



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 28.7.2017
C(2017) 5486 final*

*Mr Călin POPESCU-TĂRICEANU
President of the Senat
Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 1-3, sector 5
RO – 050711 BUCHAREST*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Senat for its Opinion concerning the 2016 Communication on EU Enlargement Policy {COM(2016) 715 final}.

The Commission welcomes the Senat's support for the European Union's enlargement policy. The Commission remains fully committed to continue supporting the candidate countries and potential candidates in their reform efforts, the implementation of which will allow them to progress on their European paths.

The enlargement policy remains focused on the "fundamentals first" principle. Core issues of the rule of law, fundamental rights, strengthening democratic institutions, including public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness remain key priorities. These issues reflect the importance the EU attaches to its core values and general policy priorities. The protection of minorities is a key requirement for the candidate countries in the accession negotiations and is specifically tackled under chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights). The Commission will pursue its active dialogue with the relevant authorities in the enlargement countries in this important area and continues to monitor closely the issues concerned.

With regard to the negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia, the Commission looks forward to further chapters being opened in 2017. Any progress will depend on reform efforts in the countries, notably on Rule of Law (chapter 23 - Judiciary and fundamental rights and chapter 24 - Justice, freedom and security). For Serbia, the country's progress under the normalisation of its relations with Kosovo^{} (dealt with under Chapter 35 - Other issues) will also be key.*

^{*} 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.

As regards Albania, the country has made crucial progress in the past few years in meeting the five key priorities for the opening of accession negotiations (public administration reform, justice reform, a track record in the fight against both organised crime and corruption, human rights). Further efforts should be made to implement the justice reform, including the vetting process. As concerns Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Commission is currently preparing its Opinion on the merits of the country's application for EU membership. The timing of the Commission's Opinion depends on Bosnia and Herzegovina's capacity to address the Commission's inquiries throughout this process.

Good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are essential elements of the Stabilisation and Association and enlargement processes. The Commission therefore welcomes the Senat's support for strengthening regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, and advancing the promotion of stability in the Southeast European region. This forms a central part of the political and implementation-related perspectives of EU engagement in the Western Balkans region, especially in relation to transport and energy connectivity, support for young people, promotion of civil society and security, and the increasing importance of regional economic integration. This is also evident in the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) multi-country programming, and can be reflected in the cross-border programmes and initiatives. We are grateful for continuing strong Romanian support for this work.

As regards the Republic of Moldova, the Commission notes the views expressed. EU-Moldova relations are developed within the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy and the Eastern Partnership, with the Association Agreement with the Republic of Moldova aimed at promoting the political association and economic integration between the country and the EU.

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

Yours faithfully,

*Julian King
Member of the Commission*