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## Transcript

# Future Prospects for EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy

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**Štefan Füle:**

Mr Chairman, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great privilege to be with you here today.

It is not my aim to be exhaustive - or exhausting. Rather, I aim to provide some key elements to provoke a lively discussion and to hear your thoughts and ideas.

First, I would like to set the EU's enlargement policy in the context of the current global economic situation and argue that the enlargement policy is more relevant than ever in the current climate.

Second, I would outline some challenges for enlargement policy in 2011.

Third, I will give a brief overview of the review of the European neighbourhood policy.

Now, let us consider enlargement and neighbourhood policy in context.

The economic crisis and its aftermath are at the forefront of everyone's attention. At a time like this, people may ask 'Why does enlargement matter?'

Enlargement and the neighbourhood policy matter because they reinforce peace, democracy, prosperity and stability in and around Europe.

It is in the EU's strategic interest to take the enlargement process forward on the basis of the agreed principles and conditions, and the renewed consensus on enlargement.

The enlargement process helps us to better achieve our own policy objectives in a number of areas that are key to economic recovery and sustainable growth. These include dealing with the economic crisis, promoting the objectives of the 2020 reform agenda, and making the EU a safer place.

The UK is a key beneficiary of this: as the European Union expands, so do the opportunities for UK traders, investors, consumers, tourists and property owners abroad. For example, Poland now takes as many exports from the UK as China does.

Beyond this, the UK also benefits from the broader stability in the region. We recognise the importance of the United Kingdom's military contributions to peace and stability in the western Balkans. The enlargement process aims to ensure that such interventions will never be needed again.

Over the past year, we have seen some notable progress across the enlargement countries towards the European Union. This progress demonstrates that enlargement is an effective policy.

To maintain this momentum we must maintain the credibility of this process. Credibility is a two-way street.

For member states, credibility means applying rigorous conditionality towards applicants, but also providing them with a tangible European perspective as they fulfil the relevant conditions. Accordingly, membership will only be recommended once a candidate country is fully prepared.

For candidates and potential candidates, credibility is built through a track record of credible reform and implementation. We have to provide them with a framework to support their transformative efforts to achieve real change with real reform and real results. Only this can guarantee that the reforms undertaken will bring the expected changes and benefits to society – including a tangible European perspective.

I have always stressed the importance of giving the enlargement countries as much political guidance and support as possible. This approach will be tested this year.

The list of horizontal issues that need to be tackled is formidable.

We face the challenge of establishing track records in:

- the reform of public administration
- reform of the judiciary
- the fight against organised crime and corruption

These are all essential to avoid the need for co-operation and verification mechanisms upon accession.

We also face challenges to:

- Strengthen freedom of expression and the media
- Work to resolve bilateral issues
- Step up regional co-operation

In our neighbouring countries that are not part of the enlargement process, the EU promotes its values and interests through the European neighbourhood policy. Here too, there is no lack of challenges.

Let me outline some concrete examples:

In Ukraine, there is an acute need for progress on democracy and human rights. For example, recent decisions of Ukrainian law enforcement bodies convey the impression of selectively targeting members of the former government. If substantiated, such practices would not be in line with the values to which Ukraine and the EU have committed themselves.

We also need to prevent the deterioration of the business and investment climate, including the fight against corruption.

In Belarus, we have been shocked by events after the Presidential elections of 19 December. The EU has condemned the unacceptable repression of the opposition and of civil society, and has called for the immediate release of all those detained on political grounds.

We must now find the right combination of measures in response to those events. On the one hand, we must target the regime. On the other, we must support civil society and our long-term relations with the population.

In the southern neighbourhood, we need to balance our interests for stability with the need for genuine political reform that should improve political accountability and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The Middle East Peace Process has a crucial impact on the neighbourhood of the EU. How can the EU build on the new opportunities offered by the Lisbon Treaty and help find a solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

Over the past six months, the EU has carried out wide-ranging consultations on a strategic review of the European Neighbourhood Policy. This has sought answers to the following questions:

- Does the current focus on stability ensure the optimum long term security for the EU?
- On which areas and on which players should the EU focus its attention?
- How can we help to provide the right incentives?
- Does the EU have the necessary resources and political will?

The EU will host a ministerial conference on 1 February, after which the Commission will publish a communication and discuss it with the European Council and Parliament, to find ways to make this policy even more effective in the coming years.

In conclusion, both our enlargement policy and our neighbourhood policy bring substantial benefits to the European Union. Both policies have been successful and credible to date, but 2011 will be a testing year.

Ladies and gentlemen, in view of the considerable expertise at this meeting, I look forward to hearing your comments and insights on how we can best pass this test.