



MEETING OF THE CHAIRPERSONS OF COSAC

SESSION II: STATE OF PLAY OF THE WESTERN BALKAN AND
EASTERN ENLARGEMENTS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Pursuant to [Article 49](#) of the Treaty on European Union, any European State which respects and is committed to promoting human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, may apply to become a member of the Union. The most important accession criteria for applicant countries were established by the European Council in 1993 ([Copenhagen criteria](#)). These are the following: stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law and human rights; respect for and protection of minority rights; a functioning market economy and the ability to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union; ability to take on the obligations of membership, including the effective implementation of EU law; and, finally, adherence to the aims of political, economic and monetary union.

The European Commission presented in February 2020 and the European Council adopted in March 2020 a [new methodology for the enlargement of the EU](#) for a more credible, dynamic, predictable and politically sound EU accession process. Fundamental reforms will have a major role in the accession negotiations, and the negotiating chapters have been grouped into six clusters ([COM\(2020\) 57 final](#)).

Enlargement will lead to Europe's long-term stability, security, peace, prosperity, to the enhancement of its geopolitical relevance, to the respect for democracy and fundamental rights. Accession is a merit-based process that depends solely on the objective progress made by each country, which must credibly and irreversibly implement the necessary reforms. EU membership is a strategic choice; therefore, the partners should strongly and clearly recognise and promote the Union's values. Essential conditions include good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation, as well as alignment with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy ([COM\(2023\) 690 final](#)).

Enlargement also requires the Union's integration capacity, which poses major challenges for the Union as well. The European Commission will conduct the

relevant reviews in early 2025 in four main areas: values, policies, budget and governance ([COM\(2024\) 146 final](#)).

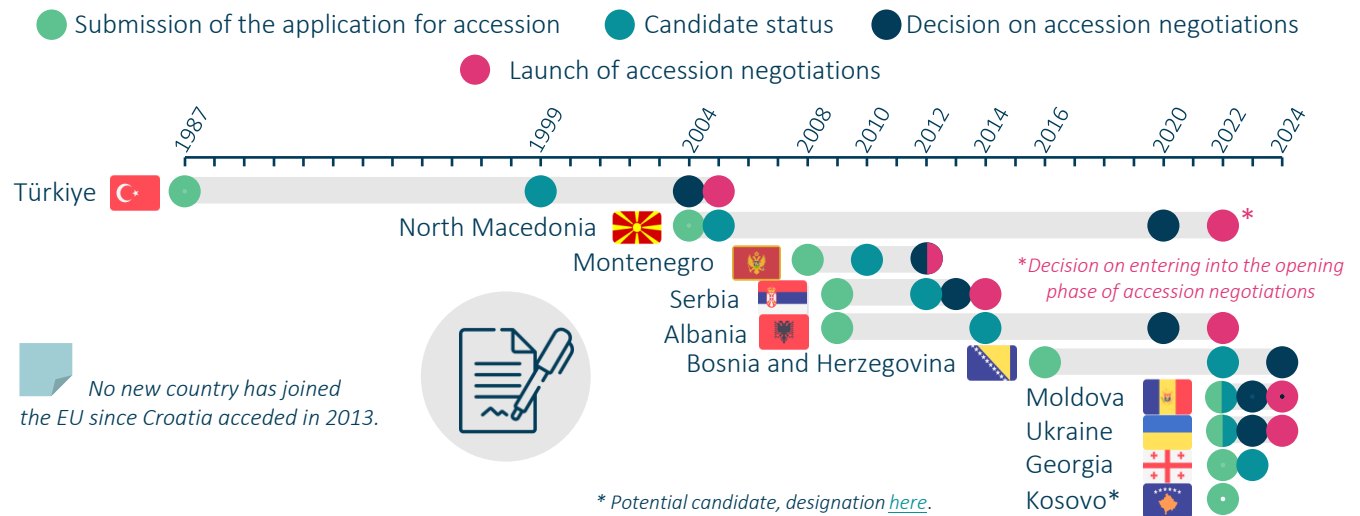
According to the European Parliament Recommendation of November 2022 on the enlargement strategy, enlargement is one of the EU's most effective foreign policy and geopolitical instruments and one of its most successful policies ([2022/2064\(INI\)](#)).

Recent geopolitical challenges have also highlighted the need for a reform of enlargement policy, in particular the geostrategic importance of the Western Balkans and the importance of their stability. Therefore, the European Commission set out a new growth agenda for the Western Balkans in its enlargement package presented on 8 November 2023. This is aimed at making certain benefits of EU membership available already before accession by accelerating reforms and increasing socio-economic convergence. The four pillars of the plan are: enhancing economic integration with the EU's single market, creating a Common Regional Market, accelerating fundamental reforms and providing dedicated financial support ([COM\(2023\) 691 final](#)). Financial support is provided by the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans ([Regulation \(EU\) 2024/1449](#)).

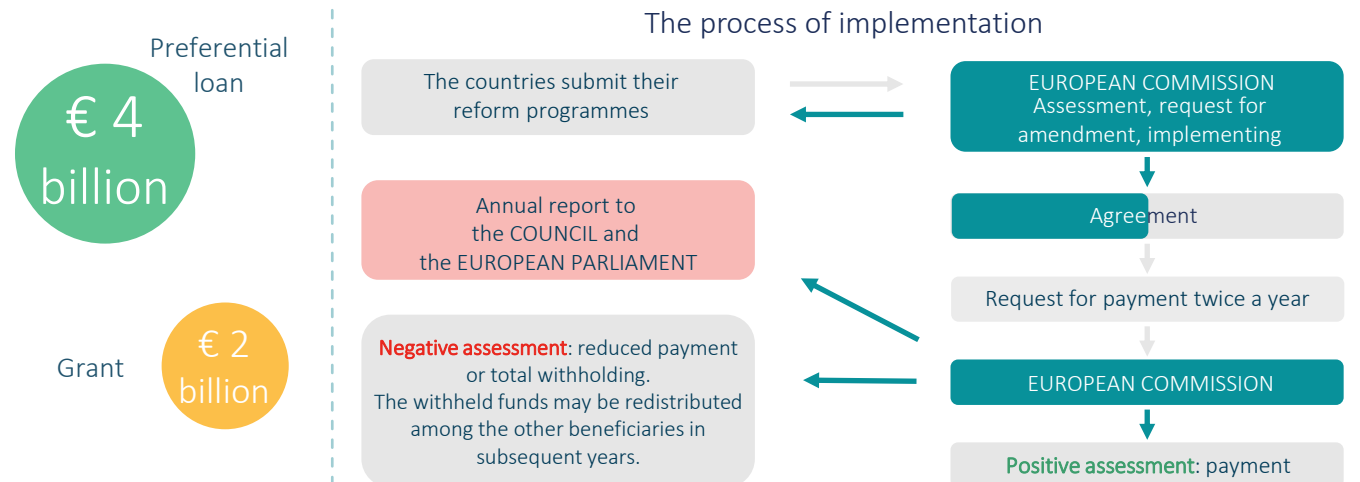
Ukraine is in a specific situation because of the war; therefore, Pillar III of the EU's dedicated Ukraine Facility aims to provide assistance, among other things, for the design and implementation of the country's EU accession-related reforms ([Regulation \(EU\) 2024/792](#)).

Having regard to the Union's capacity for enlargement, the Hungarian Presidency will seek to make substantial progress with the candidate countries on the basis of the European Commission's reports and a merit-based approach ([Programme of the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the second half of 2024](#)). ♦

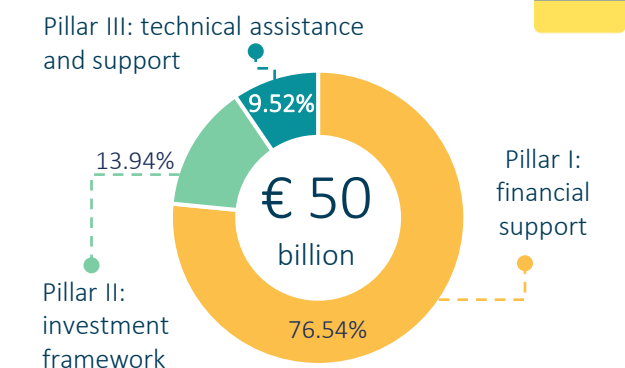
CHRONOLOGY OF THE ACCESSION PROCESS FOR CANDIDATE AND POTENTIAL CANDIDATE COUNTRIES



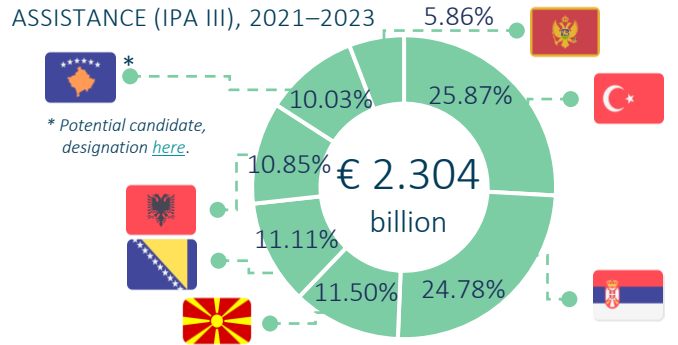
REFORM AND GROWTH FACILITY FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS, 2024–2027



UKRAINE FACILITY, 2024–2027



DISTRIBUTION OF THE AMOUNTS ALLOCATED TO THE COUNTRIES FROM THE INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA III), 2021–2023



SOURCES

1 European Council: [EU enlargement policy](#) | 2 Regulation (EU) 2024/1449 | 3 Regulation (EU) 2024/792 | 4 European Commission: [Commission adopts 2023 Enlargement package...](#) 8. November 2023.