

Commissioner Olli Rehn**Press conference "Five years of an enlarged EU", 20 Feb 2009**

- This year marks a historic double-anniversary. 20 years ago, we saw the Berlin Wall come down. And in May this year, we will celebrate the 5th anniversary of the reunification of Europe.
- With this in mind, we must make a fair and factual balance sheet of the EU's Eastern enlargement. I'd like to thank Joaquin Almunia and DG ECFIN for the excellent economic study he just presented.
- It proves that, in economic terms, enlargement has been beneficial for both new and old member states, and for the EU as a whole. To illustrate this with a concrete example: trade between the old and new member states grew almost threefold in less than 10 years (from 175 be in 1999 to ca 500 be in 2007). An even more illustrative is the fivefold growth of trade among the new member states themselves, from less than 15 to 77 be in the same period.
- This is a **key factor** explaining why, since 2004 until the current financial crisis broke out, there was a robust 1.5 % annual growth in **employment** in new Member States – which went alongside strong job creation in old Member States, about 1% per year.
- Overall, enlargement has served as an anchor of stability and driver of liberty and democracy in Europe. It has extended the area of peace and prosperity to almost 500 million people and increased our weight in the world when addressing issues of global nature, such as the climate change or the financial crisis.

- Now our challenge is to support stability and progress in South-East Europe – not least economic stability. We have extended our economic recovery plan to the countries of South-East Europe. We have already set aside 150 million euro to support their economic development, which should leverage around 600 million euro in loans from international financial institutions.
- In the Balkans, the European perspective has been instrumental in taming extreme nationalism and stabilising peace through democratic and economic transformation. It is better that we export stability into the Balkans than import instability from there. That's why it is crucial that our policy of stabilisation – sometimes called enlargement – is kept on track, even if it is no high-speed train.
- I hope that, ahead of the anniversaries of European unification and the upcoming elections of the European Parliament, the findings of today's report will contribute to a well informed public debate that will strike a factual and fair balance of the EU's historic fifth enlargement. The DG Enlargement has set up a special website where you can find more information. – Thanks for your attention.