“If we want more stability in our neighbourhood, then we must maintain a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans. It is clear that there will be no further enlargement during the mandate of this Commission and this Parliament. No candidate is ready. But thereafter the European Union will be greater than 27 in number. Accession candidates must give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights utmost priority in the negotiations.”

European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker, State of the Union Address, 13 September 2017

PROSPECTIVE EUROPEAN UNION MEMBERS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** – Potential candidate
Submitted application to join the EU in February 2016.

**Montenegro** – Candidate Country
Accession negotiations started on 29 June 2012.

**Albania** – Candidate Country
Pending Commission recommendation to open accession negotiations

**Serbia** – Candidate Country
Accession negotiations started on 21 January 2014.

**Kosovo** – Potential candidate
In April 2016, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force.

**The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** – Candidate Country
Pending Commission recommendation to open accession negotiations

All candidate countries and potential candidates have a European perspective. The Commission works with each country to help them forward on their accession path. This process is fair and merit-based. Some countries are more advanced in the accession. To strengthen our leverage and boost reforms, the Commission will adopt a reinforced Strategy for the region in February 2018, which will focus on Montenegro and Serbia, the current frontrunners.

*Kosovo - This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the "Kosovo" declaration of independence.*
The process of joining the EU broadly consists of 4 stages:

1. All Western Balkans countries have an EU accession perspective. Already today, they benefit from substantial EU assistance, Stabilisation and Association Agreements providing far-reaching access to the internal market, and detailed policy advice.

2. When a country fulfils basic political, economic and reform criteria, it becomes an official candidate for membership.

3. The candidate then moves on to formal membership negotiations. They cover 35 chapters, across all policy areas, to ensure that candidates are fully prepared to become members.

4. When negotiations and accompanying reforms have been completed to the satisfaction of both sides, an Accession Treaty is finalised and ratified and the country joins the EU.

**ENLARGEMENT CRITERIA**

The Treaty on the European Union states that any European country may apply for membership if it respects the democratic values of the EU and is committed to promoting them. The EU also needs to be able to integrate new members.

Countries wishing to join the European Union must have:

- stable institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities;
- a functioning market economy and the capacity to cope with competition and market forces in the EU;
- the ability to take on and implement effectively the obligations of membership, including adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

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“The European Union is stepping up its support to all partners towards achievable and realistic objectives, so that their progress will be irreversible by the end of our mandate.”

High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini & Commissioner Johannes Hahn, 20 September 2017, New York