

THE ENLARGEMENT PROCESS REKINDLED BY THE INVASION OF UKRAINE

After a long period of "fatigue", the European Union's enlargement policy has once again come to the forefront of the European debate. This is an unexpected consequence of Russia's aggression against Ukraine. **Enlargement has therefore resumed its role as a geopolitical means of stabilising the continent.**



One of Ukraine's first reactions to the Russian invasion was to apply for membership of the EU, on 28 February 2022. Georgia and Moldova followed suit four days later. These sudden applications had a direct impact on the accession process of the six States of the Western Balkans which was already underway.

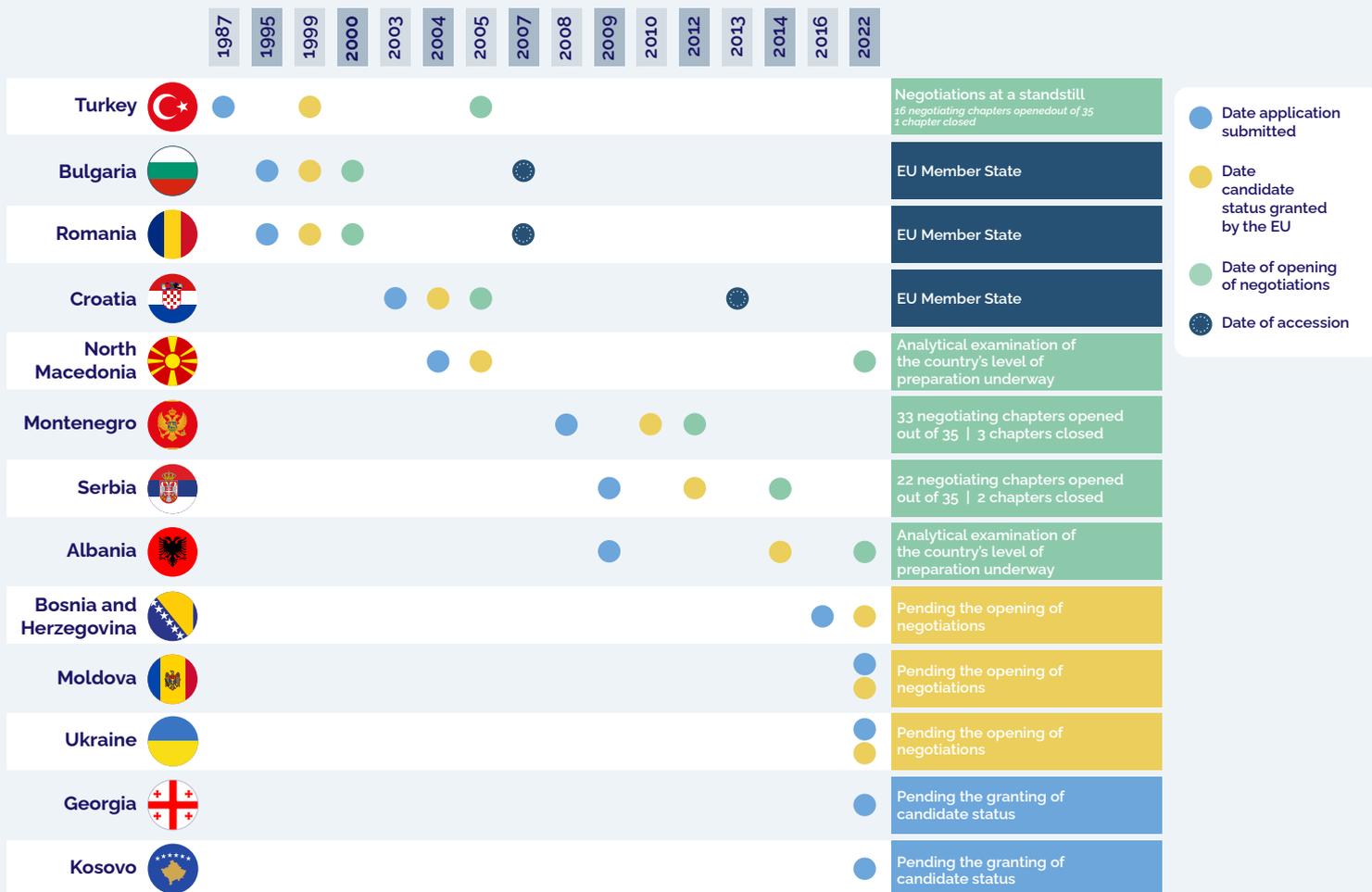
The new geopolitical context has raised awareness of the risks of instability in the Balkans, thus encouraging a revival of the accession process of the countries in the region. Within a few months, Albania and North Macedonia started accession negotiations, Bosnia and Herzegovina obtained candidate status and Kosovo applied for membership.



In the past, it took about ten years from application to membership.

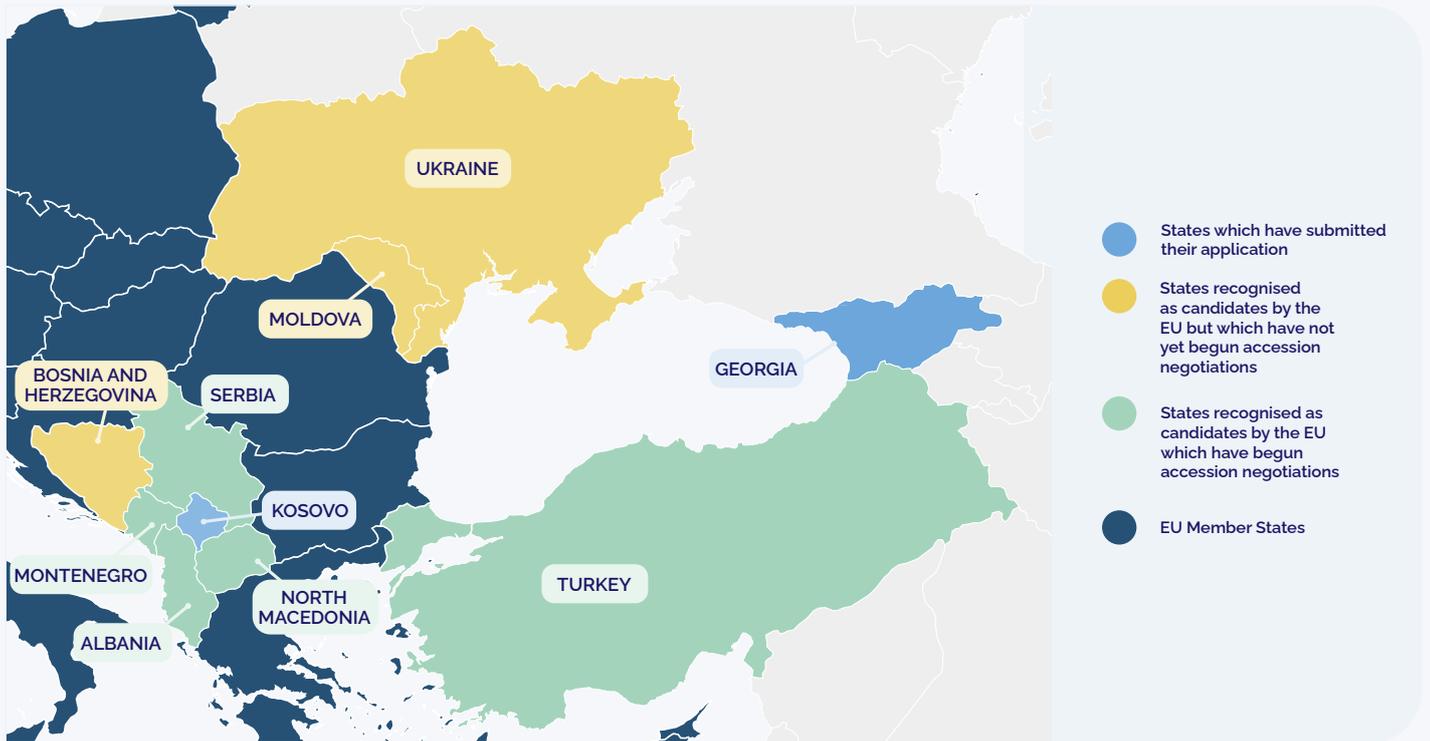


2022: a pivotal year



- Date application submitted
- Date candidate status granted by the EU
- Date of opening of negotiations
- Date of accession

Enlargement of the European Union: an overview



ENLARGEMENT IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

An assurance repeated for 20 years

Santa Maria da Feira European Council (2000)

"All the countries [of the Western Balkans] are potential candidates for EU membership."



Thessaloniki European Council (2003)

The European Council is determined "to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, which will become an integral part of the EU, once they meet the established criteria."



European Council 23-24 June 2022

"The European Union expresses its full and unequivocal commitment to the EU membership perspective of the Western Balkans and calls for the acceleration of the accession process."

Economic integration into the European Union is already well advanced...

1st
trade
partner



€65 billion
in 2021

Trade between the region and the EU has more than doubled in ten years.

68% of the region's trade is conducted with the EU.

As a comparison:  8%  5%  3%  3%



In 2021, the trade surplus tilted in favour of the EU, at **€8.5 billion**

1st
investor



61%

of foreign direct investment in the region comes from the EU.

€10.3 billion

of projects funded in the region between 2009 and 2022 by the European Investment Bank.

1st
provider
of funds



€14.2 billion

Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA III) for the period 2021-2027



€9 billion

Post-Covid Economic and Investment Plan: EU subsidies from the IPA III intended to attract €20 billion in public and private investments.

€1 billion

Energy support package: EU subsidies intended to attract €2.5 billion in public and private investments.



... but the process is dragging on, though attempts are made to adapt to the Western Balkans' specific situation



1993

A common foundation for all enlargements: the Copenhagen criteria

- shared democratic and political values
- a functioning and competitive market economy
- legislative alignment with the *acquis communautaire*
- the EU's absorption capacity

2000-2003

Adapting to the post-conflict situation in the region: the Stabilisation and Association Process

- punishment of war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide
- fostering the reconciliation process
- supporting regional cooperation



REASONS WHY THE PROCESS STALLE

For the EU

- "Enlargement fatigue" and concerns regarding illiberal excesses
- a lack of unity, interest and resources
- reluctance for enlargement without prior institutional reform



For candidate countries

- legacies that are difficult to overcome, more work necessary on stabilisation
- economic weaknesses
- lack of reforms and political developments that do not meet EU requirements
- pro-European attitude contested against a backdrop of major geopolitical competition

2011-2012

First attempt to stimulate the process: "New negotiation approach"

- focus on chapters 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights) and 24 (Justice, freedom and security)



2020

Second attempt to stimulate the process: "New enlargement methodology"

- enhanced political leadership
- 33 chapters organised into 6 thematic clusters
- "rewards" for merit and reversibility in the event of regression

2022

Discussions on a new framework to foster a rapprochement between the EU and candidate countries: the European Political Community*

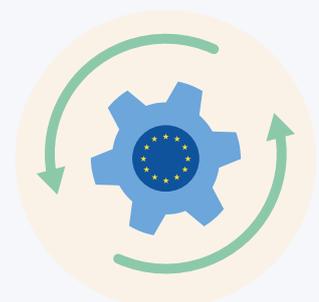


*Chopin T., Macek L. & Maillard S. 2022 "The European Political Community. A new anchoring to the European Union". Brief, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, 18 May 2022

TOWARDS A "GRADUAL ACCESSION"?

In response to the new situation caused by the war in Ukraine, the idea of **reforming the accession process** and gradually strengthening the ties between Member States and candidate countries before their full accession has gained momentum*.

On 23 June 2022, the European Council, building on the revised methodology, invited "the Commission, the High Representative and the Council to further advance the gradual integration between the European Union and the region already during the enlargement process itself in a reversible and merit-based manner."



*Macek L. 2023 « Advocating gradual accession to the European Union », Policy paper, Paris: Jacques Delors Institute, 22 May 2023.