

## **Commission recommends opening EU accession talks with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania.**

Written by Martin Banks on 19 April 2018 in News  
News

The European Commission is recommending that accession negotiations be opened with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania.



**EU flag** | *Photo credit: Press Association*

---

The recommendation comes in the latest enlargement reports on six Western Balkans countries, issued on Wednesday.

At the same time, the Commission has conceded that it is not yet ready to expand beyond the 28 current members, which will be cut to 27 after Brexit.

The report says, “The EU itself needs to be ready for new members - once they have met the

conditions - including from an institutional and financial perspective.”

---

## RELATED CONTENT

- [Charles Tannock: There is renewed focus in EU enlargement in the Balkans](#) [1]
  - [Tanja Fajon: Dreaming of a 'European Serbia'](#) [2]
  - [Boyko Borissov: If the Western Balkans do not get a clear European perspective now, this could have severe consequences for EU](#) [3]
  - [Ditmir Bushati: Albania's European path: Making significant progress and ambitious for more](#) [4]
  - [Western Balkans enlargement a priority, says EU Parliament](#) [5]
  - [Angel Dzhambazki: Bulgarian EU Council presidency: Time is right to develop relations with the Balkans](#) [6]
  - [David McAllister: Committee guide: Foreign affairs committee to focus on neighbourhood policy](#) [7]
- 

Crucially, it adds, “The Union must be stronger, more solid and more efficient before it can be bigger.”

The six Western Balkans countries - Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo - each have aspirations to join the EU and each one is at a different stage of the process, says Brussels.

The Commission’s message to each of the six nations is to continue “maintaining and deepening the current reform momentum.”

Each accession state must satisfy a set of tough criteria before formal negotiations can commence.

Parliament’s S&D group said on Thursday that it broadly welcomed the Commission’s recommendation to open accession negotiations with both Albania and Macedonia, saying this was “in recognition of efforts made by both countries to carry out reforms.”

The group, the second biggest in Parliament, called on member states to approve the Commission’s recommendation.

S&D group Vice-Chair Victor Boștinăru, who is responsible for foreign affairs, said, “It’s a very important day for Albania and FYR of Macedonia and a clear signal for all the regions of the Western Balkans that the efforts pay off. We have always said that the future of the EU includes, without doubt, the Western Balkans. We trust that the recommendations made today will further encourage the countries to continue down the path of reforms.

“The EU should now put the words into action - fostering more regional cooperation, ensuring the implementation of reforms while strengthening its credibility in the region and promoting a sustainable social and economic model in the Western Balkans’ countries. In order to ensure this, we need the EU presence, more initiatives, programmes and investments and more resources allocated.

“Last but not least, as I remain convinced that Turkey is still a partner for the Union, it is essential to be credible on our condemnation on the human rights abuses.”

His colleague, Knut Fleckenstein, rapporteur on Albania, said the country “fully deserves this positive recommendation.”

He added, "The country is undergoing a comprehensive reform of its judiciary that strongly underlines its European ambition and boosts progress on other key priorities as well. Furthermore, Albania's experience with this reform will be useful for other countries in the region too. I count on the European Council in June to take the country's accession process further. This commits Albania to maintain its level of ambition and tackle the remaining tasks without further delay.

"Over the past months, the FYR of Macedonia has proven its genuine political will to catch up with the reforms. The Commission's readiness to acknowledge this huge reform effort should be paired with a continued support for implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities.

"It will also be important to build up a strong consensus for EU-related reforms between government and opposition, politics and civil society. The Commission's unconditional recommendation for opening accession negotiations, which it had first given in 2009, will firmly tie the country on the path of accession-related reforms. Time has come to advance on the pending name issue as well."

Fleckenstein added, "We regret that for the first time, it was not possible to have the enlargement package reports presented and debated in the committee of foreign affairs. We call on the Commission to ensure that the elected members of the Parliament are fully and timely informed."

Further comment came from another S&D MEP, Kati Piri, rapporteur on Turkey, who said, "The Commission's analysis of last year's developments in Turkey is grim, as expected. However, the Commission fails to draw any political consequences.

"The delusion of EU membership is kept alive, even when a new constitution has been approved which fails to safeguard the basic principles of a democracy. The Commission missed the opportunity to send a clear message to President Erdoğan that his policies will have consequences for Turkey's EU accession process - as Parliament already did last year."

ECR group MEP Charles Tannock told this website, "I welcome the Commission's proposal to launch negotiations with Albania and Macedonia, particularly for the latter which has been left in limbo for over a decade."

Speaking on Thursday, he said, "I hope that this can also give a boost to the ongoing talks with Greece on the name issue, clearing the way for approval by the Council later this year and ultimately the country's long discussed ambitions to join the EU."

While recommending that accession talks start only with Albania and Macedonia, the Commission holds out the prospect to the other four Western Balkans countries.

It says, "A credible enlargement perspective requires sustained efforts and irreversible reforms. The EU enlargement is an investment in peace, security and stability in Europe: a prospect of EU membership has a powerful transformative effect on the partners in the process, embedding positive democratic, political, economic and societal change."

On the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Commission said that "delivering on the urgent reform priorities will be decisive for the country's further progress."

For Albania, "progress will be crucial in the key field in the rule of law, in particular across all five key reform priorities, and continuing to deliver concrete and tangible results, in the re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors."

Albania first applied for membership in April 2009 and has been an official candidate for accession to the EU since June 2014.

The Commission has recommended commencing negotiations with Macedonia every year since 2009 but progress has been blocked by failure to resolve the country's long-standing name dispute with Greece.

On Albania, the Commission says reform of the public administration "has been consolidated, with a view to enhancing its professionalism and depoliticisation."

Further actions have been taken to "reinforce the independence, efficiency, and accountability of judicial institutions, particularly through advancing in the implementation of a comprehensive justice reform."

Albania has been told that "continued, concrete, and tangible results in the re-evaluation of judges and prosecutors will be decisive for further progress."

Macedonia, says the Commission, has improved its EU membership credentials because it has overcome its "deep political crisis". It states that "the political will to move forward is once again clearly present," adding that "a positive change in the political mind-set has been seen across society, the lack of which had been a major impediment to reforms in recent years."

Since national elections in May last year, the new government has had to overcome deep political fragmentation and set the country back on track towards EU accession negotiations.

The Commission cautions that "the necessary structural reforms are a lengthy process which will take years and the damage of recent years cannot be undone overnight."

The executive also acknowledges improvements in the economies of not only the six Western Balkans states but also Turkey, another possible candidate country.

It says, "The annual assessments of the Economic Reform Programmes for the Western Balkan countries and Turkey show continued economic growth."

Meanwhile, the EESC, in a statement, said the enlargement of the EU, and "in particular the spread of its democratic values and legal standards" to the Western Balkan region, was in the interests of both the Western Balkan countries and the EU.

Andrej Zorko, rapporteur for the EESC's opinion on enlargement, said, "It is crucial that the accession of the Western Balkans remains one of the priorities of the EU. Promoting EU values in the region guarantees security and stability, enhances social and economic development, as well as democracy and the rule of law in these countries. And this in turn means stability and security to the EU. In this process, an active role by civil society, including social partners, is of great importance."

Dimitris Dimitriadis, co-rapporteur on the EESC's enlargement opinion, said, "The EESC notes that the EU accession process remains a key motivation for reforms in the countries of the Western Balkans."

## **About the author**

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

## **Tags**

[Enlargement](#) [8]

[European Commission](#) [9]

## Categories

[Western Balkans strategy](#) [10]

[International Relations](#) [11]



## Site Sections

- [Home](#)
- [Content](#)
- [Policy](#)
- [Magazines](#)
- [PM+](#)
- [Thought Leader](#)
- [EU Elections 2019](#)
- [Editorial Calendar](#)
- [Policy Events](#)
- [Event Coverage](#)
- [MEP Awards 2019](#)
- [Contact Us](#)

## Services

[Dods PeopleDods](#)  
[MonitoringDods](#)  
[ResearchDods](#)  
[EventsDods](#)  
[Training](#)

## Media & publishing titles

[Politics HomeThe](#)  
[HouseThe](#)  
[Parliament](#)  
[MagazineHolyrood](#)  
[Total PoliticsPublic](#)  
[Affairs NewsCivil](#)  
[Service](#)  
[World](#)  
[PublicTechnology](#)  
[Training](#)  
[JournalDods](#)  
[Parliamentary](#)  
[CompanionVacher's](#)

[Quarterly The  
European Union and  
Public Affairs  
Directory](#)

### **Dods events**

[Westminster  
BriefingDigital  
Health & Care  
ScotlandMEP  
AwardsThe Skills  
SummitScottish  
Public Service  
AwardsPublic Sector  
Procurement  
SummitPublic  
Sector ICT  
SummitCyber  
Security  
SummitCyber  
Security  
2017Training  
Journal Awards](#)

### **Partnership events**

[The Health and  
Care Innovation  
ExpoCivil Service  
LiveCivil Service  
AwardsChief  
Nursing Officer for  
England's  
SummitWomen into  
LeadershipThe  
Youth Justice  
ConventionSocitm  
Spring  
ConferenceNHSCC  
Annual Members'  
EventDods at Party  
Conference](#)

---

**Source URL:** <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/commission-recommends-opening-eu-accession-talks-former-yugoslav-republic-macedonia>

### **Links**

- [1] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/there-renewed-focus-eu-enlargement-balkans>
- [2] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/dreaming-european-serbia>
- [3] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/interviews/boyko-borissov-if-western-balkans-do-not-get-clear-european-perspective-now>
- [4] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/albania%E2%80%99s-european-path-making-significant-progress-and-ambitious-more>
- [5] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/news/western-balkans-enlargement-priority-says-eu-parliament>
- [6] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/bulgarian-eu-council-presidency-time-right-develop-relations-balkans>
- [7] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/articles/opinion/committee-guide-foreign-affairs-committee-focus-neighbourhood-policy>
- [8] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/enlargement>
- [9] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/tags/european-commission>
- [10] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/western-balkans-strategy>
- [11] <https://www.theparliamentmagazine.eu/categories/international-relations>