



Committee of the Regions

RELEX-IV-006

**70th plenary session
6-7 June 2007**

**OPINION
of the Committee of the Regions
on the
2006 ENLARGEMENT PACKAGE - INTEGRATION CAPACITY**

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

- considers that integration capacity is a condition to be taken into account in determining the pace of the enlargement process, but not a pretext to block accession or an additional criterion; viewing it rather as a vital factor for transparency affecting first of all the EU and subsequently the candidate countries;
- believes that enlarging the EU primarily means sharing a common political project, based on values and principles, as well as on common policies and institutions, and that integration capacity should be seen as a means of upholding these principles and values, its policies and the way the Community institutions work. So as not to water down the common political project, this project should be strengthened by means of successive enlargements;
- recalls that as the EU becomes larger, it must be able to retain its capacity for action and decision-making by implementing effective common policies; it must therefore tie its enlargement policy to its capacity to maintain its specific institutional, financial and political structure. Enlargement must not cause this structure to be weakened, and its initial purpose and scope must not be endangered;
- points out that in every single enlargement process – none of which are likely to go ahead against a backdrop of the current Treaties (and in particular unless the Treaty of Nice is amended) or unchanging financial perspectives – all the European institutions and bodies should be required to contribute to the assessment of any modifications;
- considers it a positive step to bring it into the reform of the EU funding system, which is due to take place in conjunction with the institutional reform process, and which cannot be detached from the Union's enlargement policy. In this connection, it restates its conviction that it is impossible to achieve "more Europe" with less resources, and reiterates that for the future financial structure it is particularly important for resources to be concentrated on areas which create European added value.

Reference document

Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006 – 2007. Including annexed special report on the EU's capacity to integrate new members

COM(2006) 649 final

CdR 386/2006 fin FR/PM/ht

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I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

Integration capacity and regional and local authorities

1. considers that integration capacity is a condition to be taken into account in determining the pace of the enlargement process, but not a pretext to block accession or an additional criterion; viewing it rather as a vital factor for transparency, affecting first of all the EU and subsequently the candidate countries;
2. therefore agrees with the conclusions of the December 2006 European Council which sees integration capacity as one of the keys to generating a renewed consensus among citizens in favour of enlargement policy;
3. recalls that the European Union's capacity to integrate new Member States is reflected in particular in the Union's financial capacity to implement its policies, especially the CAP and cohesion policy or in the labour market's capacity to absorb new workers from new Member States, and in the ability of the Union's institutions to work effectively with a larger number of Member States, as indicated by the Copenhagen European Council;
4. recalls that as the EU becomes larger, it must be able to retain its capacity for action and decision-making by implementing effective common policies; it must therefore tie its enlargement policy to its capacity to maintain its specific institutional, financial and political structure. Enlargement must not cause this structure to be weakened, and its initial purpose and scope must not be endangered;
5. believes that enlarging the EU primarily means sharing a common political project, based on values and principles, as well as on common policies and institutions, and that integration capacity should be seen as a means of upholding these principles and values, its policies and the way the Community institutions operate. So as not to water down the common political project, this project should be strengthened by means of successive enlargements;
6. considers the current debate on integration capacity to have come late in the day: it ought to have taken place during the negotiations on Agenda 2000 and thereafter in the immediate run-up to each subsequent enlargement, as well as during the negotiations on the financial perspective 2007-2013;
7. notes the lack of balance in the way the Commission document presents the debate on integration capacity, seeing it as more of a responsibility for the applicant countries than for the EU itself;
8. points out that in every single enlargement process – none of which are likely to go ahead against a backdrop of the current Treaties (and in particular unless the Treaty of Nice is

amended) or unchanging financial perspectives – all the European institutions and bodies should be required to contribute to the assessment of any modifications (in the area, for example, of single market rules, the EU budget and finances or its institutional arrangements) that are needed to ensure its success. Regional and local authorities, alongside national parliaments and civil society, have an important role to play in this assessment, in terms of social acceptance (society's capacity for integrating new European citizens sharing the same values, producing a shared identity and common citizenship, aimed at achieving an ever closer union between the peoples of Europe);

9. considers that the EU should be in a position to check whether or not integration capacity condition is being complied with during the negotiations with a given applicant country, and that this should take place in parallel with the monitoring of compliance with the Copenhagen criteria for each individual applicant country, and endorses the criticism levelled by the European Parliament, which judged the Commission's response to be inadequate as it fails to provide details of the current negotiations from the integration capacity point of view, and does not state the principles which should underpin such a definition.
10. expects the Commission, during the phase preceding the next enlargements, to analyse the impact of enlargement on the different policies concerned and their financing, together with the institutional structure of the Union; this exercise should also contain an analysis of the various reform processes under way in the applicant countries, concentrating especially on greater public involvement in the accession process and on administrative decentralisation;
11. suggests that the institutions promote measures enabling the public and the associations representing them publicly to state and exchange their views on the integration process,
12. against this backdrop, feels that a particular analysis of the future of Cohesion Policy is essential, and emphasises the value of providing simulations reflecting the various possible enlargement scenarios; an integration capacity exercise of this kind concerning one of Europe's most important policies from the economic and political points of view, and in terms of the visibility of European added value for citizens, must be carried out in cooperation with it;
13. is however aware of the difficulty of measuring integration capacity since it is by nature changing, since the means provided by the Union to achieve its aims can change over the years; asks therefore for a clearer definition of integration capacity and how it is to be measured;
14. emphasises that regional and local authorities should be directly involved in assessing the impact of the individual policies which affect them whenever they are amended as a result of enlargement. This is especially important for regions bordering on candidate countries;
15. backs the European Parliament's call to be allowed to give its own assent, not only at the end of the negotiations, but also before they commence;

16. recalls its decision to set up working groups (Western Balkans, Croatia and Turkey) as a practical means of assisting regional and local authorities in the candidate countries with their capacity-building efforts and of carrying forward the necessary political dialogue between the EU and these countries; it also hopes that they will develop into Joint Consultative Committees, where envisaged in the various association agreements, becoming a relay for the views of candidate country regional and local authorities throughout the negotiating phase;
17. emphasises that the integration capacity debate should also serve to discuss and identify alternative ways ahead in the event of a decision not to extend enlargement to a given candidate country or to other countries who have applied but whose applications have been rejected, such as stepping up the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) or implementing a functional approach (free trade or territorial cooperation, for example) potentially leading to differentiated forms of integration and/or special partnerships. This does not concern the countries which have currently been given the status of candidate and potential candidate countries;

Institutional and financial reform

18. agrees with the conclusions of the December 2006 European Council, and emphasises for its part that the institutional issues must be resolved prior to any further enlargement and before the European Parliament elections in 2009; it once again calls for the reform process to find ways of making the EU's decision-making procedures more efficient and, at the same time, to boost participation by citizens and local and regional authorities in the European legislative process, recognising the potential of multi-level governance in an enlarged Europe;
19. considers it a positive step to bring the Committee of the Regions into the reform of the EU funding system, which is due to take place in conjunction with the institutional reform process, and which cannot be detached from the Union's enlargement policy. In this connection, it restates its conviction that it is impossible to achieve "more Europe" with less resources, and reiterates that for the future financial structure it is particularly important for resources to be concentrated on areas which create European added value;

Transparency and communication for public consensus

20. welcomes the Commission's proposals on transparency of accession negotiations with the applicant countries in order to strengthen the democratic legitimacy of the enlargement process and to narrow the gap between the public and their political leaders who are engaged in making choices on accession and enlargement, and considers it appropriate – with a view to achieving this aim, and to enhancing the quality of the negotiations – that civil society and the regional and local authorities of the candidate countries should be actively involved in the various stages of the accession process, and that the Committee of the Regions should be involved in the screening process for the chapters regarding cohesion policy and decentralisation;

21. points out that, in the interests of consistency with its approach of transparency and openness towards citizens, the Commission should provide the text of its annual report on the EU candidate and potential candidate countries in the languages spoken by the people of these countries, thereby enhancing the quality of the accession process by enabling citizens to take part in the national debate on entry to the EU;
22. underlines moreover that the accession process, in its present form, is generally imposed from above and is not necessarily subject to the democratic control of the parliaments or regional and local authorities of the candidate countries, throughout the accession process, and that neither does it directly involve citizens, political parties, civil society or local and regional authorities. This state of affairs means that:
 - a) The quicker pace of modernisation and democratisation imposed on candidate countries has not always been matched by full support on the part of public opinion.
 - b) The changes have not always gone hand-in-hand with a process of administrative decentralisation, which however acts as a catalyst for generating both democratisation and consensus.
 - c) The internal political and social reforms required by enlargement policy are applied to administrative structures, both national and regional or local, which are generally weak, and which should be able to benefit from the know-how of other European administrations, and respect for diversity and subsidiarity;
23. believes therefore that it is helpful to propose a more participatory approach, in part through twinning, which has proved crucial in getting populations to know one another, helping applicant country authorities to implement anti-corruption measures in their public administrations, and prompting local, regional and national governments to carry out the necessary administrative and judicial reforms ;
24. supports the approach underlined by the European Parliament and the European Commission concerning the role played by regional and local authorities in communication, a policy which should be more fully decentralised and opened up to contributions from civil society in order to generate a public opinion consensus in both the Member States and applicant countries, by striving to help boost transparency and responsibility in the enlargement process, making this process a shared one as far as possible; it therefore endorses the Commission's proposals, at the same time feeling that the Commission should not shed its political responsibilities towards the communication policy on enlargement. It therefore calls upon the Commission to urge regional and local authorities to adopt the tools they need to make a success of this joint effort;
25. calls upon the EU budget authority to make a financial contribution to the efforts that the regional and local authorities of EU applicant countries will have to make, providing funds for information campaigns on enlargement at regional and local level, and to give support to

the regional and local authorities of the Member States and applicant countries in conveying the European message.

Brussels, 6 June 2007

The President
of the Committee of the Regions

Michel Delebarre

The Secretary-General
of the Committee of the Regions

Gerhard Stahl

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007 Including annexed special report on the EU's capacity to integrate new members
References	COM(2006) 649 final
Legal basis	First paragraph of Article 265 of the EC Treaty
Procedural basis	
Date of Commission referral	8.11.2006
Date of Bureau decision	25.4.2006
Commission responsible	Commission for External Relations and Decentralised Cooperation (RELEX)
Rapporteur	Mr Isidoro Gottardo (IT/EPP) , Member of the municipal council of Sacile (PN)
Explanatory memorandum	7.12.2006
Discussed in commission	25.1.2007
Date adopted by commission	29.3.2007
Result of the vote in commission	Adopted by a majority
Date adopted in plenary	6.6.2007
Previous Committee opinions	<p>CdR 115/2006 fin¹, Opinion on the <i>Communication from the Commission: The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity</i>, COM(2006) 27 final. Rapporteur: Mr Schausberger (AT/EPP), adopted in CoR Plenary 11.10.2006</p> <p>CdR 50/2006 fin², Opinion on the <i>Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on Civil Society Dialogue between the EU and Candidate Countries</i>, COM(2005) 290 final. Rapporteur: Mr Gottardo (IT/EPP), adopted in CoR Plenary 27.4.2006</p> <p>CdR 499/2004 fin³, Opinion on the <i>Proposal for a Council Decision on the principles, priorities and conditions contained in the European Partnership with Croatia</i>, COM(2004) 275 final. Rapporteur: Mr Gottardo (IT/EPP), adopted in CoR Plenary 13.10.2005</p>
	CdR 495/2004 fin ⁴ , Opinion on the <i>Recommendation of the European Commission on Turkey's progress towards accession</i> , COM(2004) 656 final. Rapporteur: Ms Lund (DK/PES), adopted in CoR Plenary 6.7.2005

¹ OJ C 51 of 6.3.2007, p. 16.

² OJ C 206 of 29.8.2006, p. 23.

³ ON C 81 of 4.4.2006, p. 42.

⁴ OJ C 31 of 7.2.2006, p. 11.