

**School of Advanced
International Studies,
Johns Hopkins University,
Washington DC**

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Commissioner Rehn

Opening remarks: video-conference

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues in the academic and policy communities,

I am pleased to address you as the Commissioner for Enlargement. I am proud of the fact that the prospect of joining the Union can be a powerful catalyst for stabilisation, reconciliation and reform in countries facing difficult problems – as many of you know from your policy work or your academic research. The accession process provides these countries with a political anchor, with economic opportunities, with financial assistance and with guidance through a host of policy issues.

This help from the EU makes it much more likely that the countries will navigate their difficult reform course successfully. They usually manage to achieve greater stability and a faster pace of reforms as a result, which benefits the European Union greatly by giving us greater security and more economic opportunities in opening markets, while also providing us with more capable partners to tackle problems such as trans-national crime and cross-border environmental threats.

The citizens of the EU are therefore among the primary beneficiaries of the enlargement process. That is why we have an enormous interest in ensuring that both sides remain committed to the process throughout its long time-frame.

For this reason, I welcome the renewed consensus on enlargement we reached at the European Council in December last year. The leaders of our Member States decided to consolidate our enlargement agenda to cover the countries of South-eastern Europe, that is Turkey and the Western Balkans. We are sticking to our commitments to these countries, but at the same time, we are firmly committed to maintaining rigorous conditionality. We also have to ensure public support for enlargement, where the Commission supports the leading role that politicians in the Member States have to take in explaining why enlargement benefits their citizens.

In practice, this means that we assess all the enlargement countries on their own merits in the annual enlargement package. This year we will present it on 6 November. Our strategy paper will examine the current challenges and propose adjustments to the enlargement process, taking into account lessons learned from previous enlargements. Our overall aim is to ensure a tighter focus on the Union's priorities, and areas where the countries need to make urgent progress.

We are striving to develop further tangible incentives for successful reforms, particularly interim incentives to provide motivation along the way. The accession process is a marathon, not a sprint, and countries have to sustain their efforts over many changes of government and over difficult economic cycles.

We have to take care to keep the Balkans and Turkey motivated throughout the long process, so our commitment should not waver. We have to keep the engine running on the EU side, so that people in the countries feel the pressure – and seize the opportunity – to keep working on their own preparations.

We should never make it easy for the nationalists in these countries to claim that there is no point continuing to work on the EU agenda, because the EU will never let their country in. That argument would destroy the strategic bargain of accession in return for meeting the conditions that gives enlargement policy its transformative power.

Our aim is to ensure that the countries undertake deep reforms which become irreversibly absorbed into the fabric of public life, not just cosmetic changes when a deadline approaches. For that reason, we are deploying measures to encourage better governance, economic and social development, increased people-to-people contacts, and strengthening of civil society.

As you know, the progress of the enlargement countries themselves is the key determinant of whether – and at what pace – each can move towards membership of the Union. We also take the EU's integration capacity into consideration: the Union has to be prepared for further accessions too.

That is why the success of the Inter-Governmental Conference preparing the Reform Treaty is important for enlargement. I welcome in particular the fine-tuning of the wording of Article 49 on accession, which underlines the fact that enlargement continues to be a key policy of the Union, based on clear and well-established conditions.

The new Treaty also provides an excellent opportunity to improve the Union's institutional architecture for external policy in general. A High Representative who chairs Council meetings on external relations and a shared external action service will allow us to conduct a more coherent foreign policy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Enlargement policy is one of the most successful foreign policies the Union has ever undertaken. I am convinced that our approach of ensuring a carefully managed accession process will allow us to keep up this track record. Of course, no one is suggesting we apply the enlargement policy on a global scale.

But EU enlargement constitutes material proof that a values-based policy can work in practice. It allows us to project democracy and stability across our continent and beyond. Moreover, some of the instruments and methods originally developed in the context of the accession process are being successfully adapted for application in other contexts, such as the European Neighbourhood Policy.

Thank you. I would be most interested to hear your comments and address your questions concerning the enlargement agenda.