

Western Balkans: where is the enlargement process up to?

During the EU-Western Balkans summit on 6 October in Brdo (Slovenia), the institutions of the European Union and its Member States must adopt a declaration of the same name that renews their support for the European integration of this part of the continent and steps up their commitment in the region.

A few months after the entry into force of a new methodology regarding the accession negotiations for the six countries in the region and while the Slovenian Presidency of the Council is determined to speed up the EU enlargement process, what is the current state of play for each of these countries?



MONTENEGRO

- Montenegro officially applied to join the EU in 2008, barely two years after declaring its independence. The EU acknowledged it as a candidate in 2010 and launched accession negotiations in 2012.
- All the chapters of the *acquis communautaire* (to be met to join the EU) have been opened and three have been provisionally closed (i.e. achieved).
- The country already unilaterally adopted the Euro upon its independence, without joining the euro area.



SERBIA

- Serbia officially applied to join the EU in 2009 and was granted candidate status in 2012. Accession negotiations began in 2014.
- Out of the 35 chapters, 18 have been opened for the moment and 2 have been provisionally closed.
- Negotiations with Serbia are closely linked to the progress made in the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue launched by the EU to normalise relations between Serbia and Kosovo. An easing of tensions between the two States is a prerequisite for their accession.



NORTH MACEDONIA

- North Macedonia officially applied to join the EU in 2004. Candidate status was granted the following year. Although the Commission has recommended the opening of accession negotiations since 2009, these have not yet begun, mainly due to the Greek, then Bulgarian vetoes.
- Greece blocked the application until 2019 because of a disagreement regarding the country's official name.
- Bulgaria has vetoed North Macedonia's application since 2020, maintaining that it must acknowledge Macedonian as a dialect of Bulgarian.



ALBANIA

- Albania, which officially applied to join the EU in 2009, was granted candidate status in 2014.
- From 2018, the Commission recommended the opening of accession negotiations and decided to link Albania's procedure with that of North Macedonia in 2019.
- Albania's accession procedure has therefore been blocked since 2020 due to Bulgaria's veto of North Macedonia's accession. The European Commission has not ruled out the option of separating the two procedures.



BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- Acknowledged as a potential candidate country in 2003, Bosnia and Herzegovina officially applied to join the EU in 2016. It has still not been granted candidate status.
- Since 2010, it has enjoyed visa liberalisation.
- In 2021, the European Parliament adopted by a large majority a report supporting the granting of candidate status to Bosnia and Herzegovina, while requiring far-reaching institutional reforms.



KOSOVO

- While Kosovo has been bound to the EU by a Stabilisation and Association Agreement since 2016, a prerequisite of its official application, it faces many obstacles before being able to join the EU.
- Notwithstanding issues regarding the compatibility of its internal legislation with the *acquis communautaire*, the thorniest issue remains an easing of tensions with Serbia, which still considers it to be part of Serbian territory. Within the EU-27, five States (Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain) do not recognise Kosovo's independence, thus making its accession application more difficult.
- Like Montenegro, Kosovo unilaterally adopted the Euro upon independence, without being a member of the euro area.

