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THE EUROPEAN UNION**

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**OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS**

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Subject : Council conclusions on Enlargement

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Delegations will find attached Council conclusions on Enlargement as adopted by the Council on 10 December 2007.

**COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS****ENLARGEMENT STRATEGY**

In line with the enlargement strategy agreed by the December 2006 European Council and the Council conclusions of 11 December 2006, the Council welcomes the Commission's communication on the enlargement strategy and main challenges 2007-2008 of 6 November and takes good note of the analysis and recommendations contained therein. The renewed consensus on enlargement, which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and better communication, together with the capacity to integrate new members, continues to form the basis of EU's enlargement strategy. An improved quality of the enlargement process will ensure that enlargement continues to foster peace, democracy and stability throughout the continent and to bring concrete benefits in terms of increased trade, investment and economic growth. Next year is crucial to further consolidate and implement the EU's enlargement strategy and support the transition process in the Western Balkans. The Council recalls various proposals made on this issue and that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union. Against this background, the consistent implementation of the renewed consensus is more important than ever.

The Council reaffirms that the pace of the negotiations depends notably on the negotiating countries' progress in addressing opening and closing benchmarks as well as the requirements of the Negotiating Frameworks, including the implementation of the Accession Partnerships, currently in course of revision, with each country being judged on its own merits. The Council recalls that chapters for which technical preparations have been completed will be opened in accordance with established procedures, in line with the Negotiating Frameworks. In this context, the Council looks forward to the Intergovernmental Conferences with Turkey and Croatia later this month. It is also essential that the enlargement policy maintains fair and rigorous conditionality at all stages of the negotiations. In this regard the Council welcomes the Commission's intention to continue enhancing the quality of the enlargement process by tackling key priorities in areas of public administration and judicial reform and the fight against corruption at an early stage, by making full use of benchmarks and impact studies, and by bringing more transparency into the process. This will be instrumental for ensuring broad and sustained public support for the enlargement process.

## Turkey

The Council welcomes the resolution of the political and constitutional crisis in Turkey earlier this year. The outcome of the crisis strengthened democracy. The conduct of the recent parliamentary and presidential elections in full respect of democratic standards and the rule of law, the high voter turnout and the broader representation in the new Parliament demonstrate the wish of the Turkish people for democracy, stability and progress. This is a decisive moment to renew and intensify the reform process and the Union will continue to assist Turkey in this regard.

The Council regrets the limited progress achieved in political reform in Turkey in 2007 but welcomes the Turkish government's declared intention and renewed commitment to continue the reform process and address the existing shortcomings. It looks forward to see these commitments soon translated into real and tangible actions.

The Council notes the process underway to revise the Constitution. This will constitute a key opportunity to fully enshrine the European standards in the Turkish constitutional law. Nevertheless, the Council stresses that this process should not delay long awaited reforms, in particular in the key areas of freedom of expression and freedom of religion where Turkey needs to proceed without delay.

Significant further efforts are also needed in other areas such as judicial reform, the fight against corruption, minority rights and the strengthening of cultural rights, women's rights, children's rights, trade union rights and the civilian control of the military. As regards the East and Southeast, the Council recalls the need to promptly develop and implement a comprehensive strategy that will guarantee the economic, social and cultural development of this area.

The Council condemns all terrorist attacks and violence in Turkish territory and expresses its solidarity with the people of Turkey as well as its support for Turkey's efforts to protect its population and fight terrorism, while respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and international law and preserving regional peace and stability.

In line with the Negotiating Framework and previous European Council and Council conclusions, Turkey needs to unequivocally commit to good neighbourly relations and to the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter, including, if necessary, jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice. In this context, any threat or action which could negatively affect good neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes should be avoided.

Recalling its conclusions of 11 December 2006, the Council notes with regret that Turkey has not fulfilled its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement and has not made progress towards normalisation of relations with the Republic of Cyprus. The Council will continue to follow up and review progress made on the issues covered by the declaration of the European Community and its Member States of 21 September 2005 in accordance with its conclusions of 11 December 2006. Swift progress on these issues is expected.

Recalling the Negotiating Framework, the Council also expects Turkey to actively support efforts to implement the agreed 8<sup>th</sup> of July process leading to a comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded including concrete steps to contribute to a favourable climate for such a comprehensive settlement.

## Croatia

The Council commends Croatia for the overall progress it continued to make in the past year, which allowed the country to enter an increasingly important and demanding stage. Negotiations are on the right track. This also demonstrates to the Western Balkan region as a whole that the perspective of EU membership is tangible. Increased attention must be given to further transpose and implement effectively the *acquis*, in order to be able to meet the obligations of membership in good time.

Further sustained efforts are required in a number of areas. Croatia needs to build on its achievements and implementing record and to make further progress particularly in judicial and administrative reforms, the fight against corruption, economic reforms, minority rights and refugee return. Full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) must be continued and further improvements are needed to ensure that the prosecution and trial of war crimes in Croatia itself is carried out, without ethnic bias.

The fulfilment of the obligations under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement remains crucial. It is also essential that Croatia continues its efforts towards good neighbourly relations, including work to find satisfactory solutions to pending bilateral issues with neighbouring countries, especially as regards border issues. The Council also calls on Croatia to fully respect the 4 June 2004 agreement concerning the Ecological and Fisheries Protection Zone referred to in the June 2004 European Council conclusions and the Negotiating Framework and not to apply any aspect of the Zone to the EU Member States until a common agreement in the EU spirit is found.