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## **Paving together the way towards Serbia's EU-membership**

As the European Union's Commissioner for Enlargement I look forward to furthering Serbia's EU membership perspective.

Enlargement has been a resounding success. It has transformed my own country and brought the whole of Central and Eastern Europe into the EU. It has brought stability, has consolidated democracy and led to enhanced economic opportunities. I will spare no effort to provide the Western Balkans with support, guidance and political engagement on their road towards accession.

The accession process provides the Western Balkans with strong incentive for political and economic reform. We therefore need to advance with Serbia in this joint endeavour and continue to promote together the values on which Europe is built.

Serbia has achieved impressive progress over the last months on its EU integration path with improved cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and entry into force of the Interim Trade Agreement. Visa liberalisation for Serbian citizens offers now new perspectives for exchanges and cooperation as well as increased opportunities for younger generations. The application for EU membership proved that Serbia is strongly committed to deliver on its strategic objective of membership of the European Union.

Those concrete achievements brought a new dynamic, a new EU momentum that now needs to be built upon to address key challenges.

Experience from previous enlargements has shown that consolidating the rule of law remains essential for a functioning democracy and economy. This also represents a challenge for Serbia, where the functioning of the judiciary, its independence, professionalism and efficiency need to be tackled as early as possible in Serbia's accession process.

Improved regional cooperation and good neighborly relations are another major challenge that needs to be addressed by Serbia, as for any country aspiring to join the EU. Issues arising from the break-up of the Yugoslavia, such as the refugees and internally displaced people and border demarcation, cannot be left aside. Another key issue is to continue bringing war crime suspects to justice. The war crime courts established in Serbia remain an essential element in this endeavour. Seeking the truth is a crucial step towards reconciliation.

We are now looking ahead and I hope Serbia will remain committed to the reform agenda. Reforms are for the benefit of Serbian citizens and not only for the sake of EU accession. A Serbia well prepared for accession will make the European Union not only larger, but also stronger.

**Štefan FÜLE**

EU Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy