



Common Position of the Green/EFA Group in the European Parliament

Future Enlargement of the European Union

Wednesday, 4 July 2006

General

1. Enlargement has to be considered as the most effective conflict prevention policy ever devised and carried out by the EU. Being able to lead and govern the transition process from dictatorship to democracy and from state economy to market economy of the neighbouring Central and Eastern European countries was a strong historical challenge, the outcome of which must be considered a success story for the EU. With the signing of the accession treaty by *Bulgaria* and *Romania* last April the “greatest” enlargement of the European Union has come to a conclusion. After the artificial division of Europe during the Cold War, the enlargement eastwards should be considered as a long overdue unification of the continent.
2. We consider the countries of the Western Balkans as part of the European family; their eventual EU accession would therefore be a natural completion of this unification;
3. The perspective for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe to become a member of the EU encouraged them to make substantial reforms which, without this perspective, would not have been launched. For both the old and the new Member States enlargement has been largely beneficial; nevertheless, the present situation within EU 25 is not satisfactory especially for large groups of people in Central and Eastern Europe in terms of economic and social standards. We support much stronger policies in terms of cooperation and solidarity among Member States;
4. Enlargement of the European Union has contributed to strengthening Europe's role in the world but, at the same time, has shown the weakness, the deficiencies and the shortcomings of the existing treaties which prevent the EU from functioning and acting effectively on the world stage; further enlargement will be beneficial for the worldwide reinforcement of the European Union's approach to foreign policy only after deep reforms are undertaken, implying a strong emphasis on conflict prevention;
5. We welcome the fact that the opportunity to work and study abroad was seized by the populations of the new Member States but mainly in Ireland, UK and Sweden. We regret that the labour market of all the other EU Member States is still closed for the workers of the newly acceded countries;
6. For the Greens, the criteria laid down in Copenhagen in 1993 are the central benchmarks for the preparedness of the candidates to enter the EU. These criteria are not negotiable. The duty to fulfil all political criteria for accession does not end with the accession. Thus a mechanism should be introduced by which the compliance with basic principles of the EU - freedom, democracy, human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law (Art. 6 EU) - of all Member States, new and old alike, is regularly reviewed. The EU Agency for Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, hopefully to be established in the near future, can play a vital role in this assessment;

The current state of play

7. The European Parliament has an important role to play in monitoring the accession countries' compliance with the criteria for accession.
8. The accession treaty for Romania and Bulgaria has been signed. Safeguard clauses have been included in the treaties, stipulating a possible delay of the accession date in case Bulgaria and Romania fail to implement all necessary measures, especially in the fields of Competition and Justice and Home Affairs.
9. We are not only in favour of a monitoring mechanism but we strongly insist that the Council and the Commission always take the views of the European Parliament into account before issuing its final recommendation on the accession date of new Member States;
10. Delaying the accession date for Romania and Bulgaria for reasons other than non-compliance with the stipulations of the safeguard clauses would create a big credibility gap for the EU;
11. The EU has rightly stuck to its commitments towards Croatia and Turkey. We welcome the start of membership negotiations with these two countries. Despite this clear general approval, we have always made clear where we see the shortcomings in the reforms in these countries and we certainly will continue to be reliable but critical supporters of both countries. The process of accession negotiations, by its very nature, is open-ended, but membership and nothing else is the goal;
12. The European perspective for the Western Balkans has to be kept upright: stabilisation and peace on the Balkans must stay a key priority for the EU in the coming years. The level of regional cooperation between the countries of the Western Balkans is an important indication of their preparedness for EU membership, but finally each country must be judged on its own merits and negotiate its accession according to an individual timetable;

The future

13. Far-reaching reforms are necessary both for the existing Union and as a precondition for future enlargements. These reforms must at all events incorporate the central achievements of the draft Constitution and the binding legal tie to the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
14. Concerning the question of Europe's borders, we stress the necessity of a European self-ascertaining process and a broad public consensus. In any case, the borders of Europe are for us the limits of its capability to build a political polity. We are aware of the significance of decisions on enlargement for both Europe and the country concerned; we therefore reject national referenda on the accession of third countries and propose the introduction of the possibility of Europe-wide referenda on enlargement;
15. Without defining the final borders for the European Union, we recognise that over the next decade the integration capacity of the Union will reach its limits with the negotiations and possible accession of Turkey and the countries of the Western Balkans. Integrating further countries will be a big challenge for the EU. The Community shall therefore not offer the concrete prospect of accession to any *further* state until the impact of the current negotiations and possible accessions can be assessed;
16. We are confident that enlargement is no impediment, but on the contrary an added value in our efforts for sustainability and justice on the European continent and in the wider world.