

## **Joint Statement**

by the Foreign Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of Croatia, the Hellenic Republic and Romania, New York, 25 September 2019.

We reiterate our strong support for credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans and for its future within the EU. We strongly believe that the EU enlargement is a mutually beneficial process both for the EU and the Western Balkans and represents a strategic investment in Europe's security, stability and prosperity.

Therefore, we believe that the EU should remain firmly engaged in the Western Balkans region and that the enlargement has to remain in the focus of the EU. We also believe that credible EU membership perspective is crucial for the development of democratic and prosperous societies in the Western Balkans. It is of key importance for the EU to ensure the overall progress of the region based on individual merit and strict but fair conditionality.

Ahead of the General Affairs Council this October, we reiterate our strong support for opening of accession negotiations with Albania and the Republic of North Macedonia, provided set conditionality is met, in particular good neighbourly relations, being convinced that both the EU and the Western Balkans partners, have to deliver on our commitments and ensure the credibility of the EU enlargement policy.

The start of the accession negotiations will enable these two countries to focus more on necessary reforms while it will enable the EU to scrutinize closely their progress in meeting established conditions and criteria, including the implementation of bilateral treaties conducive to good neighborliness in the region, such as the Treaty of Good Neighborly Relations between Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia and the Prespa Agreement between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. This will certainly contribute to the reform momentum of the whole region. It would also be a remarkable proof of the progress achieved, giving an important impetus to the accession process of the two countries, as a legacy of the strong support of the current Commission to the enlargement process.

We are also confident that enlargement policy will be high on the EU's agenda under the mandate of the next Commission, in order to accelerate progress in the next five years and ensure a clear perspective on the future of the accession process.