

Kosovo in 2010: one step closer to Europe

Yesterday we published our annual report on Kosovo's progress on its European path. This comes one year after the Commission set out its vision for how Kosovo can fulfil its European perspective.

We will soon be able to launch a visa dialogue with Kosovo. This is only the beginning of a long and difficult process, but I believe it is an effort worth making. Once the required reforms have been carried out, the people of Kosovo will join the rest of the Western Balkans in enjoying short-stay visa-free travel to the EU.

Kosovo has successfully launched the Stabilisation and Association Process dialogue with the EU. Together we focus on the reforms that bring the people of Kosovo closer to Europe. The government's efforts have enabled us to extend our financial assistance to cross-border projects. Next year, local communities from Kosovo will be able to take part in joint initiatives together with communities in neighbouring countries.

Kosovo has also made progress in terms of socio-economic development. Important reforms have been undertaken in the area of trade. The government is fully committed to prepare Kosovo for a trade agreement with the EU. We support this effort. Kosovo negotiated successfully a stand-by agreement with the IMF, which was concluded in July. This has unlocked €30 million of budgetary assistance and paved the way for additional €20 million by the end of the year.

Kosovo is advancing on its path. Key laws for the reform of the judiciary have been adopted. Decentralisation is almost complete, moving the public administration closer to local communities. The priority now is to deliver essential public services to all citizens. The authorities have undertaken, in cooperation with our rule of law mission, a number of anti-corruption operations. And Kosovo's laws are increasingly in line with EU standards.

However, Kosovo is also facing significant challenges. Corruption is still prevalent and affects everyone's life. The government needs to demonstrate concrete results in tackling corruption as well as organised crime. Together with an effective judiciary, these are essential elements for a society based on the rule of law. I invite all of you to hold your authorities to constant account on these important issues.

This has been a very important year for Kosovo. The case before the International Court of Justice is now closed. The judges concluded that the declaration of independence did not violate international law. It is time to move on.

It is important that both Pristina and Belgrade use this momentum in a constructive manner. There are a number of issues of mutual interest that can only be solved through pragmatism and dialogue. I welcome such a dialogue and appeal to everyone involved to keep in mind the final destination. The future of Kosovo is in Europe and we all need to contribute our best efforts to make this a reality.

Stefan Füle,

Commissioner for Enlargement and the European Neighbourhood Policy

This article is published on the occasion of the publication on 9 November by the European Commission of its 2010 Enlargement Package.