



EUROPEAN COMMISSION - PRESS RELEASE

European Commission recommends moving onto next stages towards EU entry

Brussels, 12 October 2011 - Today the European Commission recommends the opening of accession negotiations with Montenegro, and granting EU candidate status to Serbia. In a set of annual reports, the Commission reports on the progress towards EU accession made by the Western Balkans, Turkey, and Iceland over the past year.

Presenting the annual Enlargement Package, Commissioner Stefan Füle said: *"Today's recommendations for Montenegro and Serbia show that the enlargement process is stimulating reforms on the ground and helping to create a more stable and prosperous Europe. The transformational power of the enlargement process sends a powerful message of hope at this challenging time, both for European Union Member States and for the enlargement countries."*

In a year that has seen the closure of accession negotiations with Croatia, there has been further progress elsewhere in the **Western Balkans**. The arrest of the two remaining ICTY indictees removed a major stumbling block from Serbia's European path and marked an important step towards reconciliation in the region. A dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina was established and has yielded initial results. This needs to be pursued constructively. Montenegro has strengthened its reform efforts based on the priorities set out by the European Union. The European Commission also confirmed its earlier recommendation to open accession negotiations with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Visa-free travel to the Schengen area was granted to the citizens of two more Western Balkan countries in December 2010, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nevertheless, good governance, the rule of law, administrative capacity, unemployment and economic reform remain major challenges in the region. There are still problems concerning regional cooperation. In a number of countries, important reforms were delayed, often as a result of internal political developments and conflicts. There have been a number of worrying developments in freedom of expression in the media. Differences over status of Kosovo* continue to have a negative effect on both Kosovo and the wider Western Balkans region.

Iceland's accession process has made headway over the past year, with negotiations ongoing. The Commission expects that the accession negotiations will continue to progress well and is confident that core issues such as fisheries and environmental protection can be addressed constructively.

* Under UNSCR 1244/1999

The accession negotiations with **Turkey** have regrettably not moved into any new areas for over a year. Turkey's EU-accession process remains the most effective framework for promoting reforms, developing dialogue on foreign and security policy issues and strengthening economic competitiveness. At the same time, the Commission is concerned about the recent tensions in relations between Turkey and Cyprus. A new positive agenda in EU-Turkey relations needs to be developed, to enable a more constructive relationship based on concrete steps in areas of common interest.

Background

COUNTRY BOX

CROATIA: candidate - applied in 2003. Accession negotiations were completed in June 2011. In line with Article 49 TEU, the Commission today presents its favourable Opinion on Croatia's readiness accession to the European Union. Following the completion of the ratification process, Croatia should become a member state on 1 July 2013.

TURKEY: candidate - applied in 1987. Accession negotiations were opened in October 2005. 13 chapters are opened and 1 provisionally closed. Full implementation of the obligations under the Customs Union and progress towards normalisation of relations with Cyprus are needed before the country can advance more vigorously in its accession negotiations.

ICELAND: candidate - applied for membership in 2009 and opened accession negotiations in June 2010, with 4 chapters opened of which 2 have been provisionally closed. As Iceland is already a member of the EEA and the Schengen area, a large part of its legislation is already aligned with that of the EU.

THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA: candidate - applied in 2004. The country continues to sufficiently fulfil the political criteria and the Commission renewed its 2009 recommendation for opening accession negotiations. As a unanimous decision of Member States is required for the negotiations to start, a solution to the name issue is essential.

MONTENEGRO: candidate - applied in 2008. In 2010, the EU awarded candidate status and set out seven key priorities which the country needs to fulfil in order to achieve the opening of accession negotiations. Today the Commission recommended opening of accession negotiations.

ALBANIA: potential candidate - applied in 2009. In 2010 the EU set out twelve key priorities which the country needs to fulfil to achieve the opening of accession negotiations. Although progress was made in some of these areas the Commission was not in a position to recommend further steps for Albania this year.

Building on recent positive signals, the Commission encourages the political forces in Albania to re-establish and sustain a level of political dialogue allowing the functioning of key democratic institutions and the implementation of essential reforms.

SERBIA: potential candidate - applied in 2009. The Commission today presented its opinion on Serbia's membership application. Based on its findings, it recommends that the Council grants Candidate Status for Serbia. Condition also set one key priority which the country needs to fulfil in order to achieve the opening of accession negotiations.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA: potential candidate - has not applied for EU membership; following the 2010 parliamentary elections, the country has not yet formed a state-level government and the lack of a shared vision by political leaders on the direction of the country continued to block key EU-related reforms.

KOSOVO: potential candidate – Differences over the status of Kosovo remain an obstacle to the development of contractual relations between the EU and Kosovo. The EU supports Kosovo's efforts to fulfil its European perspective.

For more information:

For detailed findings and recommendations on each country see Memos:

Albania [MEMO/11/686](#)

Bosnia and Herzegovina [MEMO/11/687](#)

Croatia [MEMO/11/688](#)

The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia [MEMO/11/689](#)

Iceland [MEMO/11/690](#)

Kosovo* [MEMO/11/691](#)

Montenegro [MEMO/11/692](#)

Serbia [MEMO/11/693](#)

Turkey [MEMO/11/694](#)

More on enlargement package:

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/press_corner/key-documents/reports_oct_2011_en.htm

Contacts :

[Peter Stano](#) (+32 2 295 74 84)

[Anca Paduraru](#) (+32 2 296 64 30)