



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on enlargement

*2915th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 8 and 9 December 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"ENLARGEMENT STRATEGY

In line with the renewed consensus on enlargement approved by the European Council on 15 and 16 December 2006 and the Council conclusions of 10 December 2007, the Council welcomes the Commission communication dated 5 November 2008 on Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2008-2009, and takes due note of the analysis and recommendations therein.

Coherent implementation of the renewed consensus on enlargement, which is based on consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality, better communication and the EU's capacity to integrate new members, continues to form the basis for EU action at all stages of the enlargement process, with each country being assessed on its own merits. The Council notes that the EU has taken steps to improve the quality of the enlargement process, in particular by making full use of benchmarks and impact studies and by tackling at an early stage essential issues relating to the rule of law and good governance, such as reforms of public administration and the judicial system and the fight against corruption and organised crime. The enlargement process will thus continue to promote peace, democracy and stability on the continent, give the EU greater weight on the world stage and bring concrete benefits, inter alia by enhancing prosperity, the prospects for economic growth and transport and energy opportunities.

The Council reaffirms that it fully supports the European perspective of the Western Balkans countries. It recalls the conclusions adopted on that subject on the same day.

P R E S S

The Council welcomes the intention of the incoming Czech Presidency to celebrate, in May 2009, the anniversary of the fifth EU enlargement.

TURKEY

The Council welcomes the Turkish Government's reaffirmed commitment to work for the reforms, and hopes that Turkey will now redouble its efforts to implement the measures so long awaited.

The Council recalls the strategic importance for the Union of Turkey. It applauds in particular the active and constructive role Turkey has played with its diplomatic initiatives in relation to the South Caucasus and the Middle East, and welcomes the close political dialogue between Turkey and the EU on all these matters. The Council particularly encourages the incipient rapprochement with Armenia. It also notes with satisfaction that Turkey is now a viable market economy.

The Council is pleased that a serious political crisis was able to be averted in the summer of 2008. It considers a review of the legal rules, including constitutional rules, as regards the functioning of political parties to be more necessary than ever. It is also important that all participants in Turkish politics work to resolve their differences in a spirit of dialogue and compromise, respecting the rule of law and fundamental freedoms; this will also help with the relaunch of the reform process.

The Council is disappointed to note that over the year just passed Turkey has made only limited progress, particularly as regards political reforms. Substantial efforts to ensure that Turkey meets the Copenhagen criteria must be made in several fields, such as continued judicial reform, establishing an anti-corruption strategy, effective protection of citizens' rights, full implementation of the policy of zero tolerance of torture and ill-treatment, ensuring freedom of expression and of religion in law and in practice for all religious communities, respect for property rights, respect for and protection of minorities and strengthening of cultural rights, women's rights, children's rights and trade union rights, and the civilian authorities' control of the military. As regards the East and the South-east, the Council takes note of the Turkish Government's decision to complete the Southeastern Anatolia economic development plan and emphasises the need to implement measures to ensure the economic, social and cultural development of the region.

The Council condemns all terrorist attacks and violence in Turkish territory in the strongest terms and expresses its full solidarity with the people of Turkey. The EU reiterates that it resolutely supports Turkey in its fight against terrorism, which must be conducted with due regard for human rights, fundamental freedoms and international law, while preserving regional peace and stability.

In line with the Negotiating Framework and previous European Council and Council conclusions, the Council repeats that Turkey needs to commit unequivocally to good neighbourly relations and to the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with the United Nations Charter, having recourse, if necessary, to the International Court of Justice. In this context, the Union urges the avoidance of any kind of threat, source of friction or action which could damage good neighbourly relations and the peaceful settlement of disputes.

Recalling its conclusions of 10 December 2007, the Council notes with regret that Turkey has not yet fulfilled its obligation of full non-discriminatory implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Association Agreement and has not made progress towards normalisation of its relations with the Republic of Cyprus. The Council will continue to closely follow and scrutinise 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. Progress is now urgently awaited.

As emphasised by the Negotiating Framework, the Council also expects Turkey to actively support the ongoing negotiations aimed at a fair, comprehensive and viable settlement of the Cyprus problem within the UN framework, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions and in line with the principles on which the Union is founded, including concrete steps to help bring about a climate favourable to such a comprehensive settlement.

The Council points out that the pace of the negotiations continues to depend in particular on progress made by Turkey in fulfilling the conditions laid down, including fulfilment of the opening and closing benchmarks and the requirements specified in the Negotiating Framework, which cover inter alia implementation of the Accession Partnership and compliance with the obligations arising from the Association Agreement. Adoption of the Turkish national programme for adopting the *acquis* and its effective implementation will be a key tool in this perspective.

The Council points out that the chapters for which technical preparations have been concluded will be opened or closed provisionally, according to established procedures and in line with the Negotiating Framework and subject to the Council conclusions of 11 December 2006. In this context, the Council awaits with interest the Intergovernmental Conference scheduled to be held with Turkey this month, during which further progress in the negotiations is expected.

The Council will continue to follow Turkey's progress closely and it is determined to assist it in its reform efforts in order to take the negotiations forward, once all the necessary conditions have been fulfilled.

CROATIA

The Council commends Croatia for the considerable efforts it has made over the past year and the good overall progress made. Negotiations are on the right track and have entered a decisive stage.

Building on the progress already made, Croatia must further step up the pace of its reforms, in particular to make the significant progress that is expected in fundamental spheres such as judicial and administrative reforms, the fight against corruption and organised crime, respect for and protection of minorities, the return of refugees, prosecution of war crimes and economic reforms. Full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), including access to documents, remains essential in line with the Negotiating Framework. Further efforts must also be made to continue and complete the transposition of the *acquis* and above all to guarantee its effective implementation on the ground.

In line with the Negotiating Framework and previous European Council and Council conclusions, the efforts towards good neighbourly relations must be continued, in particular work on finding definitive solutions to bilateral issues with neighbouring countries, especially as regards border issues.

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The Council points out that the chapters for which technical preparations have been concluded will be opened or closed provisionally, according to established procedures and in line with the Negotiating Framework. In this context the Council awaits with interest the Intergovernmental Conference scheduled to be held with Croatia this month, during which further progress in the negotiations is expected.

The Council considers that Croatia's progress towards the final stage of the negotiations depends in particular on its completion of the necessary political, economic, legislative and administrative reforms. The Council therefore considers that the indicative and conditional roadmap drawn up by the Commission is a useful tool which will help Croatia make the remaining major efforts required to reach the final stage of the negotiations.

The Council will continue to follow Croatia's progress closely and it is determined to assist it in its reform efforts in order to achieve this objective, once all the necessary conditions have been fulfilled."
