

**June 2017**

The Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia) and Turkey have developed long-lasting relations with the EU in their efforts to join the Union. Over the years, however, progress in important areas such as rule of law and democratic governance has faltered, backsliding has occurred in areas such as media freedom, and economies have not developed as fast as hoped. This overall slow pace, an increasingly uncertain domestic context and rising ethnic tensions in some areas, coupled with the growing influence of actors such as Russia in the region, and the EU's own difficulties, complicate the case for enlargement, but also highlight its importance for the region and the EU alike. The challenges ahead call for reinvigorated EU engagement, and for strong local determination to carry out difficult reforms to advance on the path to EU membership. While relations with Turkey have recently been troubled, in the Balkans EU accession talks are ongoing with Montenegro and Serbia. Montenegro is about to become a NATO member, and Bosnia and Herzegovina is completing its questionnaire with a view to obtaining EU candidate status. Many obstacles remain, but so does EU support for the European perspective of the aspirant countries.

2016 Enlargement package: Prospects for the Western Balkans

Briefing by Velina Lilyanova, January 2017

In 2016, the Commission's annual enlargement package focused on complex and long-term reforms as part of the 'fundamentals first' approach. The main message was that enlargement policy continued to deliver results and drive reforms, albeit slowly and unevenly. Amidst increasing complexities and declining public support, concerns of enlargement being side-lined highlighted the need for continued EU commitment, but also for the countries' own responsibility.

Anti-corruption efforts in the Western Balkans

Briefing by Velina Lilyanova, April 2017

Widespread corruption is a major shared challenge for the Western Balkans, which poses a threat to core EU values and undermines good governance and economic development. Anti-corruption reform is thus a key requirement for EU accession. The latter has proven to be a strong incentive for reforms, and yet, the latest 2016 assessments show that corruption continues to permeate the region and concrete results achieved are disproportionately low.

Media freedom trends 2017: Western Balkans

'At a glance' note by Velina Lilyanova, May 2017

Media freedom in the Western Balkans continues to be undermined by systematic shortcomings, and remains a priority reform area on these countries' EU accession agendas. In recent years, the region has experienced a trend of erosion of media freedom and has not made progress in addressing its long-standing challenges.

Mapping EU-Turkey relations: State of play and options for the future

Briefing by Philippe Perchoc, April 2017

In 2016, EU-Turkey relations were challenged by the management of the migration crisis and the EU-Turkey agreement, the attempted military coup, and ensuing severe purge, but accession talks have continued and in December both parties decided to upgrade their 20-year-old customs union. Opinion polls in some Member States, recent Turkish politicians' campaigns in the EU ahead of the April referendum, and clear human rights breaches, triggered debate about an alternative to enlargement, such as purely economic integration. Some

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believe the outcome of the UK's negotiations on its future relationship with the EU might serve as a model for Turkey. Despite difficulties, accession remains the ultimate goal of EU-Turkey relations, endorsed by the European Council and Turkey.

Further reading

[Media freedom trends 2017: Turkey](#)

'At a glance' note by Philippe Perchoc, May 2017

[Turkey since the failed July 2016 coup](#)

Briefing by Philippe Perchoc, September 2016

[The Western Balkans and the EU: Enlargement and challenges](#)

Briefing by Velina Lilyanova, September 2016

[The Western Balkans' Berlin process: A new impulse for regional cooperation](#)

Briefing by Velina Lilyanova, July 2016

[Kosovo: 2016 country report](#)

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[Serbia: 2016 country report](#)

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[The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: 2016 report](#)

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[Montenegro: 2016 report](#)

'At a glance' note by Velina Lilyanova, March 2017

[Bosnia and Herzegovina: Developments in 2016](#)

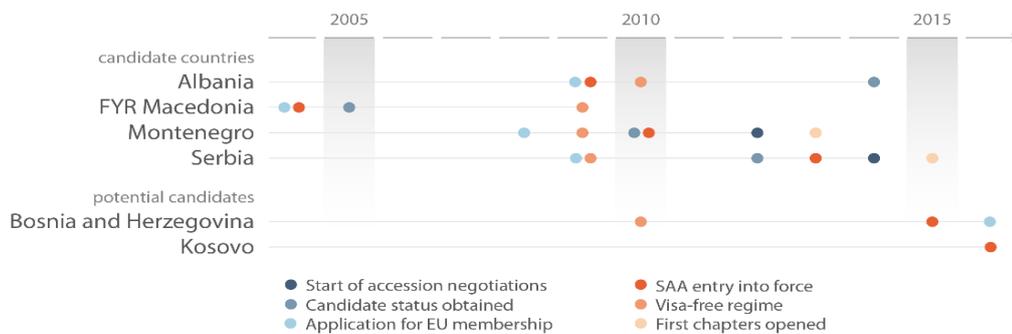
'At a glance' note by Velina Lilyanova, February 2017

[Albania: 2016 developments on the EU path](#)

'At a glance' note by Velina Lilyanova, February 2017

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Enlargement: state of play



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