in the Irish electorate, which will be voting on the Treaty in a few days. I hope that the historic objective of unifying our continent will not be overturned by this vote.

Let me finally move to the issue of Cyprus. Let us hope for real progress towards reunification of the island, even though the conclusions of the Helsinki European Council do not make it a precondition for entry. The Commission wants a reunited Cyprus to join the EU and believes this is the best solution for all.

In recommending that the Council conclude negotiations speedily with Cyprus, the Commission is also issuing a fresh appeal to the parties concerned to work to attain the island's reunification. We call on everyone to rally to the process now under way under the auspices of the UN Secretary-General so that we can get a solution before the year's end.

The Seville European Council affirmed that the EU "would accommodate the terms of such a comprehensive settlement in the Treaty of Accession in line with the principles on which the European Union is founded."

Honourable Members,

All too often all I hear is talk about the risks and costs of enlargement. Of course we can and must speak about this calmly and openly, because the costs have been analysed in detail and they are in line with the resources available.

We should also -- and above all -- be telling the public about the **benefits** of enlargement:

- stability in Europe,
- unification of an artificially divided continent,
- creation of the biggest single market in the world.

Enlargement will unite us with economies that have lower incomes than the present Member States but which have greater growth potential.

We had exactly the same situation in 1985 when the accession negotiations with Spain and Portugal were concluded. Nobody could now doubt the rightness and farsightedness of that decision, though at the time it was controversial.

Enlargement is the new frontier of the European project. It will give impetus to trade, investment, education and research. And to economic growth.

So let us look at the costs of enlargement. We know that they are sustainable until 2006 because they are included in the Berlin financial perspectives.

I shall not hide the fact that the accession of ten countries will entail a significant financial burden in the next few years. But it will be paid back in full when the enlargement process is consolidated.

But enlargement is not just about economics. It is important primarily for political and ethical reasons.

Enlargement is the fulfilment of the European project. This project has given us half a century of peace and prosperity, and it should be extended to the whole continent.

The recent events in the Balkans are a case in point. Thousands of deaths, whole communities forced to flee, cities destroyed.

Enlargement is our political masterpiece since it will prevent such things happening. From this broader and fairer perspective, the cost of enlargement is slight compared with the cost of non-enlargement.

In coming months we need to conduct a realistic and positive information campaign. We must reach out to our citizens.

Enlargement is happening thanks to determination, tremendous political courage and a farsighted vision of history. It also obliges us to follow it through, since accession will force us to change as well as bringing big changes for the new members.

This is the task of the Convention. The institutional reforms that come out of it will have to be just as courageous and farsighted.

We must understand that, without a radical and intelligent reform of the institutions, enlargement could turn out to be an unsustainable success.

The new European Union needs a clear, stable geographical shape and institutional framework that is understood by all our citizens. In other words, the time has come for a European constitution.

- A constitution that guarantees the rights of all citizens and the role of the Member States.
- A constitution that preserves cultural and linguistic diversity, while also reinforcing solidarity.
- A constitution that enshrines the creation of a democratic EU, a true union of peoples and states.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

I should like to conclude with a geographical and historical overview that goes beyond this immediate enlargement.

We are inviting the new countries to join our Union because we want peace and stability over the whole continent.

But this process must not result in new barriers being erected, just when we are trying to break down the old ones.

We should keep this in mind when building new relations with our neighbours after enlargement. Here I am thinking of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova. They will border on an enlarged Union, which will extend one day to the Balkans region.

But paying attention to our new European neighbours should not make us any less receptive to the ever-higher expectations of the Mediterranean countries. Expectations that we have not yet managed to fulfil.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

The process of European integration that started half a century ago has earned us the admiration and respect of the whole world.

We are alone in building a genuine, serious model for mastering globalisation, if only across our continent. This globalisation is a democratic globalisation with a human dimension, a globalisation where all citizens play their part.

Our enlargement is an example to the world and a visionary act: for the first time it unites the whole continent and it makes us protagonists of history once more.

Thank you.