



EUROPEAN COMMISSION



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Dear President

The Commission would like to thank the Narodno Sabranie for its Opinion on the Annual enlargement package 2012 {COM(2012) 600}.

The Commission fully agrees with the Narodno Sabranie on the importance of the EU integration process of the Western Balkans, and its contribution to regional stability and strengthening of democracy. The enlargement policy continues to contribute to peace, security and prosperity on our continent. The prospect of accession drives political and economic reforms, transforming societies and creating new opportunities for citizens and businesses.

In its 2012 enlargement package the Commission pays particular attention to the strengthening of the rule of law and democratic governance, which is central to the enlargement process. An increased focus on these areas underpins and further promotes stability in a region still affected by the legacy of armed conflicts in its recent history and supports the creation of an environment attractive for investments conducive to growth.

The Commission takes good note of the Narodno Sabranie's focus on building regional infrastructure and increasing connectivity in South East Europe. The Commission recalls in this regard the creation of the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF). The Commission, national donors and IFIs are supporting € 8 billion worth of regional and local investments in a number of sectors, including transport, energy, and the environment. The Commission also insists on the importance of further cooperation within regional fora such as the Energy Community, the European Common Aviation Area, the South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) and the Central European Free Trade Area. The integration of energy and transport markets is making the region more competitive and is creating the conditions to attract investors to these areas. A continued effort in these areas is essential, and should continue to be supported through the EU's pre-accession assistance.

The Commission underlines the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, which are essential elements of the Stabilisation and Association process. Issues stemming from past conflicts, including war crimes, refugee return, the treatment of minorities and ensuring equal rights for all citizens remain key challenges to stability and

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need to be addressed. The Commission is of the view that open bilateral issues need to be addressed by the parties concerned as early as possible during the enlargement process, with determination, taking into account the overall EU interests. Bilateral issues should not hold up the accession process.

The Commission takes good note of the views expressed by the Narodno Sabranie as regards the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The Commission welcomes the expression of openness to dialogue by Bulgaria to overcome problems in the spirit of good neighbourly relations.

The Commission would like to thank the Narodno Sabranie for its engagement with the enlargement process and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*