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Parliamentary Dimension
Bulgarian Presidency of the Council
of the European Union

Inter-Parliamentary Conference for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) **15-17 February 2018, Sofia**

Background information

Session II: Accelerating Reforms in View of European Perspective for the Western Balkans

The enlargement policy is one of the most successful policies of the European Union. It remains the most efficient tool to foster deep political and economic transformations in order to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria. Fair and rigorous conditionality is essential for preserving the credibility of the process, with each country being assessed on its own merits. Rule of law-issues, economic governance, and public administration reform are considered fundamental parts, where focus is on sustainable and lasting implementation of reforms. In addition, good neighbourly relations and inclusive regional cooperation are horizontal elements which are indispensable for guaranteeing sustainable peace and stability in the region.

In March 2017, the unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans was reaffirmed by EU Heads of State and Government as stated in the Conclusions by the President of the European Council. Furthermore, the European future of the Western Balkans was re-affirmed also in the 2017 State of the Union address of Commission President Mr. Juncker.

During the Bulgarian Presidency, enlargement gains prominence as a series of events and documents related to the process and the Western Balkans in particular, that are foreseen for 2018:

- 6 February: The European Commission presented a Western Balkans Strategy, as announced by President Juncker in his letter of intent in September 2017;
- Early 2018: Subject to reform progress by Albania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Commission may issue formal recommendations to open accession negotiations with the two candidate countries;
- 17 April: The Commission will present its regular Enlargement Package, with individual progress reports on all Western Balkan partners and Turkey;



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- 17 May: The EU-Western Balkans Summit will take place in Sofia;
- 26 June: General Affairs Council will adopt conclusions on Enlargement and the Stabilisation and Association Process;
- July: The Annual Summit in the context of the Berlin process will take place in London.

Following the last Enlargement package from the Commission of November 2016, a new cycle of reporting has begun, aiming for alignment with the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) cycle, thus publishing the reports in April. This way, the 2018 reports will present the state of play using the statistical data for 2017.