Future enlargements and cohesion


The European Parliament,

— having regard to its resolution of 16 March 2006 on the Commission’s 2005 enlargement strategy paper (1),

— having regard to the Commission’s Communication of 8 November 2006 on Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006 — 2007, including the special report annexed thereto on the EU’s capacity to integrate new members (COM(2006)0649),

— having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2006 (2) on the Commission’s Communication on the Enlargement Strategy,

— having regard to its resolution of 13 December 2006 on the institutional aspects of the European Union’s capacity to integrate new Member States (3),


— having regard to its resolution of 28 September 2005 on the opening of negotiations with Turkey (4),

— having regard to the Conclusions of the General Affairs and External Relations Council of 3 October 2005 (5) on the opening of negotiations with Croatia,

— having regard to the Presidency Conclusions of the European Council of 15 and 16 June 2006 (6),

— having regard to its resolution of 27 September 2006 on Turkey’s progress towards accession (7),

— having regard to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 17 May 2006 between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission on budgetary discipline and sound financial management (8),

— having regard to the Commission’s Third report on economic and social cohesion of 18 February 2004 (COM(2004)0107),


(5) 12877/05, 4.10.2005.
(6) 10633/1/06, 17.6.2006.
— having regard to Article 49 of the EU Treaty and Article 158 of the EC Treaty,

— having regard to Rule 45 of its Rules of Procedure,

— having regard to the report of the Committee on Regional Development and the opinion of the Committee on Budgets (A6-0087/2007),

A. whereas, under Article 2 of the EU Treaty, social, economic and territorial cohesion is an important objective of the European Union and provides citizens with a visible sign of European solidarity,

B. whereas the European Union’s cohesion policy has enjoyed considerable successes in terms of achieving the objective of social, economic and territorial cohesion, as is shown in particular in the Commission’s Fourth progress report on cohesion,

C. whereas the EU’s past enlargements have contributed to ensuring peace, security, stability, democracy and the rule of law, as well as growth and prosperity in the Union as a whole, benefits that have helped the EU to become a more competitive and dynamic economy and which therefore must be borne in mind when deciding on future enlargements,

D. whereas further significant efforts will, nonetheless, be needed to achieve the convergence of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, since their economic point of departure was lower than that of acceding states in previous enlargements, while at the same time a radical change had to take place in their political and economic systems,

E. whereas the effects of globalisation impede the process of convergence and also give rise to new business location problems for the Union as a whole,

F. whereas well managed cohesion policy can help regions cope with some of the challenges of globalisation,

G. whereas pressure on government budgets is increasing, whereas many Member States are infringing the stability criteria and whereas demographic trends will place additional demands on budgets and weaken economic growth,

H. whereas the EU should remain an open community and structural policy issues must not stand as an obstacle to future enlargement, provided that necessary reforms guarantee integration capacity,

I. whereas, since October 2005, the Community has been holding open-ended accession negotiations with Turkey and Croatia, and in December 2005 the European Council granted the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia candidate status; whereas the other states of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia (including Kosovo)) are regarded as potential candidates for membership; whereas the reform process in all these countries is already receiving support from pre-accession programmes containing structural policy components,

J. whereas, with the accession of Romania and Bulgaria, special rules entered into force on claiming appropriations from the Structural Funds, and the full effects of this accession on structural policy have yet to be determined,

K. whereas all countries receiving EU pre-accession aid as well as the full consideration of Romania and Bulgaria would require an additional EUR 150 billion in the current funding period on the basis of the structural policy scheme in force; whereas, however, the accession of all countries receiving pre-accession aid will not happen simultaneously,
L. whereas the accession of Romania and Bulgaria increased the area of EU-25 eligible for EU structural funding by 9% and its population by 6% and decreased its per-capita GDP by 5%; whereas the accession of Croatia would increase the area of EU-27 by 1.3% and its population by 0.9%, while it would decrease its per-capita GDP by 0.6%; whereas the accession of Turkey would increase the area of EU-27 by 18.3% and its population by 14.7%, while it would decrease its per-capita GDP by 10.5%; whereas the accession of the other Western Balkan states would increase the area of EU-27 by 4.8% and its population by 4%, while it would decrease its per-capita GDP by 3.5%,

M. whereas there is an urgent need for institutional, financial and political reform of the institutions of the European Union which underpin the EU’s integration capacity; whereas accession to the EU is fully dependent on meeting the Copenhagen criteria and thus on democratic development in the countries mentioned in recital I,

N. whereas, in a 34-Member State European Union, Croatia would account for only 7% of this additional structural funding, calculated under existing rules, and the other Western Balkan states currently receiving pre-accession assistance for 9.2%, while Turkey alone would receive 63%,

O. whereas the accession of the Western Balkan states taken individually, even during the current financial framework, would not give rise to any statistical effect on the eligibility of Member State regions, nor would it lead to any dramatic financial impact on the cohesion policy of the current Union of 27 Member States due to their size, population and economic development; whereas Croatia, with which negotiations are the furthest advanced and which is even more developed in socio-economic terms than some current Member States, would, in comparative terms, represent the smallest financial burden for the Union, given the country’s size, population and level of economic development and would not give rise to any statistical effect in relation to the eligible areas at regional and national level, even in the current financial period,

P. whereas, under the current rules and conditions, the accession of Turkey would lend an entirely new scale to EU cohesion policy, which has never yet been applied to a country of such a size, with such a low level of economic development and such large regional disparities,

Q. whereas, the Presidency Conclusions of the June 2006 European Council pointed out that, in accepting new Member States, the EU should remain in a position to maintain the dynamic of European integration and ‘that every effort should be made to protect the cohesion and the effectiveness of the Union’,

R. whereas, in its Communication of 8 November 2006, the Commission calls for the effects on the EU budget to be examined in detail ahead of any further enlargements, taking into account the future development of relevant policy areas such as agriculture and cohesion policy,

S. whereas regional policy, as one of the largest EU budget items, will come under particularly intensive discussion — not least with reference to efficiency criteria — in the review of the EU financial framework scheduled for 2008-2009,

T. whereas, in a still enlarging Union, the efficiency of Community policies is needed more than ever, the effectiveness of cohesion policy and its demonstrated genuine added-value being heavily dependent on the financial resources available; whereas, therefore, the utmost attention should be paid to the review of the Community’s system of own resources,

1. Considers that the integration capacity of the European Union means in particular that it must be in a position, in the light of budgetary realities, to pursue the objective of social, economic and territorial cohesion; considers therefore that it is necessary at the time of the accession of every candidate country to decide whether the EU is capable of integrating the state in question;

2. Considers that institutional, financial and political reform is also necessary in the context of a review of the EU’s financial framework; in this connection, believes that a comparison should be made between the effects of the various main funding instruments (European Regional Development Fund, European Social Fund, Cohesion Fund, European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development) on the development of EU-27, thus enabling appropriate budgetary decisions to be taken;
3. Considers that future enlargements must not lead to ever more regions ceasing to be eligible for cohesion policy funding under the current Objective 1 as a result of the statistical effect and without existing disparities really being eliminated;

4. Stresses that an honest and efficient cohesion policy is impossible without an increase in EU spending to 1.18% of EU GNI, as was stated by Parliament in its resolution of 8 June 2005 on Policy Challenges and Budgetary Means of the enlarged Union 2007-2013 (');

5. Regrets, therefore, that, in its Communication of 8 November 2006 on Enlargement Strategy, the Commission does not offer any in-depth analysis of the financial consequences of future enlargements;

6. Calls on the Commission to present a detailed impact analysis in order to enable a proper forecast to be made of the full effects on structural policy of the accession of Romania and Bulgaria;

7. Calls also on the Commission, in connection with forthcoming enlargements, regularly to calculate, showing separate figures for each state, the regional policy expenditure which the EU would be likely to incur, using the current as well as the amended and extended criteria, and what consequences this would have on the existing eligibility for funding of the regions; in this respect, notes that the databases and analytical instruments of the European Spatial Planning Observation Network (ESPON) could also be used; believes that consideration should also be given to improving the integration of the various EU funding instruments;

8. Considers that there is a need for ongoing studies that are based on experience gained with previous enlargements and that include the socio-economic improvements that will take place during the current programming period, in order to develop scenarios for the future financing of EU cohesion policy;

9. Stresses the importance of a very strict approach in terms of quantitative and qualitative evaluation of the use of the Structural Funds entailing sound management and appropriate monitoring in order, in the interests of Union citizens, to optimise the cost-benefit ratio of the EU's cohesion expenditure;

10. Calls on the Commission to devote a chapter in its forthcoming Fourth cohesion report to its view of the sustainability of current cohesion policy and to the future measures that might, where appropriate, impact on cohesion policy;

11. Considers that, in view of the current state of the EU's resources system, it would be difficult to finance future enlargements without jeopardising the effectiveness of current cohesion policies;

12. Urges the Commission to issue a communication setting out a proposal for a graduated model for cohesion policy, making it possible to draw a further distinction between pre-accession assistance and membership and enabling potential accession candidates to receive effective support for regional development, subject to their political progress, prior to possible membership of the European Union;

13. Calls for a graduated approach to Turkey in particular, more closely focused on the funding of specific thematic areas (such as industry clusters, institution-building and equality) and regions, so as to avoid the unthinking adoption of the usual accession-related financial measures and achieve more targeted effects on cohesion and growth;

14. Asks for the co-decision procedure to apply to the evaluation and reform of pre-accession assistance from 2010 onwards;

15. Calls on the Commission to define in more detail what it means by 'reinforcing the neighbourhood policy', and in this context to give more thought to structural funding instruments;

16. Considers it essential for the effectiveness of cohesion policy that the individual responsibility of the Member States should be increased in the future;

17. Proposes, in the context of the debate on future cohesion policy, that the EU should make greater use of the leverage effect of loan financing — particularly in regions that have already received EU funding for many years — in order to improve the effectiveness of Community support, albeit without replacing it;

18. Considers in this connection that more favourable conditions should be set for the financing of loans and grants for the least developed regions of the EU;

19. Calls on the Commission to devise proposals for a future cohesion policy tailored more closely to the actual needs of the regions, since regions which have been receiving aid from EU funds for 10, 20 or 30 years have clearly achieved a different level of development than those which have not yet received any funding; believes that greater differentiation may possibly be the answer to the future challenges facing EU cohesion policy;

20. Expresses concern at the fact that in some regions EU aid is poorly targeted, as a result of which the situation in those regions is failing to improve despite many years of financial support, meaning that Community resources are being wasted;

21. Calls for more use to be made of private funds as a source of co-financing structural funding, and for the private co-financing of projects and programmes under the Structural Funds to be significantly simplified in line with best practice;

22. Calls for future structural funding to be geared so as to avoid displacement effects as well as the EU funding of company relocations, and considers that the Commission must look critically, in the context of cohesion policy, at whether subsidies given to firms are effective in influencing business decisions regarding location, taking into account the size of the firms in question;

23. Notes that the success of cohesion policy is linked to national economic policies and that in this connection the implementation of the National Action Plans for the Lisbon Strategy has a particular influence on the success of cohesion policy;

24. Urges the Commission to ensure that, in the framework of future programmes for regional competitiveness and for territorial cooperation, funding is concentrated more closely on the Europeanisation of the regional economy and on infrastructures of European importance;

25. Calls for greater use to be made of the Structural Funds in future in order to cushion the effects of demographic change and resulting regional migration;

26. Considers that greater use should be made in future of the European Social Fund as a horizontal instrument, among other things, to help regions cope with the social challenges of globalisation as well as the effects of demographic change;

27. Stresses that the results of cohesion policy can only be reviewed if the award of Structural Funds takes place in a transparent manner, and therefore calls for the European Union to employ very stringent transparency criteria for the award of funding;

28. Calls for tougher sanctions in the event of proven abuse of funding and more effective procedures for the recovery of funds;

29. Notes that successful measures to combat corruption, and the building of administrative capacity to implement Structural Fund programmes efficiently and transparently, are crucial preconditions for the receipt of structural funding; calls for consistent and rigid application of the control instruments;

30. Calls on the Commission and the Member States to consider all these points when conducting its mid-term review of the EU’s current financial framework scheduled for 2008-2009;

31. Instructs its President to forward this resolution to the Council, the Commission and the Committee of the Regions.