Basic information

2019/2210(INI) INI - Own-initiative procedure	Procedure completed
Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit **Subject** 6.40.03 Relations with South-East Europe and the Balkans	

Key players

European Parliament

Committee responsible	Rapporteur	Appointed
AFET Foreign Affairs	PICULA Tonino (S&D)	06/11/2019
	Shadow rapporteur GÁL Kinga (EPP) KYUCHYUK Ilhan (Renew) VON CRAMON-TAUBADEL Viola (Greens/EFA) ZIMNIOK Bernhard (ID) KOULOGLOU Stelios (GUE/NGL)	

Committee for opinion	Rapporteur for opinion	Appointed
INTA International Trade	The committee decided not to give an opinion.	

Key events

Date	Event	Reference	Summary
19/12/2019	Committee referral announced in Parliament		
20/04/2020	Vote in committee		
05/05/2020	Committee report tabled for plenary	A9-0091/2020	Summary
17/06/2020	Decision by Parliament	T9-0168/2020	Summary
17/06/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		

18/06/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
18/06/2020	Debate in Parliament		
19/06/2020	Results of vote in Parliament		
19/06/2020	End of procedure in Parliament		

Technical information	
Procedure reference	2019/2210(INI)
Procedure type	INI - Own-initiative procedure
Legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 121
Other legal basis	Rules of Procedure EP 165
Stage reached in procedure	Procedure completed
Committee dossier	AFET/9/02113

Documentation gateway

European Parliament

Document type	Committee	Reference	Date	Summary
Committee draft report		PE646.913	07/02/2020	
Amendments tabled in committee		PE648.421	03/03/2020	
Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading		A9-0091/2020	05/05/2020	Summary
Text adopted by Parliament, single reading		T9-0168/2020	17/06/2020	Summary

European Commission

Document type	Reference	Date	Summary
Commission response to text adopted in plenary	SP(2020)427	14/12/2020	

Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit

2019/2210(INI) - 17/06/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 532 votes to 70, with 63 abstentions, a recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit.

While recalling the strategic importance of the enlargement process for the EU, Members stressed that the Western Balkan countries are geographically, historically and culturally part of Europe and the process of integrating them into the European Union is of key importance for the stability and security of the continent as a whole, free and at peace.

The prospect of accession on the basis of merit is also a fundamental incentive for reform in the countries of the Western Balkans.

Parliament addressed the following recommendations to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

Maintaining the objective of enlargement

Parliament recommended supporting the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries and enhancing the accession process by ensuring that it reinforces fundamental values and the rule of law, contributes to sustainable democratic, economic and ecological transformation and social convergence, and fosters good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, which are essential elements of enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process.

Members also called for:

- increased efforts to build political will among the Member States in progressing with the enlargement to the Western Balkans;

- an accelerated accession process of the countries committed, both politically and administratively, to the implementation of EU-related reforms;

- the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia to be in the interest of the Union, to give impetus to the negotiations in order to accelerate the accession of Montenegro and Serbia and to liberalise the visa regime for Kosovo as soon as possible.

Enhanced method for injecting a new dynamic into the enlargement process

Parliament recommended facilitating the implementation of the enhanced method for accession negotiations adopted by the European Commission for candidate countries whose negotiations have already started if they decide to use it for effective and sustainable alignment with EU standards and rules. It also called for:

- clear, transparent and consistent accession benchmarks and continuous political and technical support throughout the process, and improve the measuring of progress on the ground ensuring that each candidate country is assessed on the basis of conditionality and its own merits;

- increased policy incentives offered to the countries of the Western Balkans and encourage the gradual integration of the candidate countries into the Union's sectoral policies and programmes prior to accession, including through targeted financial assistance from Union funds.

Conditionality

Parliament recommended strengthening the conditionality mechanism and insisted on the reversibility of the accession process by applying objective criteria when deciding whether negotiations should be interrupted or suspended. It also highlighted the importance of:

- enhancing ownership of the enlargement process by Member States by increasing the involvement of experts on the rule of law and other areas from the Member States, as well as of civil society and human rights defenders on the ground;

- bringing the primacy of democracy, the rule of law, human and fundamental rights back to the very heart of the enlargement process by opening first and closing last the chapters related to the judiciary, corruption and organised crime, as well as those covering respect for human rights, including minority rights, media freedom and freedom of expression;

- compliance by the Western Balkan countries with their international obligations to prosecute war crimes and determine the fate of missing persons, in full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and its successor the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (SC) and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office (SPO);

- the implementation of an anti-discrimination policy and the strengthening of the legal framework to prevent feminicide and violence against women and children.

Parliament also recommended:

- fostering of electoral reforms ensuring free, fair, pluralistic and transparent elections at central and local levels and the strengthening of the role of civil society in the accession process;

- increasing the EU’s commitment in solving outstanding bilateral issues and in developing good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation; the Western Balkans are called upon to commit themselves to reconciliation and to finding a peaceful solution to their long-standing disputes.

Investment strategy plan

Recalling that the EU is the largest foreign investor in the region by investing EUR 12.7 billion in foreign direct investments between 2014-2018, Members suggested that a strategic economic and investment plan be drawn up to improve competitiveness, the legal and business environment, the situation of SMEs and sustainable development in the whole region in line with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal.

Recommendation to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission / High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans, following the 2020 summit

2019/2210(INI) - 05/05/2020 - Committee report tabled for plenary, single reading

The Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Tonino PICULA (S&D, HR) on the recommendation of the European Parliament to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy on the Western Balkans ahead of the 2020 summit.

While recalling the strategic importance of the enlargement process for the European Union, Members stressed that the merit-based prospect of full membership of the Western Balkan countries in the Union is in the Union's own political, security and economic interest. Such a prospect is recognition of a major geopolitical challenge for the unification of the European continent and a fundamental incentive for reform in the Western Balkan countries.

The report contains a series of recommendations which the European Parliament should address to the Council, the Commission and the Vice-President of the Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy:

- support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries by ensuring that the accession process strengthens fundamental values and the rule of law, contributes to sustainable democratic, economic and ecological transformation and social convergence, and promotes good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation;

- increase efforts to strengthen the political will of Member States in progressing with the enlargement process with the Western Balkans, to maintain enlargement as a necessary condition for the EU’s credibility, and to speed up the accession process of those countries that have committed themselves to implementing Union-related reforms;

- consider that the opening of accession negotiations with Albania and Northern Macedonia is in the interest of the Union and give impetus to the negotiations in order to speed up the accession of Montenegro and Serbia;

- provide clear, transparent and consistent accession benchmarks and continuous political and technical support throughout the process, and improve the measuring of progress on the ground ensuring that each candidate country is assessed on the basis of conditionality and its own merits;

- ensure that the enhanced method for accession negotiations adopted by the European Commission is conducive to the ultimate objective of full membership of the Union and that it is applied to those candidate countries whose negotiations have already started if they decide to use it with a view to effective and sustainable alignment with the Union's standards and rules;

- increase the policy incentives offered to the countries of the Western Balkans and encourage the gradual integration of the candidate countries into the Union's sectoral policies and programmes prior to accession, including through targeted financial assistance from Union funds;

- strengthen the conditionality mechanism and insist on the reversibility of the accession process by applying objective criteria when deciding whether negotiations should be interrupted or suspended;

- bring the primacy of democracy, the rule of law, human and fundamental rights back to the heart of the enlargement process and pay particular attention to state capacity building, implementation of court decisions, judicial reforms and efforts to fight corruption and organised crime.

The report furthermore highlighted:

- compliance by the Western Balkan countries with their international obligations to prosecute war crimes and determine the fate of missing persons, in full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and its successor the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT), and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers (SC) and Specialist Prosecutor’s Office (SPO);

against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI);

- the EU’s commitment in solving outstanding bilateral issues and in developing good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation; the Western Balkans are called upon to commit themselves to reconciliation and to finding a peaceful solution to their long-standing disputes;

- the fostering of electoral reforms ensuring free, fair, pluralistic and transparent elections at central and local levels and the strengthening of the role of civil society in the accession process;

- support for a democratic media landscape and resilience to disinformation and disruptive media campaigns;

- the implementation of an anti-discrimination policy and the strengthening of the legal framework to prevent feminicide.

Recalling that the EU is the largest foreign investor in the region by investing EUR 12.7 billion in foreign direct investments between 2014-2018, Members suggested that a strategic economic and investment plan be drawn up to improve competitiveness, the legal and business environment, the situation of SMEs and sustainable development in the whole region in line with the commitments made under the Paris Agreement and the European Green Deal.