



## EU increases support for border and migration management in the Western Balkans

Brussels, 25 October 2022

The Commission adopted a recommendation to the Council to authorise the opening of negotiations of upgraded European Border and Coast Guard Agency's (Frontex) status agreements between the EU and Albania, Serbia, Montenegro, as well as with Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Commission is also adopting today a new assistance package worth €39.2 million under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) to strengthen border management in the Western Balkans.

Commissioner for Home Affairs, Ylva **Johansson**, said: *"We are committed to supporting our partners in the Western Balkans and strengthening our cooperation on migration management on the ground. Therefore, we propose to negotiate status agreements under the new legal framework that would allow for the deployment of Frontex to all four partner countries with the full power of its mandate, to ensure that their borders continue to be respected and protected in line with European best practices."*

Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér **Várhelyi**, said: *"This package is timely, as migration remains an area where we need to work even more closely with our Western Balkan partners. Given the increased migratory pressure in the region, we are focusing on strengthening border protection, fighting the smuggling networks and stepping up returns from region. To this end, we will provide increased political and financial help. Between 2021 and 2024, we intend to increase our funding by 60% in total, to at least €350 million for our Western Balkan partners. This will support the Western Balkans in all areas of developing effective migration management systems, including asylum and reception, border security and returns. We count on the commitment our Western Balkan partners to make these actions a success."*

With today's proposal, the Commission with the support of Frontex will strengthen the capacity of the Western Balkans' partners in their migration management, fight against smuggling and ensuring security. Under the currently existing status agreements between Frontex and Albania, Serbia and Montenegro, deployment of the standing corps may only take place at the countries' borders with the EU and without exercising executive powers. Under the new legal framework, the status agreement will allow Frontex standing corps to be deployed in the third country both at the EU border and at the borders with the third countries and exercise the executive powers. Therefore, new status agreements will better support and strengthen cooperation on border management in the Western Balkans.

The assistance package adopted today follows a detailed assessment of needs established with the Western Balkan authorities. The support targets the region's border management capacities mainly through the provision of specialised equipment. It includes mobile surveillance systems, unmanned aerial vehicles, biometric devices, training and support to establish and operationalise National Coordination Centres. The support also covers the operationalisation of migration facilities, including reception and detention facilities. This package brings the total bilateral and regional support adopted in this area under IPA III to €171.7 million.

### Background

The European Commission works closely with all the Western Balkan partners on all areas of migration management to develop and align their systems with EU standards. The focus is on ensuring that partners from the Western Balkans are equipped as future Member States to respond constructively to the shared migration challenges.

The [Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance \(IPA\)](#) is the means by which the EU has been supporting reforms in the enlargement region with financial and technical assistance. The IPA III funds, designed for the period 2021-2027 aim to build up the capacities of the beneficiaries throughout the accession process, resulting in progressive, positive developments in the region.

Status agreements under the previous mandate of the [European Border and Coast Guard Agency](#) have been concluded with Serbia in November 2019, with Albania in October 2018 and with

Montenegro in October 2019. On the basis of those agreements, team members of the European Border and Coast Guard standing corps are already deployed in all three countries, but are limited to borders with Member States. Negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina were successfully finalised in 2017 but the status agreement has not been signed at the time of the entry into force of the revised Frontex regulation, hence the proposal for revised status agreement between Frontex and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as in the case of Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. On 26 October, the European Union is also expected to sign a second status agreement with the Republic of North Macedonia allowing the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) to deploy border management teams to North Macedonia. This new agreement will be based on the reinforced mandate of Frontex.

### **Next steps**

Following the Commission recommendations put forward today, the Council will need to adopt a decision authorising the Commission to open negotiations with Albania, Serbia and Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **For more information**

[Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance \(IPA\)](#)

[Website: The European Border and Coast Guard Agency](#)

[Website: Directorate-General for Migration and Home](#)

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Press contacts:

[Ana PISONERO-HERNANDEZ](#) (+32 2 295 43 20)

[Anitta HIPPER](#) (+32 2 298 56 91)

General public inquiries: [Europe Direct](#) by phone [00 800 67 89 10 11](#) or by [email](#)