

H.E. Kaja Kallas
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy /
Vice-President of the European Commission

H.E. Marta Kos
Commissioner for Enlargement

12 December 2024

Dear High Representative,
Dear Commissioner,

With Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and other security challenges to our continent, the enlargement policy, one of the EU's most effective geopolitical tools, has been given a new and strong impetus. In this regard, the Western Balkans will be the geostrategic litmus test for the European Union. Only by integrating this region into our EU family can we secure our continent's stability and prosperity.

Over the past two years, we, the "Friends of the Western Balkans", have been active in keeping the Western Balkans high on the EU's political agenda and in advancing the EU integration of this region, as set out in our 2023 Götting Declaration and the 2024 Appeal for Western Balkans' Enlargement. We have advocated for anchoring gradual integration between the EU and the region on the way to full membership and enhancing cooperation on shared foreign and security challenges.

We therefore fully support President von der Leyen's tasking in her Mission Letter to you, Commissioner Kos, to drive forward the enlargement process in the coming critical years, building on the renewed momentum, and to work on gradual integration. We will continue to support an even more dynamic, credible and efficient enlargement process. Time has come for decisive progress, and we will continue to assist the region in achieving the next substantial steps on their EU accession path.

In this respect, we call for a clear agenda and timeline to fully implement the Growth Plan and advance gradual integration into the Single Market as well as into other EU policies, once all necessary requirements are fulfilled. This should provide a tangible EU membership perspective and produce more visible results for the Western Balkans' citizens, in particular young people, and contribute to strengthening their support for the EU.

To meet these goals, we encourage our Western Balkan partners to accelerate the necessary reforms, particularly in the area of fundamentals, engage in regional cooperation, foster good neighbourly relations through reconciliation and resolution of outstanding issues and implement the Common Regional Market, a stepping-stone into the Single Market.

Both the EU and the Western Balkans are exposed to similar security challenges, such as malign foreign influence, hybrid threats, cyber attacks, disinformation and illegal migration. In order to strengthen our resilience and the region's progress towards full alignment with EU foreign policy positions, we have to continue deepening our engagement and cooperation in the field of Common Foreign and Security Policy, including capacity building. To that end, we suggest inviting our Western Balkan partners for informal exchanges on the occasion of Foreign Affairs Council and Gymnich meetings to discuss Europe's security and resilience in the context of global challenges as well as other CFSP-related issues of mutual interest at least once per semester. We also need more regular and structured informal exchanges as well as cooperation through the Political and Security Committee, CFSP and CSDP dialogues and joint projects.

Furthermore, we propose increasing the EU's presence and visibility in the Western Balkans through more frequent and coordinated Ministerial visits, also on behalf of the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

Enlargement, as one of the main priorities in the upcoming institutional cycle, should be reflected in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework, such as through focusing on a more effective and performance-based pre-accession instrument. We also suggest better targeting IPA funding to facilitate a wider participation of our Western Balkan partners in EU programmes and agencies, support capacity building and further boost their economic growth.

We look forward to welcoming the next EU member states when all conditions are met and based on the principle of own merits. The necessary EU-internal reform process should advance in parallel to the accession process, but not be seen as a precondition for enlargement.

We must also start preparing EU citizens for future enlargement rounds. As outlined in the above-mentioned Mission Letter, we would welcome a Union-wide communication campaign to explain the reasons, needs and benefits of this joint geostrategic move. Such a campaign should not only include EU institutions and EU member states but also our Western Balkan partners. In parallel, the EU also needs to strengthen its Strategic Communication in the region

and encourage partners to intensify their communication on EU values and the benefits of the EU integration process.

The core priority of the new European Commission is to promote Europe's prosperity, security and democracy. In this new EU institutional cycle, the new momentum in our enlargement policy towards the Western Balkans should be a key driver in achieving these strategic goals. We look forward to working with you and would welcome an early exchange on how to make the Western Balkans' EU accession a success story in the coming years.



Alexander Schallenberg,

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



Gordan Grlić Radman

Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia




Jan Lipavský

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic



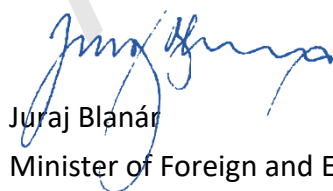
George Gerapetritis

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic



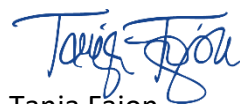
Antonio Tajani

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