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Answer given by Mr Hahn
on behalf of the European Commission
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Peaceful demonstrations are a fundamental right in all democratic countries. The Commission has always been clear on that, and that violence must be avoided. The ongoing protests are country-specific and there is no overarching “Balkan” theme. Citizens across the region have legitimate expectations that their governments will deliver on reforms to improve their lives. The Commission expects governments and oppositions in the region to work constructively, inside their parliaments, to address the demands of their citizens.

As set out in the Communication “A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans”¹, the Commission maintains that a firm, merit-based prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the Union's very own political, security and economic interest. It is a geo-strategic investment in a stable, strong and united Europe based on common values. The Communication also includes a set of actions to strengthen further the EU engagement on security and on migration.

The European perspective of the Western Balkans region and the EU's focus on the rule of law provide strong instruments to address common challenges such as irregular migration, organised crime and human trafficking. The accession process sets out clear conditions and the Commission continuously monitors the progress of the region, including on rule of law and good neighbourly relations.

The next detailed assessment will be included in the 2019 Enlargement package. The decision whether to open or close accession negotiations is the prerogative of the Council.

¹ COM(2018) 65 final, 06/02/2018