

Brussels, 27 October 2010

Orientation Debate on Enlargement

On 9 November, the 2010 Enlargement package will be on the agenda of the Commission meeting. This will be the first enlargement package of the new Commission. It will comprise a Strategy paper, the Opinions on the membership applications by Montenegro and Albania and seven Progress Reports on the other candidate countries and potential candidates.

For half a century, the European Union has pursued ever-deeper integration while taking in new members. Most of the time, the two processes took place in parallel. A growing membership has been part of the development of European integration right from the start. Today's EU, with 27 Member States and a population of close to 500 million people, is much safer, stronger and more influential than the original European Economic Community of 50 years ago, with its 6 members and population of less than 200 million.

In 2006 the governments of the EU Member States at the European Council renewed the consensus on the Enlargement policy and reconfirmed the EU perspective of the countries in South East Europe - Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, Kosovo under UN Security Council Resolution 1244 and Turkey.

Enlargement has moved forward over the last year. Negotiations with Croatia have entered their final stage, and there has been some progress on bilateral issues. Serbia has applied for membership. The Commission is about to issue its opinions on applications by Montenegro and Albania. Iceland began accession negotiations in July. New chapters have been opened in the negotiations with Turkey and the country has embarked on a thorough revision of its constitution, moving closer to European standards.

The current enlargement agenda covers the Western Balkans, Turkey and Iceland. The countries are at various stages, in a highly demanding preparation process:

- 3 candidate countries are in accession negotiations: Turkey, Croatia (both since October 2005) and Iceland (since July 2010).
- The Commission recommended in 2009 to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia but Council has not yet taken a decision on this recommendation.
- 3 countries have applied for EU membership: Montenegro (in December 2008) Albania (in April 2009) and Serbia (in December 2009). The Commission Opinions on Montenegro and Albania will be part of the 2010 enlargement package. Regarding Serbia, Council has asked on 25 October the Commission to prepare its Opinion.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo are the 2 remaining potential candidates.

Background

Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union lays down the procedure for EU accession: *"any European States which respects the values referred to in Article 2 and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union."* Article 2 (TEU) says that *"the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These values are common to the Member states in a society in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women prevail."*

Article 49 contains also a reference to the *"conditions of eligibility agreed upon by the European Council"*.

The December 2006 European Council agreed that *"the enlargement strategy based on consolidation, conditionality and communication, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members, forms the basis for a renewed consensus on enlargement"*.

The most important conditions in this regard are the Copenhagen political, economic and legislative criteria formulated by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993.

The "Copenhagen criteria" require a candidate country to have:

- stable institutions that guarantee democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- a functioning market economy, as well as the ability to cope with the pressure of competition and the market forces at work inside the Union;
- the ability to assume the obligations of membership, in particular adherence to the objectives of political, economic and monetary union.

Contact:

Angela Filote +32 229 51968

Anca Paduraru +32 229 66430