



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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C(2018) 5260 final*

*Mr Milan ŠTĚCH
President of the Senát
Valdštejnské náměstí 17/4
CZ – 118 01 PRAGUE 1*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Senát for its Opinion on the Communication 'A Credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans' {COM(2018) 65 final}.

The future of the Western Balkans as an integral part of the European Union is indeed in the Union's very own interest and the prospect of European Union membership is a real driver of reforms and stability in the region. European Union accession remains a merit-based process fully dependent on the objective progress of each country. Much work lies ahead for the Western Balkans to be in a position to meet the well-established criteria for membership. The Commission expects the region to deliver real and sustained reforms, and to achieve reconciliation and solve open bilateral issues well before accession. In this context, the 2025 perspective for membership is an indicative date, is extremely ambitious and depends fully on the results achieved by each country.

Core issues such as the rule of law, fundamental rights, strengthening democratic institutions, public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness, remain key priorities in the enlargement process. The flagship initiatives put forward by the Commission in the Strategy indeed aim at supporting real progress, reform and change in the region.

The Commission's proposal for the new Multiannual Financial Framework reflects the need to focus on strategic priorities both geographically and thematically. The Commission proposes that the pre-accession assistance should be increased considerably, in line with these priorities. This will better support the Western Balkans on their European path and facilitate a smooth and gradual transition to European Union membership.

The Communication forms part of the larger strategy to strengthen the Union by 2025. In this context, and as included in the 2018 Commission Work Programme,¹ the Commission will present new initiatives on the possibility to enhance the use of qualified

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/cwp_2018_en.pdf.

majority voting, which are expected around the third quarter of 2018. These initiatives are aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of overall decision making. A Treaty of Accession is signed by the Member States and the acceding country and it enters into force only after the ratification by all the contracting parties.

Yours faithfully,

Elżbieta Bieńkowska

Member of the Commission