



TWELVE PROPOSALS FOR EU ENLARGEMENT FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS

The European Union opened its doors for the Western Balkans (WB) countries at the Thessalonica Summit in 2003, on the condition that membership criteria are met. Fifteen years later, only Croatia managed to join the EU in 2013. Serbia and Montenegro have been negotiating membership since 2014 and 2012, respectively. Macedonia and Albania have been promised the opening of accession negotiations in June 2019, also if the criteria are met. Bosnia and Herzegovina applied for membership and they are currently finalising their responses to the Questionnaire, looking forward to the Commission's *Avis*. Kosovo* is not included in the accession process since five EU member states do not recognise it as an independent state.

In February 2018, the European Commission published the Communication "*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*", providing directions for future activities with the ultimate goal to enlarge to the WB. The document outlines a possibility for the first enlargement to occur by the end of 2025, indicating the front-runner countries - Montenegro and Serbia - providing that the conditions are met, and in the foreseeable future for the rest of the WB as well. The first EU-WB summit was held after 15 years in Sofia in May 2018. However, enlargement was not even mentioned and the topic instead was connectivity of the EU and the WB. It is evident that, both in the EU and in the WB, there is no critical mass to use all available resources for implementing the WB 2025 project. The outcome of the 2019 European Parliament elections, the composition of the new Commission, situation in the EU member states, finalisation of Brexit and the adoption of the new MFF 2021-2027 would set the tone of enlargement after 2020.

Nevertheless, it must be stressed that enlargement is a successful EU policy, maybe the most successful one in the foreign policy arena. **In order for enlargement to remain credible as a policy and EU as a policy actor in the WB region, the way enlargement is run needs to change.** We are at a crossroads: the process of enlargement will either accelerate and lead to the final goal of new members joining the EU in a foreseeable future or it will lose its purpose.

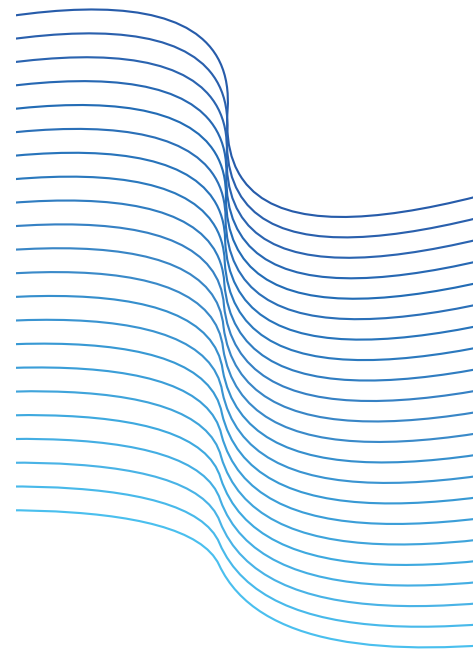
The European Movement in Serbia, together with its partners from the WB region, developed **Twelve Proposals for the EU Enlargement**. They outline the ways to re-energize the process, making it successful in the WB without diluting the membership criteria or abandoning fundamental values of the EU. This particularly stands for the rule of law that is under threat both in the EU and in the WB.

Basic assumption necessary for the success of the enlargement process is that the EU sincerely wants to accept new members and that the WB sincerely wants to join the EU and fulfil membership criteria. Proposals are mostly directed to the EU institutions and EU member states since they are defining the policy, setting the dynamic and methodology of the process. The WB (potential) candidates should fulfil their obligations regarding membership criteria that are already defined and well-known, and not to attempt mimicking their fulfilment.

THE EUROPEAN MOVEMENT IN SERBIA HAS DEFINED THE FOLLOWING TWELVE PROPOSALS:

- 1. The EU should boldly reform and then implement its enlargement strategy.** The European Commission's Communication has brought back enlargement into the EU policy mainstream as part of its agenda for a new Europe in the year 2025. It is meant to give boost to pro-European and pro-reform forces in the WB region in general, and in Serbia and Montenegro in particular. The general discourse after publishing the Communication demonstrated that both in the EU and in the WB there is still no critical mass to use all available resources to implement WB 2025 project.
- 2. The EU should demonstrate the political readiness to make enlargement functional, putting it in the centre of its policy by devoting resources and funds, as it was the case in the 2004/2007 enlargement.** The EU should be ready to *put its money where its mouth is* as the flagship initiatives in the new EC Enlargement Communication rely more on the so-called *soft measures* (adoption of policies, new institutions etc.) while they are not so explicit on the issues of additional financing.

* 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.



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- 3. The EC is right to insist on three crucial conditions that are linked to WB progress towards accession: the respect of the rule of law, further economic and social development and the advancement of regional cooperation.** The EC reaffirmed the merit-based approach to enlargement because the gaps in the accession process among WB countries have become too wide. The insistence on the respect of the rule of law and fundamental rights is one of the reasons why there is still large support for EU integration in the region. However, the EC should be straightforward in naming both concrete practices and those who practice state capture and undermine the rule of law.
 - 4. The methodology of running accession negotiations should be altered** in order to move quickly toward the opening of chapters and shifting the bulk of reforms needed for the period after a chapter is opened. **Current methodology of accession negotiations became an end in itself and it is questionable whether it could lead to closing the negotiations and membership.** *Roadmaps*, as a new instrument in the accession process, should be introduced in every phase of accession in order to streamline the reforms necessary for reaching the next step. The existing mechanisms should be enhanced to give better results.
 - 5. The qualified majority voting procedure in the European Council should be extended to the decision-making process in enlargement policy.** Currently, a member state has at least 76 opportunities to halt the accession of a candidate country. Reducing this would significantly relax negotiation process and enable faster progress. Unanimity should be maintained for the initial and final decisions in the process, namely to start and close accession negotiations with an individual country. The EU should insist that the resolution of issues is a duty of both (potential) candidate countries among themselves and between (potential) candidate countries and individual EU member states on a bilateral basis.
 - 6. The EU should, in particular, devote more funds to enlargement to the Western Balkans. This increase would start with the new MFF 2021-2027, with the goal of reaching 2% of individual WB countries' GDP in the year of their accession to the EU.** The increase of pre-accession assistance would enable the WB countries to be better prepared for accession, meeting the *acquis* standards and improving the economic convergence with the EU.
 - 7. It is necessary to develop, strengthen and maintain the capacities of countries to manage the increased funds.** Therefore it is necessary to ensure that the new financial pre-accession instrument for the MFF 2021-2027 is prepared on time and harmonised with the requirements of structural funds – especially in programming, financial management and control. The WB countries should secure a continuous project pipeline and develop and implement efficient recruitment and retention policies for staff dealing with the EU funds.
 - 8. The EU should extend the benefits of its internal market to the region prior to accession as much as possible.** This should be done through the existing Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the WB as the legal frameworks for adaptation to single market rules and for economic development. Through full exercise of the possibilities envisaged in the existing SAAs, some benefits of the EU internal market can be extended to the WB without the need to amend the existing agreements or the EU legal framework.
 - 9. The EU should apply to its trade with the WB the same recommendations it gave to the WB in the Enlargement Communication, and sign bilateral Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance of Industrial Products** with the WB countries to eliminate technical barriers to trade, which are currently the main obstacles when goods are exported from the WB to the European Union.
 - 10. The EU should guide the WB in using state aid rules within the SAAs as a policy tool to gradually redirect public funds from perpetuating economic inefficiencies to supporting investments compatible with the internal market.** However, the EU should also demonstrate flexibility for national investment policies aligned with the EU agenda, allowing for the reindustrialization of the region.
 - 11. The EU should start perceiving the WB as if it were already a part of the EU.** In particular, this should be done by including the WB in the internal work of the EU institutions as much as possible (albeit without voting rights), as well as in discussions about the future of the Union. This approach would strengthen the much-needed feeling of ownership of the process, of acceptance and equality, the lack of which is the strongest argument of anti-EU forces in the WB. Additionally, the EU should extend its internal developmental, regional and infrastructural strategies to include the WB as much as possible in all areas and policies where feasible, such as the Energy Union and the EU Industrial Policy.
 - 12. Developing the rule of law and reaching the EU standards in judicial independence, in the fight against corruption and organised crime and in the protection of fundamental rights** by the WB should be the ultimate test of readiness for EU membership. **No leniency** should be accorded in this area. In order to change the situation of “state capture” in the WB, the EU should identify where such state capture exists and **name the offending actors** in the individual country reports.

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