

EU Agenda 2030: Stable Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans through the Growth Plan

Adopted at the YEPP Council Meeting in The Hague, Netherlands. 13/04/2024

Recognizing that:

- At the session held on March 21, the European Council adopted a historic decision on the opening of accession negotiations with Bosnia and Herzegovina which heralds a transformative step towards deeper European integration, marking a pivotal moment in the country's path to become a full-fledged member of the European Union.
- President of the European Council, Mr. Charles Michel emphasized the importance of EU enlargement at the 2023 Bled Strategic Forum where he urged both the EU and candidate countries to prepare for enlargement by 2030. Mr. Michel also reminded that previous year he proposed the idea of gradual integration of the candidate countries in specific EU policies, which the European Council supported. The idea is that the country can participate in the corresponding Council Formation once they complete the negotiation in the given policy chapter.¹
- Bosnia and Herzegovina is dedicated to fostering regional cooperation and maintaining strong neighbourly relations within the Western Balkans through continuous political dialogue and various initiatives, emphasizing regional cooperation as fundamental to its foreign policy as integral steps towards achieving full membership in the EU.
- The new law on the prevention of conflict of interest was adopted by the Council of Ministers on March 6 then it was adopted by both Houses of Parliament on March 8. The law aims to improve the level of compliance with European standards at state level.²

¹ „Michel: We must be ready, on both sides, to enlarge by 2030“, 28.8.2023.

><https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2023/08/28/michel-we-must-be-ready-on-both-sides-to-enlarge-by-2030/>< (18.3.2024)

² „Communication from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament: Report on progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina – March 2024“, 12.3.2024.

- A law on anti-money laundering and countering terrorism financing (AML/CFT) was adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2023 and by the Parliament in February 2024. It improves provisions on risk assessment and provides for a permanent coordinating body of all authorities in charge of preparing it, in line with the EU acquis.³
- In December 2023 the Council of Ministers adopted the negotiating mandate on the Frontex status agreement. The Presidency endorsed it in February 2024, and chief negotiators have been appointed, allowing the start of negotiations with the Commission.
- The Collegium for European Integration adopted the Program for the Integration of Bosnia and Herzegovina into the European Union, thus fulfilling one of the key prerequisites expected from our country in the continuation of the EU integration process.
- We welcome the adoption of the new EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans⁴, recognizing it as a historic opportunity to stimulate regional economic growth, accelerate the EU accession process, and integrate Bosnia and Herzegovina (BIH) into the joint market. The plan, accompanied by a €1 billion investment contingent upon specific economic reforms, focuses on key priorities such as the green agenda, digital transition, private sector development, human capital, and the rule of law, serving as a crucial catalyst for BIH's progress and integration into the EU market.
- Economic convergence is an essential element in getting the Western Balkan countries closer to the EU. Therefore, there is a need to jump-start and incentivise the Western Balkans' preparations for EU membership by bringing forward some of its benefits especially in ways that can be felt directly by the citizens of the Western Balkan countries. The objective should be to enable

>https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/fa9da504-4ecb-4317-b583-c9fff0b833b2_en?filename=Report%20on%20progress%20in%20Bosnia%20and%20Herzegovina%20-%20March%202024.pdf<

(19.3.2024)

³ *Loc.cit.*

⁴ „Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans“, 8.11.2023.

>https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_691_New%20Growth%20Plan%20Western%20Balkans.pdf< (19.3.2024.)

partners to step up reforms and investments to significantly accelerate the speed of the enlargement process and the growth of their economies.

- With a strong focus on integration within the Western Balkan region, the Growth Plan should help the countries to focus on their common future as members of the EU and to overcome bilateral challenges that unfortunately consume too much energy in the region and hold it back.
- Full support is extended to the establishment of a Common Regional Market (CRM)⁵ as a crucial step towards accessing the European Single Market. The CRM's emphasis on the four freedoms and alignment with EU standards demonstrates Bosnia and Herzegovina's commitment to EU membership and fulfilling associated obligations. Through the creation of the CRM, we showcase our capacity to collaborate within a unified regional industrial and innovation sphere, along with a cohesive digital framework.
- We therefore welcome the signing of three agreements at the Berlin Process Summit in 2022, including the Agreement on Freedom of Movement with Identity Cards in the Western Balkans, the Agreement on the mutual recognition of professional qualifications, and the Agreement on the mutual recognition of higher education qualifications. These agreements are crucial for enhancing regional integration, facilitating the free movement of citizens within the Western Balkans, and strengthening people-to-people relations and cultural exchanges in the region

Acknowledging that:

- Developing a Common Regional Market is crucial to unlocking the economic potential of the region, to creating opportunities for domestic firms and workers alike and to making the Western Balkans a more attractive place for European investors.⁶

⁵ The Common Regional Market (CRM) is an initiative agreed by the leaders of the six Western Balkans at the Berlin Process summit in Sofia 2020. The CRM and its associated action plan are intended to bring the four freedoms of movement (goods, services, capital and workers) within the region.

⁶ „Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: New Growth Plan for the Western Balkans“, 8.11.2023.

>https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/COM_2023_691_New%20Growth%20Plan%20Western%20Balkans.pdf< (21.3.2024.)

- It is estimated that the Common Regional Market could add 10% to the economies of the countries in the region.⁷
- To unlock the potential of this Growth Plan, the Western Balkan partners will need to meet this offer with resolute efforts to advance both on the domestic reform agenda and on strengthening economic integration within the region.
- Without the implementation of all decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and international courts, there is no progress on the country's European path, because this is one of the main requirements listed in the 14 key priorities from the opinion of the European Commission.
- The equality of all constituent peoples as well as other citizens is crucial for the long-term stability, development and progress of the country on its European path.
- The Western Balkan countries are not just neighbors but key partners and an integral part of the European family. Their history, culture, and potential for growth contribute to the richness of Europe's diversity.⁸
- Acknowledging the importance of fostering a culture of dialogue, reconciliation, and mutual respect among different ethnic and religious communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as a foundation for long-term stability and prosperity.
- Bosnia and Herzegovina remains committed to the goals outlined in the Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy⁹, contributing to its implementation within its capabilities and granted EU candidate status, recognizing the enlargement policy as a pivotal tool for advancing the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP).
- Regarding the cooperation in the field of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to the goals of the Global Strategy for Foreign and Security Policy. It will continue contributing to its implementation in accordance with its capacities and to the extent to which its

⁷ Gomez Ortiz Maria Del Mar; Zarate Vasquez, Roman David; Taglioni, Daria. *The Economic Effects of Market Integration in the Western Balkans (English)*. Policy Research working paper; no. WPS 10491 Washington, D.C. : World Bank Group, 2023.

><http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/099544006202322289/IDU062c50b5106fe8046d1080530898bbe45d6fa>< (21.3.2024.)

⁸ The Letter of Intent-Western Balkans“, Council Meeting in Skopje, 18.11.2023.

⁹ „A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign And Security Policy“, 14.11.2016.

>https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/eugs_review_web_0.pdf< (22.3.2024.)

status, as granted by the EU, enables it. When it comes to advancing and improving EU's CFSP we consider that the most powerful EU tool is the enlargement policy and offering the prospect of membership. Bosnia and Herzegovina has also reached and maintained full alignment with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) which is a more significant signal than ever of shared values and strategic orientation in the new geopolitical context.

- Bosnia and Herzegovina is committed to promotion of peace, stability, security and prosperity in the region emphasizing strong political will for EU integration and underscoring the strategic importance of the Western Balkans for the EU's overall goals and security framework
- Continued cooperation with the EU, regional partners, and other stakeholders is crucial for addressing common challenges such as terrorism, radicalization, organized crime, and irregular migration. Bosnia and Herzegovina's adoption of strategies and legislation in these areas demonstrates its commitment to effective collaboration and alignment with EU standards.
- The establishment of full cooperation with EUROPOL and initiatives such as the proposed Agreement with FRONTEX highlight Bosnia and Herzegovina's proactive approach to enhancing security and combating organized crime, recognizing the importance of stability for the broader Western Balkans region and beyond. Additionally, stability of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and consequently the Western Balkans, is essential for the stability of the whole continent.

YEPP calls on:

- Adopting important rule of law and judicial reforms in Bosnia and Herzegovina and moving forward with constitutional and electoral reforms, which are of utmost priority to ensure equal rights for all constituent peoples and citizens.
- Implementation of all decisions of the Constitutional Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina and international courts, and for the representation of the constituent peoples based on the Dayton-Paris Peace Agreement to be

achieved. The Electoral Law that will enable legitimate political representation in the key institutions of political representation remains a key challenge and an open political issue that needs a final political and institutional solution. We remind you that in Priority No.1., the European Commission highlighted the reform of the Electoral Legislation as progress, especially after the political agreement for City of Mostar in June 2020.

- Emphasizing the importance of promoting ethical governance, transparency, and accountability in all public institutions as part of the European integration process.
- Western Balkan countries to continue their efforts in implementing the EU Growth Plan for economic growth and stability.
- The EU to provide continued support for the integration of the Western Balkans through financial aid and technical assistance.
- EU member states to enhance cooperation with the Western Balkans in security and migration management.
- Governments in the region to prioritize further reforms aligned with EU standards to fully benefit from the Growth Plan.
- Civil society and businesses to actively participate in ongoing initiatives related to the EU Growth Plan.
- The international community to maintain its support for the Western Balkans' efforts towards EU integration and regional stability.
- For the Western Balkan countries to continue to work together on the human and infrastructural connectivity, economic development, governance, rule of law, suppression and fight against corruption, solving bilateral issues, fight against terrorism, extremism, radicalization and organized crime as well as prevention of irregular migration.