



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



1 THE WAY FORWARD IN VIEW OF A POSSIBLE 2025 PERSPECTIVE

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.

This requires **serious efforts** on key reforms including **rule of law** and **fundamental rights**, tackling **corruption and organised crime**, improving the functioning of **democratic institutions**, **public administration** and the **economy**, and fostering **good neighbourly relations** and **solving bilateral disputes**.

2 LOOKING AHEAD - INDICATIVE TIMETABLE FOR 2018



This is an indicative illustration of steps required for Montenegro and Serbia, the two countries who are already in negotiations, to complete the accession process in a 2025 perspective. It is purely indicative and based on the best case scenario. It implies no automaticity; the process is and will remain objective and merit-based. It serves to illustrate how quickly the transformational reforms would have to be adopted and implemented for this scenario to be realised. Each country will be evaluated independently on its own merit in accordance with the progress achieved in meeting the established conditions.

The next steps



2018

Montenegro and Serbia are the two countries with which accession talks are currently underway.



Completion of interim benchmarks

An even stronger focus on meeting the interim benchmarks in the rule of law area is vital. These requirements and conditions are already clearly spelt out by the Commission in its regular reporting. The countries' leaders must now tackle the existing challenges forcefully and with clearer commitment. In Serbia's case, the interim benchmarks related to the normalisation of relations with Kosovo (chapter 35) must be met and a comprehensive, legally-binding normalisation agreement concluded urgently.



Definition of EU common positions in key policy areas

The Commission will prepare a Communication with assessments of the effect of future accession on key policy areas such as agriculture, cohesion policy, and the budget. This will enable Member States to define EU common positions for the negotiations in the relevant chapters with a full understanding of the likely impact as well as to define any transitional measures. The application of the principle of free movement of workers to new Member States is an issue of concern to EU and Western Balkan citizens alike. The nature of transitional measures in this area will therefore have to be addressed in the negotiations. In the case of Serbia, implementation of the comprehensive, legally-binding agreement on normalisation of relations with Kosovo will need to have advanced substantially.



Closing negotiations

Once all closing benchmarks for all chapters have been met, including a credible and sustainable track record of reform implementation, notably on the rule of law, Member States would be in a position to agree to closing overall negotiations in an inter-governmental conference. This would require continued, irreversible progress on the reform agenda. In the case of Serbia, irreversible implementation of the comprehensive, legally-binding agreement with Kosovo reflecting the consolidation of the full normalisation of relations will need to have been reached.



Signature of the Accession Treaty

Once the country or countries have concluded negotiations, the Accession Treaty can be signed, after the opinion of the Commission, the consent of the European Parliament and the unanimous decision of the Council on the admission of the new Member States.



Accession

Once the ratification of the Accession Treaty in all EU Member States and the acceding country or countries is completed, taking into the account the respective national constitutional requirements, accession could then take place.

Possible 2025 perspective