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## TEXTS ADOPTED

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### **P9\_TA(2020)0168**

#### **Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit**

#### **European Parliament recommendation of 19 June 2020 to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit (2019/2210(INI))**

*The European Parliament,*

- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 28 June 2018, the Council conclusions of 18 June 2019 and the European Council conclusions of 17-18 October 2019 postponing the decisions on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania,
- having regard to the Zagreb Declaration of 6 May 2020,
- having regard to the Final Agreement for the Settlement of the Differences as described in UN Security Council resolutions 817 (1993) and 845 (1993), the termination of the Interim Accord of 1995 and the establishment of a Strategic Partnership on 17 June 2018 between Greece and North Macedonia, also known as the Prespa Agreement,
- having regard to the European Council conclusions of 26 March 2020 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, which endorsed the Council conclusions of 25 March 2020 on enlargement and stabilisation and association process,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 5 February 2020 entitled ‘Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans’ (COM(2020)0057),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 29 May 2019 on EU enlargement policy (COM(2019)0260),
- having regard to the Commission communication of 6 February 2018 entitled ‘A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans’ (COM(2018)0065),
- having regard to the EU Global Strategy of 2016, which specifies that a credible enlargement policy represents a strategic investment in Europe’s security and prosperity, and has already contributed greatly to peace in formerly war-torn areas,
- having regard to the Commission communication of 16 October 2013 entitled

- ‘Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2013-2014’ (COM(2013)0700),
- having regard to the renewed consensus on enlargement approved by the European Council in December 2006 and subsequently endorsed in the European Council conclusions of June 2019,
  - having regard to the Final Declaration of the Zagreb Summit of 24 November 2000,
  - having regard to the EU-Western Balkans Summit Declaration of Thessaloniki, of 21 June 2003, concerning the prospect of the Western Balkan countries joining the European Union,
  - having regard to the Sofia declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit of 17 May 2018 and the Sofia Priority Agenda annexed thereto,
  - having regard to the Berlin Process, launched on 28 August 2014, and in particular to the declaration of the Western Balkans Foreign Ministers on regional cooperation and bilateral disputes of 27 August 2015, and the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), with further summits being held in Vienna (2015), Paris (2016), Trieste (2017), London (2018) and Poznan (2019),
  - having regard to the conclusions of the General Affairs Council of 29-30 April 1997 on the application of conditionality with a view to developing a coherent EU strategy for relations with the countries of the region,
  - having regard to the joint statement of the Foreign Ministers of 13 EU Member States of 11 June 2019 on the EU commitment to the Western Balkans’ European integration,
  - having regard to the joint declaration of the European Parliament-Western Balkans Speakers’ Summit, convened by the President of the European Parliament with the leadership of the Western Balkan parliaments on 28 January 2020,
  - having regard to the informal meeting of 16 February 2020 which brought together the leaders of the Western Balkan countries, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Croatia presiding the Council of the European Union,
  - having regard to the resolution of the European Economic and Social Committee of 31 October 2019 entitled ‘Opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania: EU credibility and geostrategic interests should be upheld’<sup>1</sup>,
  - having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on the Enlargement package 2019, adopted on 13 February 2020<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 9 July 2015 on the Srebrenica Commemoration<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to its legislative resolution of 27 March 2019 on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Instrument

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<sup>1</sup> OJ C 47, 11.2.2020, p. 15.

<sup>2</sup> CDR 2727/2019.

<sup>3</sup> OJ C 265, 11.8.2017, p. 142.

for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)<sup>1</sup>,

- having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania<sup>2</sup>,
  - having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Parliament’s position on the Conference on the Future of Europe<sup>3</sup>,
  - having regard to the Council conclusions of 5 June 2020 on enhancing cooperation with Western Balkans partners in the field of migration and security,
  - having regard to the Commission communication of 29 April 2020 entitled ‘Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery’ (COM(2020)0315),
  - having regard to Rule 118 of its Rules of Procedure,
  - having regard to the letter from the Committee on International Trade,
  - having regard to the report of the Committee on Foreign Affairs (A9-0091/2020),
- A. whereas enlargement is one of the EU’s most successful and strategic policies as well as the most effective foreign policy instrument contributing to extending the reach of the Union’s core values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, fostering peace and prosperity equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities across Europe;
- B. whereas the enlargement process is an integral part of European integration and remains strategically important to the European Union;
- C. whereas the merit-based prospect of full EU membership for the Western Balkan countries is in the Union's own political, security and economic interests;
- D. whereas the prospect of EU membership constitutes recognition of a major geopolitical challenge for the unification of the European continent and a fundamental incentive for reforms in the Western Balkan countries;
- E. whereas the Western Balkan countries are geographically, historically and culturally part of Europe and the process of integrating them into the European Union is of key importance for the stability and security of the continent as a whole, free and at peace;
- F. whereas the EU’s enlargement process is a two-way street on which both sides have to uphold their commitments and is built on the premise of delivering on obligations by both the European Union and the candidate countries;
- G. whereas the enhanced methodology proposed by the Commission aims at injecting new dynamism into the enlargement process and provides a new impetus for the transformation of accession countries;
- H. whereas the EU is the leading investor, trading partner and donor in the region;

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<sup>1</sup> Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2019)0299.

<sup>2</sup> Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2019)0050.

<sup>3</sup> Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2020)0010.

- I. whereas the European Parliament in its resolutions welcomed the progress achieved by North Macedonia and Albania; whereas given this progress, Parliament agreed to the granting of the performance reward under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance to North Macedonia and Albania;
- J. whereas the 2020 Zagreb Summit recognised the primacy of democracy and the rule of law and called on the EU to further intensify its engagement with the region;
- K. whereas the European Parliament deplored the failure of the European Council to agree in 2019 on opening accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania; whereas this failure following the Commission's recommendations of 2018 and 2019, which were endorsed by Parliament, eroded the credibility of the European Union, contributed to the rise of populism, nationalism and Euroscepticism, undermined efforts made by candidate countries, risking the creation of a political vacuum, and emboldened third-party actors seeking to establish political influence in the region to the detriment of the EU integration process;
- L. whereas the enlargement process fosters and strengthens capacities to resolve bilateral disputes and strives for reconciliation between societies in the region;
- M. whereas the Western Balkan countries should increase efforts to overcome political polarisation and protracted parliamentary boycotts in order to strengthen parliamentary oversight;
- N. whereas the European Parliament remains a reliable partner of countries in the EU accession process and an advocate of the enlargement process as a positive mechanism of the European Union to stimulate reforms aimed at the institutional and socio-economic strengthening of those countries for the benefit of their citizens;
- O. whereas the Thessaloniki Agenda and the Sofia Declaration highlighted that special emphasis will be placed on creating further opportunities for youth, while ensuring that this contributes to the socio-economic development of the Western Balkans;
- P. whereas the European Parliament is committed to intensifying political and institutional support for democratic and economic reforms in the region and assisting the Western Balkan countries in the process of EU accession;
- Q. whereas the Political Guidelines of the Commission 2019-2024 reaffirm the European perspective of the Western Balkans;
- R. whereas during their hearings in the European Parliament both Vice-President/High Representative Borrell and Commissioner Várhelyi committed to prioritising the enlargement process, undertaking to accelerate structural and institutional reforms and integration processes in the Western Balkans;
- S. whereas an ambitious enlargement policy requires an adequate budget; whereas the Council should provide for sufficient budgetary means in support of the enlargement policy;
- T. whereas the EU also needs to strengthen the rule of law mechanisms inside the Union and establish an ambitious agenda for the Future of Europe conference;
- U. whereas the prosperity and security of Europe are closely linked to the integration

process and the advancement of peace, democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law in the Western Balkans region and its countries' future in a strong and reformed EU;

- V. whereas in its communication of 5 February 2020, the Commission undertook to present a communication defining actions on bringing forward fundamental reforms including on the rule of law;
  - W. whereas the EU has mobilised EUR 3,3 billion to address the coronavirus pandemic in the Western Balkans, including EUR 38 million in immediate support to the health sector, EUR 389 million for the social and economic recovery, EUR 750 million for macro-financial assistance, EUR 455 million for economic reactivation and EUR1,7 billion in preferential loans from the European Investment Bank;
  - X. whereas the Western Balkan countries have benefited from the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the joint procurement of medical equipment, exemptions from the EU's export authorisation scheme for personal protective equipment, and the 'green lanes' for essential goods;
1. Recommends the following to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:
- (a) to support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries and to enhance the accession process by ensuring that it strengthens fundamental values and the rule of law and brings sustainable democratic, economic and ecological transformation and social convergence, and ensures good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation as essential elements of the enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process, and by making sure that enlargement of the Union continues in parallel with the discussions on the future of Europe and the internal reform of the EU;
  - (b) to increase efforts to build political will among the Member States in progressing with the enlargement to the Western Balkans instead of letting internal EU processes stand in the way, as well as improving the EU's political and strategic guidance of overall policy in the region;
  - (c) to maintain enlargement as a necessary condition for the EU's credibility, success and influence in the region and beyond;
  - (d) to accelerate the accession process of the countries committed, both politically and administratively, to the implementation of EU-related reforms;
  - (e) to ensure that the enhanced methodology sustains fully-fledged EU membership as the final goal and that the EU sets more predictable rules and criteria based on conditionality and reversibility and applies them consistently, making the accession process more dynamic and thus restoring its credibility by applying the revised methodology;
  - (f) to ensure that the stronger emphasis on the political nature of the process, as presented in the revised enlargement methodology proposal by the Commission, does not supersede evaluations of completion of benchmarks at the expert level or hinder the EU's commitment to a merit-based enlargement process;

- (g) to ensure that the grouping of policy areas enhances the depth, quality and sustainability of reforms, bringing concrete results in the accession countries while enabling simultaneous negotiations on different chapters;
- (h) to provide clear, transparent and consistent accession benchmarks as well as continued political and technical support throughout the process, including for parliaments to ensure their independent oversight roles, and to improve the measuring of progress on the ground, ensuring that each accession country is assessed on the basis of conditionality and the principle of own merits;
- (i) to ensure the continuity, accountability, consistency and predictability of the enlargement process by anchoring the Commission's new methodology as a long-term policy adjustment and avoiding ad hoc revisions of the process and its parameters as a consequence of political considerations of any Member State; to ensure that the accession benchmarks and support are based on lessons learnt in order to avoid shortcomings found earlier and improve the accession process;
- (j) to facilitate the implementation of the enhanced methodology for the accession countries already in negotiations, should they decide to opt in with a view to a meaningful and long-lasting alignment with EU standards and norms;
- (k) to increase political and economic incentives for the Western Balkan countries and improve coherence between the enlargement process and political initiatives in the EU via annual regional meetings on the margins of the European Council with Western Balkans leaders, ensuring the regular participation of Western Balkans representatives in the meetings of the European Council, in the Political and Security Committee and in Commission working groups;
- (l) to encourage the gradual integration of accession countries in EU processes, sectoral policies and programmes prior to their accession, including via targeted financial support through EU funds, in order to bring tangible benefits for citizens, particularly for children and young people, and enhance the EU's pre-accession assistance and presence in those countries prior to their full membership;
- (m) to support an enhanced parliamentary role in the accession process through the established forums and to consistently encourage new initiatives such as the Speakers' Summit, which was convened, for the very first time, by the President of the European Parliament and the leaders of the Western Balkan parliaments on 28 January 2020;
- (n) to facilitate and promote closer association of members of parliament from the countries in negotiations in the work of the European Parliament;
- (o) to engage the representatives of the Western Balkan countries in the Conference on the Future of Europe, with a special focus on youth participation;
- (p) to strengthen the conditionality mechanism and insist on the reversibility of the accession process by applying objective criteria when deciding whether negotiations should be put on hold or suspended; to ensure that the Commission initiates these procedures after a thorough evaluation and in response to a proposal from the Member States or the European Parliament, while also noting that the principle of the imbalance clause and reversibility is already applicable to the

current negotiating frameworks for Serbia and Montenegro; to ensure that the conditionality and suspension mechanism is accompanied by a clear communication from the EU institutions on the specifics of a possible suspension;

- (q) to enhance ownership of the enlargement process by Member States by increasing the involvement of experts on the rule of law and other areas from the Member States, as well as of civil society and human rights defenders on the ground, and to improve the measurement of the overall developments by continuing to adhere to the long-standing objective standards and by avoiding politicisation of the technical aspects of the accession process, in particular drawing upon the monitoring reports and recommendations of the Council of Europe and other standard-setting bodies;
- (r) to recognise that the Berlin Process supports and supplements the EU enlargement policy and cannot be treated either as an alternative to accession or as replicating efforts undertaken as part of the enlargement;
- (s) to recognise that the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia is in the Union's own political, security and economic interests;
- (t) to recognise that the European Council's failure to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, in June 2018, June 2019 and October 2019, had a detrimental effect on the EU's role in the region and on public opinion regarding EU accession, sending a negative message to the Western Balkan countries, and to acknowledge that opening accession talks restores credibility to the process, as recommended by the European Parliament and the Commission;
- (u) to grant visa liberalisation to Kosovo as soon as possible, as the benchmarks have been fulfilled since July 2018;
- (v) to increase the dynamism of the negotiations in order to accelerate the accession of Montenegro and Serbia;
- (w) to bring the primacy of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms back to the very centre of the enlargement process by opening first and closing last the chapters related to the judiciary, corruption and organised crime, as well as those covering respect for human rights, including minority rights, media freedom and freedom of expression;
- (x) to focus on institutional and administrative capacity building in order to reinforce transparency and the effectiveness of good governance at all levels;
- (y) to use experience of recent enlargements, including lessons learnt from Central European countries;
- (z) to continue working together with the Western Balkan countries on countering terrorism and organised crime;
- (aa) to ensure targeted focus on state capacity-building, implementation of court rulings, judicial reforms and efforts to combat corruption and organised crime;
- (ab) to insist on the respect and full implementation of domestic and international court rulings, including those of constitutional courts and all rulings of the European

Court of Human Rights, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and its successor the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (SC) and Specialist Prosecutor's Office (SPO), as well as the recommendations of the Council of Europe monitoring bodies, including the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI);

- (ac) to urge the Western Balkan countries to comply with their international obligations in the prosecution of war crimes and the determination of the fate of missing persons; to advocate full cooperation with the IRMCT, the Kosovo SC and SPO and the explicit upholding of the work and the findings of ICTY, as well as the promotion and dissemination of its work and legacy to citizens; to condemn all attempts to glorify war criminals and to deny historical facts and to support, in this respect, the Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia (the RECOM initiative);
- (ad) to increase EU engagement in solving outstanding bilateral issues, promoting good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation through confidence-building and mediation efforts, and to urge the Western Balkan countries to commit to reconciliation and peaceful solutions to longstanding disputes;
- (ae) to strengthen the accession process with a view to deepening solidarity between the peoples of the Western Balkan countries and the Member States, while respecting their history, culture and traditions;
- (af) to support the newly appointed EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues in achieving comprehensive normalisation of relations between Serbia and Kosovo and advancing good neighbourly relations in the region during his mandate;
- (ag) to promote wider support in society for regional reconciliation by inter alia supporting full engagement of parliaments in the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and in pursuing sustainable regional reconciliation;
- (ah) to reinforce and, where possible, increase the common efforts by EU and Western Balkan countries to foster people-to-people contacts and exchanges in order to build mutually positive images of each other among their respective populations;
- (ai) to foster the creation of a level playing field for inclusive political environments and to facilitate efforts in all Western Balkan countries to overcome political polarisation and protracted parliamentary boycotts; to develop an inclusive and constructive parliamentary culture and to strengthen parliamentary scrutiny and oversight; and to promote a responsible approach towards representing citizens' interests within the parliaments, in order to promote democratic scrutiny and better quality of legislation;
- (aj) to take note of and facilitate the accession-related work and democracy support activities of the European Parliament, including the activities of its standing committees and delegations, and to involve Parliament's standing rapporteurs for the Western Balkan countries in the scrutiny process and on the ground;

- (ak) to foster electoral reforms that ensure free, fair, competitive and transparent elections at central and local levels that are free from intimidation and disinformation campaigns, in line with international standards, including on transparency in party funding, and with the recommendations of international observation missions; to follow up on the implementation of Venice Commission opinions; to contribute to the European Parliament's democracy support programmes in the region;
- (al) to encourage the national parliaments to use the European Parliament's democracy support tools, such as the Jean Monnet Dialogue and the Inter-Party Dialogue, in order to facilitate political work on parliamentary dialogue and to enhance accountability, oversight, democratic scrutiny and the quality of legislative work;
- (am) to strengthen and closely associate civil society in its role as an indispensable actor in the processes of democratic consolidation, regional cooperation and accession-related reforms, with a focus on pro-European and pro-democratic forces in the region;
- (an) to ensure that the citizens and societies of candidate countries are more closely associated with and benefit from the accession process; to give particular support and encouragement, in this framework, to pro-European and pro-democratic segments of society, views and opinions;
- (ao) to make sure that each step taken includes a substantial and comprehensive dialogue with civil society organisations, academia and youth from the early stage of decision-making to the implementation and evaluation phase, taking special care not to support or finance existing local anti-European power structures or local structures of dubious democratic reputation, and thereby fostering the development of EU values, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and the building of strong and efficient democratic institutions as the foundation for a successful accession to the EU;
- (ap) to strongly condemn smear campaigns, threats and intimidation against journalists and media outlets and to insist on the investigation and prosecution of such offences, thus enabling a safe environment for journalists, while tackling the issues of concentration, political and economic pressure on the financing of the media and lack of transparency of media ownership;
- (aq) to actively support and strengthen a democratic, independent and diverse media landscape, as well as media accountability and governance;
- (ar) to increase support measures fostering resilience against disinformation and disruptive media campaigns, including those conducted through foreign influence operations seeking to undermine democratic processes and the sovereignty of the Western Balkan countries as well as the role of the EU in the region by means of hybrid warfare;
- (as) to promote and actively support the implementation of anti-discrimination policies and to insist on the prosecution of hate crimes; to encourage swifter progress towards gender equality and in tackling discrimination and ensuring social inclusion of ethnic, national and religious minorities, people with disabilities,

Roma and LGBTQI+ people, with special attention to children, by establishing inclusive policies to protect the fundamental rights of citizens;

- (at) to call for a stronger legal framework to prevent and actively fight femicide and violence against women and children and other forms of domestic violence, including by recalling the obligations under the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, and by undertaking the necessary steps for its ratification; to prevent and combat trafficking in human beings;
- (au) to acknowledge the difficulties Western Balkan countries face in managing migration and refugee flows and the substantial efforts the region has made to provide shelter and humanitarian supplies, primarily with the support of the EU; to ensure efficient implementation of the status agreements between Western Balkan countries and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex);
- (av) to underline the significance of the contribution of the Western Balkan countries to the protection of the European Union's external border and to intensify European support to border management in the region; to strengthen the capacity of the asylum system in the region in cooperation with the European Asylum Support Office (EASO) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR);
- (aw) to emphasise the crucial importance of the social dimension and of socio-economic cohesion and its key role throughout the accession process;
- (ax) to focus more on the eradication of poverty, support for civil society and the implementation of the commitments in the area of labour law;
- (ay) to encourage the Western Balkan countries to raise the standard of their labour and social rights, to promote growth and implement the EU's social *acquis*, and to include a wide range of stakeholders such as trade unions, chambers of commerce and chambers of labour in the negotiation process with EU partners;
- (az) to tackle the brain drain with concrete measures such as promoting quality educational reforms of an inclusive nature, especially in the area of vocational education and training (VET), ensuring that the education sector better matches requirements in the labour market and contributes to the creation of long-term and sustainable job opportunities for young people;
- (ba) to support the regional dialogue platform 'Bridging the Gap' under the European Parliament's Young Political Leaders Programme, in the effort to eliminate the gap between youth policy, youth participation and parliamentarians in the Western Balkans, and to encourage concrete actions to enhance youth participation in politics and the implementation of youth-centred policies throughout the region;
- (bb) to promote opportunities in volunteering and civic engagement for young people and to invest more in the region's young people by increasing the participation of the accession countries in existing mobility programmes, such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and Horizon 2020 and establishing new programmes for intraregional mobility;

- (bc) to strengthen cooperation in the fields of science, research and innovation via dedicated European Commission programming;
- (bd) to intensify assistance to the Western Balkan countries with a view to improving their environmental, energy efficiency and climate laws and ensuring that they have the capacity to implement them in line with EU standards and the Paris Agreement, including by fully and swiftly implementing their international obligations under the Energy Community Treaty with regard to the full alignment and implementation of the energy *acquis* of the Union;
- (be) to call on the authorities to take urgent measures for the monitoring, mitigation and prevention of air and water pollution; to ensure *ex ante* strategic environmental assessments and environmental impact assessments in order to secure sustainable hydropower and tourism development, balanced with conservation efforts;
- (bf) to facilitate regional energy integration, increasing diversification and security of supply sources, and to enhance connectivity of the energy infrastructures and digital networks;
- (bg) to encourage the necessary energy transition to cleaner renewable energy sources and away from coal and lignite, which cause serious social and health risks to local populations and neighbouring countries; to include the Western Balkan accession countries in the European Green Deal and Just Transition Fund processes;
- (bh) to recall that the EU is the largest foreign investor in the region, having invested EUR 12.7 billion in foreign direct investment between 2014 and 2018; to put in place a strategic economic and investment plan with a view to improving competitiveness, the legal and business environment, the situation of SMEs and sustainable development in the whole region in line with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal, while noting that growth in the Western Balkans is slowing down after a short-lived revival in investment in previous years and that the contribution of investment and of exports to growth is fading;
- (bi) to promote and enhance regional economic integration in the Western Balkans, as already implemented within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and modelled on the EU *acquis*, and to actively support economic integration between the EU and the region by extending EU policies and the internal market to the Western Balkan countries when the preconditions have been met;
- (bj) to support initiatives based on the Multiannual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) adopted by the prime ministers of the Western Balkan countries at the 2017 Trieste summit, comprising four pillars – trade, investment, mobility and digital integration – which are crucial for the economic development of the region and to accelerating convergence with the EU;
- (bk) to support cooperation of the Western Balkans countries with regional and international organisations such as the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Organisation for Economic

Cooperation and Development (OECD), and with international financial institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB);

- (bl) to continue supporting and providing the assistance needed as soon as possible to accomplish the processes of Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina's accession to the World Trade Organisation (WTO), welcoming their WTO membership applications which were lodged in 1999 and 2005 respectively, and recalling the importance of WTO membership for opening up trade opportunities and bringing candidate countries closer to EU membership;
- (bm) to defend the interests of the Union by mitigating the negative effect of free-trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union signed by countries which have applied for membership of the European Union and which have been granted the opportunity of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the European Union, including by reviewing the level of assistance provided to such countries;
- (bn) to encourage regional cooperation in the area of infrastructure development between the countries of the Western Balkans;
- (bo) to give the region high priority under the EU's Connectivity Strategy, highlighting the importance of improving transport infrastructure in the region, and, in particular, the role this plays in facilitating trade; to support the construction of European rail and road corridors throughout the Western Balkan countries; encourages the Commission to expedite infrastructure investment financing;
- (bp) to bring the people and economies of the region and the EU closer together by embedding the Western Balkan countries in the TEN-T and TEN-E networks, and to assist in ensuring quality and safe transport and energy services and improving infrastructure and overall connectivity within the region, as well as between the region and the EU, in line with the Commission's proposal for a strategic economic and investment plan for the Western Balkans;
- (bq) to accelerate the implementation of the digital agenda for the Western Balkans in order to bring the benefits of the digital transformation to citizens; to assist the countries of the region in improving funding and development opportunities for start-ups and SMEs;
- (br) to establish a predictable timetable and speed up the implementation of a regional roaming free zone and to initiate a further decrease in tariffs for communications with the EU based on increased physical and digital regional cooperation and connectivity;
- (bs) to improve the consistency, efficiency, visibility and transparency of Union financing in the field of external action, thereby advancing the Union's values, the rule of law, the fight against corruption and the building of strong and efficient democratic institutions; to align, where appropriate, the IPA III funding with the objectives of the European Green Deal;
- (bt) to ensure adequate, fair and proportionate, performance-based and results-oriented pre-accession assistance that matches the transformation needs of the beneficiaries and helps them deliver on EU accession obligations; to prioritise specific projects

benefiting the people of the countries in question and to enhance the absorption capacity of beneficiaries;

- (bu) to coordinate economic governance issues more closely with international financial institutions (IFIs) and to improve mutual cooperation in order to streamline support efforts and avoid duplication of funding;
- (bv) to strengthen the conditionality between macro-financial assistance and progress in the fight against corruption and respect for the rule of law and human rights;
- (bw) to avoid cuts in the overall IPA funding which could slow down EU-related reforms and undermine the Union's capacity to fulfil its strategic objective of stabilising and transforming accession countries and preparing them for membership obligations, as well as seriously limiting the ability to address multiple challenges related to the rule of law, reconciliation, regional integration and climate change, while leaving the region even more susceptible to the influence of third-country actors; to ensure adequate and continuous support to civil society;
- (bx) to ensure that IPA III is driven by political priorities that through concrete projects have a direct impact on citizens' lives, and that pre-accession funding is allocated in a transparent, proportionate and non-discriminatory manner and is based on solid performance indicators, taking into account the commitment shown and progress made by the beneficiary countries in implementing reforms;
- (by) to reinforce the performance-based approach through a suspension mechanism, ensuring coherence with the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI); to complement the IPA III Regulation with a reformed and improved 'Strategic Dialogue' ensuring that the European Parliament is informed and consulted in a timely manner;
- (bz) to uphold democratic accountability by ensuring the full involvement of the European Parliament in the scrutiny, oversight and strategic steering of the design, programming and monitoring and evaluation of IPA III through delegated acts;
- (ca) to improve the overall visibility of and information about EU support in the region by strengthening strategic communication and public diplomacy in order to convey the values of the Union and highlight the added value of the EU-funded projects and programmes; to prepare a joint communication strategy in cooperation with the Western Balkan countries; to further develop an understanding of the benefits of the accession and unification process across the European continent;
- (cb) to insist on the progressive alignment of accession countries with the EU common foreign and security policy and common commercial policy;
- (cc) to significantly increase communication concerning the EU aid, in particular concerning the substantial support the EU has provided to the Western Balkans to fight the COVID-19 pandemic, and to ensure that the recipients of this aid do not spread disinformation and negative rhetoric concerning the EU's response to COVID-19;
- (cd) to commend the cooperation of Western Balkan countries in common security and

defence policy (CSDP) missions with the EU;

- (ce) to condemn the actions of third countries aimed at destabilising and undermining democratic governance in the Western Balkan region;
- (cf) to continue cooperation in the field of countering hybrid threats, including combating Russian propaganda;
- (cg) to follow up on the 2020 EU-Western Balkans Summit in order to evaluate, reassess and inject new dynamism into the enlargement process and provide a new impetus for the transformation of accession countries;
- (ch) to swiftly implement the revised enlargement methodology for a relaunch of the accession process, and, building upon the Zagreb Western Balkans Summit, to adopt negotiating frameworks and convene intergovernmental conferences aimed at starting accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia;
- (ci) Stresses the 15 conditions, decided by the Council of the European Union, that Albania needs to have fulfilled prior to its first intergovernmental conference with the EU Member States;
- (cj) to sustain cooperation with the United Kingdom in the Western Balkans, taking into account the British ties with the region, as well as common objectives, from the advancement of the rule of law and fighting organised crime to counter-terrorism and other objectives and goals of CSDP missions;
- (ck) to intensify high-level political dialogue through regular EU-Western Balkans summits;
- (cl) to implement the recommendations of the 2019 Thematic Evaluation of EU Support for Rule of Law in Neighbourhood and Enlargement Countries (2010-2017), in addition to the prompt adoption of a Commission communication addressing serious rule of law concerns through a conditionality and reversibility mechanism;
- (cm) to follow up on the significant support provided to all the Western Balkan countries to address the immediate health and humanitarian needs resulting from COVID-19;
- (cn) to continue to support the EU candidate countries and potential candidate countries in the Western Balkans in response coordination and mitigation of the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 outbreak, and to align the measures with the EU's common emergency economic package prepared with international financial institutions;
- (co) to ensure that the current and next generation MFF along with the economic and investment plan for the Western Balkans significantly contribute to the post-COVID-19 recovery, and facilitate economic growth and integration through enhanced and sustainable digital, energy and transport links;
- (cp) to guarantee that the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans is not predominantly financed via existing IPA funds, thus potentially absorbing financing for other important policies and programmes; to bring this plan

completely in line with the European Green Deal, in particular the EU's decarbonisation target;

- (cq) to prioritise the Western Balkans in the new External Action Guarantee and the European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD+) under the Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI); to ensure a twofold increase in the provision of grants through the Western Balkans Investment Framework to support private sector development, connectivity, digitalisation, the green agenda, and social investments, and to substantially increase the financial guarantees for supporting public and private investment in the region through the Guarantee Instrument;
  - (cr) to extend the geographic scope of the European Union Solidarity Fund, which already covers public health crises, to all the Western Balkan countries;
2. Instructs its President to forward this recommendation to the Council, the Commission, the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the governments and parliaments of the accession countries.