



Committee of the Regions

CIVEX-V-026

**95th plenary session
3 and 4 May 2012**

**DRAFT OPINION
of the
Committee of the Regions**

ENLARGEMENT STRATEGY AND MAIN CHALLENGES 2011-2012

Rapporteur: **Stanisław Szwabski (EA/PL)**
Chairman of the municipality of Gdynia

Deadline for tabling amendments:

midnight on Wednesday, 18 April 2012 (Brussels time), to be submitted through the new online tool for tabling amendments (available on the Members' Portal: www.cor.europa.eu/members).

Number of signatures required: 6

Reference Document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council:
Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012
COM(2011) 666

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

General recommendations

1. points out that the goal of EU enlargement is to expand the area of peaceful development and cooperation in Europe; the European Union is therefore open to any European country that wishes to join, respects and is committed to the democratic values and meets the membership criteria;
2. would point out that all the countries¹ covered by the enlargement strategy have formally ratified the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and would encourage them to meet and implement these commitments;
3. welcomes the Commission's proposal to make greater use of IPA to promote and accelerate result-oriented reform efforts;
4. stresses that the enlargement process is designed to ensure stability and increased prosperity for the citizens of the EU and the candidate countries and to ensure shared responsibility for the development of an ever greater area of peace, freedom, security and justice with an internal market and pursuing the goals of economic, social and territorial cohesion, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women;
5. points out that successful and persisting reform efforts should include all levels of society. Good governance – including modernisation of the public sector coordinated at national, regional and local level – provides better conditions for broad and stronger democracy, increased transparency and systems that are less beset by corruption and nepotism. A decentralised system increases public accountability and makes it easier for citizens to get involved in decision-making processes;
6. draws attention to the vital importance of the formation and development of multilevel governance, independent media and civil society in the candidate countries and urges them to support respect for civil liberties and democratic procedures in political life;
7. stresses the importance of a formal consultation procedure between competent national authorities, and local and regional authorities at every stage of the EU enlargement process. This broadens public participation and helps apply the subsidiarity principle and bring citizens closer. It also facilitates the implementation of legislation and helps to make better use of IPA if local and regional representatives are well informed about the integration process;

¹ With the exception of Kosovo, in accordance with UN resolution 1244/1999.

8. calls for the creation or reinforcement of organisations that group together local and regional authorities, and the cooperation with their counterparts in other EU Member States, which can help to share experiences and support the integration process;
9. takes a positive view of the ongoing integration process in the candidate countries, which should also be taken advantage of as one element in a decentralisation process based on transparent implementation;
10. highlights the fact that the progress and success of the enlargement process depends largely on the candidate countries making genuine advances in implementing reforms to meet the Copenhagen criteria;
11. stresses the key importance of respect for the principle of good neighbourly relations among EU Member States, candidate countries and other countries and the role and importance of developing cross-border and regional cooperation between these countries;
12. requests that the authorities of countries applying for EU membership establish consistent regulations and national strategies in cooperation with administrative bodies at local and regional level and that the necessary means be made available to local and regional authorities to carry out strategies to integrate Roma and other marginalised groups;
13. stresses the need for comprehensive and balanced information in candidate countries about the EU, its institutions, the integration process and the changes this process entails for individual countries, as well as the challenges and opportunities for citizens. Such information, large part of which needs to be provided by the authorities of the acceding countries, is essential to allow citizens to actively participate in their country's integration into the EU and to recognise the benefits of potential membership;
14. calls on all candidate countries to play a part in developing and strengthening the EU and Community institutions, depending on their formal possibilities;
15. highlights the need for, and importance of, a clear and unambiguous confirmation by the EU of its commitment to the enlargement process to take in candidate countries that meet the conditions for accession;

ICELAND

The candidate country's progress

21. welcomes the progress made in the accession negotiations with Iceland; underlines the very constructive cooperation between Iceland and the EU in the framework of the EEA and the Schengen area;
22. believes that Iceland could join the EU in the near term based on the "own merits" principle and encourages timely continuation of alignment in remaining policy areas;

23. commends the fact that Iceland has, to some extent, successfully overcome its economic difficulties and has persevered with implementation of the necessary reforms;
24. is concerned about the lack of strong public support for the integration process;