



Written message for the “ANETREC
concluding conference”

from

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European Commissioner for Neighbourhood
and Enlargement

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Distinguished Professors, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you all, for your valuable work in support of the EU enlargement policy and regional reconciliation in the Western Balkans. Your support is strongly needed as you give the intellectual basis in the region for this complex and challenging transformation process.

Please allow me to shortly outline our work and priorities for the next months for which I ask for your continued support.

Enlargement is a top priority for the European Union today. Following the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, the European Council gave candidate status and EU perspective to the three Eastern partners, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia. At the same time EU leaders called for the acceleration of the accession process of the Western Balkans.

This is a historic opportunity to integrate the Western Balkans into the EU and we have a plan how to make it happen. It remains a formidable challenge that requires political will and hard work on all sides: the EU institutions, the Member States and the accession countries. But it is doable now.

The technical process for the negotiations is in place. The new methodology that this Commission developed provides the right framework. It is a politically driven process, with fundamentals in the centre that ensures predictability and credibility for the negotiations. We can use this structure to significantly speed up the process, if the accession countries are delivering on reforms.

The EU will need to take all the decisions in relation to enlargement without delay. No matter how small, no matter how big. Every time there is delivery on the side of the Balkan countries, there has to be a recognition and a decision in the enlargement process by the EU.

We also have a plan for accelerating the economic growth and bringing forward the real integration of the region to the EU. We will present this Growth Plan for the Western Balkans together with the annual enlargement package later this autumn.

The Plan is based on four pillars: 1. bringing the Western Balkans closer to the EU Single Market; 2. deepening regional economic integration; 3. accelerating fundamental reforms; and 4. increasing pre-accession funds.

The new Growth Plan comes on top of the implementation of the EUR 30 billion Economic and Investment Plan for the region (EIP). The implementation of the EIP is well on track, we have approved EUR 4.3 billion grants leveraging EUR 15 billion investments in key transport, energy and digital infrastructure in the region.

We will continue our strong political, technical and financial support to all six Western Balkan partners to help them advance key political, institutional, social and economic reform that are necessary to progress on their path towards the EU.

I wish you fruitful discussions and exchange on these important topics.

Thank you!