



A CREDIBLE **ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE** FOR  
AND ENHANCED **EU ENGAGEMENT** WITH  
**THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Commission Communication of 6 February 2018

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*Enlargement  
Negotiations*



The Western Balkans Strategy follows the [2017 European Council conclusions](#) and President Juncker's [State of the Union](#) speech

*“The European Council [...] reaffirmed its [unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans](#). Welcoming the progress made by the countries of the region, the European Council stresses that the EU remains committed and engaged at all levels to support them in conducting EU-oriented reforms and projects.”*

European Council conclusions

March 2017



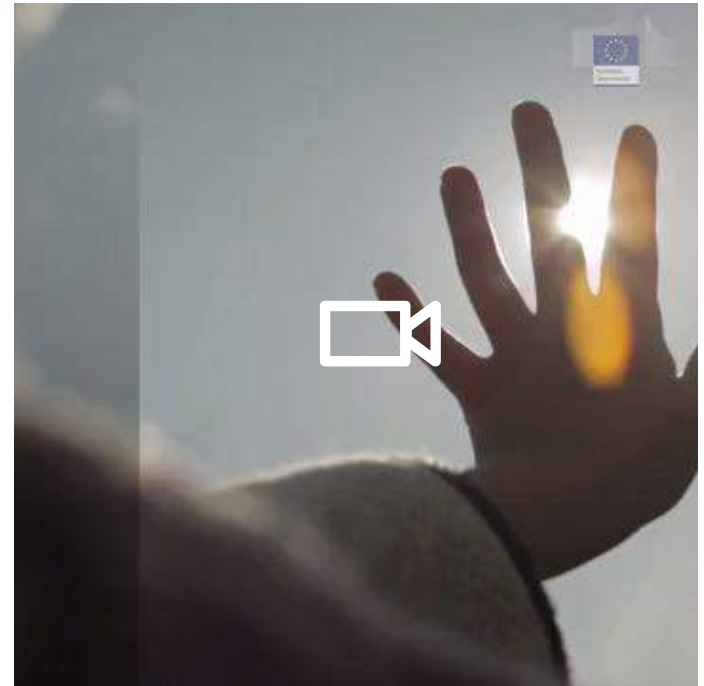
*«If we want more stability in our neighbourhood, then we must maintain a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans. It is clear that there will be no further enlargement during the mandate of this Commission and this Parliament. No candidate is ready. But thereafter the European Union will be greater than 27 in number. Accession candidates must give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights utmost priority in the negotiations.»*

European Commission President **Jean-Claude Juncker**  
State of the Union Address

**13 September 2017**

On 6 of February the European Commission adopted the Communication

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## Why is this Strategy relevant for the EU ?

Credible enlargement perspective for the region in the EU's own interest:

- Strategic investment in the EU's security and stability
- Addressing **common challenges**: migration, terrorism, organised crime, economic development, etc.



# Main elements of the Western Balkans Strategy

## 1. Reaffirms the **EUROPEAN FUTURE** of the Western Balkans

- Historic **window of opportunity for all** Western Balkans

In the coming years, **all Western Balkan countries have the chance to move forward** on their respective European paths.

The Commission assesses all the countries in a fair and objective manner on the basis of **their own merits** and at the speed at which they achieve progress in meeting the established criteria.

- **2025** perspective for Montenegro and Serbia – not a fixed accession date

# Main elements of the Western Balkans Strategy

## 2. Action points for WESTERN BALKANS

- Enlargement perspective in the hands of the countries themselves as this remains a merit-based process
- Progress only possible with strong political will, the delivery of real and sustained reforms, and definitive solutions to disputes with neighbours



# EU relations with the Western Balkans

## OVERVIEW OF THE EU RELATIONS WITH THE WESTERN BALKANS

**Bosnia and Herzegovina** –  
Potential candidate  
Submitted application to join  
the EU in February 2016.

**Montenegro** – Candidate country  
Opened chapters – 30  
Provisionally closed chapters – 3

**Albania** – Candidate country  
Commission recommends Council  
to decide that accession  
negotiations be opened in light of  
progress achieved.

**Serbia** – Candidate country  
Opened chapters – 12  
Provisionally closed chapters – 2

**Kosovo** –  
Potential candidate  
In April 2016, the Stabilisation  
and Association Agreement  
entered into force.

**The former Yugoslav Republic of  
Macedonia** – Candidate country  
Commission recommends Council to  
decide that accession negotiations be  
opened in light of progress achieved.

## Specific areas of focus for the Western Balkans



### Reforms in the **rule of law, fundamental rights** and **good governance**

Deliver on **judicial reforms**, fight against **corruption** and **organised crime** and on implementation of fundamental rights

Enhance the functioning of **democratic institutions** and **public administration reform**



### Strengthened economy

Address **structural weaknesses**, low competitiveness and high unemployment rates

Enhanced connectivity



### Reconciliation and Good neighbourly relations

Commit, in both word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past, by **achieving reconciliation and solving open issues** well before accession.

# Main elements of the Western Balkans Strategy

## 3. EU measures for the region - Six flagship initiatives

Strengthening the rule of law



**Establishment of detailed action plans and advisory missions** expanded to all Western Balkans countries. Greater use will be made of **leverage provided in the negotiating frameworks** with Montenegro and Serbia.

Reinforced engagement on security and migration



Strengthen the **fight against organised crime, terrorism and violent extremism**; cooperation on **migration and border management**. **Europol liaison officers** posted in the region; **Joint Investigation Teams** further promoted.

Enhanced support for socio-economic development



Expand the **Western Balkans Investment Framework**, **put in place a guarantee fund**, supporting start-ups, access to finance of SMEs, research and innovation. Support the development of the **Regional Economic Area**. Increased focus on employment and social reforms. Funding under **Erasmus+** will be doubled.

Increased connectivity



Within the region and with the EU and new investment support. More effective use of the **Connecting Europe Facility** and the EU's **Energy Union** to be expanded to the region. Work to complete the **Regional Electricity Market** in the Western Balkans and a **new rail strategy** to be pursued.

A Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans



Roadmap to facilitate **lowering roaming costs**, support to the **deployment of broadband** and development of eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth and **digital skills**; capacity building in **trust and security** and the **digitalisation of industry**.

Support for reconciliation and good neighbourly relations



Support to transitional justice, missing persons and increased cooperation in education, culture, youth and sport, and expanding the scope of the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office**. The Western Balkans as part of the European Year of Cultural Heritage.

and an **Action Plan with 57 measures**

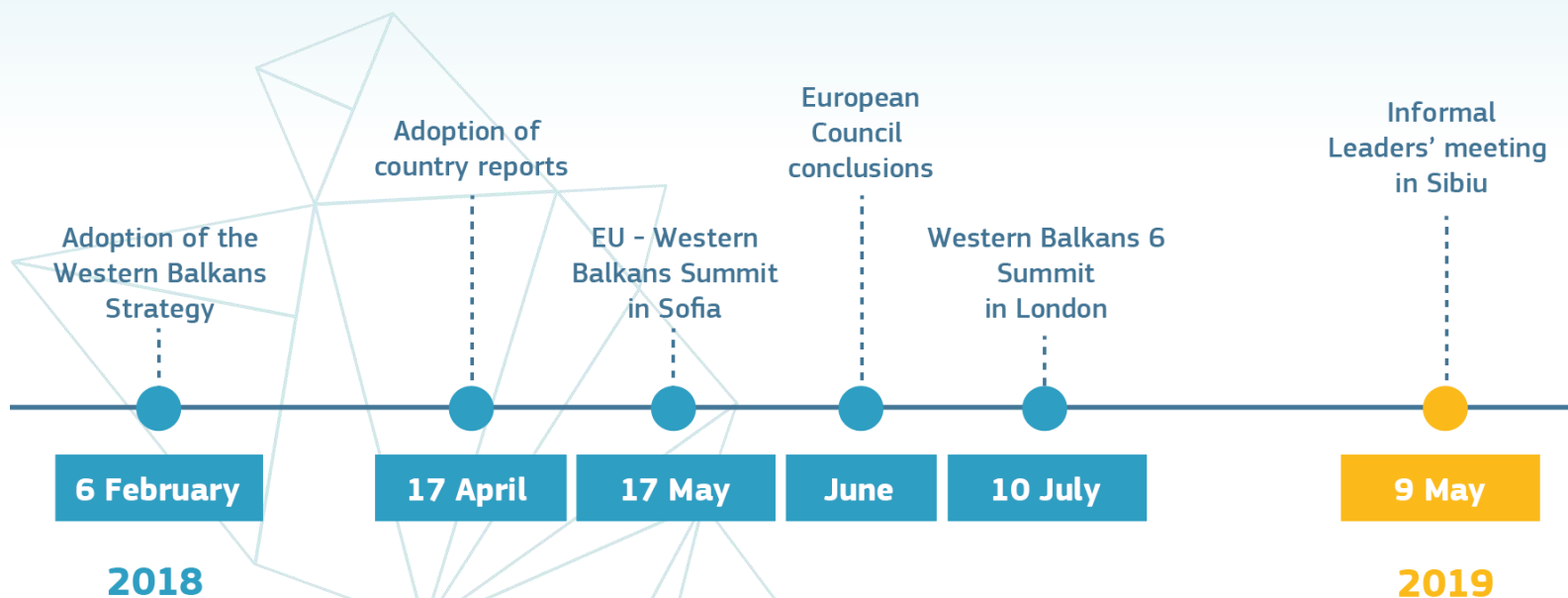
# Main elements of the Western Balkans Strategy

## 4. PREPARING THE EU to welcome new members

The EU must be stronger and more solid, before it can get bigger

- **Institutional issues**
  - Further enhancing the use of **qualified majority** voting in the Council
  - Further strengthen the enforcement of the **rule of law** in the EU
  - Assessment on how key policy areas (e.g. agriculture, cohesion policy, budget) would be affected by the accession of a new Member State, well before accession negotiations are closed
- **Funding**
  - increase of the EU funding for the Western Balkans until 2020
  - Gradual seamless transition to allow the necessary absorption capacity to be developed
  - Multi-annual Financial Framework with specific provisions on enlargement

# Milestones



# High level visits to the region

## Reaffirming the EU support and new momentum





## EU - Western Balkans Sofia Summit, May 2018

The summit:

- reaffirmed the **EU's commitment** towards its Western Balkans partners and reiterated the region's **belonging to the European family**
- **strengthened links** between the EU and the Western Balkans in infrastructure, digital and human connectivity
- reaffirmed the need to **tackle jointly common challenges**, such as security, migration, geopolitical developments and good neighbourly relations

Brought together **EU and Western Balkans leaders** for the first time after the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003.

# Want to know more?

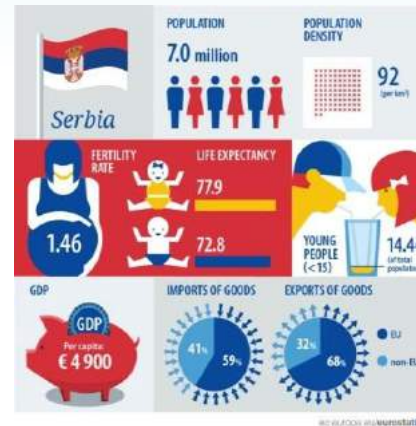
User-friendly material on [EU – Western Balkans webpage](#) of DG Neighbourhood and Enlargement negotiations

**A CREDIBLE ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE FOR AND ENHANCED EU ENGAGEMENT WITH THE WESTERN BALKANS**

**SEE NEW FLEETSHIP INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS**

Through its flagship initiatives, the Western Balkans Strategy sets out the EU's unprecedented support to the transformative process in the Western Balkans, targeting specific areas of interest for both the EU and the Western Balkan countries:

- INITIATIVE TO STRENGTHEN THE RULE OF LAW**  
Stronger links with an enlarged region will be supported by all Western Balkan countries. Assessment of reform implementation will be enhanced, including through new advisory missions. Greater use will be made of language courses in the negotiating framework with Montenegro and Serbia.
- INITIATIVE TO REINFORCE ENGAGEMENT ON SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**  
Reinforced cooperation on fighting organized crime, countering terrorism and cyber, economic and social security, and on human security and regional management. Support to the UNHCR will be further increased in the region. Joint investigations teams further promoted and closer cooperation with the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation in Albania reinforced.
- INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**  
This will include supporting the Western Balkans Investment Framework, a significant boost in the provision of guarantees to SMEs in private investment, support to start-ups and SMEs and greater trade facilitation. It will also include more investment with our main focus on entrepreneurship and social services, with increased financial assistance to support the digital sector, in particular education and health, funding under Erasmus+ will be awarded.
- INITIATIVE TO INCREASE TRANSPORT AND ENERGY COOPERATION**  
While the region works with the EU, including new investment support, more effective use will be made of the Connecting Europe Facility in the Western Balkans. Also, the EU Energy Dialogue will be expanded to the Western Balkans.
- INITIATIVE FOR A DIGITAL AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS**  
This will include a roadmap for digital training, learning tools, support to the employment of IT specialists and development of e-governance, e-innovation, which will digitalize public services.
- INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT RECONCILIATION AND GOOD NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS**  
This will include support to transnational, meeting persons and increased cooperation in education, culture, health and sports with neighboring EU states. The Regional Health Cooperation Office, the Western Balkans will be fully established in the European Year of Cultural Heritage. The EU – Western Balkans Heritage Route will be launched.



**ENLARGEMENT OF THE EUROPEAN UNION:**  
How does it work?



**SERBIA**  
ON THE PATH TOWARDS THE EU

**KEY MILESTONES**

- 2000: EU accession negotiations start
- 2002: EU accession negotiations start
- 2004: EU accession negotiations start
- 2006: EU accession negotiations start
- 2008: EU accession negotiations start
- 2010: EU accession negotiations start
- 2012: EU accession negotiations start
- 2014: EU accession negotiations start
- 2016: EU accession negotiations start
- 2018: EU accession negotiations start
- 2020: EU accession negotiations start

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ATTENTION



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