

 Federal Chancellery  
Republic of Austria

 Federal Ministry  
Republic of Austria  
European and International  
Affairs

H.E.  
Josep Borrell  
High Representative of the Union  
for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy  
Vice President of the European Commission

Vienna, 25 September 2023

H.E.  
Olivér Várhelyi  
Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement  
Member of the European Commission

EU Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Ministers / State Secretaries for European Affairs

### **Advancing gradual integration for the Western Balkans on the way to full membership**

Dear High Representative,  
Dear Commissioner,

We fully agree with the important message that the President of the European Commission underlined in her 2023 State of the Union Address: „The future of the Western Balkans is in our Union.“ Twenty years after the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki, this message is more important than ever. At the same time, it is obvious that the current enlargement process has become more and more complex and bureaucratic and is therefore advancing too slowly. The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has changed Europe’s political landscape and has made it even more urgent to tie the Western Balkans countries and their citizens closer to the EU. We need to create a “level playing field” with other candidate and aspiring countries that already enjoy benefits based on Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas.

While we recognise the importance to discuss intra-EU reforms and the future of the EU, we believe that this should not be used as a pretext to delay the enlargement process of our Western Balkans partners, which we have been discussing for years and decades.

Building upon the Austrian Non-Paper of May 2022, the European Council Conclusions of 23-24 June 2022 as well as the new growth plan for the Western Balkans announced by the President of the Commission in May 2023, we deem it crucial to further advance the gradual integration of the Western Balkans on the way to full membership. Reiterating the joint

declaration of the “Friends of the Western Balkans” of June 2023, we call on the EU institutions to present a clear agenda for gradual and accelerated integration with concrete implementation steps until 2024 and beyond, based on fair and rigorous conditionality and the principle of own merits.

We are therefore submitting the attached list of concrete proposals which we will elaborate further together with the EU Presidency, the EU institutions and interested member states, in particular the „Friends of the Western Balkans“.

We hope that these proposals will contribute to our upcoming discussions and will be swiftly implemented.

Yours sincerely,



**Karoline Edtstadler**

Federal Minister for the EU and Constitution  
at the Federal Chancellery  
of the Republic of Austria



**Alexander Schallenberg**

Federal Minister  
for European and International Affairs  
of the Republic of Austria