

## Address given by Romano Prodi on preparations for enlargement (Strasbourg, 13 November 2001)

**Caption:** On 13 November 2001, Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, considers the successive stages of the forthcoming enlargement of the European Union, referring to Europe's historic duty.

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## Address given by Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission, to the European Parliament: 'The Enlargement' (Strasbourg, 13 November 2001)

Madam President,

Honourable Members,

Enlargement has been priority number one for this Commission since its very beginnings.

From the point of view of Europe's powers and duties, and of its potential and ambition, enlargement is the real acid test. It is also Europe's historic duty.

Enlargement - in other words, the unification of this continent - closes one chapter in Europe's history and lays the basis for building the future.

It is a process which sees the Union preparing to shoulder responsibilities on the scale of a continent. As a result, we need to take a close look at our methods, policies and goals, regional and global.

Our resolve and our courage must be no less strong than the resolve and courage which the candidate countries themselves are showing in preparing to join the Union.

Since I became President of the Commission, nothing has made a deeper impression on me than my trips to the candidate countries, my meetings with their citizens, my meetings with their governments, or my contacts with their parliaments, bravely working day and night on the arduous task of bringing their societies through a transition that includes preparations for enlargement.

For their efforts, I would like to send them from the Parliament here in Strasbourg a message of thanks and good wishes.

These are countries which barely ten years ago were cut off from the Europe in which we live. Since then, they have been restoring contact with our common values.

Even before becoming new members of the Union in the legal sense, the candidate countries have been reaping the benefits of their integration. In practice, they are already part of our area of stability and development, as is shown by the growing presence there of companies from the Member States.

We have already seen extraordinary progress down the road to accession.

The Reports we are presenting to you today analyse as precisely as possible the concerted efforts of preparation which all these countries are engaged in, and give details of what has been achieved so far.

In short, the Reports show that a historic moment really is just around the corner if we are able to keep up the pace.

Without going into the content of the Reports, which Günter Verheugen will be describing in a few moments, we can conclude that progress has been made in virtually all the chapters making up the accession process.

I think I can safely say that this remarkable progress has been greatly inspired by Nice, where one year ago we set out the stages and the "roadmap" for the final phase of the complicated path to enlargement.

Exactly one year from now, we will be evaluating the ability of each of the candidate countries to take on the rights and obligations which being part of the Union brings.

We realise that when that time comes, we will have to have completed and concluded, or very nearly

completed and concluded, the negotiations with the countries which have met the criteria laid down.

Once the conditions set by Parliament and the European Council are complied with, and once the necessary ratification procedures are complete, these countries will be in a position to join the European Union before the June 2004 elections.

As a result, next year will be a decisive one for the enlargement process and for the future of Europe. Negotiations will be tackling sensitive issues like agriculture, the Structural Funds and the budget. When this happens, we will show the same determination to find constructive answers that we have shown in the past. From the beginning of the year, the Commission will be putting forward proposals based on the current *acquis* and on the principles adopted at the Berlin European Council.

Much will depend on the unabated efforts of the candidate countries to adopt and implement the *acquis*. As the Commission highlights in its Regular Reports this year, the candidate countries will also need to develop the necessary administrative capacity so that they can properly apply the Union's rules and policies.

However, sustained efforts on behalf of the candidate countries are only one side of the coin. In order for enlargement to be a success, it is important to uphold the Community method and the necessary co-operation between the Council, the Parliament and the Commission. 2002 will be a year of intense reviewing and monitoring and I count on Parliament to follow this work very closely.

I would also urge the Member States to continue to respect their existing commitments regarding enlargement, in particular Agenda 2000 and the financial perspective up to 2006, as agreed by the Berlin European Council in 1999.

Further reforms cannot be made a pre-condition for enlargement, although the responsibilities which we are taking on with enlargement must be seen as providing the opportunity to begin preparing - with considerable momentum and political vision - the new institutional process due to be launched at the Laeken European Council.

Similarly, the current negotiations should not be linked to the issue of the Union's finances after 2006 these are separate issues. Any attempt to link them would mean changing the rules and would inevitably disrupt our carefully balanced negotiation process.

The Reports we are presenting to you also look at the implications of enlargement for the candidate countries' neighbours in Europe and the Mediterranean.

The terrorist attacks on the US on 11th September have completely changed the world. It is now less stable, less predictable and more frightening. The world - whether we are talking about our fellow citizens, our neighbours in Europe and the Mediterranean or our US allies - now more than ever needs a strong Europe which is sure of its values, which encourages stability, predictability, security and prosperity around it, and which is active internationally.

With enlargement, Europe's position as the world's biggest economy and trading power, with an internal market of 500 million consumers, will be confirmed.

With this situation established, we have the opportunity to expand the area of stability and prosperity which we so need beyond the Union and the candidate countries. If we are to achieve this, we need a new "neighbourhood policy", something which is a strategic goal for this Commission.

As I have long maintained, and as I confirmed yesterday at the College of Europe in Bruges, we need to move forward and expand the range of instruments available to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the partnerships with Russia and Ukraine, and our stability efforts in the Balkans. The fundamental idea is to extend liberalisation of trade in goods and services, technical standards and the legislation which governs our internal market to all our neighbours. Negotiations should determine what shape the appropriate

agreements take - free-trade agreements or agreements modelled on the European Economic Area agreement - but the central aim will be to attract investment to consolidate mutual economic presence.

The goal is to build a partnership with our neighbours that is as close as possible, and which can become an anchor for stability and security on our continent and around the Mediterranean.

What we need to do is in effect to "export" stability, and lay the groundwork for balanced development in all areas bordering on the Union, drawing on the strengths of European integration.

This will make integration of our closest neighbours in the Western Balkans easier when the time is right.

In our efforts, we must not neglect the importance of the cultural dimension of our partnership. This is why we are working on a new initiative to encourage dialogue and mutual understanding between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean.

I am grateful for Parliament's support and constructive attitude towards the enlargement process. I am counting on Parliament's continued support during the final phase of the negotiations. The work of the members of this House will be crucial, not only in connection with ratification itself, but also in connection with the wider democratic support for enlargement among Europe's citizens.

Opinion polls indicate that in many parts of the Union citizens still need to be convinced of the overall benefits of enlargement. The Commission will of course continue and intensify its information strategy. But more effectively than anybody else, it is the Parliament and its Members that can help to build up democratic support for enlargement.

Madam President, Honourable Members,

Parliament's continuous involvement in the enlargement process remains crucial, just as it is in the debate on Europe's future a debate to which the candidate countries and future Member States are expected to make a substantial contribution.

The Reports presented by the Commission today show the beginning of a new European era is "just a few steps away". Let us take these steps together, continue and intensify our co-operation in the months to come and lay the foundations for a larger and stronger Union.

Thank you.