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on the Commission's 2007 enlargement strategy paper
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Rapporteur: Elmar Brok

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The European Parliament,

- having regard to the Commission's Communication on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2007-2008 (COM(2007)0663),
 - having regard to its resolutions of 16 March 2006 on the Commission's 2005 enlargement strategy paper¹ and of 13 December 2006 on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007²,
 - having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,
 - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0000/2008),
- A. whereas the Union's Enlargement Strategy has both an external and an internal dimension,
- B. whereas the external dimension of this strategy involves the promotion of reforms, in line with European standards, of democracy, of peace, and of stability and prosperity,
- C. whereas the internal dimension of the Enlargement Strategy directly affects the Union's ability to pursue its policy objectives and to achieve an ever closer Union, as laid down in the Treaties,
- D. whereas this strategy cannot therefore be reduced to a simple negotiating methodology but should involve a debate on the Union's objectives, covering both the Union's own future and its role in the neighbourhood,
- E. whereas the methodology and criteria outlined in the Commission Communication for pursuing accession negotiations deserve full support and should be implemented rigorously,
- F. whereas the Union's Enlargement Strategy should be part of a more diversified array of external relations policies, reconciling the Union's geo-strategic interests with our neighbours' diverse expectations,
- G. whereas these policies should encompass the variety of situations prevailing in our neighbourhood, notably in those countries which have candidate status and have started negotiations, those which have candidate status but have not yet started negotiations, those which have membership prospects, those which have a European integration goal and those which merely wish to have close neighbourly ties with the Union,

¹ OJ C 291 E, 30.11.2006, p. 402.

² OJ C 317 E, 23.12.2006, p. 480.

- H. whereas these policies should be complementary and mutually permeable, that is to say, should allow a given country to move from one type of contractual relationship with the EU to another, if the necessary internal and external conditions are fulfilled,
- I. whereas, as stated in its above-mentioned resolution of 13 December 2006, countries with European prospects should benefit from a close bilateral or multilateral relationship with the EU, matching their specific needs and interests; whereas this option, which entails a broad spectrum of operational possibilities, would grant partner countries a stable, long-term perspective of institutionalised relations with the EU and provide the incentive necessary to foster stability, peace and democratic and economic reform in the countries concerned;
- J. whereas, in accordance with the same resolution, it would be up to all countries with recognised membership prospects to decide whether they want to join this multilateral framework as an intermediate step towards full membership;
- K. whereas these policies need also to be effectively explained and communicated to our citizens so as to ensure public support for the Union's commitments towards its neighbours, thus guaranteeing the Union's credibility as partner,
1. Reaffirms its firm commitment to the countries with which it has started membership negotiations and to the countries which have been given clear membership prospects, with the understanding that full compliance with the Copenhagen criteria and compatibility with the Union's integration capacity must be fulfilled before these countries can join the Union;
 2. Takes the view that the Union's Enlargement Strategy should strike a balance between the Union's geo-strategic interests, the impact of political developments outside its borders together with the resulting expectations of its neighbouring countries, and the Union's integration capacity, including its ability to cope with future internal and external challenges and to realise its political integration project;
 3. Recalls that integration capacity reflects the Union's ability at a given point in time to decide and thus to achieve its political objectives, in particular the aim of promoting economic and social progress and a high level of employment in its Member States, of asserting its identity and its ability to act on the international scene, of promoting the rights and interests of Member States' nationals, of developing an area of freedom, security and justice, and of fully maintaining and building on its *acquis communautaire*;
 4. Recalls that this ability not only has institutional and financial implications but also involves sufficient political, social and economic cohesion within the Union;
 5. Recalls, furthermore, that the economic structure and interests of each new Member State have a direct impact on the direction which the Union's policies and budget take and could therefore affect the nature of the Union itself;
 6. Is also convinced that any new Member State must first resolve any bilateral issue with neighbouring countries before it can join the Union, lest such issues become a hindrance in the development of the Union's relations with its neighbours and affect its credibility as

an impartial mediator in international affairs;

7. Therefore takes the view that every enlargement must be followed by adequate consolidation and political concentration, that is to say, by a strengthening of the Union's cohesion and a serious reassessment of the Union's policies and means in order to ensure consensus and to focus on objectives which respond to the expectations of our citizens and which guarantee the viability of the Union as a political project;
8. Warns, therefore, that further enlargement without adequate consolidation could lead to a Union of multiple configurations, with core countries moving towards closer integration and others lying at its margins, and that this scenario would have seriously detrimental implications for the Union's capacity to act – since it would weaken its institutions, for the stability of some of its Member States – since it would make them more vulnerable to external pressure, and for its credibility as global actor – since it would undermine its already precarious unity in external affairs;
9. Is also convinced that the Enlargement Strategy should be flanked by a more diversified range of external contractual frameworks and that these frameworks could be structured as mutually permeable concentric circles, with countries being offered the opportunity, under strict but clear internal and external conditions, to move from one status to another if they so wish and if they fulfil the criteria pertaining to each specific framework;
10. Takes the view that the gap existing between the Union's Enlargement Strategy and its Neighbourhood Policy needs to be filled in order to respond to the expectations of our eastern neighbours; is convinced that the Commission's strengthened neighbourhood policy is not sufficient in this respect, although it represents an already positive step in the right direction, and that a more substantive qualitative change is required;
11. Suggests, therefore, that, as regards those eastern neighbours which, in view of their political, economic and social situation and of the Union's current integration capacity, currently do not have membership prospects but at the same time fulfil certain democratic and economic conditions, the Union should establish an area based on common policies covering, in particular, economic and financial issues, trade, energy, transport, environmental issues, justice, security, migration and education; takes the view that these common policies, whilst striving gradually to achieve EU standards and opening the way for closer integration of these countries, should be shaped jointly with the participating countries on the basis of specific decision-making mechanisms, and should be underpinned by adequate financial assistance;
12. Welcomes in this respect the launch, within the framework of the EU, of the Union for the Mediterranean as a positive step in our relations with the southern neighbours; believes that this new development strengthens the argument in favour of specific contractual multilateral relations with our eastern neighbours, which, compared to their southern partners, have clear European ambitions and perspectives; recalls that, as first step, these relations should translate themselves into the establishment of a Free Trade Area, to be followed by closer relations along the lines of a European Economic Area Plus (EEA +), of a European Commonwealth or of specific regional cooperation frameworks, for example in the Black Sea area;

13. Believes at the same time that countries which enjoy clear membership prospects but still have considerable ground to cover before they can attain the political, economic and social conditions necessary to achieve candidate status, could usefully benefit from an incremental approach in their EU integration process and that this approach could involve, besides increased assistance and cooperation measures, voluntary participation in the above bilateral or multilateral framework as an intermediate step towards full membership;
14. Welcomes in this context the Commission Communication on the Western Balkans of 5 March 2008 (COM(2008)0128), which outlines a range of measures for supporting the countries in the region in their efforts towards EU integration and for deepening our relations with them, whether in the areas of trade, energy, education and/or research; believes that such measures should include also the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia and calls on all Member States to overcome their reservations in this respect;
15. Furthermore, urges the Commission to come up with concrete proposals for a more diversified external relations policy towards our neighbours, along the lines outlined in the present resolution, and to reconsider its own administrative structures in order to establish a structural link between the activities carried out by the Enlargement and the RELEX Directorates-General;
16. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council and the Commission.