

## **Statement on accession negotiations of North Macedonia and Albania**

We, representatives of political groups in the European Parliament, stand behind the promises made at the EU-Western Balkans Thessaloniki Summit in 2003 and continue to support the Western Balkans' European future, also expressed in the European Parliament resolution of October 2019 on opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. In the run-up to the next meeting of European Affairs ministers, we therefore urge the Council to approve the negotiating frameworks for North Macedonia and Albania and stop further delaying EU accession talks. The current hold-up is jeopardizing the Union's credibility in the Western Balkans and reducing the EU's transformative power and impact in the region. A geopolitical EU that wants to have a positive and direct impact in its neighbourhood must keep its promises. Both countries have made significant progress on fundamental reforms. All Member States have to show clear political will and commitment to the European future of the Western Balkans. A joint future is in all our interest.

In particular, we call on Bulgaria and North Macedonia to find a compromise on pending bilateral issues in order to not further delay the accession process. Bulgaria and North Macedonia should receive every and any help available - including mediation and external expertise if desired - to resolve the issue. In order to acknowledge the country's efforts in the EU accession process, Bulgaria should approve the opening of the intergovernmental conference (IGC) with North Macedonia as soon as possible, but in any case, still in December. North Macedonia, in its role as a future accession country, should also make every effort possible from its side to resolve the outstanding issues. We welcome the pro-EU orientation of the citizens of North Macedonia, whose patience and confidence in the European future of their country, expressed in the 2018 referendum on the Prespa Agreement, should be rewarded by continuing engagements from the EU side. We are, however, worried by the growing use of nationalist rhetoric by some political actors in both countries. The Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria were historic and their implementation remains crucial. All parties must therefore continue a constructive dialogue based on good neighbourly relations, including by considering the further steps in the form of roadmaps.

At the same time, Albania also deserves to move forward on its path to EU accession, given the comprehensive efforts on reforms, in particular in the justice sector, over the past years and the Commission's positive assessment of those. Effort is needed by Albania in several areas, on their way to meet all the conditions laid out in the Council Conclusions. Efforts also need to be made by certain Member States, currently showing doubts on granting Albania the green light to open the IGC, by working with Albania in addressing their concerns. The main transformative and reform efforts will have to take place during the actual enlargement negotiations.

We urge all parties involved to find a solution at the next Council meeting to ensure that accession negotiations will be started before the end of the year.

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