



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera dei Deputati for its Opinion concerning the 2016 Communication from the European Commission {COM(2016) 715 final} on the EU Enlargement Policy and the accompanying 2016 Reports on the candidate countries and potential candidates.

The Commission welcomes the Camera dei Deputati's support for the European Union's Enlargement policy. The Commission remains fully committed to continue supporting the candidate countries and potential candidates in their reform efforts, the implementation of which will allow them to progress on their European paths. The European Commission shares the view that a credible enlargement process is an irreplaceable tool to strengthen the countries of Southeast Europe and to help support their modernisation through political and economic reforms, in line with the established accession criteria.

Enlargement policy remains focused on the "fundamentals first" principle. Core issues of the rule of law, fundamental rights, strengthening democratic institutions, including public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness remain key priorities in the enlargement process. Properly addressing the fundamentals is key to meeting the Copenhagen and Madrid membership criteria. It will also help to ensure that both the future and current Member States can fully reap the benefits of future EU enlargement.

To support reform efforts in all enlargement countries, the Commission aims to make maximum use of existing mechanisms and fora, whether through the structures of the Association Agreement/Stabilisation and Association Agreements, the accession negotiations or Commission-led country-specific initiatives such as high-level dialogues. The Commission will also continue to ensure appropriately targeted financial support under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II).

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As regards public support for enlargement, the Commission is of the opinion that effective communication on how the enlargement process works and its implications for citizens' lives remains essential for ensuring public support. This requires a joint effort of the EU and its Member States as well as of the governments and civil society in the Enlargement countries.

The Commission shares the Camera dei Deputati's assessment of the domestic situation in Turkey and has expressed its views clearly in its 2016 Turkey Report as well as in its bilateral contacts with the Turkish authorities. The issue of remedies to excesses in the framework of the post-coup measures is crucial and the Commission underlines the importance of close cooperation with the Council of Europe in this context. The Commission remains committed to working together with a democratic and stable Turkey in all fields of cooperation.

The Commission welcomed the Italian leadership in conducting an ambitious and successful Western Balkans Summit in Trieste on July 12, and worked closely with the Italian hosts to present concrete deliverables at the Summit. These included the annual Connectivity Package of investments in transport and energy projects, the signature of the Transport Community Treaty, continuing a number of the elements of the 'Positive Agenda for Youth', and the adoption of an Action Plan to create a Regional Economic Area, in which barriers to trade and investment are to be removed. All of these elements of regional co-operation have been proposed not as alternatives to enlargement, but as means to strengthen the European Integration perspective of the Western Balkans.

The Commission would like to thank the Camera dei Deputati for its engagement with the enlargement process and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours sincerely,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Johannes Hahn
Member of the Commission*