



# EU Engagement in THE WESTERN BALKANS

The European Union has long supported its partners in the Western Balkans on their respective integration paths. To underline our commitment to the European future of the region, in our shared interest, the European Commission adopted a strategy for '[A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans](#)' in February 2018. The Strategy includes **six flagship initiatives** - specific actions that the Commission will take over the next years to support the transformation efforts of the Western Balkans in areas of mutual interest. These range from strengthening the rule of law, reinforcing cooperation on security and migration and expanding the EU Energy Union to the Western Balkans, to lowering roaming charges and rolling out broadband in the region. The Strategy also underlines the need for the EU to be prepared to welcome new members once they have met the rigorous criteria for doing so.



“ *If we want more stability in our neighbourhood, then we must maintain a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans.* ”

**Jean-Claude Juncker**  
President of the European Commission

A credible enlargement policy is a key component of the [EU's Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy](#). It is not only **a strategic investment in Europe's security and prosperity**, but has already contributed greatly to peace in formerly war-torn areas. The EU's enlargement conditionality, as well as the focus on strong regional cooperation helps create a political environment conducive to bilateral issues being resolved or no longer being politically instrumentalised.

EU support for and cooperation with its partners in the region **delivers concrete benefits today**: fostering economic development to create jobs, opportunities to travel and to study abroad, improvement of governance and rule of law, strengthening good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation.

## SIGNIFICANT STEPS FOR EUROPEAN INTEGRATION:

- Stabilisation and Association Agreements have entered into force for all **six partners**.
- Accession negotiations are progressing well with **Montenegro** (32 chapters opened, 3 provisionally closed) and **Serbia** (16 chapters opened, 2 provisionally closed).
- In June 2018, the Council set out a path towards opening accession negotiations with **the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** and **Albania** in June 2019, based on continued progress and tangible results, maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum.

- **North Macedonia** has continued to implement the EU reform agenda at a steady pace and has delivered tangible and sustainable results. The Prespa agreement sets an example of reconciliation for the region and has now entered into force.
- **Albania** has consolidated its achievements in the rule of law areas. These include steady implementation of the justice reform, with tangible results delivered by the vetting of judges and prosecutors, and renewed focus on the fight against organised crime which led to a drastic reduction of drug cultivation.
- Following the country's EU membership application and the submission of replies to the Questionnaire, the Commission has prepared the Opinion on **Bosnia and Herzegovina** on which basis the Council will decide on the next steps of the country's EU integration process.
- **Kosovo** is focused on implementing its Stabilisation and Association Agreement which entered into force in 2016 and the related European Reform Agenda with key reform priorities. In July 2018, the Commission confirmed the fulfilment of all benchmarks for visa liberalisation.
- Belgrade and Pristina have committed to the **EU facilitated Dialogue**, which brought concrete achievements for the benefit of the people of Kosovo, Serbia and across the entire region. With facilitation by High Representative/ Vice-President, Kosovo and Serbia are engaged in talks on comprehensive normalisation of their relations.

## REGIONAL COOPERATION

There is strong EU political and financial support for cooperation in the region, which acts as a catalyst for reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. In addition to its strong political support for the Western Balkans and the Berlin Process, the EU is providing concrete financial support for **seven regional co-operation organisations**, including the [Regional Cooperation Council](#), to boost economic development, improve connectivity, and enhance security and many other benefits across the region. The EU is supporting the Western Balkans initiative to establish a **Regional Economic Area** to make the region of some 18 million people more attractive to investors, creating new jobs and opportunities within the region.



## CONNECTIVITY AGENDA

The EU is supporting the establishment of a **Regional Electricity Market** and has signed a **Transport Community Treaty** with the region. Well-developed and connected transport and energy infrastructure is vital to regional cooperation, economic growth and attracting new investment. The EU pledged up to **€1 billion** for infrastructure in the Western Balkans and has set aside funds for related technical assistance. More than **€700 million** has already been committed to specific projects.



“ Accession of the Western Balkans is also in the own interest of the European Union and it is more relevant than ever.

**Johannes Hahn**

Commissioner of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations

## THE EU IS THE BIGGEST DONOR IN THE WESTERN BALKANS



**IPA:** The [Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance](#) (IPA) is the means by which the EU supports reforms in the enlargement region with **financial and technical help**. IPA II aims at supporting the partners in the reforms they have to undertake throughout the accession process, resulting in progressive, positive developments in the region. IPA II builds on the results already achieved by dedicating nearly **€4 billion** among individual partners in the Western Balkans and an additional **€3 billion** in multi-country funds for the period 2014-2020.

EU pre-accession funds are a sound investment into the **future of both the Western Balkans and the EU itself**. They help the IPA beneficiaries complete political and economic reforms, preparing them for the rights and obligations that come with EU membership. Those reforms provide their citizens with better opportunities and will contribute raising standards closer to the ones enjoyed by EU citizens.



**Strong economic relationship:** The EU is the [main trading partner](#) for Western Balkans partners and accounts for **more than two-thirds** of foreign direct investment in the region. **The volume of trade between the EU and the Western Balkans in 2018 totalled €54.4 billion.**



**Creating opportunities for youth and innovation:** Direct participation in EU programmes such as [Erasmus+](#), [Horizon 2020](#), [Creative Europe](#), and [COSME](#) helps the Western Balkans partners boost their development by creating opportunities for young people and researchers. In 2016, **more than 5,000 students and staff** from the Western Balkans took advantage of exchange opportunities provided by Erasmus+. Additionally, approximately 7,000 young people and youth workers participated in youth exchanges, another 50,000 persons were involved on the local level in different conferences, meetings or large-scale events organised through Erasmus+. The Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme will provide more than **€125 million** in EU funding between 2014 and 2020 to boost research and innovation in the region.

*“ The people of the Balkans are European. They deserve to benefit from the same opportunities, the same safeguards and rights as all other citizens of this continent.*

**Federica Mogherini**  
EU High Representative/Vice-President



## THE EU SUPPORTS STABILITY AND SECURITY IN THE REGION

**Regional and Global Security:** Two Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions ([EUFOR Althea](#) and [EULEX Kosovo](#)) operate in the region; at the same time the partners in the Western Balkans are making steps towards becoming **security providers**, with 10 contingents operating in EU CSDP missions throughout the world.



**Counterterrorism and countering violent extremism:** Terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation are common threats to the EU and to its Western Balkan partners and they require a **common approach**. We are working together in Europol, Eurojust, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), and the Western Balkans Counterterrorism Initiative (WBCTi). With IPA financial support, under the over-arching framework of the Western Balkans Integrative Internal Security Governance, the EU is providing more than **€31 million** for counterterrorism and projects countering violent extremism in the region, in addition to funding related security and rule of law.



**Migration:** The EU has strongly supported and continues to support Western Balkan partners with more than **€100 million** through dedicated financial support and humanitarian aid, as well as delivery of expertise on the ground, ensuring smooth handling of migration flows and minimising space for threats to human rights.

