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on Enlargement: policies, criteria and the EU's strategic interests
(2012/2025(INI))

Committee on Foreign Affairs

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CONTENTS

	Page
MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION	3

MOTION FOR A EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RESOLUTION

on Enlargement: policies, criteria and the EU's strategic interests

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Treaty on European Union (TEU), in particular its Articles 2, 21 and 49,
 - having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the Copenhagen European Council of 21-22 June 1993, of the Madrid European Council of 15-16 December 1995, of the Thessaloniki European Council of 19-20 June 2003 and of the Brussels European Council of 14-15 December 2006,
 - having regard to the Commission communication of 20 February 2008 on ‘Five years of an enlarged EU – Economic achievements and challenges’ (COM(2009)0079/3),
 - having regard to its resolutions of 13 December 2006 on the Commission communication on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007, of 10 July 2008 on the Commission’s 2007 enlargement strategy paper, and of 26 November 2009 on the Commission’s 2009 enlargement strategy paper concerning the Western Balkan countries, Iceland and Turkey,
 - having regard to its previous resolutions on the countries of the Western Balkans, Iceland and Turkey,
 - having regard to Rule 48 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinions of the Committee on Budgets and the Committee on Regional Development (A7-0000/2012),
- A. whereas, in accordance with Article 49 TEU, any European state which respects and remains committed to the promotion of the values of human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, may apply to become a member of the Union; whereas these values are common to the Member States;
- B. whereas enlargement has been part of the EU agenda since as early as the 1960s; whereas since the first enlargement in 1973, the EU has grown gradually, its membership rising from the six founding members to the current 27 (soon to be 28); whereas a number of countries still aspire to become EU members;
- C. whereas enlargement has been a success story for the EU and Europe as a whole, in helping to overcome the division of the Cold War, contributing to peace, stability and prosperity throughout Europe, stimulating reforms and consolidating liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, as well as the market economy;

- D. whereas 20 years after the Copenhagen summit the moment has come for a general re-evaluation of the accession criteria, of the established procedures and of enlargement policy as a whole; whereas Parliament contributes to improving the transparency and accountability of enlargement and thereby increasing public support for this process;
- E. whereas the prospect of accession has a significant impact on the socio-political, economic and cultural landscape of the countries wishing to join, and acts as a powerful incentive for pursuing the necessary political, economic and legislative reforms and the strengthening of peace, stability and reconciliation based on good neighbourly relations; whereas this makes enlargement the essence of the EU's soft power and an important element of its external action;
- F. whereas each country has to be judged on its own merits in fulfilling the same set of criteria; whereas the pace of the accession process should be dictated by effective compliance with the accession criteria, as well as fulfilment of the priorities of the Accession Partnership and the negotiating framework; whereas the degree of compliance with the requirements for membership has to be assessed in the most fair and transparent fashion;
- G. whereas, in line with the renewed consensus on enlargement of 2006, this process should be based on consolidation, conditionality and communication, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members; whereas integration capacity is a major consideration and a prerequisite for the sustainability of enlargement policy and the overall integration process; whereas this consideration has been a positive incentive for institutional deepening, as demonstrated by the consecutive treaty revisions that have accompanied the different waves of enlargement, extending the functions and activities of the Union;
- H. whereas true reconciliation between different peoples and the establishment of good neighbourly relations between countries contribute substantially to a genuine European integration process, and are of key importance to the enlargement process; whereas a number of candidate and potential candidate countries continue to have unresolved issues with their neighbours;

General considerations

1. Strongly believes that enlargement needs to continue to be a credible policy; considers it, therefore, important for the EU to fulfil the promises already made and to create the conditions for ensuring that future enlargements are successful;
2. Considers that the Copenhagen criteria continue to represent a valuable basis and should remain at the heart of enlargement policy; underlines, however, the need to keep the economic subcriteria up to date in line with recent developments in the sphere of economic governance, while taking due account of their social implications for the candidate and potential candidate countries;
3. Points out that the EU continues to be attractive, also because of its unique combination of economic dynamism with a social model, and regrets that this social dimension has been largely neglected in the enlargement process; invites the Commission to reflect on possible options, including developing a set of social criteria, to address this deficiency

and foster positive social transformation in the future EU Member States; stresses that failure to comply with the EU's common basic social standards constitutes a form of social dumping which is detrimental to European enterprises and workers;

4. Takes the view that strict conditionality requires that the progress of a country is effectively assessed at every stage of the process, and that countries wishing to join the EU should proceed from one stage to the next only once all the conditions have been met at each stage; notes, however, certain tendencies to exaggeration, and recommends avoiding requiring of candidate and potential candidate countries higher standards than those applying in the EU; stresses the importance of setting transparent and fair benchmarks throughout the process;
5. Calls on the Commission to maintain and further develop a toolbox that draws on conditionality, and to intensify its monitoring of progress in the accession process, so as to ensure that candidate and potential candidate countries achieve a high degree of preparedness which will benefit both them and the EU;
6. Believes that, in order to maintain the credibility of the enlargement process, the EU's integration capacity should be evaluated at an early stage and should be properly considered in the Commission's 'opinion' for each potential candidate state, outlining the major concerns in this regard; is of the view that a comprehensive impact assessment should then follow;

Enlargement policies

7. Welcomes the new negotiating approach that prioritises issues related to the judiciary and fundamental rights, as well as to justice and home affairs; agrees that these should be tackled early in the accession process and that the corresponding chapters should be opened accordingly on the basis of action plans, as they require the establishment of convincing track records; calls on the Commission to report to Parliament regularly on progress in these areas, and for the monthly pre-accession reports of the EU delegations to be forwarded to the members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs;
8. Considers it important to give adequate priority within enlargement policy to the building of an efficient, independent and impartial judicial system that can strengthen the citizens' confidence in the rule of law; underlines, at the same time, the need to ensure freedom of the media in law and in practice, as well as to effectively fight corruption and organised crime;
9. Encourages greater participation by civil society and non-state actors in the accession process; stresses that civil society can work as an engine of approximation with the EU and create bottom-up pressure for the implementation of the European agenda; calls for additional financial support, inter alia via the Civil Society Facility;
10. Strongly believes in the need to promote a climate of tolerance, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, as prerequisites for stability and as means of facilitating reconciliation; considers that the prosecution of war crimes and the reintegration of refugees and displaced persons must be fundamental elements of the accession process in regions with a recent history of conflict;

11. Reiterates its position that bilateral issues should not represent or be used as an obstacle in the accession process, but should be addressed in a constructive spirit and as early as possible, taking account of the EU's overall interests and its values; stresses that the accession negotiations should not be used to pre-empt the final settlement of such issues, notwithstanding the obligation to fully comply with the *acquis* and respect the principles on which the EU itself is founded;
12. Calls on the EU to support efforts to resolve outstanding disputes, including border disputes, before accession; in line with the provisions of the UN Charter, encourages all parties to disputes whose continuation is likely to endanger the preservation of international peace and security to engage constructively in their peaceful resolution and, in case of proven inability to reach a bilateral agreement, to refer the matter to the International Court of Justice or to commit themselves to a binding arbitration mechanism of their choice;
13. Takes note of initiatives such as the positive agenda on Turkey and the high-level accession dialogue with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; welcomes the aim of creating a fresh dynamic in the reform process, but stresses that these initiatives must in no way replace the formal negotiation procedures;
14. Stresses that enlargement policy is an instrument for modernisation and stabilisation, and also has the aim of strengthening the EU; calls on the Commission to undertake comprehensive impact assessments whenever it considers new applications for EU membership and when it recommends the opening or, in case of fundamentally changed circumstances, the closing of accession negotiations;
15. Supports the Commission's commitment to improving the quality of the accession process by making it more benchmark-driven and transparent; takes the view that this will make the process fairer and more objectively measurable, thus further enhancing its credibility; in this context, recommends that the progress reports should be more assertive and clearer in their demands; stresses that the benchmarks should not set additional conditions for the candidate and potential candidate countries, but should translate the general membership criteria into concrete steps towards accession;
16. Recalls the need to accompany EU enlargement with a concerted and more effective and transparent communication policy involving all EU institutions, the governments and parliaments of the Member States, and representatives of civil society;
17. Is of the opinion that, in order to maintain the support of the EU's citizens for further enlargement and the commitment of the citizens of the candidate and potential candidate countries to continue with reforms, it is crucial to present them with clear and comprehensive information on the political, socio-economic and cultural benefits of enlargement; considers it essential, in particular, to explain to the public how the pursuing of enlargement policy has brought in its wake new investment and export opportunities for the older Member States, and how it can help attain the EU's objectives in terms of tackling the economic crisis, creating jobs, protecting the environment and mitigating the effects of climate change, and enhancing security and safety, while at the same time accelerating the reform agenda and improving living conditions in the enlargement countries for the benefit of all European citizens; stresses the need to target, as a priority

in this regard, young people and trade unions, as well as key opinion-formers such as journalists, representatives of civil society and economic actors;

Prospects and the EU's strategic interests

18. Strongly believes that the EU can still attain great strategic benefits through enlargement policy; emphasises that EU membership represents a stable anchor in the swiftly changing international environment, and that 'belonging to the club' continues to offer hope for stability and prosperity, despite the ongoing economic crisis; is of the opinion that enlargement is a long-term strategic concept, which cannot necessarily be measured in terms of short-term balance sheets; considers it important to take due account of its value as representing soft but nevertheless essential power for the EU;
19. Remains fully committed to the prospect of enlargement, and calls on the Member States to maintain the momentum of the enlargement process by reconfirming the European perspective of every candidate and potential candidate country, notwithstanding the requirement of strict compliance with the Copenhagen criteria; stresses its conviction that with the Lisbon Treaty the EU can both pursue its enlargement agenda and maintain the impetus of deeper integration;
20. Recalls that the process is not concluded with the simple transposition of the *acquis*, and stresses the importance of effective implementation; considers that in order to maintain the credibility of the accession conditions, existing Member States should also be assessed for their continued compliance with the EU's fundamental values and the fulfilment of their commitments concerning the functioning of democratic institutions and the rule of law; calls on the Commission to work out a detailed proposal for a monitoring mechanism, building on the provisions of Article 7 TEU and Article 258 TFEU;
21. Notes that the global financial crisis and the difficulties in the eurozone have highlighted the interdependence of national economies, both within and beyond the EU; emphasises, therefore, the importance of further consolidating economic and financial stability and fostering growth, also in the candidate and potential candidate countries; in these difficult circumstances, stresses the need to provide adequate pre-accession financial aid to candidate and potential candidate countries; welcomes the increase proposed by the Commission for the financial perspective 2014-2020; stresses, in this regard, the need to simplify and speed up procedures, as well as to strengthen the administrative capacity of the beneficiary countries, in order to ensure a high level of participation in EU programmes and to enhance absorption capacity;
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22. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Governments and Parliaments of the Member States and of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Iceland, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey.