



# EU Engagement in the Western Balkans

The European Union has long supported its partners in the Western Balkans on their respective integration paths, and the European Council reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans on 9 March 2017. A credible enlargement policy is a key component of the [EU's Global Strategy](#) and 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 the 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: opportunities to travel, study abroad, gradual improvement of governance and rule of law, 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 (30 chapters opened, 3 provisionally closed) and Serbia (12 chapters opened, 2 provisionally closed).
- ▶ Albania is continuing its efforts to consolidate achievements related to the five key priorities. These include continued implementation of justice reform and further progress in the vetting process which is monitored and supported by the EU.
- ▶ Following the country's membership application, the Commission launched the process of preparing the Opinion on Bosnia and Herzegovina in September 2016 and is awaiting responses to the Questionnaire.
- ▶ Kosovo has started implementing its Stabilisation and Association Agreement which entered into force in 2016 and has also agreed the European Reform Agenda with key reform priorities
- ▶ In the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the new reform-oriented government is making significant progress to ensure the implementation of the Pržino agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities.

**“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

- Belgrade and Pristina have shown a great level of commitment 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, the Presidents of Kosovo and Serbia are currently 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, as announced at the Berlin Process Vienna Summit in 2015. More than €500 million has already been committed to specific projects.

#### The EU is the biggest donor in the Western Balkans.

**IPA:** [The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance](#) (IPA II) 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 2016 totaled €43 billion.



**“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



### **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 2015, more than 18,000 students took advantage of the Erasmus+ programme for youth related actions. 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 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 initiative:**

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 Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), and the Western Balkans CT Initiative (WBCTi). With IPA financial support, under an over-arching framework, the Western Balkans Integrative Internal Security Governance, we are 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.

**“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