

COMMISSIONER DANUTA HÜBNER

**PLENARY SESSION OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT
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STRASBOURG**

CONCLUSIVE REMARKS

Thanks for this lively debate and useful comments on this very important report.

I would like to make clear that I read this report as an expression of concern about the need to maintain or, indeed, improve further the effectiveness of the Cohesion Policy while implementing the EU's Strategy for enlargement.

Your debate has also provided many ideas which I take back with me.

I would like to stress three issues we must remember when having a discussion on Cohesion Policy in the context of enlargement.

Firstly, financial framework and eligibility rules for 2007-2013 have been decided and will be applied irrespective of any further enlargement.

Secondly, in 2008-2009 in accordance with European Council conclusions the Commission will carry out a review covering all aspects of EU spending and of resources (to be accompanied by an assessment of the application of the current IIA). Review will be carried out in close cooperation with European Parliament. Broad consultation process will be launched as well. Final timing of the review will take account of consultation process as well as of the larger debate about the future of Europe.

Thirdly, the European Commission in its Communication on Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2006-2007 as well as Member States at December 2006 European Council confirmed that the enlargement strategy is

based on consolidation, conditionality and communication and combined with the EU's capacity to integrate new members. The EU's commitment regarding the ongoing accession negotiations has been reiterated. The pace of accession process will depend on the results of the reforms in the negotiating country, with each country being judged on its own merits. The Union will refrain from setting any target dates for accession until the negotiations will be close to completion. The Commission will provide impact assessments on the key policy areas in the course of negotiations.

Let me also say that I am open to new ideas, especially with regard to the need for new delivery mechanisms to improve the responsiveness of Cohesion Policy to a rapidly changing environment and the need for new ways of achieving further synergies between development strategies implemented at Community, national and regional level. We must ensure that our Cohesion Policy ties in with this favourable sustainable national growth policy, the Lisbon Strategy and the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs. I fully agree with you that we have to explore all those links further.

Finally, I would like to say that you should not expect my support for any ideas that tend to weaken the Community character of Cohesion Policy.

Thanks again for excellent work carried out by Mr. Pieper.