



Reforms in the Western Balkans and Turkey: annual assessments and recommendations

Brussels, 29 May 2019

Confirming that a credible enlargement policy is a geostrategic investment in peace, stability, security and economic growth in the whole of Europe, the Commission today adopted its [annual assessment](#) of the implementation of reforms in the Western Balkan partners and Turkey, together with recommendations on the next steps for those countries.

Western Balkans

A firm and credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans remains essential to drive transformation, foster reconciliation, export stability to the region and promote EU values, norms and standards. The [Commission's Western Balkans Strategy](#) of February 2018 generated a renewed engagement by the EU and its Member States and created new momentum across the region. One year on, the partner countries have made concrete progress and demonstrated commitment to the European perspective, even if the overall uptake of reforms varies.

Albania and North Macedonia have embraced the opportunity and delivered on reforms, in particular in the areas identified as crucial by the Council in June 2018. In light of the significant progress achieved and the relevant conditions being met, the Commission recommended today that the Council now opens accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.

High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, Federica **Mogherini**, said: *"The Western Balkans are Europe and will be part of the EU's future, of a stronger, stable and united European Union. The past year has been a year of positive change, across the region. Albania and North Macedonia have shown a strong determination to advance on the EU path and achieved results that are concrete and must be irreversible. Based on that, today we recommend that the Council opens the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. The European Union's enlargement policy is an investment in peace, in security, in prosperity and in the stability of Europe."*

Johannes **Hahn**, Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, stated: *"Albania and North Macedonia have embraced the opportunity of the reinvigorated enlargement agenda, and delivered on reforms. North Macedonia not only continued its ambitious reform agenda, but also reached a historic agreement with Greece, resolving a 27-year old name dispute, an example for the entire region and beyond. Albania is pursuing profound reforms, in particular a major transformation of its justice system. All these efforts are testimony to the power of attraction of the European Union."*

The Commission also issued today its [Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina's](#) application for membership of the European Union, together with an analytical report that reviews, for the first time, the situation in the country against all standards applicable to EU Member States. The Commission considers that negotiations for accession should be opened once Bosnia and Herzegovina has achieved the necessary degree of compliance with the membership criteria and in particular the political criteria requiring stability of institutions, guaranteeing notably democracy and rule of law. Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to fundamentally improve its legislative and institutional framework to ensure it meets a number of detailed priorities in the field of democracy, rule of law, fundamental rights and public administration reform. The Opinion - a roadmap for comprehensive reforms in these crucial areas - is a milestone in EU-Bosnia and Herzegovina relations, providing new momentum to the country in its EU integration process.

Turkey

Turkey is a key partner for the EU and a candidate country. Dialogue and cooperation, including at highest level, in essential areas of joint interest have continued, including through effective cooperation on migration and support to refugees. However, Turkey has continued to move further away from the European Union, with serious backsliding in the areas of the rule of law and fundamental rights and through the weakening of effective checks and balances in the political system, brought forward by the entry into force of the constitutional amendment. In June 2018 the

Council noted unanimously that Turkey's accession negotiations have therefore effectively come to a standstill and no further chapters can be considered for opening or closing. The underlying facts leading to this assessment still hold.

Next steps

It is now for the Council to consider the recommendations of the Commission and take decisions on the steps ahead.

Background

Enlargement process

The current enlargement agenda covers the partners of the Western Balkans and Turkey. Accession negotiations have been opened with candidate countries [Montenegro](#) (2012), [Serbia](#) (2014), and [Turkey](#) (2005). [North Macedonia](#) is a candidate country since 2005 and [Albania](#) since 2014. [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) (application to join the EU submitted in February 2016) and [Kosovo](#) (Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force in April 2016) are potential candidates.

The EU accession process continues to be based on established criteria, fair and rigorous conditionality, and the principle of own merits. EU accession requires implementation of complex reforms in a challenging environment; it is an objective which can only be achieved in the long term. For the process to move forward, accession candidates need as a matter of priority to deliver more swiftly genuine and sustainable results on key issues: the rule of law, justice reform, fight against corruption and organised crime, security, fundamental rights, functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform, as well as on economic development and competitiveness.

The Western Balkans must also make progress on reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, following the example of the historic agreement between North Macedonia and Greece.

The Western Balkans Strategy has provided new momentum to EU-Western Balkans relations. The Strategy focuses on areas where further reforms and efforts are needed from the Western Balkans partners, and on the EU's enhanced support to the region, through a number of specific commitments grouped in six flagship initiatives.

Since the adoption of the Strategy, the EU has focussed on fulfilling its commitments through enhanced political engagement, strengthening security cooperation, tightening operational links between the Western Balkans and the EU and its agencies, providing wider access to finance and technical assistance, as well as refocussing EU financial assistance under the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), which in 2018 alone amounted to an annual allocation for the Western Balkans of over €1.1 billion.

For More Information

[Commission's Communication](#)

For detailed findings and recommendations on each country, see:

Montenegro: [MEMO](#); [Report](#)

Serbia: [MEMO](#); [Report](#)

Turkey: [MEMO](#); [Report](#)

North Macedonia: [MEMO](#); [Report](#)

Albania: [MEMO](#); [Report](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina: [MEMO](#); [Opinion](#)

Kosovo: [MEMO](#); [Report](#)

For more general information:

[EU Engagement in the Western Balkans](#)

[Credible enlargement perspective and enhanced engagement with the Western Balkans](#)

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