



Summary of the European Commission Enlargement Strategy October 2014

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The presentation of the Enlargement Package 2014, including the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014-15, gave outgoing Commissioner Štefan Füle the opportunity to take stock of the progress in European enlargement in the last five years. Furthermore, the new progress reports of the candidate and potential candidate countries listed the achievements as well as challenges in the accession processes.

Taking stock of the European Enlargement Strategy 2010-14

Over the last five years, a clear focus for the enlargement packages has been set. In 2010, the focus was on strengthening the *credibility* of the enlargement process. In 2011, the *transformative power* of enlargement was emphasized. Subsequently, three key pillars of enlargement were introduced under the heading of “fundamentals first”. In 2012, the first pillar was introduced, a new approach to the *rule of law* which focusses on Chapter 23 - Judiciary and fundamental rights, and Chapter 24 - Justice, freedom and security. In 2013, the second pillar was introduced, a framework for *economic governance* inspired by the European Semester. Finally, in 2014 the third pillar was introduced, *public administration reform and strengthening of democratic institutions*.

The 2014 Enlargement Package: challenges and achievements

Over the past year, important developments have marked the European enlargement process. On 21 January 2014, the first intergovernmental conference with Serbia took place, establishing the negotiation framework. Kosovo concluded negotiations on the Stability and Association Agreement in May, and the agreement was initialled in July. On 24 June, Albania was granted candidate status.

Chapters 23 and 24 were opened with Montenegro in December 2013, and the screening process was completed in May. With Turkey, Chapter 22 was opened in November 2013.

Furthermore 2014 saw the launch of the new Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA 2), which provides €11.7 billion for the period 2014-2020 to support the enlargement countries in their preparation for accession as well as regional and cross-border cooperation. IPA II increases focus on priorities for EU accession in the areas of democracy and rule of law as well as competitiveness and growth. IPA II also introduces a sector approach, incentives for delivery on results, increased budget support and prioritisation of projects.

The 2014 Enlargement Strategy also focusses specifically on the following issues, where important challenges remain for the candidate and potential candidate countries:

- *Respecting fundamental rights:* the Enlargement Strategy stresses a need for better protection of minorities and tackling discrimination and hostility towards vulnerable groups, including on grounds of sexual orientation. Respecting and promoting the right of women, children and people with disabilities is also mentioned. More robust institutional frameworks for the protection of fundamental rights are needed. Freedom of expression and media remains a particular concern.
- *Freedom of expression:* the situation concerning freedom of expression and media in practice has deteriorated in some countries in the past year. Government interference with media freedom remains a serious concern, and informal pressure on the media, as well as violence and intimidation against journalists needs to be tackled. The work on freedom of expression and media remains a priority in the EU accession process.
- *Importance of regional cooperation:* good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation remain essential elements of the Stabilisation and Association process. The last year saw some positive developments in regional cooperation, such as the inclusion of Kosovo in regional fora, the launch of the Western Balkans Six, and regional solidarity and cooperation after the floods which severely affected Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia. But further efforts to overcome bilateral disputes are needed and reconciliation is essential. The process of normalisation between Serbia and Kosovo needs to continue, and the Brussels Agreements need to be implemented. Under the auspices of the UN an acceptable solution to the name issue between the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Greece must be negotiated.
- *Constructive and sustainable dialogue across the political spectrum:* the last year has seen increasing clashes between governments and opposition in some countries, even leading to one parliamentary boycott. But to support the reform process, strengthening the functioning and independence of key democratic institutions in the enlargement countries is essential. Constructive and sustainable dialogue across the political spectrum, notably within the parliament, needs to be ensured, and dialogue with civil society should be strengthened.

Montenegro

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| Applied in 2008 Candidate status in 2009 Opening of accession negotiations: 2012 |
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Accession negotiations between the EU and Montenegro have been continuing. In May 2014, the screening process was concluded. So far, twelve chapters have been opened, including chapter 23 on Judiciary and fundamental rights and chapter 24 on Justice, freedom and security, which were opened at the third Accession Conference in December 2013. At the fourth Accession Conference in June 2014, the chapters on Free Movement of capital; Foreign, security and defence policy; and financial control have been opened. The chapters were opened on the basis of action plans submitted by Montenegro, and the implementation of the action plans has started. Two chapters, on Science and research and Education and culture, have been provisionally closed.

Furthermore, the Stabilisation and Association Committee in December 2013 and the Stabilisation and Association Council met in June 2014. Various subcommittee meetings have been held since October 2013, plus two meetings of the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee, in December 2013 and March 2014.

The 2014 Enlargement Package concludes that Montenegro continues to sufficiently meet the political criteria, has made further progress in establishing a functioning market economy and has improved its ability to take on the obligations of EU membership. Implementation of the relevant rule of law reforms has started, mainly through adoption of legislation and reforms in the judiciary. However, deadlines are being missed in some areas. The legislative framework must be strengthened and thorough investigation of cases of corruption must be ensured. The overall pace of accession negotiations will be determined by the pace of rule of law-related reforms. Furthermore, Montenegro should ensure that an adequate law on political party financing is in place and the effective application of its electoral legislation. This will help build trust in the electoral system.

It is emphasized that, though Montenegro is at the forefront of the EU accession process and leading the way in the region, it needs to take urgent action to deliver on the main challenges the country is facing: rule of law-related issues and the need to strengthen public administration. In particular, the strengthening of administrative capacity in the area of European integration needs to be ensured. The adoption of the action plans is regarded as a key milestone, but it is now their implementation that matters most, as well as ensuring that the tangible effects of these changes are felt by citizens.

Serbia

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| Applied in 2009 Candidate status in 2012 Opening of accession negotiations: 2013 |
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In December 2013, the European Council established the negotiating framework with Serbia and agreed to hold the first intergovernmental conference which took place on 21 January 2014, signalling the formal start of Serbia's accession negotiations. Furthermore, the screening process started in September 2013. In line with the new approach for the chapters on judiciary and fundamental rights, together with justice, freedom and security, the screening meetings for these chapters took place from September to December 2013. Together with chapter 35, normalisation of relations with Priština, these chapters were opened first and will remain open until the end of the negotiations. So far, 15 chapters have been fully screened and the screening of 9 more chapters has started. The screening exercise is expected to be completed in 2015.

Following the entry into force of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA), the inaugural Stabilisation Association (SA) Council met in October 2013. Serbia has continued to build a satisfactory track record in implementing the obligations of the SAA, but needs to put more effort in the area of State aid control. The SA Committee met in March and seven sub-committee meetings were held. The SA Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) met for the first time in November 2013 in Belgrade. Serbia also takes part in the multilateral economic dialogue with the European Commission and EU Member States to prepare the country for participation in multilateral surveillance and EU economic policy coordination. A number of targeted policy recommendations were endorsed by the Economic and Financial Affairs Council in May, and Serbia is expected to follow up on these recommendations in the course of the year. A Special Group on Public Administration Reform was established under the SAA.

The 2014 Enlargement Package states that the launch of accession negotiations marked a turning point in EU – Serbia relations, acknowledging the progress Serbia made but also stressing that as a negotiating country, Serbia has both new responsibilities and new opportunities. Serbia has shown a high level of commitment and set an ambitious timetable for the negotiations. However, it needs to continue delivering on its reform priorities, notably on the rule of law, freedom of expression, public administration reform, and economic governance. Constitutional reform is necessary to improve inclusiveness and transparency of the reform process, and the implementation of the 2013-2018 strategies on judicial reform and the fight against corruption need to be backed by strong monitoring and coordination mechanisms.

It is crucial that Serbia continues its commitment to regional cooperation and normalisation of relations with Kosovo. Furthermore, Serbia needs to pay more attention to the alignment with the EU *acquis* in the field of energy, referring specifically to the South Stream gas pipeline, and in the field of foreign policy and security. The reforms are demanding, Füle states, but will contribute to a better business and legal environment and improve the life of its citizens. Serbia's commitment to regional cooperation will be key for the EU in consolidating peace and stability in the region.



The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

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| Applied in 2004 Candidate status in 2005 Opening of accession negotiations: Not yet. The opening of negotiations has been recommended by the European Commission since 2009. |
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In the 2014 Enlargement Package, the European Commission recommends opening accession negotiations with FYR of Macedonia for the sixth time since 2009. However, the dispute with Greece over the use of the name Macedonia remains, consequently blocking the opening of negotiations.

Without accession negotiations underway, the FYR of Macedonia is participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process and has been implementing its commitments under the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU. This year also marked the tenth anniversary of the implementation of the SAA, the oldest in the region. Meetings of the Stabilisation and Association Committee and the Stabilisation and Association Council took place in June and July 2014. Experts met in seven sub-committees and in a special group on public administration reform. The FYR of Macedonia is engaging in the reinforced multilateral economic dialogue with the Commission and with EU Member States. No meetings of the High Level Accession Dialogue, launched in 2012, took place during the reporting period.

The impasse in the accession process as a result of the name issue is also reflected in the pace of reforms. The 2014 Enlargement Package concludes that there has been a backsliding in key reform areas over the past year. The front line position and optimism of the FYR of Macedonia five years ago has been lost. The FYR of Macedonia needs to take resolute reform action if it wishes to sustain European Commission recommendation in the future. This refers in particular to the name issue, but there are other reform priorities. Action is needed to address concerns about increased politicisation and growing shortcomings with regard to the independence of the judiciary and freedom of expression. Furthermore, domestic political confrontations and an increasingly divisive political culture are causing concern. Both government and opposition need to ensure that political debate takes place primarily in parliament, and need to contribute to creating the conditions for its proper functioning. There is also concern about government control over the media, also in the context of elections. Furthermore, more effort in trust-building among different communities is needed, including through the completion of the review of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and implementation of its recommendations. With regard to the implementation of the *acquis*, the focus should now be on administrative capacity and coordination, to ensure effective implementation.



Albania

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| Applied in 2009 Candidate status in 2014 |
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Albania participates in the Stabilisation and Association Process, and the Stabilisation and Association Committee and Council met in March and May 2014. Meetings of six subcommittees and of the special group on public administration reform were held. Albania also participates in multilateral economic dialogue with the European Commission and the EU Member States to prepare the country for participation in multilateral surveillance and economic policy coordination. In November 2013, a High Level Dialogue on the key priorities for opening accession negotiations was launched, and meetings took place in March, June and September 2014. In June 2014, the European Council granted Albania candidate status. Joint working groups to structure work on the required reforms were established in September 2014.

The decision to grant Albania candidate status was recognition of its reform efforts and the political will of the government in pursuing European integration and introducing reforms. At the same time, candidate status brings more responsibility and should be seen as an incentive for delivering further reform results. Sustained reform efforts in key priority areas set out by the European Commission – predominantly regarding the rule of law - are necessary in order to be able to move towards the opening of accession negotiations.

The 2014 Enlargement Package states that the Albanian government is committed to fighting organised crime, which is for example visible in successful police operations against drugs trafficking in June. Overall, Albania has made progress in the area of political criteria and rule of law reforms, strengthening the accountability and transparency of the judicial system. But reforms in public administration (de-politicisation), the judiciary, the fight against corruption and organised crime and strengthening the protection of fundamental rights are still needed, and also need to be transparent as well as politically inclusive. Particular concern is expressed regarding the political climate and the current boycott of the parliament by the opposition. Sustainable political dialogue between the government and opposition, both compromise-based and constructive, will allow the opposition to perform its democratic control function and is important for the success of reforms. Over the last year, Albania did make some further progress towards becoming a functioning market economy. However, progress regarding good economic governance is essential for more investment, employment and growth. In this regard, Albania presented a roadmap with key priorities for reform in March 2014. Regarding the EU legislation, preparations for implementing the *acquis* need to be upgraded and administrative capacity needs to be strengthened.

Commissioner Füle highlights the already tangible changes in Albania, such as visa-free travel, an improved democratic mechanism, the adoption of a resolution on European integration, a new National Plan for European Integration for 2014-2020, and efforts on judicial reform including engagement with the Venice Commission and a conference in October 2014. At the same time, the political polarization prevents these reforms from reaching all citizens and it is therefore essential that both government and opposition feel ownership of the reform processes.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

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| Potential candidate |
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There has not been any significant progress over the past year regarding the situation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the context of the European integration process. Bosnia and Herzegovina participates in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA), but it has not yet entered into force due to the failure to implement the Sejdić-Finci ruling of the European Court of Human Rights. The non-implementation is also in breach with the Interim Agreement (IA), and prevents Bosnia and Herzegovina from submitting a credible membership application to the EU.

In October 2013, the third meeting of the High Level Dialogue on the Accession Process (launched in 2012) took place, but no agreement was reached on the implementation of the Sejdić-Finci ruling. Facilitation efforts by the Commission, with meetings in October and December, were stalled in February 2014. In November 2013, an extraordinary meeting of the Interim Committee took place, where the European Commission initiated a dispute settlement against Bosnia and Herzegovina over their refusal to accept the methodology for the technical adaptation of the IA/SAA. Engaging in a constructive discussion with the EU on this matter is deemed crucial, and agreement on the technical adaptation is urgent. As a result of the stalemate, receiving full benefits from IPA funding is made conditional on reform in key areas.

In the 2014 Enlargement Package, the standstill in the European integration process is attributed to lack of collective political will on the side of the leadership. It states that the efficiency and functioning of the political institutions at all levels of government need to be improved and a well-functioning coordination mechanism on EU matters needs to be set up urgently. The lack of governmental will is contrasted to the desire of Bosnia and Herzegovina's citizens to put Bosnia and Herzegovina back on the path of European integration. The challenges remain manifold, however. Apart from the non-implementation of the Sejdić-Finci ruling, there is no effective coordination mechanism on EU issues, no reform of the public administration or an increase of its capacity, and no progress regarding judicial reform or the fight against corruption. Concern is expressed regarding pressure on media and intimidation of journalists and editors. There was almost no progress towards a functioning market economy, hampered by an inefficient judicial system and lack of coordination.

Several priorities are presented with regard to reform in Bosnia and Herzegovina. With regard to the October 2014 elections, hope was expressed that the government would be formed rapidly and effective coordination would be set up for socio-economic reforms. Addressing the socio-economic needs of citizens is deemed a priority. In February, three initiatives were presented by the European Commission to further reform. The first was the expansion of the EU-BiH Structured Dialogue on Justice to additional rule of law matters, and a plenary meeting took place in May 2014. The second is a focus on the strengthening of economic governance, and included the presentation of the 'Compact for Growth and Jobs' in July 2014, forming the basis for urgent economic reforms. Thirdly, a joint EU-BiH Working Group to accelerate the implementation of EU funded projects was established.

Kosovo

Potential candidate

The initialling of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with Kosovo in July marked an important step towards European integration. The SAA negotiations started in October 2013 and were concluded in May 2014. Over the past year, Kosovo also joined several regional fora, such as the Regional Cooperation Council (February 2013), Regional School of Public Administration (November 2013), and the South-East European Cooperation Process and Venice Commission (both June 2014).

The initialling of the SAA is regarded as a milestone for Kosovo by the European Commission. At the same time, it is emphasized that the post-election impasse after the June elections already presents a setback to reform. The impasse needs to be overcome, and the new government needs to live up to Kosovo's commitment to European integration. In particular, it should engage in inclusive dialogue to deliver on its European Union-reform agenda, including building a track record in the area of rule of law, strengthening public economic administration and economic governance.

Over the last year, Kosovo authorities demonstrated a good capacity to coordinate their European integration agenda. They showed a good grasp of the commitments made. In the area of rule of law, good cooperation with the EU rule of law mission, EULEX, has continued. Progress has also been made in the visa liberalisation dialogue. What is needed however are more practical results in the fight against organised crime and corruption, and increased independence of the judiciary. The independence of the media, as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms need to be further strengthened. The new government will need to launch electoral reforms and public administration reforms. Structural economic reforms are also needed to tackle structural weaknesses. Kosovo needs to start its preparations for the implementation of the SAA in key sectors such as competition and public procurement, and needs, amongst other issues, to ensure effective and independent competition authorities. It is crucial that Kosovo, like Serbia, continues its commitment to the normalisation of relations as well as its participation in regional fora; it is the regional cooperation the country has been particularly praised for lately.

Turkey

Applied in 1987
Candidate status in 1999
Opening of accession negotiations: 2005

Accession negotiations between the EU and Turkey have been marked by some important steps over the past year, but important concerns remain. Regarding the negotiations, 8 negotiation chapters cannot be opened and no chapter can be closed without the implementation of the additional protocol to the Association Agreement, regarding the Cyprus issue. Save these reservations, in the Accession Conference in November 2013 the fourteenth chapter was opened, Chapter 22 on Regional Policy and coordination of structural instruments. In total, 14 out of 33 negotiation chapters have been opened, and one of the chapters has been provisionally closed.

In December 2013, the EU – Turkey readmission agreement was signed in parallel with the launching of the visa liberalisation dialogue, and the agreement entered into force in October 2014. The year 2014 was named ‘Year of the European Union’ by current president Erdoğan (then Prime Minister), who visited Brussels in January. In September 2014, Turkey adopted a ‘European Union Strategy’ to reinvigorate the accession process. Furthermore, a political dialogue took place at ministerial level in February 2014, and at political directors’ level in March. Several discussions were also held on foreign policy issues, with several high-level visits to European institutions. Furthermore, the Association Committee and Association Council met in June 2014.

The important steps taken by Turkey over the past year, highlighted by the 2014 Enlargement Package, include the adoption of a democratisation package and the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violations of the European Convention on Human Rights, the EU-Turkey Readmission Agreement and launching of the visa dialogue, progress under chapter 24 in migration and asylum policy, as well as the continuation of the process aiming for a settlement of the Kurdish issue. The concerns expressed in the 2014 Enlargement Package relate to the adoption of legislation undermining the independence of the judiciary as well as dismissal of judges and prosecutors. It also refers to changes to the internet law and the blanket bans imposed on social media, of which some have been overturned by the Constitutional Court. The need to engage in an effective dialogue, both within the country and with the EU to ensure that further reforms in the area of the rule of law and fundamental freedoms follow European standards, is stressed. Concern is also expressed on the tendency to pass laws in haste and without sufficient stakeholder (both parliament and civil society) consultation, which also risks affecting the effectiveness of the courts. The start of formal negotiations on chapters 23 and 24, dealing with the rule of law, is seen as the next step forward.

The strategic partnership between Turkey and the European Union is referred to repeatedly, and with regard to various areas: economic and trade relations, migration policy, and energy security. Turkey is regarded as a key business partner for the EU, and the potential of further cooperation is pointed out. At the same time, the importance of the settlement talks between the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot community leaders under UN auspices for the future of Cyprus and the region is underlined. Turkey is expected to show its support for the settlement talks in constructive statements and concrete action. A positive progress in this direction was noted on 11 February 2014 by the signing of a joint declaration signifying the start of renewed negotiations to settle the Cyprus dispute. In September 2014 President Anastasiades and Eroğlu agreed to increase the pace of meetings to at least twice a month, fostering the progress of sustainable peace dialogue.



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Movement
International**

The 2014 Enlargement Package: useful links

Speech by Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Štefan Füle to the European Parliament [click here](#)

Commission Communication Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2014-15 [click here](#)

Website European Commission on Enlargement [click here](#)

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