



European Economic and Social Committee
The President

Brussels, 30 May 2012, EP

Meeting of Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET), European Parliament
"Enlargement: policies, criteria and the EU's strategic interests."

Staffan Nilsson's speech

Seul le texte prononcé fait foi

Check Against Delivery

Intervention on the accession criteria and the impact of enlargement on the EU

I wish to thank the Rapporteur Ms Koppa for her draft report. I could already sign it as it is since a number of views of the EESC on the enlargement process are already reflected in this draft.

The emphasis is put in the report on fair conditionality for the enlargement countries, and I strongly support this concept. There needs to be from day one clear guidelines for both citizens and their politicians on how to enter the EU. This is essential for the credibility of the EU. This also makes it easier for the citizens of the enlargement countries to assess the work of their politicians on the EU agenda. But this also means that EU member states must be fair and stick to their commitments.

Of course, while being based on fair conditionality and transparency, the enlargement policy is always a learning process for the EU. And it is normal to adjust the process, learning from experience. Such adjustments must always tend to increase the level of preparedness of the candidate countries to join the EU.



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In this respect, the recent move taken by the Commission and the Council certainly goes in this positive direction. Putting a stronger emphasis on judiciary and fundamental rights (so-called chapter 23) and on justice, freedom and security (chapter 24) is certainly making the candidate countries better prepared for accession. Overall, this is the rule of law which is being made central when tackling reforms on those issues. And rule of law is indeed one of our core European values in my views. To build a stronger EU, we need to welcome members on which we can fully rely on this critical issue. We keep on emphasizing this priority in our contact with those countries.

You also ask in the draft report for a stronger social dimension in the enlargement process. Our Committee certainly shares this view. The enlargement process is indeed often considered as something painful (loss of competitiveness, layoffs in restructured companies, end of state aids, etc...). The stress must also be put on social policies, and on communicating better on those policies. For example, the social acquis on working hours or on health and safety at the work place are good examples of how EU workers are protected by the EU acquis.

The proposal of the EESC on this social dimension is also to raise the profile of social and civil dialogues. We want them as benchmarks to assess the progress of the enlargement countries. This is indeed a necessity to make the enlargement process more inclusive. The enlargement cannot only be in the hands of European and national public administrations. It is also a matter for citizens, social partners, and other civil society organisations to get involved in. This is the only way to make it successful for the current and the future member states.

On this social dimension, allow me also to stress that in all the enlargement countries, there is a need for much stronger trade unions. Trade unions have a key role to play in accompanying the changes on the long paths towards the accession. The EU must provide more support to them in order to reinforce their capacity. Social partners and especially trade unions need the help of the EU to successfully engage into meaningful bilateral and tripartite social dialogues. The European Commission Civil Society Facility must then be re-designed in order to succeed in reaching out social partners.



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On the impact of the enlargement on the EU, I wish to stress that it is certainly challenging to convince the EU citizens that the enlargement should be a political priority for the EU. Most of the European citizens wish the EU would only focus on finding a way out of the economic crisis and on improving their day-to-day life. But we should not forget that the expectations are huge in the population of the enlargement countries. So I see the role of the European Parliament and of the EESC as being also their spokespersons towards our fellow EU citizens and our governments.

The EESC is getting civil society of the enlargement countries involved in the accession process

All the views and messages I have just expressed, we keep working on their implementation. We hammer those messages to the European Commission and to the governments of the enlargement countries. We do this in close cooperation with the solid network of civil society organisations we have built in the region.

We use mainly two tools to do so. First we have the Joint Consultative Committees, main instrument of cooperation with civil society of candidate countries for many years. These civil society joint bodies are established on the basis of the respective Stabilisation and Association Agreements. JCC members follow the accession negotiations, share their expertise, and provide political leaders on both sides with civil society inputs. The regular meetings of those joint bodies also help out reaching a broader audience to debate the enlargement topic. In the coming months will be held the first meetings of the EU-Iceland JCC, as well as of the EU-Montenegro JCC. I would be honoured if we cooperate more closely with the parallel Joint Parliamentary Committees of the European Parliament. Maybe one day, we could even hold a joint meeting together with our respective partners.

Second tool, the Western Balkans Civil Society Forum. This is a bi-annual event that the EESC organises to address topical issues together with a wide range of civil society representatives from the region. This year will be held the 4th Forum in Zagreb, on 29-30th November 2012. We will address some of the key concerns that you have highlighted in your draft report, namely rural development, unemployment, and last but not least, freedom of expression and freedom of the media. Some common recommendations will be sent to the EU



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political leaders and the Balkan ones. We will then work on their implementation together with our civil society partners in the region.

To conclude, the EESC will keep on advocating for the enlargement process to go on, in an inclusive, transparent and fair manner. Any delay due to the current turmoil in the EU has to be seen as a chance for reaching a better level of preparedness when entering the EU. But for this opportunity to be seized, the EU needs to work side by side with civil society in the region. We are working in this direction. I count on your support to have all the other EU institutions working in the same direction.



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