
PRESS RELEASE

EU Western Balkans Strategy: A welcome change of approach

The Commission has acknowledged that economic integration alone will not drive political cooperation, and signals a more interventionist stance by Brussels in the region.

- The European Commission will today announce a new strategy for Western Balkan accession to the bloc.
- The Commission has put significant focus on two key areas: the resolution of outstanding security issues in the region, and the strengthening of the rule of law.
- This represents a change of focus from Brussels. Whereas previously the EU had assumed that improving economic connectivity would automatically bring about political cooperation, the approach now recognises that these two issues must progress together, and that sometimes the politics has to come first.
- Broadly, this also represents more of an interventionist strategy than previously; the EU is pushing for major changes in state-building and bilateral and regional cooperation.
- These moves are broadly positive, and a greater EU role in mediating regional conflicts is likely to increase the chances of a resolution. However, alone they will not be enough to ensure speedy EU accession for the Western Balkan states, as it remains to be seen to what instruments the bloc will be able to use to achieve its aims.
- An indicative target of 2025 has been set for EU accession, although this will be too ambitious for most if not all. The key to the whole region is Serbia, and an advance in membership talks could be positive for all.

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