



Draft

Title: **Upholding the prospect of EU integration of the Western Balkans**

Tabled by: Committee, European Green Party

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1 The European Union is a community of values. Respect for human dignity, freedom,
2 democracy, equality, the rule of law and for human rights, including the rights
3 of those belonging to minorities, constitute the foundation of the EU. The
4 societies within this community uphold pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance,
5 justice, solidarity, and gender equality. EU policy towards Albania, Bosnia and
6 Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia (the Western Balkan
7 states) holds these values close to their hearts. We European Greens consider
8 that an important priority for EU foreign policy should be the integration,
9 democratisation, stabilisation, and reconciliation of and in the Western
10 Balkans.

11 We believe that the accession of all Western Balkan states is our historic
12 responsibility. Thus, we consider that there is a double responsibility
13 concerning these states, as several Member States have been involved
14 historically in armed conflicts, their outbreak, course, and cessation within
15 the region.

16 The Western Balkans are an integral part of Europe, both culturally and
17 geographically, as well as economically and, as such, must be welcomed into its
18 political union. The multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural character
19 of the Western Balkans states makes a unique contribution to Europe.

20 As Greens, we welcome the renewed EU perspective for all six Western Balkans
21 states, as concluded by EU leaders at the Zagreb summit on 6 May 2020 and at the

22 EU-Western Balkans summit on 6 October 2021. This came 18 years after the EU
23 made a firm commitment for the Western Balkans states to join the Union for the
24 first time at the 2003 Thessaloniki European Council.

25 We Greens believe that this is the right moment to accelerate the EU's
26 enlargement policy with the aim of accelerating integration. We therefore
27 welcome the new enlargement methodology and demand to use this as a window of
28 opportunity to reinforce the accession process driven by the objective merits of
29 individual countries, and credible and objective frameworks on the EU side. We
30 consider that, following the adoption of new laws in line with the EU *acquis* in
31 candidate countries, priority should be given to areas and mechanisms ensuring
32 sustainable change, in particular as regards democracy, freedom of the media,
33 fair and free elections, a functioning and independent judiciary, human rights,
34 societal freedom, and a green and just transition.

35 As Greens, we strongly support the transformation of the Western Balkan
36 countries towards sustainable, genuine, civic, and pluralistic democracies based
37 on individual rights and freedoms, the rule of law and non-corrupt governance,
38 free media, respect for minority rights, and an active, strong, and open civil
39 society. We are deeply concerned by autocratic trends, the erosion of
40 fundamental rights and freedoms, the marginalisation of minorities, the
41 criminalisation of human rights defenders and environmental movements and
42 initiatives, the emergence of information disorder and hate speech, state
43 capture and the development of alliances with illiberal regimes such as Russia
44 and China.

45 The responsibility for upholding European values also lies strongly with
46 national governments. Thus, we expect the Western Balkan countries to continue
47 constructive national and regional dialogue towards further democratisation and
48 cooperation and to work towards accession milestones.

49 The EU strongly objects to any border changes, especially based on ethnic
50 divides. Thus, we strongly advocate for the continuation of the Belgrade -
51 Pristina dialogue and for the implementation of mutually agreed steps. The EU
52 stands behind the Dayton Agreement and will fully support the further building
53 of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a multi-ethnic, multireligious, and civic state,
54 entrusting the leaders of Republika Srpska with the obligation to contribute to
55 this goal and not to engage in opposing political initiatives. We acknowledge
56 the influence the Serbian government has in the region, and we await to see that

57 this is not used to stir conflict but to reduce tensions and work further
58 towards reconciliation between all six Western Balkan states.

59 Overcoming historical divisions and conflicts, staying on the path of EU
60 integration, and working towards further democratisation and a green and just
61 transition is not only a matter of policy direction. It must become part of the
62 political and societal reality and be transformed into political delivery. This
63 can only be achieved when stakeholders sincere to European values are elected,
64 and genuine support for and cooperation with civil society is ensured.

65 Fundamental rights and freedoms, the rule of law, women's rights, LGBTIQ+
66 rights, gender equality, social justice, inclusion, and non-discrimination are
67 at the core of the Greens' societal project. As Greens, we support youth and
68 women's organisations in particular, especially efforts to foster regional
69 cooperation and reconciliation. Likewise, we want to facilitate mobility and
70 exchanges for young people while, at the same time, preventing a brain drain by
71 creating jobs which meet the standards of decent work.

72 The Western Balkans harbour the blue heart of Europe, its last wild rivers,
73 primeval forests, highest levels of biodiversity and many natural resources. At
74 the same time, the countries still have dysfunctional waste-management systems,
75 rely on outdated and heavily polluting coal-powered plants, lack networks and
76 connectivity, and plan to build several thousand unsustainable micro-hydropower
77 plants in protected areas, without socio-economic impact assessments, public
78 consultations, transparency, and against the will of the local population. We
79 are alarmed by an increase in air and water pollution, land degradation, and the
80 fostering of carbonisation in some of the countries in the region. Not least
81 because such unsustainable issues are supported by China and Russia, not only
82 preventing green policies in the region and impacting citizens' quality of life,
83 but also directly and negatively affecting the EU's own environmental policies
84 and achievements due to their transnational character. The emergence of a
85 polluting Western Balkan region as a stepping stone for anti-environmental
86 policies must be countered and prevented.

87 We believe that blockades in the Council in recent years have shown that
88 tackling enlargement policy and the situation in the Western Balkan region have
89 been neglected. As European Greens, we commit to ensuring that the accession
90 process in the six Western Balkan countries is high on the agenda at all levels
91 within our member parties. It is also essential to rebuild EU credibility in the

92 Western Balkans, ensuring that citizens and states preserve trust in our common
93 European project, staying motivated to become an integral part of it and to
94 further contribute to its development.

95 **Therefore, the European Green Party:**

96 1. Calls on the European Council to hold intergovernmental conferences to
97 start accession negotiations with both North Macedonia and Albania as soon
98 as possible.

99 2. Calls on EGP member parties to engage and raise national debates about the
100 accession of the Western Balkans and to support Green positions in these
101 debates.

102 3. Calls on the EU to link its financial support within IPA III to strict
103 measures focused on anti-corruption, transparency, and good governance,
104 and to fully align the funding with the European Green Deal.

105 4. Calls on the EU to reinforce the monitoring of democratic processes and
106 media freedom, and the assessment of emergency laws due to the COVID-19
107 pandemic in the region.

108 5. Calls on all Member States to immediately recognise Kosovo and grant visa
109 liberalisation as it fulfils all criteria.

110 6. Calls on the Western Balkan states to reinforce the respect for
111 implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements.

112 7. Calls on the Western Balkan states to increase cooperation in the fight
113 against organised crime in the region.

114 8. Calls on Bulgaria to open up the path to the first intergovernmental
115 conference and to solve its disputes with North Macedonia bilaterally
116 during the accession process.

117 9. Calls on the EU to increase support to the Western Balkans by creating
118 adequate conditions for refugees and migrants, and a well-functioning
119 asylum and migration policy.

120 10. Calls for close cooperation among Greens, civil society, and expert panels
121 on protecting nature and biodiversity in the region, urgently replacing
122 coal-fired power plants with renewables, providing support for the fight
123 against the climate crisis, and for a green and just transition to Green
124 and other actors in the region.