



The EU conducts regular meetings with the Kosovo authorities on a number of topics in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Process Dialogue (SAPD). This serves as a benchmarking tool within the "carrots and sticks-policy" of the EU Enlargement process. The EU and the authorities discuss a range of policy issues and agree on follow-up actions. Prior to each SAP Dialogue the EU discusses the same issues with local civil society.

The Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) is the EU's policy framework for the Western Balkan countries, all the way to their eventual accession.

The partnership between the EU and the Western Balkans is in the interest of all partners: peace, stability, freedom, security and justice, prosperity, quality of life, for the EU and the Western Balkan countries.

The Stabilisation and Association Process pursues three aims, namely stabilisation and a swift transition to a market economy, the promotion of regional cooperation and the prospect of EU accession. It helps the countries of the region to build their capacity to adopt and implement European standards, including the *Communityacquis*, as well as international standards.

The Stabilisation and Association Process is based on a progressive partnership, in which the EU offers a mixture of trade concessions, economic and financial assistance (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance Programme) and contractual relationships (Stabilisation and

Association Agreements). Each country moves forward on the basis of the fulfilment of its commitments in the framework of the SAP. Annual Progress Reports assess the readiness of the Western Balkan countries to move closer to the European Union.

Following the EU Regional Approach for the Western Balkans of 1997, the European Commission set out, in 1999, the rationale for moving to a more ambitious vision for the region's development – the Stabilisation and Association Process. Its instruments were formulated at the Zagreb summit in November 2000.

The Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003 enriched the SAP with elements inspired by the enlargement process, so that it can better meet the new challenges. The Thessaloniki Agenda introduced an array of new instruments to support the reform process in the Western Balkan countries and to bring them closer to the European Union.

The most far-reaching of these new instruments are the European Partnerships, inspired by the Accession Partnerships. The first set of European Partnerships was approved in 2004: by identifying short and medium-term priorities which the countries need to address, the European Partnerships will help the Western Balkans countries with their reforms and preparations for future membership.

All the countries of the Western Balkans have the prospect of future membership of the European Union, an objective endorsed by the European Council in Feira in June 2000 and confirmed by the European Council in Thessaloniki in June 2003. The European Council in December 2010 clearly re-confirmed these existing commitments.

Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Montenegro which have been granted candidate country status, remain part of the SAP.

The rest of the Western Balkans are potential candidates: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo.

In January 2006, the European Commission adopted a Communication on "The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity". The Communication assesses progress made since the Thessaloniki Summit and sets out concrete measures to reinforce the EU policy for the Western Balkans and its instruments.

In its March 2008 communication on the Western Balkans Enhancing the European Perspective, the Commission adopted new enhanced existing initiatives to support the political and economic development in the Western Balkans, thus helping to accelerate their progress on the road towards EU membership.

The 2009 study, [Kosovo – fulfilling its European perspective](#)  [69 KB] , evaluated Kosovo's needs for further political and socio-economic development, and examined how it can best progress towards further integration within the region and the EU.