



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 15.7.2022
C(2022) 5155 final*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Camera Deputaților for its Opinion on the Communication on EU Enlargement Policy {COM(2021) 644 final}.

The Commission welcomes the support of the Camera Deputaților to the enlargement policy as a geostrategic investment in peace, stability, security and economic growth in the whole of Europe.

The application for EU membership by Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Georgia has sent a clear message about the EU's role as a beacon of peace and stability on the continent. The Commission has swiftly prepared its Opinions on the three applications. As a result of this rigorous and robust assessment, the Commission recommended to grant the perspective to become a member of the EU to all three applicant countries and to grant candidate status for Ukraine and Georgia, on the understanding that progress in certain key areas will be pursued. Regarding Georgia, the Commission recommended to grant Georgia candidate status, once certain priorities will have been addressed. The European Council of 23-24 June took a historic decision and fully endorsed the Commission's recommendations. With this European perspective, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia would be set on a firm track towards the EU.

In the current geopolitical context, our priority remains the Western Balkans. We are committed, more than ever, to bring the entire region within the European Union. It is more important now than ever to work on that not only fast, but with full commitment and will by all the institutions. This is reflected in the depth of engagement at political and technical level with the Western Balkans. EUR 3.3. billion have been mobilised to support the Western Balkans in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Western Balkans have also been associated in an unprecedented manner to mechanisms used for European Union Member States such as joint procurement. The Commission has then come forward with an ambitious economic and investment plan to support the long-term recovery. With a focus on green and digital transition, the October 2020 Economic and

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Investment Plan for the Western Balkans already provides a response to help address the economic impact arising from the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

The Commission is firmly committed to advancing the accession process with Albania and North Macedonia with the aim of starting formal accession as soon as possible. The Commission looks forward to holding the first Intergovernmental Conference with both countries without delay.

To maintain a credible perspective, the revised methodology adopted by the Commission in February 2020 has enhanced the focus on fundamental reforms such as rule of law, fundamental freedoms, sustainable economy and functioning of democratic institutions. Reforms in these areas remain crucial for preparing the candidate countries and potential candidates to meet the requirements of European Union membership. Progress on reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation are also essential to the European Union accession process. Enlargement is a clear, merit-based process.

Alignment with the common foreign and security policy of the European Union by all Western Balkan partners is of the utmost importance, particularly in the current geopolitical context. Most Western Balkan partners continue to cooperate closely with the European Union on common security and defence policy matters, including through their important contributions to the European Union's common security and defence policy missions and operations.

Work on youth is at the heart of the European Union's enlargement process from two different but complementary perspectives. There is the direct impact that our policies have on young people. This ranges from ensuring that their fundamental rights are respected to support for economic development and youth employment. The Commission recognises the importance of youth as a vector of communication on enlargement and the European Union as a whole. Here, for example, we have supported the creation of a network of European Young Ambassadors across the Western Balkans.

As a recognition of the sacrifices that young people have made during the pandemic, the European Union has declared 2022 the European Year of Youth. This is an important milestone that puts a spotlight on young Europeans and their important role in our society. Under the slogan 'Activate Youth', Tirana European Youth Capital for 2022 encourages active participation focusing on the importance of European youth to build a better future – greener, more inclusive and digital.

Support to the development of human capital in the region is also a key element of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans with a strong focus on improving labour market participation, especially of young people, focusing in particular on increasing employment opportunities and developing entrepreneurial skills. One of the ten flagships of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans consists in the launch of youth guarantee schemes to support young people in accessing the labour market.

To advance on its European Union path, Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to fulfil the 14 key priorities set out in the May 2019 Commission Opinion on the country's application for European Union membership, including on democracy, rule of law and reconciliation. Bosnia and Herzegovina's authorities need to demonstrate that they can deliver on reforms. The Commission will continue supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina on its European Union path and will report on the implementation of the 14 key priorities, with special attention to those which constitute a substantial set of reforms in its next Enlargement Package. This will allow the European Council to revert to decide on the matter of candidate country status for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

For the accession process to be more effective, combatting the flow of disinformation, misinformation and foreign influence operations through proactive and positive communication is essential. More broadly, promoting freedom of expression and independent journalism in the enlargement region remains a priority.

The Commission has deepened its policy dialogue with enlargement partners on countering hybrid threats, in particular on cyberresilience, the protection of critical infrastructures, strategic communication and addressing misinformation and disinformation. Building cybersecurity capacity is a crucial part of the new European Union cybersecurity strategy. In the wake of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, the Commission is stepping up support in the field of cybersecurity with due attention to the Western Balkan partners which are most at risk with regards to cyberattacks.

Regional economic integration is an essential element in boosting the economic development of the Western Balkans, by creating a larger market, which attracts greater investment and provides better employment opportunities. Inclusive integration in line with European Union standards will also play a significant role in preparing the region for integration into the European Union's single market. The Commission is supporting the implementation of the Common Regional Market, as agreed by the six economies of the Western Balkans in the 2020 Berlin process summit in Sofia. Regional economic integration is also an essential element in ensuring the potential benefits arising from the European Union's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans are fully realised.

The Commission believes that the political dialogue with national Parliaments is essential for linking the institutions and the citizens of the European Union and looks forward to continuing it with the Camera Deputaţilor in the future.

Yours faithfully,

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Vice-President*

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Member of the Commission*