



# HELSINKI COMMISSION HEARING

UNITED STATES COMMISSION ON  
SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN EUROPE

## Testimony

### - Contribution of the European Union

As we move from 2013 through 2014 and into 2015, it is clear that the continued cooperation of the US and the EU, together with a range of partners, has produced and continues to produce results in the Western Balkans. The long haul towards stabilisation over two decades has been effective. But more is needed. We are not beyond fragilities. The work is not over yet.

A quick status is telling: Slovenia and Croatia joined the EU as Member States (in 2004 and 2013, respectively). The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia became an EU candidate country in late 2005. Montenegro became an EU candidate country in 2010 and opened EU accession negotiations in 2012. Serbia became an EU candidate country in 2012 and, following the historic agreement in April 2013, opened its EU accession negotiations six weeks ago. Kosovo<sup>[1]</sup> is negotiating a Stabilisation and Association Agreement. Albania is approaching the status of candidate country. And Bosnia and Herzegovina is increasingly aware that it is only as a whole country that its future in the European Union will be realised.

The US engagement when hostilities broke out over 20 years ago in this region of mainland Europe was crucial. It has remained so. And it will continue to be very important in the next years.

Similarly, the engagement of a range of partners of the EU and the US (UN, NATO, OSCE, CoE) and a number of third countries (Japan, Turkey, Norway, Switzerland, Russian Federation, etc.) has been and will remain important for some time still.

In itself, the creation of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy in the wake of the Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav wars has worked well in this region. But increasingly together with the EU perspective and the EU's enlargement policy it is the combination of EU policies that has achieved full impact. Member States of the EU have invested massively, both politically and financially, in making this possible.

The combined impact of all these contributions has carved out a path away from war and instability in the region to a future where citizens must be able, again, to move freely, to vote as they desire in free elections and where they can, again, marry and establish families across linguistic, ethnic and geographical lines and will be able to express their opinion without fear.

But carving out a path does not ensure success by itself. We would not have achieved results if all of this had not been underpinned by a deep, inherent desire in the populations in this region for a better future. In short, our most important partners are the citizens in the region.

### The EU path

Overall, the EU's Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) is the conceptual platform within which we interact with the countries of this region. Each country progresses towards the objective of EU membership in stages (Stabilisation and Association Agreement; submission of application for EU membership; candidate status; opening of accession negotiations; accession).

In this context, the 2003 Thessaloniki Agenda is of strategic importance. In 2003, the Council explicitly confirmed that the EU perspective applies to all countries of the Western Balkans. That commitment on the side of the EU has been reiterated repeatedly ever since, and most recently by the Council in December 2013.

Each country should be able to master its own contribution to each next stage, so that EU conditions and criteria are fulfilled. Progress is based on own merits. But, to a varying degree, challenges remain for each of the Western Balkans countries. In some, important stabilisation issues continue to play a potential role and have, so far, justified support by for instance a military mission, a rule of law mission and an EU Special Representative or the introduction of sui generis tools such as an EU-facilitated dialogue. These challenges can be about inter-ethnic relations, disputes over political status, fragile political dialogue between State institutions, the structure and administration of aspects of rule of law, relations inside a country or across borders, the normalisation of relations with neighbours, the rights of minorities, etc.

Each of the countries still outside the EU will need to come to grips with one or more of these issues in 2014 or 2015. The EU is convinced that the region and each of the countries are moving gradually and irreversibly towards the EU. Overall stability is anchored now, but fragilities remain important in certain locations. It is too early to fully replace hard hardware with soft software, but the tool of dialogue has increasingly shown that it can bridge what 20 years ago seemed unbridgeable. Among the most difficult challenges to tackle, beyond stability, is an effective tackling of the fight against pervasive corruption and organised crime in this region.

### The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina

The dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina has achieved historical progress in the normalization of relations between the two sides. This is tremendously important and positive for their people, for the stability of the Western Balkans region and for its European future. And it is important to all the partners who have supported this process.

HR/VP Catherine Ashton has facilitated 22 meetings between Prime Ministers. The First agreement of principles governing the normalization of relations reached in April 2013 was a turning point in their relations. Its implementation included the successful holding of Kosovo-

wide local elections, including for the first time in northern Kosovo, and the integration of all security and justice structures into the Kosovo legal framework.

Because of this progress, the EU was able to respond by opening accession negotiations with Serbia and launching negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Kosovo. Apart from the clear benefits for each side, we hope this dialogue can and should be an inspiration for positive changes, for a new momentum, in other parts of the Western Balkans.

In this regard, it is relevant to note that this process has also been an example of excellent cooperation between the EU and the US, illustrated not least in the joint visit to Pristina and Belgrade in late 2012 by Secretary of State Clinton and HR/VP Ashton.

### Serbia

This country has come a long way, from being party to all the wars of the 1990s to bold political gestures and decisions in recent years, culminating in the April 2013 agreement with Kosovo. Since January 2014, Serbia is in the beginning of EU accession negotiations and as for any country having reached that stage, a sustained focus on delivering will be needed to keep up the forward moving momentum.

The country will have to continue to fully engage in a visible and sustainable improvement in relations with Kosovo. In parallel, it will need to develop and implement a reform agenda particularly focusing on the rule of law and the economy.

Within the region, this country can play an important role in projecting a policy in support of European values and principles.

### Kosovo

Kosovo too has shown impressive commitment to the implementation of the April 2013 agreement on normalisation of relations. The strategic choice of stability, security and pursuit of EU values, which has been the framework of the EU-facilitated Dialogue between Belgrade-Pristina, has been reciprocated by the EU in the drawing up of a rich EU-Kosovo agenda which will culminate this year, hopefully, with the signature of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

The follow-up to the EU's work in Kosovo will also require a sustained and consistent effort by the Kosovo authorities. Continuous work on the internal reform program and maintaining the focus on implementation of agreements in the Dialogue are the main expectations of the EU.

While continuing to respect the different positions on status, the EU in the coming months will pursue its comprehensive agenda with Kosovo and will aim for further progress in the normalisation of relations in the next steps on Kosovo's EU path.

## Montenegro

Montenegro was spared many of the atrocities than affected other parts of the former Yugoslavia. With a clear focus on the future and the implementation of the EU reform agenda this country has managed to progress to EU accession negotiations very rapidly.

Handling elections and their aftermath, maintaining a fully functional political dialogue in Parliament and beyond as well as enhancing the capacity of the public administration and focusing on rule of law reforms will be critical factors.

Over the coming period, the EU will pay particular attention to the area of rule of law, especially the need to establish a solid track record in the fight against organised crime and corruption.

## The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

This country represents diversity in so many ways. This can be a source of abundance when looking to the future, if the full potential of this richness is unlocked.

But there are fragilities. In that context, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (concluded in 2001) remains a central pillar for the country. In line with its spirit, the country has a strong tradition of coalition Governments. The current coalition partners are in cooperation since 2008. In a country where local incidents and political fragilities have erupted too frequently that should be a safe-guard against volatility.

With its SA agreement in force since 2004 and candidate status since 2005, this country is administratively well-positioned for the next stages on its EU path. The European Commission has recommended that accession negotiations be opened. To that end, boldness and political courage to seek -- and actually landing -- agreements on outstanding issues is of paramount importance so good neighbourly relations can become an enabling asset rather than remain political hurdles. The EU considers good neighbourly relations essential, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution to the name issue, under the auspices of the UN.

The country's leaders need to make progress on remaining reforms such as ensuring judicial independence and freedom of expression. The focus in other areas is on implementation of existing strategies and laws. The tone of political dialogue and cooperation between government and opposition parties needs improvement.

The EU is aware that an overwhelming majority of the citizens in this country wants the EU path to come to full fruition. The EU, together with the US and all the partners mentioned above, strongly support that aspiration.

## Albania

In the region, Albania is privileged by the absence of many of the difficult challenges facing several of its neighbours (Albania faces no critical threats linked to recognition, language,

religion, ethnic groups or being land-locked). Following the June 2013 ordinary general elections in this country, the new coalition Government holds a clear majority. The calm transfer of power after 2013 speaks to the credit of the whole of the country. But it is clear that deep political rivalries continue to characterise the political dialogue in Tirana.

Albania has been a member of NATO since April 2009. This was also the time when the Stabilisation and Association Agreement came into force. Albania is approaching EU candidate status, provided reforms continue and the domestic political dialogue proceeds fruitfully with the interests of the country taking precedence over more narrow disputes. Also, the EU will be focusing, in the next weeks and months, on progress in all aspects of the rule of law and continuous deepening of the fight against corruption and organised crime.

Albania is a constructive partner with a clear and repeatedly confirmed policy of stable borders in the Western Balkans.

### Bosnia and Herzegovina

This country is one. Its future as one country in the EU is fully achievable. But the immensely tragic developments in the 1990's led many to think in terms of divisions. However, that is not a mind-set applicable when searching for solutions to the challenges facing the citizens, private companies and politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In other words, dialogue and the will to bridge what was recently unbridgeable are going to be increasingly valuable commodities here.

The country is going to elections in October of this year. These will take place after the most intense protests since the 1992-95 war. Ahead of these elections, it will therefore be important for the political leaders and institutions in BiH to provide responses to those popular protests, inspired by socio-economic frustration. It is necessary and fully possible for the institutions of BiH to rise to this occasion. Building on such responses, the elections can and must be run in an orderly fashion.

In the next weeks and months, the EU will focus on helping Bosnia and Herzegovina tackle the socio-economic challenges highlighted by recent protests. These can and must be addressed already in the very short term. With commitment and unity of voice locally, the EU will remain actively engaged and be a staunch supporter of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EU will continue to work closely with the US and other partners to assist BiH institutions in addressing, before the October elections, the important and pressing issues on the agenda. The objective must be that 2014 can be the year when the whole of the country of BiH moves forward domestically and also on its path to the EU.

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[1] This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.