

On the Future of Enlargement of the European Union

The Congress of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe (ALDE) Party convening in Dublin, Ireland, on 2-4 June 2022:

Underlines that:

- the most important and most successful historical lesson for Europe is investing in prevention and integration of the continent;
- the geopolitical position of the EU today would be significantly worse if the enlargements of the first decade of this century had not taken place;
- European Union and alignment to its values and standards remain the greatest unifying factor for all the people of the Western Balkans;
- the perspective for full membership in the European Union is the strongest motivation for democratic transformation in the region;
- the European project and the European unification needs to include the countries of the Western Balkans.

Reiterates that:

- the European liberals have played decisive role in the unification and integration on the European Continent;
- the ALDE Party has adopted clear policy papers, the latest at the Congress in 2021, urging for full integration of the Western Balkans in the European Union based on individual merits in fulfilment of Copenhagen criteria;
- the liberals in Southeast Europe have been the champions of regional cooperation and integration, as prerequisite for EU membership, creating unified voice in the Liberal Network of Southeast Europe (LIBSEEN).

Recalls that:

- at the 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, 18 years ago, the countries of the Western Balkans were offered a path to full membership and integration in the European Union, based on fulfilment of Copenhagen criteria and in line with the EU treaties;
- the European perspective of the Western Balkans, following the Thessaloniki Agenda, was confirmed at the 2018 Sofia Summit and 2020 Zagreb Summit;
- the enlargement of the European Union is based on adopted institutional strategy by the Member States, with Directorate General and Commissioner for Enlargement;

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- the promised Kosovo visa liberalisation process has not yet materialised;
- North Macedonia's start of the accession talks is currently being blocked by Bulgaria, despite the repeated promises since June 2018;
- Albania's start of the accession talks has been left to wait for North Macedonia;
- Montenegro and Serbia have stalled in the accession process, without new chapters being opened in over a year;
- Bosnia and Herzegovina is not near to the formal start of the accession talks;
- next to the slow pace of the EU integration of the Western Balkans, the European perspective of the region is challenged the global rise of authoritarianism and actions by increasingly aggressive geopolitical competitors.

Recognises that:

- the democratic transformation process in the Western Balkans has stalled in many places and there is a need for accelerated level of democratic and socio-economic reforms;
- Europe and the world has gone through multiple serious financial, political, and sanitary challenges over the last 15 years, culminating in the COVID-19 pandemic and the effects of climate change, causing the EU to focus on consecutive crises;
- the European Union has nonetheless demonstrated that the challenges are always better addressed through internal cooperation, cohesion, solidarity, and respect of the rule of law;
- the process of needed structural reforms to make the EU more efficient, functional, and credible should be done in parallel with the process of the completion of the unification with the Western Balkan states.

Calls for

- demonstration of determination and leadership by renewed commitment of the European Union to the open-door policy for the European countries that fulfil the Copenhagen criteria and in that for sense for EU enlargement with the countries of the Western Balkans;
- removal of individual vetoes by neighbouring EU member states that are not related to the Copenhagen criteria for membership but based on bilateral matters;
- rapid implementation of the mechanisms for an EU compatible Regional Economic Market in Southeast Europe based on the conclusions of the Berlin Process in 2020;
- integration of the citizens and the countries of the Western Balkans in the deliberations on the Conference of the Future of Europe, that will

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- define the future Union in which the Western Balkans will be members;
- bold and substantial reforms of the Union that will make the EU institutionally efficient, effective in its services, unified in the world and above all resolute in respecting the rule of law, democratic principles, and human rights;
 - include all the countries of the Western Balkans in the next European elections in 2024 offering them observer non-voting status in the European Parliament until their full membership, as was done previously;
 - complete the full integration of the Western Balkans in the European Union by the European elections in 2029, if necessary, by providing transitional mechanisms in the accession agreements that will guarantee efficient functioning of the EU institutions.

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