



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 30.7.2018
C(2018) 5189 final*

Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Seimas for its Opinion on the Communication 'A credible enlargement perspective for an enhanced European Union engagement with the Western Balkans' {COM(2018) 65 final}.

The Communication forms part of the larger strategy to strengthen the Union by 2025. The future of the Western Balkans as an integral part of the European Union is indeed in the Union's very own interest and the prospect of European Union membership is a real driver of reforms and stability in the region.

At the same time, accession to the European Union is and will remain a merit-based process fully dependent on the objective progress of each country. Much work lies ahead for the countries concerned to be in a position to meet the well-established criteria for membership. The Commission expects the Western Balkans to deliver real and sustained reforms and to achieve reconciliation and solve open bilateral issues well before accession. In this context, the 2025 perspective for membership is an indicative date and extremely ambitious and depends fully on the results achieved by each country.

Core issues such as the rule of law, fundamental rights, strengthening democratic institutions, public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness remain key priorities in the enlargement process. Through the Communication, the European Union will be able to provide unprecedented support to the ambitious efforts of the region. This will include the support to the socio-economic development of the region and increasing its connectivity.

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Joining the European Union is a choice, and one that requires sharing the principles, values and goals the Union seeks to promote in its neighbourhood and beyond, including full alignment with the common foreign and security policy. The Commission will continue to follow closely the developments in this area, and will raise the issues concerned with the Western Balkans on all appropriate occasions.

For the accession process to be a success, its opportunities and challenges must be communicated more clearly, in the region and in the European Union. The Commission will support the efforts of the Western Balkans and Member States by stepping up its strategic communication in the countries and in the Union and to ensure the visibility of the enlargement policy.

The Commission also agrees that the European Union should continue to work actively with its Eastern Neighbours to build a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation, while strengthening their and the Union's resilience to crises and shocks. The Commission remains fully committed to the Eastern Partnership, in line with the outcome of the Brussels Eastern Partnership Summit of 24 November 2017, the revised European Neighbourhood Policy of 2015 and the 2016 Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy.

The Commission hopes that these comments address the issues raised by the Seimas and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Elżbieta Bieńkowska
Member of the Commission*