

In October, Commissioner for Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn will present the 2015 'Enlargement Package' with the annual Enlargement Strategy Paper and progress reports on all (potential) candidate countries, to serve as the basis for Council decisions on enlargement negotiations.

After publication, the Enlargement Strategy Paper and Process reports on individual countries can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/countries/strategy-and-progress-report/index_en.htm.

2015 in a nutshell

This year has been relatively quiet with regard to enlargement. One of the candidate countries, Iceland, withdrew its EU membership application in March. The same month, two negotiation chapters were opened with Montenegro, while Serbia completed the screening process of chapters in EU accession talks. In June, furthermore, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina entered into force, and another negotiation chapter was opened with Montenegro.

At the same time, there were developments on the national or regional level challenging the precarious balance in the Western Balkan region. In April, remarks by the Albanian Prime Minister about unification with Kosovo stirred unrest in Serbia. Nevertheless, the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue facilitated by the EU HR for Foreign Policy Federica Mogherini resumed and resulted in a landmark achievement in the process of normalisation of relations. Kosovo also set up a special war crimes court in The Hague in August. Together with the agreement on better relations with Serbia, this paves the way for their further European integration.

In July, an EU-brokered deal ended a severe political crisis in the FYR of Macedonia. In September, Hungary completed a controversial barbed-wire fence blocking its border with Serbia and begun building one on its border with Croatia to keep the refugees out, while growing tensions between Serbia and Croatia caused by a massive influx of refugees resulted in the temporary closure of borders. Amid the tensions, the EU organized a High Level Conference on the Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkan Route.

Balkan leaders also met in August for the EU-Western Balkans Summit, one in a row of yearly summits organised in the frame of the "Berlin Process", exhibiting the commitment of the EU and member states to the enlargement towards the Western Balkans region. The "Vienna Summit" was dominated by the refugee crisis but also resulted in the signing of a number of (regional) cooperation agreements. In a preparatory meeting in May, Balkan leaders had already called for extra EU funds to keep up reforms..

With regard to Turkey, the deterioration of fundamental rights, rule of law and press freedom, as well as the end of the promising Kurdish peace process halted any progress on enlargement. Erdoğan's visit to Brussels in September focused on the refugee crisis and the war in Syria instead of Turkey's membership bid.

European Movement Policy Position

- **Intensify and accelerate the European enlargement process.** There has been very limited progress in enlargement negotiations this year, yet enlargement is the most successful policy in bringing peace and stability to the European continent.
- **Open the first negotiation chapters with Serbia and open negotiations with Albania and with the FYR of Macedonia.** With regard to the FYR of Macedonia, further reform is threatened if the opening of negotiations is blocked any longer. The credibility of the enlargement process is dependent not only on reform in the candidate countries, but also on the EU following up on its commitments.
- **Continue the 'fundamentals first' strategy.** The focus of the negotiations should be on those issues that proved most difficult in the past: rule of law, fundamental rights, economic governance and the reform of public administration and judiciary.
- **Put symbolic issues into perspective.** The accession process can be used as a facilitator for the resolution of issues of symbolic importance. All actors involved – the EU, its Member States and the (potential) candidate countries – must look at the bigger picture and mutually beneficial goal of EU membership.
- **Take into consideration local and regional government and civil society views in the negotiation process.** The impact of future EU accession on the life of citizens and the distribution of competences and powers among levels of government calls for the inclusion of their views in the negotiation process as much as possible.

The full policy position, adopted by European Movement International members, can be found at <http://ow.ly/T1qGI>.