

**European Parliament Resolution of 26 November 2009
on the Commission's 2009 enlargement strategy paper
concerning the Western Balkan countries, Iceland and Turkey**

The European Parliament,

– having regard to the communication from the Commission entitled "Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010" (COM(2009)0533), and the accompanying 2009 Country Progress Reports,

– having regard to its resolutions of 16 March 2006 on the Commission's 2005 enlargement paper⁽¹⁾, of 13 December 2006 on the Commission's Communication on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006–2007⁽²⁾, and of 10 July 2008 on the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper⁽³⁾,

– having regard to its previous resolutions on the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey,

– having regard to the Commission Communication of 14 October 2009 entitled "Kosovo⁽⁴⁾ – Fulfilling its European Perspective" (COM(2009)0534),

– having regard to Rule 110(2) of its Rules of Procedure,

A. whereas, on the basis of Article 49 of the EU Treaty, "[any] European State ... may apply to become a member of the Union",

B. whereas the future of the Western Balkans lies with the European Union, as reaffirmed by the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003, the Brussels European Council of 15-16 June 2006 and subsequent summits; whereas all the existing commitments made to the south-east European countries should be honoured,

C. whereas Turkey has been a candidate country since 1999, Croatia since 2004 and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia since 2005; whereas Albania, Montenegro and Iceland have applied for membership of the Union and the Commission is in the process of evaluating the applications of Montenegro and Iceland; whereas Stabilisation and Association Agreements have been signed with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and with Serbia; and whereas the Commission has announced its intention to propose trade agreements and visa liberalisation for Kosovo in the medium term,

D. whereas, since previous enlargements have undoubtedly been a success both for the EU and for the Member States which joined it and have contributed to the stability, development and prosperity of Europe as a whole, it is essential to create the conditions needed to ensure that future enlargements are a success too,

E. whereas the enlargement strategy must be much more than a negotiating methodology, reflecting the core belief that the EU is a community of shared values, and is inextricably linked to the debate on the EU's objectives and effectiveness, its future and its role in the neighbourhood and the world,

F. whereas a number of candidates and potential candidates for EU membership continue to have unresolved issues with their neighbours; whereas regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations remain key factors in the integration process,

1. Remains strongly committed to the enlargement policy, which has proved to be one of the most successful of all EU policies and has benefited both existing and new Member States; recalls that previous enlargements have contributed to an unprecedented extension of the area of peace, security and prosperity in Europe, and reaffirms the commitment of the European Union to keeping up the enlargement process;
2. Believes that lessons can be learned from previous enlargements and that further ways of improving the quality of the enlargement process must be based on the positive experiences accumulated so far; also recalls, as indicated in previous resolutions, the need to allow for adequate institutional, financial and political consolidation whilst pursuing the enlargement process;
3. Emphasises that the principles expressed in the Presidency conclusions of the Brussels European Council meeting of 14-15 December 2006 concerning the "renewed consensus on enlargement", in particular the European Union's ability to function effectively and to develop, must remain indispensable tenets of the EU enlargement policy;
4. Reaffirms that a firm commitment to full and rigorous compliance with all the criteria established at the Copenhagen European Council of 21 and 22 June 1993 by candidate countries as well as by the European Union is imperative, including for the European Union's integration capacity;
5. Calls on the EU institutions to analyse and increase the integration capacity of the European Union;
6. Stresses that the rule of law is a key principle of democratic, economic and social development and one of the main conditions for EU accession; welcomes the efforts made in the region in implementing respective reforms but notes that some countries continue to face major challenges, particularly in the fight against corruption and organised crime; urges those countries to intensify their efforts in this field;
7. Stresses that freedom of expression is one of the fundamental principles of democracy and observes with concern that in some countries it is not yet fully respected; considers it to be a priority for the Western Balkans and Turkey to ensure the freedom of media from political interference and to guarantee the independence of the regulatory bodies; calls on the countries concerned to set up proper legal frameworks and to ensure that the law is respected;
8. Emphasises that full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) constitutes a fundamental condition for the Western Balkans countries to make progress on the path to membership of the Union, but points out that, equally importantly, redress for war crimes should be seen by society in those countries as a vital step to bring justice to the victims and to facilitate regional reconciliation;
9. Emphasises the importance of good neighbourly relations as a prerequisite for regional stability and cooperation and for an unhindered enlargement process; therefore, calls on all the countries concerned to make every possible effort to resolve their disagreements with their neighbours in the early stages of the enlargement process; stresses, however, that such bilateral disputes should be resolved by the parties concerned; suggests that if the parties concerned fail to resolve such disputes, the European Union should make all efforts to bring about a solution; points out that while such disputes should not, in themselves, constitute an obstacle to progress towards accession, the European Union should avoid being encumbered by such outstanding bilateral disputes and should endeavour to resolve them before accession;
10. Notes with concern the economic problems facing the Western Balkans region as a result of the

financial crisis; welcomes the Commission's willingness to provide extraordinary financial aid, such as macro-economic assistance and direct budget support; stresses that the situation is particularly difficult in view of high poverty and unemployment levels in some of the countries concerned; calls on the Commission and on the countries themselves to make every possible effort to mitigate the effects of the crisis, particularly on the most vulnerable members of society;

11. Underlines the importance of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans as an important factor for the enlargement process and at the same time as a vital element of the reconciliation process, enhancing people-to-people contacts; moreover, recalls the benefits of such cooperation in terms of increased trade volumes, energy security, enhanced by diversifying energy suppliers, sources and supply routes, environmental policies and the fight against organised crime and trafficking; to this end, notes with satisfaction the work of the Regional Cooperation Council; calls for more political will and better coordination for the implementation of the anti-trafficking strategy, particularly regarding victim protection; stresses that regional political and economic cooperation must include all the political players as well as civil society, in particular women's organisations, and should not be hampered by bilateral political problems; in this respect, calls on all parties concerned to seek pragmatic solutions with a view to ensuring the inclusiveness of regional cooperation, without prejudice to the differing positions on the status of Kosovo;

12. Calls on all countries concerned to make a greater effort in the area of women's rights and gender equality, particularly as regards combating gender violence, promoting access to legal remedies for gender discrimination and furthering the political participation of women;

13. Considers it crucial to encourage increased participation of civil society and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) at both central and local level as well as to improve support and funding for NGOs, to encourage their participation in the planning and the use of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Civil Society Facility, and to improve the social dialogue in the labour market;

14. Calls on the countries in the region to make greater efforts to improve the situation of ethnic minorities, and in particular the Roma; emphasises that the Roma are frequently victims of discrimination, and that, in particular, their participation in decision-making processes, in the labour market and in mainstream education systems should be greatly increased; in this regard, takes note of the bilaterally agreed readmission agreements concluded by the Western Balkan countries with the Member States, and calls on the countries concerned to step up their efforts to create appropriate social conditions, infrastructure and access to public services in order to ensure the fundamental rights of the Roma and to facilitate their reintegration after their return; calls on Western Balkan countries and the Member States to follow up closely the reintegration of the repatriated Roma and to report back on the achievements reached to the Commission on an annual basis in order to facilitate the evaluation of the reintegration policies and the exchange of best practices;

15. Stresses the vital importance of the process of visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries; welcomes the fact that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia have met the criteria for visa liberalisation so that the visa-free regime is expected to apply for their citizens from 19 December 2009; welcomes the actions taken by the BiH and Albanian authorities to accelerate meeting the conditions of the roadmap on the visa-free travel regime and urges them to advance preparations in order to fulfil all relevant criteria so that visa liberalisation for citizens of those countries can apply from July 2010; considers that, with the aim of furthering the implementation of the Thessaloniki agenda and as part of its regional approach, the Commission, within the limits of its competence and in the light of UN Security Council resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, should start the visa dialogue with Kosovo as soon as possible with a view to establishing a roadmap for visa facilitation and liberalisation similar to those established with Western Balkan

countries;

16. Urges all countries in the region to adopt or effectively implement laws on the prohibition of discrimination as soon as possible, particularly in light of the fact that many instances of threats, attacks, intimidation, or discrimination of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people remain unreported and unprosecuted;

17. Calls on the international and the Kosovar authorities to do their utmost for the immediate closure of the lead-contaminated camps for internally displaced people in Çesmin Llugë/Cesmin Lug, Osterode and Leposaviq/Leposavic, which are located at the highly toxic tailing stands of the Trepça lead mine, and to ensure the very basic human rights of families living there by relocating them to secure places with decent sanitary conditions;

18. Is of the opinion that, in order to maintain the support of EU citizens for further enlargement and the commitment of the citizens of the candidate countries to continue reforms, it is crucial to present them with clear and comprehensive information on the benefits and implications of this policy; calls on the Commission and the Member States to make efforts to that end; considers it to be equally essential to listen to and address citizens' concerns and questions;

19. Commends Croatia for its continued progress in meeting the criteria of accession to the Union as well as the obligations of membership; welcomes the bilateral agreement on resolving the border dispute with Slovenia, which has created the momentum to open further chapters in the accession process; considers that the accession negotiations can be concluded by mid-2010, provided that Croatia steps up its efforts and fulfils all the necessary criteria and benchmarks, including full cooperation with the ICTY;

20. Congratulates the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia on the progress it has achieved since the last progress report, and in particular during the last few months; notes with satisfaction that this progress has been acknowledged by the Commission, which has recommended the opening of accession negotiations with the country; calls on the Council to act in accordance with the Commission's recommendation at the summit to be held in December 2009; expects the negotiations to begin in the near future with the hope that mutually satisfactory solutions to outstanding issues with neighbouring countries can be reached, including the name issue between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece; calls on the governments of both countries to intensify their efforts to this end; recalls the importance of good neighbourly relations and urges the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to be sensitive on issues affecting its neighbours; notes the recent establishment of diplomatic relations with Kosovo, as well as the conclusion of the agreement on the physical demarcation of the border, as a vital contribution to regional stability;

21. Calls on the authorities of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to continue their efforts in the reform process, particularly in the fields of the reform of public administration and the judiciary, anti-corruption policy, women's rights and inter-ethnic relations, including guaranteeing the rights of persons of all ethnic backgrounds and increasing their participation in public life and administration;

22. Commends the progress that Turkey as a candidate country has made towards fulfilment of the Copenhagen political criteria; urges the Turkish Government and all parliamentary parties in Turkey to establish consensus on the formulation and implementation of key reforms; welcomes the government's approval of the judiciary reform strategy and points out the crucial importance of its swift implementation for the functioning of the Turkish State and society; is concerned about the situation in the area of freedom of expression and freedom of the press, particularly following the unprecedented fine imposed on a media group; notes with satisfaction the increasingly open public

debate in Turkey about previous taboos; regrets the limited progress made in the area of freedom of religion, and urges the government to establish a legal framework in line with the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms enabling all non-Muslim religious communities and the Alevi community to function without undue constraints; deplores the continued non-fulfilment of commitments stemming from the Additional Protocol to the EC-Turkey Association Agreement and urges Turkey to proceed to its full, non-discriminatory implementation; calls on the Turkish Government, as well as on all the parties concerned, to contribute actively to the swift devising of a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus question, based on UN Security Council resolutions and the principles on which the EU is founded; welcomes the efforts to resolve the Kurdish issue in the context of the "Democratic Opening" project; encourages the Turkish Government to take concrete measures to address the situation of citizens of Kurdish origin and asks all political forces to support this process; commends the diplomatic efforts made to normalise relations with Armenia and urges the Turkish Grand National Assembly, as well as the Parliament of Armenia, to ratify the relevant protocols; welcomes Turkey's signing of the Intergovernmental Agreement on the Nabucco gas pipeline, the implementation of which remains one of the EU's highest energy security priorities, and calls for the opening of the energy chapter in the accession negotiations; takes note of the resumption of negotiations on a EU-Turkey readmission agreement, and urges Turkey to fully implement, in the meantime, the existing bilateral readmission agreements with the Member States; calls on the Turkish Government to intensify the foreign policy coordination with the EU, in particular regarding Iran; regrets, however, that the NATO-EU strategic cooperation extending beyond the "Berlin plus" arrangements continues to be blocked by Turkey's objections, which has negative consequences for the protection of the EU personnel deployed, and urges Turkey to set aside those objections as soon as possible;

23. Notes with satisfaction the progress made by Serbia, and in particular its unilateral implementation of the Interim Agreement; is of the opinion that such unilateral implementation, carried out against the background of the financial crisis, shows that country's commitment to moving forward on the path to membership of the Union; therefore urges the Council to decide on the ratification of the Interim Agreement without delay; requests Serbia to cooperate fully with the ICTY; welcomes in this respect the report, submitted on 4 June 2009, of the Chief Prosecutor of the ICTY, stating that Serbia has made additional progress in its cooperation with the ICTY; attaches importance to the fact that prosecutions are continuing in the War Crimes Chamber of the Belgrade District Court; welcomes the signing of the police protocol by the Serbian authorities with the European Union Rule of Law Mission in Kosovo (EULEX KOSOVO) and calls on Serbia to further step up its cooperation with EULEX KOSOVO, especially as regards EULEX KOSOVO's operations in northern Kosovo; regrets the call addressed by the Serbian authorities to the Kosovo Serbs for a boycott of the local elections on 15 November 2009 and urges them to adopt a constructive approach aimed at encouraging the active participation of the Kosovo Serb community in the Kosovo institutions;

24. Acknowledges that some progress has been made by BiH in the area of security and border management; however, expresses its dissatisfaction over the limited progress achieved by BiH as a potential candidate country on the path to membership of the Union; notes with growing concern the unstable political climate and the lack of a common vision shared by both entities, and condemns the use of inflammatory language, which can undermine the achievements in the process of inter-ethnic reconciliation and the functioning of State structures; encourages the Council to continue its efforts, with the support of the international community, to pursue a dialogue with political leaders in BiH in order to help that country and its peoples to remain on the path to European integration; emphasises the importance of creating a more sustainable constitutional framework permitting the country's institutions to function more effectively; consequently takes note of the most recent joint diplomatic efforts by the Presidency of the Council, the Commission and the US

administration and recommends further negotiations taking into account previous arrangements between politicians in BiH; recalls the necessity of involving parliamentarians and civil society more closely in sustaining a viable country;

25. Welcomes the intention of the Commission to strengthen relations with Kosovo⁽⁵⁾, including exploring the possibility of Kosovo participating in Community programmes; expects the process of decentralisation to be concluded before the end of the year in order to meet the basic requirements of the Ahtisaari Plan, ensuring political representation for all the inhabitants of Kosovo and in particular for the Serb minority; calls on the Kosovar authorities to continue their efforts to improve and guarantee respect for the rights of minorities; welcomes the overall peaceful and smooth conduct of the local elections of 15 November 2009 and acknowledges the efforts of the Central Election Commission in preparing for them; welcomes, furthermore, the unprecedented good participation of Kosovo Serbs and regards this as an encouraging indication that the Kosovo Serb community is willing to take up its responsibilities in the Kosovo institutions; welcomes the achievement by EULEX KOSOVO of a full operational capability such as will enable it to fulfil its mandate of promoting the rule of law, public order and security in transparency and accountability throughout the whole of Kosovo and pave the way for Kosovo's integration in the Union, if it meets the necessary conditions and requirements;

26. Acknowledges the progress made by Montenegro since the last progress report; notes that the country has applied for membership of the Union and that the Council has taken the decision to invite the Commission to prepare its opinion on Montenegro's application; commends Montenegro on its achievement, especially on the smooth conduct of the recent elections and its solid economic performance in spite of the global economic crisis, and encourages the country to continue its efforts on the path of reform;

27. Acknowledges the progress made by Albania since the last progress report, and in particular in the process of issuing identity cards and improvements in the legal and administrative framework of the election process, as manifested by the last national elections; urges the opposition to stop boycotting the parliament and calls on it to perform its duty to represent its voters in the parliament; calls on the government and the opposition to find a common basis for a follow-up of the last elections in the parliament; notes that Albania has applied for membership of the Union and that the Council has taken the decision to invite the Commission to prepare its opinion on the country's application; encourages the Albanian authorities to continue their efforts on the path of reform in favour of the economic and social progress of its citizens, so that the country can progress on its way to membership of the European Union;

28. Welcomes Iceland's application for membership and expects that the Commission will soon formulate an opinion and a recommendation on that application and that, in view of that country's well-established democratic tradition and high level of alignment with the *acquis communautaire*, Iceland will receive candidate status in the near future; however considers that Iceland's track record in implementing its obligations under the Agreement on the European Economic Area should be an essential element of the Commission's assessment; reiterates its call for the Commission to open a delegation office in Reykjavik as soon as the first half of 2010;

29. Calls on the Commission and the Council to develop a functional and coherent model for the new EU delegations in the enlargement area, preserving the unity of EU action after the setting up of the European External Action Service (EEAS), especially if competence for enlargement policy remains outside of the scope of the EEAS.

30. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission and to the

governments and parliaments of the Member States and of the countries concerned.

(1) OJ C 291 E, 30.11.2006, p. 402.

(2) OJ C 317 E, 23.12.2006, p. 480.

(3) Texts adopted, P6_TA(2008)0363.

(4) * Under UNSCR 1244/1999.

(5) 22 EU Member States have recognised Kosovo and five have not.