

Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CFSP/CSDP)

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Background Paper

Session 3: The European Perspective for the Western Balkans

A European Union of stability, security and peace is only possible if stability and security also prevail in its immediate neighbourhood. The EU and the Western Balkans region share a historical and cultural heritage, and it is in Europe's interest to anchor the future of the Western Balkans in the European Union. To this end, the EU must also be institutionally and financially prepared to welcome the new members should they meet the necessary conditions. Furthermore, EU relations with the Western Balkans hold considerable economic potential.

The European Commission's Strategy for the Western Balkans 2018

The EC's "Strategy for a Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans" confirms that the region's European future is tantamount to a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on shared values. The strategy sets out priorities and areas for enhanced cooperation aimed at addressing the major challenges facing the Western Balkans. Fundamental reforms and good neighbourly relations in particular are needed.

The European Commission's flagship initiatives in 2018

The European Commission's strategy contains an action plan with six concrete flagship initiatives aimed at further strengthening cooperation and supporting the transition process. These flagship initiatives target specific areas of common interest: (1) the rule of law, (2) security and migration, (3) socio-economic development, (4) improving the connections of transport and energy networks, (5) the Digital Agenda, (6) reconciliation and good neighbourly relations. In these areas, concrete actions are planned for the period 2019 to 2020, for which sufficient funding will be required.

Political commitment to credible reforms

There is still some work to be done before the countries concerned meet the conditions and criteria for EU membership. Leaders in the region must not allow doubts to arise concerning their strategic objectives and their commitment to significantly strengthen the

rule of law, fundamental rights and governance. Specific progress is needed on judicial reforms, combating corruption and organised crime, and public administration reform. Vigorously pursuing economic reforms and improving the functioning of democratic institutions is also essential.

Reconciliation

Each of the countries must make a clear commitment to finally overcoming past conflicts by achieving reconciliation and resolving outstanding issues prior to accession. This concerns the settlement of border disputes in particular. A comprehensive, legally binding agreement is needed for normalising relations between Serbia and Kosovo, so that both countries can move forward on their respective road to the EU. The process of settling the name dispute between Macedonia and Greece is also an important step.

- How can the EU continue to credibly communicate a prospect of accession?
- What further measures can the EU – the EP and the national parliaments in particular – take to support the implementation of the outstanding reforms in the candidate countries and to strengthen a sustainable pro-European orientation in these countries?