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Address to Members of Parliament in the Netherlands

Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

Meeting with Members of Parliament

The Hague, 3 November 2011

Mr Chairman, Honourable Members of Parliament

The last time that I spoke in this house I made a commitment to return and keep you informed. It is an honour to be able to keep this commitment here today.

Your institution plays a vital role in the enlargement process. A process which brings benefits to the European Union as a whole and to the acceding countries.

Today I will present to you the Commission's enlargement package.

This presentation will cover three main areas.

The credibility and transformative power of our enlargement policy and the benefits this brings the European Union as well as the countries of the region.

Second, how we place the values at the heart of the European Union at the heart of the accession process.

Third the progress made and the challenges arising for the individual countries.

Let me start with Credibility and transformation.

Mr Chairman, I am keeping my commitment to this house and keeping to commitments is a cornerstone of our enlargement process

The enlargement process is **credible** because countries deliver on their reforms, and the EU delivers on its commitments once the conditions are met at full.

It is **credible** because we monitor the demanding criteria and conditions, and also their implementation. Thanks to this, candidate countries achieve a higher level of readiness to join, which benefits both them and the European Union.

The progress made this year clearly confirms that our policy is credible and delivers real results. Croatia completed its accession negotiations. We have seen good progress on reforms in a number of other countries in the region. Furthermore, the last indictees of the International Criminal Tribunal to the former Yugoslavia were transferred to The Hague. This is immensely significant.

Here I would like to thank this chamber. The "strict and fair approach" which you have adopted has greatly assisted us in ensuring that all in the region respect their obligations to the Tribunal. That approach goes beyond ICTY commitments and it is to the benefit of the whole process.

Honourable members,

Enlargement policy goes beyond being credible. As Croatia has shown, for the candidate countries and potential candidates our policy facilitates a profound **transformation**.

- A **transformation** to a stable, pluralistic democracy which upholds and reinforces the rule of law.

- A **transformation** to a functioning market economy and the prospect of long term prosperity.

- A **transformation** to a modern society, which fully embraces the values at the heart of the European Union.

Mr Chairman

This process is not just for the benefit of the candidate countries. This same process benefits the European Union and its Member States. At this time of on-going economic uncertainty in Europe, the transformational enlargement process

- provides **stability in the region**
- creates a **larger economic space**
- **increases our security** through combating organised crime and illegal migration.

Honourable members,

The **transformation** that is underway in the enlargement countries is built on the same foundations on which our Union is constructed. These underpin our values, the values which the enlargement countries have undertaken to embrace.

The 2011 Strategy paper continues to focus on these essential elements.

First, **strengthening the rule of law and public administration reform;**

To underpin this work, I announce today that **we are proposing a new approach** to Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and to Justice, Freedom and Security. We intend to tackle these issues early in the accession process. We will open the relevant chapters on the basis of action plans adopted by governments and these chapters will be among the very last ones to be closed. The chapters 23 and 24 are those closely associated with the values our Union is based on and here the track record has a very important meaning. We will report regularly on implementation, on meeting the milestones in the action plans and on the development of track records. If needed, we will propose corrective measures.

We remain resolute on the need for countries to respect everyone's fundamental rights and combat discrimination on any grounds including ethnicity, gender or sexual orientation.

Second, **ensuring freedom of expression in the media;**

This is essential: there can be no real transformation without freedom of expression. We had a conference "Speak Up!" this spring dedicated to this topic and we have sent the conclusions to the prime ministers of aspirant countries. One of the most important conclusions was: the chapter 23 will be focusing much more on the freedom of media.

Third, **enhancing regional cooperation and reconciliation** in the Western Balkans is one of the cornerstones of the stabilisation and association process: from energy and the environment to refugees and war crimes.

Finally, **achieving sustainable economic recovery, embracing Europe 2020 and extending energy and transport networks.**

Mr Chairman,

The transformative power of the enlargement process of the European Union can be seen most obviously in **Croatia**.

Today, Croatia is very different to the country that applied for accession to the European Union a decade ago. Democracy functions. Fundamental rights are respected. The economy has weathered the financial crisis. And Croatia will be ready to accept the rights and obligations of membership from the day of accession.

Of course, Croatia needs to continue preparations on the ground. Our report identifies the areas where further delivery is needed. The Commission will closely monitor the fulfilment of all remaining commitments made by Croatia during the negotiations and will present fair monitoring reports next May.

It is my pleasure to witness that the transformative impact of the enlargement process is also being seen in other countries.

Let me start with **Montenegro**.

This year the European Commission is recommending that Montenegro starts accession negotiations. **Montenegro has worked hard** to fulfil the 7 key priorities which had to be met before opening negotiations could be considered.

We have seen real progress including in: judicial reform, revising the electoral law, media freedom, anti-discrimination and the fight against corruption and organised crime.

The situation is not perfect. But Montenegro has made real progress. In the fight against corruption there have been investigations and arrests including mayors and judges. There have been two arrests against alleged organised crime chiefs. In these cases assets totally around €40 million have been seized

The question is how best to maintain this momentum? How best to build a track record. For me the best approach is not to delay Montenegro's progress towards the EU. Rather it is to give the next incentive.

Our new approach and focus on Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Justice and Home Affairs from the very first stage of negotiations will help to create a new dynamic of reforms in these areas and is the best way to support this consolidation.

I understand that a Delegation from your parliament was recently in Montenegro. This is an important initiative. Passing on best practices and experiences will greatly support our new approach.

The enlargement package also contains **our Opinion on Serbia's application for membership**. On the basis of the progress achieved in reforms, co-operation with the International Court Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia, and regional reconciliation, **I have recommended granting Serbia Candidate Status** on the understanding that Serbia re-engages in the dialogue with Kosovo and **is moving swiftly to the implementation in good faith of agreements reached to date**.

Furthermore, we recommend that accession negotiations be opened as soon as Serbia achieves further progress in meeting the one key priority we identify, namely: further steps to normalise relations with Kosovo in line with the conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process. This is not a new condition and all elements outlined under this key priority relate to the conditions of the Stabilisation and Association Process and the EU acquis.

This is the only priority we set which in itself is a tribute to the reform efforts we have witnessed in Serbia over the last year. In the area of judicial reform Serbia listened to our concerns about the appointment of judges. New procedures in line with European Standards are now in place. More broadly there has been progress on the rule of law and in other areas intrinsically linked to the Copenhagen political criteria.

Honourable members

These are the attention grabbing headlines but there has also been good progress with **Iceland**. I am confident we will continue to do so this year. The Commission has always encouraged a swift resolution of the Icesave outstanding dispute. The framework for this is Iceland's existing commitments to fully respect its obligations deriving from membership in the European Economic Area. The EFTA surveillance authority's decisions to launch infringement proceedings will I hope give a new momentum to finding a solution.

Unfortunately, we can not record good progress across all the enlargement countries.

Turkey, with its dynamic economy and its important regional role, continues to be a key country for the European Union. I am convinced that the accession process remains the most effective tool to frame our relations with Turkey.

Regrettably, accession negotiations have not moved forward for more than one year. There are frustrations about this on both sides. But these should not blind us from the importance of our relationship, or the underlying fundamentals which remain good. I believe it is time to work for a renewed positive agenda in EU-Turkey relations. To build together on our common strategic interests.

In our strategy paper, we propose concrete measures to re-build momentum in the process and establish a new positive agenda. An agenda which will include support for political reform, in particular an inclusive constitutional reform process. This agenda also covers a broad range of areas of common interest such as: foreign policy dialogue; alignment with the European Union acquis; practical progress on visas; mobility and migration; and deepening our economic relationship to get the most out of the Customs Union.

Concerning **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**, we maintain our recommendation to open accession negotiations. The prospect of European Union accession has been a driver of the reform process.

However, with the continued impasse over the name issue, the motivation for reforms has diminished. There has been little progress over the past year. Core challenges remain, notably: independence of the judiciary, reform of public administration and fighting corruption. Freedom of expression remains a serious concern.

It is, therefore, crucial that there is progress on the name issue. A solution is long overdue. Opening negotiations will benefit not only the country and the region but the EU as a whole. Another year should not be lost.

On Albania, **I would have liked to see more progress.** Last year, we identified 12 key priorities that need to be addressed before the accession process can reach the next stage. However, progress has been hampered by the continuation of the political stalemate and parliamentary boycott. This is despite all our efforts to support progress.

More recently, some positive signals suggest that the political parties want to restart dialogue. This is urgently needed to re-establish and maintain a level of cooperation which would allow for progress on the EU integration path.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, political and institutional deadlock has continued. This has prevented work on the reform agenda including those needed to bring the country closer to the EU. A state-level government is urgently needed to drive forward the reform process **and so is constitutional reform**. To advance towards the EU, the country needs to amend its constitution in line with the European Court of Human Rights ruling to eliminate ethnic discrimination regarding representation in institutions and adopt a state aid law at the state level.

In **Kosovo**, lengthy electoral processes meant progress achieved with the reform agenda was limited. However, the new institutions are committed to Kosovo's European perspective. They have produced some initial reforms. Organised crime and corruption remain major challenges. Kosovo needs to strengthen public administration. Judicial reform is pressing. The Commission proposes to launch a structured dialogue with Kosovo on the rule of law to address these challenges.

While the integration of Kosovo Serbs has improved in the South, tensions in northern Kosovo have increased. It is of utmost importance that Kosovo launches a comprehensive agenda for the north.

We will continue supporting Kosovo's efforts to reach key objectives such as a trade agreement and participation in Community programmes. On visas, a dialogue will be launched towards the end of this year. We will also review our 2009 Communication to ensure that Kosovo can further benefit from the EU accession process.

Honourable members

Mr Chairman,

To conclude, Enlargement is a strong policy, a credible policy, a policy with the transformative power to change countries to the benefit of their populations and to the benefit of the European Union as a whole.

An essential element in this process is the support from our member states. This parliament has a vital role to play:

As a legislator,

In giving a political steer to the process

And as an important source of information for your citizens about the enlargement process.

For this reason I value the opportunity to discuss our enlargement policy with you and look forward to your questions and comments.