EU enlargement in 2014 and beyond: progress and challenges

In a set of annual reports adopted today, the European Commission has assessed the progress made over the past year by the countries wishing to join the EU in the Western Balkans and by Turkey, and the challenges ahead.

Presenting the annual Enlargement Package, Commissioner Štefan Füle said: "Five years ago, we set out to strengthen the credibility and the transformative power of enlargement policy. We put a particular emphasis on three pillars: rule of law in 2012, economic governance in 2013 and this year, we’re setting out new ideas to support public administration reform, and strengthening of democratic institutions. Today, this approach is bearing fruit. The process is credible and is bringing concrete results through reforms that gradually transform the countries concerned, improving stability in our immediate neighbourhood. It also makes the countries better prepared for the EU entry and for the responsibilities of the membership".

**Fundamentals first**

The enlargement strategy adopted today confirms the approach based on fundamentals – the rule of law, economic governance and public administration reform.

The **rule of law** is at the heart of the enlargement process: countries concerned need to tackle issues such as judicial reform and the fight against organised crime and corruption early in the accession negotiations, to demonstrate a solid track record of sustainable results.

Drawing on the experience of the European Semester, the Commission has launched improved processes of cooperation with the enlargement countries to strengthen their **economic governance**, including through National Economic Reform Programmes, with focus on fiscal stability and structural reforms for improved competitiveness and growth.

Finally, the new strategy places particular emphasis on the challenge of reforming **public administration** and strengthening of democratic institutions, which remain weak in most enlargement countries, with limited administrative capacity, high level of politicisation and a lack of transparency.

**Overview by country**

**Montenegro** has taken further steps in accession negotiations. Twelve chapters have been opened so far, of which two provisionally closed. Implementation of rule of law reforms has started. Tangible results on the ground are now needed and will be key to determining the overall pace of the accession negotiations.

The opening of accession negotiations is a turning point in the EU's relations with **Serbia**. Now Serbia needs to continue delivering on its reform priorities in a sustained manner as the pace of negotiations will depend on progress in key areas, notably on rule of law and
the normalisation process with Kosovo. New momentum needs to be generated in the
dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina in order to tackle key outstanding issues and open
a new phase in the normalisation of relations.

The EU accession process with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is at an
impasse. Action is needed to reverse recent backsliding, notably as regards freedom of
expression and of the media and the independence of the judiciary. There is an urgent
need to find a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the name issue. Government
and opposition should take steps to restore political dialogue in parliament.

Albania was granted candidate status in June as recognition for its reform efforts and
progress made in meeting the required conditionality. The country needs to build on and
consolidate the reform momentum and focus its efforts on tackling its EU-integration
challenges in a sustainable and inclusive way. Both government and opposition need to
ensure political debate takes place primarily in parliament.

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains at a standstill on its European integration path.
Following the October general elections, it will be essential for the country to tackle urgent
socio-economic reforms and to progress on its European agenda.

The initialling of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo in July is a major
milestone in EU-Kosovo relations. Now Kosovo needs to deliver on key reforms, in
particular the rule of law.

Implementation of certain reform commitments by Turkey has continued, such as the
2013 democratisation package, and steps have been taken towards a settlement of the
Kurdish issue. However, there have also been grounds for serious concerns regarding the
independence of the judiciary and the protection of fundamental freedoms. Active and
credible accession negotiations provide the most suitable framework for exploiting the full
potential of EU-Turkey relations. Opening negotiations on the relevant chapters on rule of
law and fundamental rights would provide a roadmap for reforms in these key areas.

For detailed findings and recommendations on each country see Memos:

Montenegro
Serbia
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
Albania
Bosnia and Herzegovina
Kosovo
Turkey

Background

[COUNTRY BOX]

Accession negotiations were opened in June 2012. Twelve negotiating chapters have been
opened, of which two provisionally closed. The screening process was completed in May
2014. The rule of law chapters, chapter 23 (judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24
(justice, freedom and security) were opened in December 2013, after Montenegro adopted
comprehensive action plans for these chapters.
**SERBIA:** candidate - applied in 2009, obtained candidate status in March 2012. The EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was launched in March 2011. The First agreement of principles governing normalisation of relations was reached between Belgrade and Pristina in April 2013. The momentum of reforms has also been reinvigorated in Serbia. The European Council decided in June 2013 to open accession negotiations and the first Intergovernmental Conference on Serbia’s accession negotiations was held in January 2014. The EU accession negotiations are now underway. The analytical examination of the *acquis*, or screening process, is ongoing and is planned to be completed in March. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) entered into force on 1 September 2013.

**THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA:** candidate since 2005. The country continues to sufficiently meet the political criteria and it is at a high level of alignment with the EU *acquis*. The Commission maintains its recommendation to open accession negotiations, but regrets the backward steps of the past years. Decisive action is needed to address concerns about increased politicisation and growing shortcomings with regard to the independence of the judiciary and freedom of expression so that its recommendation can be sustained in future years. It is responsibility of both government and opposition to ensure that political debate takes place primarily in parliament and to contribute to creating the conditions for its proper functioning. The Commission has recommended six years in a row that accession negotiations be opened. The Council has not yet taken a decision on this. The Commission believes that if screening and the Council discussions on the negotiating framework were under way, this process would have also contributed to creating the conditions to finding a negotiated and mutually accepted solution to the name issue.

**ALBANIA:** candidate - applied in 2009; granted candidate status in June 2014, based on the Commission’s assessment that Albania continued to implement and consolidate reforms, in particular in judiciary and the fight against organised crime and corruption. Work on this has continued, with major operations against drug-related crimes. For opening accession negotiations, Albania will need to consolidate and intensify reforms in key priority areas, notably as regards the rule of law. It is responsibility of both government and opposition to ensure that political debate takes place primarily in parliament and to contribute to creating the conditions for its proper functioning.

**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA:** potential candidate - has a European perspective like the rest of the Western Balkans. Country remains at a standstill in the European integration process with the Stabilisation and Association Agreement still not in force. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s leaders need to decisively engage in a comprehensive reform agenda after the October general elections. They need to address the socio-economic concerns of the citizens and improve efficiency and functionality of institutions at all levels of government as well as the coordination between them, necessary to progress on the EU path.

**KOSOVO:** potential candidate – shares a European perspective with the rest of the Western Balkans region. The EU-facilitated dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade was launched in March 2011. The First agreement of principles governing normalisation of relations was reached between Pristina and Belgrade in April 2013. Negotiations on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo were concluded and the agreement was initialled in July 2014.

**TURKEY:** candidate - applied in 1987. Accession negotiations started in October 2005; 14 chapters are opened of which one provisionally closed. Chapter 22 – regional policy and coordination of structural instruments, was officially opened in November 2013. The Commission underlines the importance for the EU to enhance its engagement with Turkey, so that it remains the benchmark for reforms in the country.
ICELAND: following a decision of the Icelandic government, accession negotiations have been put on hold since May 2013.

More information
The documents can be found here

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