

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Dear Lord Boswell,

The Commission would like to thank the House of Lords for its Report on "The future of EU Enlargement" from 6 March 2013, following the publication of the Annual enlargement package 2012 {COM(2012) 600 final}.

The Commission agrees with the House of Lords on the importance of the EU enlargement process as a means to promote security, stability, democracy, and economic growth. The prospect of accession drives political and economic reforms, transforming societies and creating new opportunities for citizens and businesses.

*The Commission agrees with the view expressed by the House of Lords regarding the **need to prioritise the enlargement agenda**. Despite the major challenges and significant global uncertainty that the European Union is facing, it is essential to maintain the enlargement momentum. As the European Union reflects on its future, it is important that it remains open to those on our continent that want to apply to become part of our common democratic project built on our shared values. Enlargement countries face many political and economic challenges, and maintaining momentum is a powerful tool to address them.*

*The Commission supports the views expressed by the House of Lords regarding the **application of the Copenhagen criteria**. The Commission underlines the importance of fair and rigorous conditionality in the enlargement process. While the enlargement conditionality remains essentially the same, the way it is applied in terms of supporting candidates in meeting the criteria evolves based on lessons learnt from past enlargement. The Commission is putting an increased focus on good governance and the rule of law, including judicial reform, public administration reform and the fight against corruption and organised crime. The EU's new approach to negotiations in the chapters "Judiciary and fundamental rights" and "Justice, freedom and security" is a case in point. From now on, these chapters will be tackled early in the negotiations to allow maximum time to establish the necessary legislation, institutions, and solid track records of implementation before the negotiations are closed. It is difficult to speculate on what would have happened in the past, had such*

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measures been in place then. The Commission is focusing on ensuring that in future accessions we build on the lessons learned from the past, to the benefit of all concerned.

*The Commission underlines the importance of **regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations**, which are essential elements of the Stabilisation and Association process. As regards **bilateral issues**, the Commission is of the view that these should not hold up the accession process. At the same time, such issues need to be addressed by the parties concerned as early as possible during the enlargement process, taking into account the overall EU interests. The Commission continues to urge parties to make every effort towards solving outstanding disputes in line with established principles and means, including referring issues as appropriate to the International Court of Justice or other existing or ad hoc dispute settlement bodies. The Commission stands ready to facilitate the creation of the necessary political impetus in the search for solutions and to support related initiatives. This being said, the Commission acknowledges the difficulty inherent in situations in which one party to a dispute is a Member State.*

*As regards the Commission's **innovations in the enlargement process** such as the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and the positive agenda with Turkey, the Commission underlines that such initiatives are not meant to replace accession negotiations but form a bridge to them and inject new momentum to the enlargement process.*

*The Commission agrees with the views expressed by the House of Lords on the **importance of dispelling any misperceptions on the existence of 'enlargement fatigue'**. This can be achieved by improving the credibility of the enlargement process, notably by rigorously applying accession conditionality and encouraging far-reaching reforms, with the EU, for its part, delivering on commitments once the countries have met the established criteria. Credibility also applies in terms of ensuring the support of Member States and their citizens. At a time when the EU faces major challenges, it is essential to foster understanding and informed debate on the impact of enlargement policy, by communicating to citizens the successes and long term benefits of enlargement as well as the risks on non-enlargement, in particular in view of the EU's aim of ensuring stability in the Western Balkans. The principles of consolidation of commitments, fair and rigorous conditionality and good communication with the public, combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members, represent the basis for the EU's enlargement policy, as defined by the renewed consensus on enlargement agreed by the European Council.*

*The Commission shares the views expressed by the House of Lords concerning the more strategic orientation of the **Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)**. In December 2011 the Commission submitted a proposal for the IPA II Regulation. Among the main innovations are improved strategic focus of pre-accession financial assistance through the establishment of stronger linkages with the priorities identified in the enlargement strategy, as well as multi-annual planning.*

*Concerning the **institutional impact of enlargement**, the Commission underlines that the present institutional framework is adequate for further enlargement to take place in the*

medium-term on the basis of the current enlargement agenda. The Commission is of the view that the EU and its policies have substantially benefited from enlargement. As in previous enlargement rounds, institutional adjustments will have to be made, including the addition of new languages, but they do not constitute a barrier to the process.

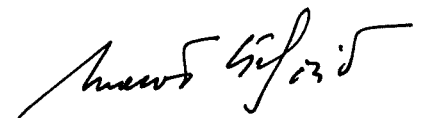
*As regards **Member State compliance with the principles of the Union** as reflected in the Treaties, this is ensured through mechanisms provided for in these same Treaties. The Commission has a specific and key role in this context. As regards the more general monitoring of Member States referred to by the House of Lords, the Commission points to two recent developments: the publication in March of the European Justice Scoreboard, and the EU Anti-Corruption Report, which will be published in the second half of 2013.*

*As regards the pace of the enlargement process, the Commission shares the view expressed by the House of Lords that the **'own merits' principle** is essential. The pace at which each country advances towards membership depends on its performance in meeting the necessary conditions. Enlargement is thus by definition a gradual process, based on solid and sustainable implementation of reforms by the countries concerned.*

*As for the European perspective of the **countries in the Eastern Partnership**, Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union states that any European State which respects the EU's values - human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities - and is committed to promoting them may apply to become a member of the Union. The current enlargement agenda covers the Western Balkans, Turkey and Iceland (although the Icelandic government has decided in the meantime to put accession negotiations on hold). Any steps to include further countries are subject to consensus among Member States.*

The Commission would like to thank the House of Lords for its engagement with the enlargement process and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,



*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*