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| **European Parliament**2019-2024 | EP logo RGB_Mute |

 *Plenary sitting*

**<NoDocSe>A9-9999/2020</NoDocSe>**

<Date>{28/04/2020}28.4.2020</Date>

<TitreType>**REPORT**</TitreType>

<Titre>on a European Parliament recommendation 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 </Titre>

<DocRef>(2019/2210(INI))</DocRef>

<Commission>{AFET}{AFET}Committee on Foreign Affairs</Commission>

Rapporteur: <Depute>Tonino Picula</Depute>

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**DRAFT EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT RECOMMENDATION**

**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 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 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 ofThessaloniki, 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’[[1]](#footnote-1),

***–*** having regard to the opinion of the European Committee of the Regions on the Enlargement package 2019, adopted on 13 February 2020[[2]](#footnote-2),

– having regard to its resolution of 9 July 2015 on the Srebrenica Commemoration[[3]](#footnote-3),

– 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 for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III)[[4]](#footnote-4),

– having regard to its resolution of 24 October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania[[5]](#footnote-5),

– having regard to its resolution of 15 January 2020 on the European Parliament’s position on the Conference on the Future of Europe[[6]](#footnote-6),

– 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 (A9-0000/2020),

A. whereas enlargement isone of the EU’s most successful and strategic policies

as well asthe 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;

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 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;

K. whereas the enlargement process fosters and strengthens capacities to resolve bilateral disputes and strives for reconciliation between societies in the region;

L. whereas the Western Balkan countries should increase efforts to overcome political polarisation and protracted parliamentary boycotts in order to strengthen parliamentary oversight;

M. 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;

N. 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;

O. whereas the European Parliament is committed to intensifying political andinstitutional support for democratic and economic reforms in the region and assisting the Western Balkan countries in the process of EU accession;

P. whereas the Political Guidelines of the Commission 2019-2024 reaffirm the European perspective of the Western Balkans;

Q. 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;

R. whereas an ambitious enlargement policy requires an adequate budget; whereas the Council should provide for sufficient budgetary means in support of the enlargement policy;

S. 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;

T. 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;

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 technicalsupport throughout the process, 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 ofown 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 initiativesin 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 countriesin 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 facilitate and promote closer association of members of parliament from the countries in negotiations in the work of the European Parliament;

n) to engage the representatives of the Western Balkan countries in the Conference on the Future of Europe, with a special focus on youth participation;

o) 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 suspensionmechanism is accompanied by a clear communication from the EU institutions on the specifics of a possible suspension;

p) 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;

q) 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;

r) to recognise that the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia is in the Union's own political, security and economic interests;

s) 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;

t) to grant visa liberalisation to Kosovo as soon as possible, as the benchmarks have been fulfilled since July 2018;

u) to increase the dynamism of the negotiations in order to accelerate the accession of Montenegro and Serbia;

v) 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;

w) to focus on institutional and administrative capacity building in order to reinforce transparency and the effectiveness of good governance at all levels;

x) to use experience of recent enlargements, including lessons learnt from Central European countries;

y) to continue working together with the Western Balkan countries on countering terrorism and organised crime;

z) to ensure targeted focus on state capacity-building, implementation of court rulings, judicial reforms and efforts to combat corruption and organised crime;

aa) 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);

ab) 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);

ac) 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;

ad) 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;

ae) 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;

af) 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;

ag) 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;

ah) 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;

ai) 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;

aj) 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;

ak) 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;

al) 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;

am) 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;

an) to actively support and strengthen a democratic, independent and diverse media landscape, as well as media accountability and governance;

ao) to increase support measures fostering resilience against disinformation and disruptive media campaigns, including those conductedthrough foreign influence operations seeking to undermine democratic processes and the sovereignty of the Western Balkan countries by means of hybrid warfare;

ap) 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;

aq) 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;

ar) 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 implement the agreements between Western Balkan countries and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex);

as) 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);

at) to emphasise the crucial importance of the social dimension and of socio-economic cohesion and its key role throughout the accession process;

au) to focus more on the eradication of poverty, support for civil society and the implementation of the commitments in the area of labour law;

av) 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;

aw) 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;

ax) 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;

ay) 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;

az) to strengthen cooperation in the fields of science, research and innovation via dedicated European Commission programming;

ba) 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;

bb) 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;

bc)to facilitate regional energy integration, increasing diversification and security of supply sources, and to enhance connectivity of the energy infrastructures and digital networks;

bd) 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;

be) 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;

bf) 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;

bg) 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;

bh) 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);

bi) 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;

bj) 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;

bk) to encourage regional cooperation in the area of infrastructure development between the countries of the Western Balkans;

bl) 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;

bm) to bring the people and economies of the region and the EU closer together byembedding 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;

bn) 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;

bo) to establisha 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;

bp) 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;

bq) 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;

br) 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;

bs) 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;

bt) 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;

bu) to ensure that IPA III is driven by political priorities that throughconcrete 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;

bv) 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;

bw) 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;

bx) 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;

by) to insist on the progressive alignment of accession countries with the EU common foreign and security policyand common commercial policy;

bz) to commend the cooperation of Western Balkan countries in common security and defence policy (CSDP) missions with the EU;

ca) to condemn the actions of third countries aimed at destabilising and undermining democratic governance in the Western Balkan region;

cb) to continue cooperation in the field of countering hybrid threats, including combating Russian propaganda;

cc) to ensure that the 2020 EU-Western Balkans Summit will evaluate, reassess and inject new dynamism into the enlargement process and provide a new impetus for the transformation of accession countries;

cd) to endorse the new methodology proposed by the Commission for a relaunch of the process in time for the Zagreb Western Balkans Summit, as well as for the opening of negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia;

ce) 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;

cf) to intensify high-level political dialogue through regular EU-Western Balkans summits;

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.

**LETTER FROM THE COMMITTEE ON INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

David McALLISTER

Committee on Foreign Affairs

Chair

**Subject: INTA opinion to AFET report on the Western Balkans**

Dear Mr McAllister,

I address this letter to you, in my capacity as rapporteur for the INTA opinion to the AFET report on *"European Parliament recommendation 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, in the run-up to the 2020 summit".*

INTA was scheduled to vote on its opinion in March, but under the exceptional COVID-19 related circumstances, originally planned ordinary meetings have been cancelled. Pursuant to the information currently available, INTA might not be able to hold a vote on a formal opinion before AFET’s envisaged adoption of its report, in order to ensure Parliament’s timely input into the Summit preparations.

Considering on one hand the very limited meeting possibilities and on the other hand AFET’s political prerogatives to ensure Parliament’s timely input into the Summit preparations, INTA Coordinators agreed at their meeting on 1 April that they would exceptionally agree to presenting INTA’s position in the form of compromise amendments (agreed by the groups) transmitted by a letter to AFET, provided that such letter would be substantially treated as opinion and properly taken into account.

Therefore, I ask you to share this letter with your Rapporteur and consider the attached amendments as INTA contribution to AFET report on Western Balkans. In those exceptional circumstances, I trust you to treat this letter accordingly during the procedure of the votes by your Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Reinhard BÜTIKOFER

Cc: Bernd LANGE, INTA Chair

 Tonino PICULA, AFET Rapporteur

Annex: INTA’s position in the form of a letter

**Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, in the run-up to the May 2020 Summit**

**INTA’s position in the form of a letter**

**(INTA Rapporteur: Reinhard Bütikofer)**

1. Highlights that supporting EU-related reforms in the areas of democracy, rule of law, social market economy, economic cooperation and trade as well as good neighbourly relations and successfully opening, conducting and concluding accession talks with the Western Balkan countries is one of the EU’s core priorities in the region; recalls that the environmental ambition of the Green Deal and the ecological transition for Europe can only be fully effective if third countries, including the EU’s immediate neighbourhood also takes effective action and calls on the EU to use its influence, expertise and financial resources to mobilise Western Balkan countries to join it on a sustainable path;

2. Recalls that the EU is the main trade partner of the Western Balkan countries and that bilateral trade doubled between 2006 and 2016; notes, furthermore, that the EU continuously runs a steady and heavy trade surplus with the Western Balkans, counting for 9 billion EUR in 2018, and this surplus has continued in 2019, largely due to a pick-up in EU exports and a slow-down in EU imports, as the World Bank has also noted in its study "Rising Uncertainties";

3. Takes into account the new methodology for the accession negotiations adopted by the European Commission, which envisions the EU’s enlargement policy as a two-way street on which both sides must uphold their commitments and supports the Commission in rewarding negotiation progress as well as in reopening negotiations when expected reforms are not delivered; stresses that the pace of negotiations should reflect the merits and readiness of each country and their progress with regards to internal reforms;

4. Calls on the candidate countries of the Western Balkans to fully comply with the obligations assumed under the Stabilisation and Accession Agreements (SAA) when negotiating free trade agreements; and their trade policies with third countries should be shaped in light of their future EU membership;

5. Welcomes the WTO membership applications of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia which took place respectively in 1999 and 2005; Recalls the importance of WTO membership to open up trade opportunities and to bring candidate countries closer to EU membership; calls on the EU;

6. Calls for an increase to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and other funds to support reforms and assistance for remaining countries in the Western Balkans; in this regard, calls for strong integration efforts and projects, for instance from funds such as the Western Balkans Fund, in order to support Western Balkan countries in strengthening the rule of law, democracy, human rights, fight against corruption, and their administrative and judicial capacity so as to enhance economic competitiveness, prosperity and social wellbeing, budgetary balance and structural reform and to achieve stable conditions for business to operate and invest in the region; in this respect, calls on the candidate countries to deliver reforms which will step by step guarantee a rules-based economic system with a level playing field for all participants and to adopt EU standards with regard to citizen's labour and social rights;

7. Reminds the Western Balkan countries of the importance of regional economic cooperation, wider market environment and good neighbourly relations; recalls the importance of regional integration efforts coordinated within the framework of the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue, the Berlin Process, economic cooperation within CEFTA, continued work on the connectivity agenda and further engagement in the creation of the Regional Trade Area; supports initiatives that promote regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations while moving countries closer to EU membership; highlights the importance of stability and prosperity in the region as well for the EU; stresses that retaliatory trade measures and diplomatic initiatives aiming at non-recognition of a neighbouring country handicap both the regional economic integration of the affected countries and block several lines of political dialogue;

8. Recalls that the EU is the largest foreign investor in the region by investing 12,7 billion EUR in foreign direct investments between 2014-2018; urges the European Commission to put in place a strategic economic and investment plan with a view to improving competitiveness and sustainable development in the whole Western Balkans region, as the growth in the Western Balkans is slowing down after a short-lived revival on investments in previous years and the contribution of investments and of exports to growth are fading in the region; emphasises the need to give the region high priority under the EU’s Connectivity Strategy; highlights the importance of improving transport infrastructure in the region, and in particular the role this plays in facilitating trade; supports the construction of European railway and highway corridors throughout the Western Balkan countries; encourages the European Commission to expedite infrastructure investment financing;

9. Requests that the Commission provide further technical support to the Western Balkans, particularly its private sector, to improve the external investment framework, in particular in the areas of predictability and investor protection also by the means of increased financing of technical assistance through the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance;

10. Reiterates its call on the Commission to monitor the effects of EU policies, including trade policy, on SMEs, as they play a vital role in international trade; due to their size and limited resources, the costs of administrative burden affects the SMEs disproportionally, therefore the EU’s trade policy with the Western Balkans should be SME-friendly, providing user-friendly, up-to-date and practical information; calls on the Commission to explore increased sectoral cooperation, especially in terms of SME investment and domestic market capitalisation, of education and research, innovation and digitisation as well as environmental and green technologies, in order to share know-how and best practices; in this regard, emphasises the importance of focused youth programmes in the region in order to improve their job market situation, create decent jobs and support mobility and cyclical migration rather than irreversible economic emigration;

11. Underlines that energy industries in the Western Balkans remain defined by outdated infrastructure, the overwhelming dominance of coal and hydropower; urges the Western Balkan countries, but also foreign investors, in particular EIB, EBRD and other public financial institutions, to work to meet climate objectives and EU environmental legislation when selecting projects in the energy sector in order to reduce energy poverty, increase energy efficiency and security and pay particular attention to the preservation of biodiversity and protected sites under international conventions; calls for environmental impact assessments and public consultations on projects affecting protected areas, biodiversity and environmental protection, also taking into account local community views.

**INFORMATION ON ADOPTION IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date adopted** | 20.4.2020 |  |  |  |
| **Result of final vote** | +:–:0: | 5875 |
| **Members present for the final vote** | Alviina Alametsä, Alexander Alexandrov Yordanov, Maria Arena, Petras Auštrevičius, Traian Băsescu, Lars Patrick Berg, Anna Bonfrisco, Reinhard Bütikofer, Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Susanna Ceccardi, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Katalin Cseh, Tanja Fajon, Anna Fotyga, Michael Gahler, Kinga Gál, Giorgos Georgiou, Sunčana Glavak, Raphaël Glucksmann, Klemen Grošelj, Bernard Guetta, Márton Gyöngyösi, Sandra Kalniete, Karol Karski, Dietmar Köster, Stelios Kouloglou, Andrius Kubilius, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, David Lega, Miriam Lexmann, Nathalie Loiseau, Antonio López-Istúriz White, Lukas Mandl, Thierry Mariani, David McAllister, Vangelis Meimarakis, Sven Mikser, Francisco José Millán Mon, Javier Nart, Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor, Urmas Paet, Demetris Papadakis, Kostas Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Manu Pineda, Kati Piri, Giuliano Pisapia, Diana Riba i Giner, Jérôme Rivière, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Isabel Santos, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Andreas Schieder, Radosław Sikorski, Sergei Stanishev, Tineke Strik, Hermann Tertsch, Hilde Vautmans, Harald Vilimsky, Idoia Villanueva Ruiz, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, Thomas Waitz, Witold Jan Waszczykowski, Charlie Weimers, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Salima Yenbou, Željana Zovko |
| **Substitutes present for the final vote** | Nikos Androulakis, Nicolas Bay |

**FINAL VOTE BY ROLL CALL IN COMMITTEE RESPONSIBLE**

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| --- | --- |
| **58** | **+** |
| ECR | Anna Fotyga, Karol Karski, Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, Hermann Tertsch, Witold Jan Waszczykowski |
| GUE/NGL | Stelios Kouloglou, Manu Pindea, Idoia Villanueava Ruiz |
| NI | Fabio Massimo Castaldo, Márton Gyöngyösi |
| PPE | Alexander Alexandrov Yordanov, Traian Băsescu, Michael Gahler, Kinga Gál, Sunčana Glavak, Sandra Kalniete, Andrius Kubilius, David Lega, Miriam Lexmann, David McAllister, Lukas Mandl, Vangelis Meimarakis, Gheorghe-Vlad Nistor, Radosław Sikorski, Isabel Wiseler-Lima, Željana Zovko |
| RENEW | Petras Auštrevičius, Katalin Cseh, Klemen Grošelj, Bernard Guetta, Ilhan Kyuchyuk, Nathalie Loiseau, Javier Nart, Urmas Paet, María Soraya Rodríguez Ramos, Hilde Vautmans |
| S&D | Maria Arena, Włodzimierz Cimoszewicz, Tanja Fajon, Raphaël Glucksmann, Dietmar Köster, Sven Mikser, Demetris Papadakis, Tonino Picula, Kati Piri, Giuliano Pisapia, Nacho Sánchez Amor, Isabel Santos, Andreas Schieder, Sergei Stanishev, Nikos Androulakis |
| Verts/ALE | Alviina Alametsä, Reinhard Bütikofer, Diana Riba i Giner, Tineke Strik, Viola Von Cramon-Taubadel, Thomas Waitz, Salima Yenbou |

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| **7** |  |
| ECR | Charlie Weimers |
| ID | Lars Patrick Berg, Thierry Mariani, Jérôme Rivière, Harald Vilimsky, Nicolas Bay |
| NI | Kostas Papadakis |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **5** | **0** |
| GUE | Giorgos Georgiou |
| ID | Anna Bonfrisco, Susanna Ceccardi |
| PPE | Antonio López-Istúriz White, Francisco José Millán Mon |

Key to symbols:

+ : in favour

- : against

0 : abstention

1. OJ C 47, 11.2.2020, p. 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. CDR 2727/2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. OJ C 265,11.8.2017, p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Texts adopted, P8\_TA(2019)0299 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2019)0050 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Texts adopted, P9\_TA(2020)0010. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)