MEPs begin work on 2018 enlargement package

• MEPs welcome 2018 enlargement package
• Support to accelerate accession talks with Western Balkans
• Critical on accession talks with Turkey

Foreign affairs MEPs welcomed the positive news on EU accession talks with Albania and FYROM, but questioned the accession talks with Turkey, in a debate on Monday.

“Enlargement policy yields results,” stressed European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Commissioner Johannes Hahn in a Foreign Affairs Committee debate on the 2018 enlargement package. He listed the main achievements and challenges that EU candidate countries and potential candidates faced during last year. The Commissioner noted that Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia secured the Commission’s recommendation to start accession talks, while Turkey “continues to move away significantly from the European Union”.

Foreign Affairs Committee MEPs welcomed the analysis presented by Commissioner Hahn, expressed high hopes that the EU enlargement momentum will not be wasted and that further accession talks will not be blocked by EU member states. Some MEPs also voiced their concerns on the Turkey report, questioning the Commission’s intention to treat Turkey as a strategic partner, despite severe violations in the rule of law and human rights field.

Turkey

Kati Piri (S&D, NL), rapporteur on Turkey, stated: “According to the European Commission’s 2017 Report on Turkey, the candidate country is doing worse than before in its efforts to meet the EU’s political criteria. The almost two-year old state of emergency has severely curtailed fundamental rights, ten thousands of people have been jailed without due process, and a
controversial referendum was held on a new constitution. However, despite the grim analysis, the Commission fails to draw any political consequences. It keeps the illusion alive that the accession process can continue, even after a constitution, which fails to uphold the basic principles of a democracy, is implemented. With this 'all bark, no bite' strategy, the Commission missed the opportunity to send a clear message to President Erdoğan that his policies have a direct effect on EU-Turkey relations."

Serbia

David McAllister (EPP, DE), the chair of EP’s Foreign Affairs committee and rapporteur on Serbia, said: "Serbia is one of the two frontrunners in the enlargement process. The government in Belgrade has adopted important economic reforms that continue to produce results. However, addressing and implementing reforms in the area of the rule of law and fundamental rights remains the most important task for Serbia. Belgrade and Pristina have to substantially deepen their engagement in the Dialogue. The initiative of President Aleksandar Vučić to launch an internal Dialogue in Serbia on the future of the relations with Kosovo is therefore very important."

Albania

Knut Fleckenstein (S&D, DE), rapporteur on Albania, said: “Albania fully deserves this positive recommendation. The country is undergoing a comprehensive reform of its judiciary that strongly underlines its European ambition and boosts progress on other key priorities as well. Furthermore, Albania’s experience with this reform will be useful for other countries in the region too. I count on the European Council in June to take the country's accession process further."

Montenegro

Charles Tannock (ECR, UK), rapporteur on Montenegro, noted: "The Commission report for Montenegro is a fair assessment of the progress and challenges that the country faces. With nearly all negotiation chapters now opened, Montenegro is the front runner in the accession process and is in a good position to consolidate its progress and focus efforts on those areas highlighted for improvement."
The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE, SI), rapporteur on FYROM, said: "By recommending once again the start of accession negotiations with Macedonia, the European Commission is sticking to the principle that candidate countries are judged on their own merits. Macedonia has been kept in the waiting room long enough. The last obstacle – the name issue with Greece – will hopefully be overcome soon and the country will be able to devote all its energy to pursuing reform and meet all necessary criteria for EU membership."

Kosovo

Igor Šoltes (Greens, SI), rapporteur on Kosovo, stressed: “It is important for Kosovo’s government to continue with the reforms they have already started to implement: the fight against corruption and organised crime, pursuing an independent and fully functional judiciary system. In order for the region to remain stable, it is of outmost importance to continue the dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina in a peaceful, tolerant and respectful way. I expect that visa liberalisation will soon be granted to Kosovo and that there will be as few obstacles as possible along the way.”

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Cristian Dan Preda (EPP, RO), rapporteur on Bosnia and Herzegovina, noted: "I am worried that the pace of reforms in BiH slowed down due to political disagreements. BiH has to catch up with other countries in the region and get the candidate country status, so reforms must accelerate. At the same time, a compromise must be urgently found on changes to the electoral legislation, in particular for the Federation House of Peoples, so that credible elections can take place in October."

You can watch the recording of the debate via Video on Demand (from 17:30)
Next step

The Foreign Affairs Committee will now begin its in-depth examination of the country-specific reports in order to draft a resolution on each country.

Quick facts

EU candidate countries - Turkey, Montenegro, Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania. Potential candidate countries - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo.

Accession negotiations have been opened with Turkey (2005), Montenegro (2012) and Serbia (2014).

Further information
Foreign Affairs Committee
Video on demand
EP rapporteur on Turkey Kati Piri (S&D, NL)
EP rapporteur on Serbia David McAllister (EPP, DE)
EP rapporteur on Montenegro Charles Tannock (ECR, UK)
EP rapporteur on Kosovo Igor Šoltes (Greens, SI)
EP rapporteur on Albania Knut Fleckenstein (S&D, DE)
EP rapporteur on Bosnia and Herzegovina Cristian Dan Preda (EPP, RO)
EP rapporteur on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Ivo Vajgl (ALDE, SI)
2018 enlargement package

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