

Address given by José Manuel Barroso on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU (Strasbourg, 26 September 2006)

Caption: On 26 September 2006, José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission, delivers an address to the Members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg in which he comments on the final monitoring report on the state of preparedness of Bulgaria and Romania for accession to the European Union.

Source: RAPID. The Press and Communication Service of the European Commission. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: European Commission, [24.10.2006]. SPEECH/06/535. Available on http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/key_documents/reports_sept_2006_en.htm.

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Mr President, Honourable Members,

The European Commission has just adopted its final report on the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. Our conclusion is that both countries are in a position to take on the rights and obligations of European Union membership on 1 January 2007.

The accession of Bulgaria and Romania will mark an historic achievement: the completion of the 5th enlargement of the European Union, which further pursues the reunification of our European family.

On this occasion, I would like to congratulate the peoples and the authorities of Bulgaria and Romania for all the efforts they have produced in order to fulfil the conditions for accession to the European Union.

I would also like to thank you, Honourable Members, for the constructive role of the European Parliament. The Parliament has always been a staunch champion of the political, economic, and cultural benefits of enlargement. Your support has helped to spread peace, stability and prosperity in Europe.

The most recent enlargement – like others before it – has proved to be a great success. It has confirmed that enlarging the Union – if carefully managed – produces a win-win situation for both the existing and the acceding Member States. Enlargement stimulates economic growth and social cohesion and re-enforces the role and influence of the European Union in the world.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The readiness of Bulgaria and Romania is a direct result of the sustained progress both countries have achieved over the last years and particularly since our last report in May.

I must emphasise that the Commission takes its responsibility as guardian of the Treaties very seriously. First and foremost we must protect the functioning of the Union. This endorsement of the 2007 accession date for Bulgaria and Romania is based on a rigorous, fair and objective assessment, as Commissioner Olli Rehn will explain in detail in a few moments.

Bulgaria and Romania have found the right answer to our strict conditionality by addressing the areas we highlighted in May. In doing so, they have achieved considerable progress. However, today's report also outlines some areas where both countries need to achieve further progress by sustaining the current reform drive until accession and beyond.

The Commission has fixed a number of measures to accompany the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. In particular, the Commission will set up a mechanism for cooperation and verification of progress in the areas of judicial reform, the fight against corruption, and organised crime. The mechanism contains specific benchmarks which have to be met.

The Commission will report regularly to the Parliament and to the Council on the progress achieved. On that basis, the Commission may, if necessary, invoke the safeguard measure set out in the Accession Treaty.

The Commission has further accompanying measures at its disposal, which ensure the proper functioning of the Union up to and beyond the accession of both countries.

EU rules provide us with a comprehensive set of measures which allow us to combat potential risks in acceding and in current Member States and address concerns linked to food safety or the management of European tax payers' money.

The rigorous application of such accompanying measures underlines the emphasis we have placed on

conditionality throughout the accession preparations of both countries. We are therefore convinced that - once again - enlargement will proceed smoothly in a way which will strengthen, not compromise the functioning of the Union.

It is indeed important to ensure that, as we enlarge, we are still able to function efficiently.

I would like to use this opportunity to state my position concerning future enlargements. After the completion of the 5th enlargement, with the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, I believe that an institutional settlement should precede any future enlargement. This is the way to ensure that our enlarged Union will function in an efficient and harmonious way.

In any case, the Nice Treaty already imposes on us, after the accession of the 27th member, adaptations to our institutional setup.

Last June's European Council conclusions have set the course for that institutional settlement and I hope that by the end of 2008 we will succeed.

In following that timetable, we would respect our commitments towards countries to whom we have opened an accession perspective and fulfil our strategic goal of consolidating peace and prosperity in our Continent.

Mr President, Honourable Members,

We are looking forward to Bulgaria's and Romania's historic achievement of European Union membership in 2007. I expect both to contribute energetically to the process of European integration.