[Enlargement: new enlargement methodology will be applied to Montenegro and Serbia](#)

The Council agreed on the application of the revised enlargement methodology to the accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia, after both candidate countries expressed their acceptance of the new methodology. The changes will be accommodated within the existing negotiating frameworks with Montenegro and Serbia during the next Intergovernmental Conferences.

The European Union and its Member States have consistently expressed their unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. This firm, merit-based prospect of full EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the Union's own political, security and economic interests.

> A credible accession perspective is the key driver of transformation in the region and enhancing the opportunities for our collective security and prosperity. It is a key tool to promote democracy, rule of law and the respect for fundamental rights, which are also the main engines of economic development, social integration and the essential anchor for fostering regional reconciliation and stability. Maintaining and enhancing this policy is indispensable for the EU's credibility, for the EU's success and for the EU's influence in the region and beyond.
>
> *Ana Paula Zacarias, State Secretary for European Affairs of Portugal*

The enhancement of the accession process of Montenegro and Serbia focuses on the following elements:

- **A stronger focus on fundamental reforms**: it is essential and also in the candidate countries' own interest that they keep delivering on reform commitments and produce tangible results in their implementation. This is key to realising their European perspective. This requires a stronger focus throughout the accession process on the rule of law, fundamental rights, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration reform, as well as on economic criteria.
- **A stronger political steer:** a key element for enhancing the enlargement process, regular Intergovernmental Conferences at ministeriallevel, together with the Stabilisation and Association Councils, will strengthen the dialogue with the candidate countries and help focus efforts on key reforms that should allow for further progress.
- **An increased dynamism:** a clustering of the negotiating chapters should help candidate countries to accelerate their preparations by cross-

fertilisation of efforts across individual chapters, and put a stronger focus on core sectors and the most important and urgent reforms. It should also help with identifying accelerated integration measures.
- Improving the **predictability** of the process, based on objective criteria and rigorous positive and negative conditionality.

Background

On 25 March 2020, the Council endorsed the Commission communication on '*Enhancing the accession process – A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans*' of 5 February 2020, aiming to reinvigorate the accession process by making it more predictable, more credible, more dynamic and subject to stronger political steering. The new process is based on objective criteria, rigorous positive and negative conditionality, and reversibility. Its credibility is reinforced through an even stronger focus on fundamental reforms, starting with the rule of law, the functioning of democratic institutions and public administration as well as the economies of the candidate countries.

Montenegro's accession negotiations started in June 2012, when the negotiating framework with Montenegro was presented at the first meeting of the accession conference at ministerial level, on 29 June 2012.

Serbia's accession negotiations started in January 2014, when the negotiating framework with Serbia was presented at the first meeting of the accession conference at ministerial level, on 21 January 2014.

Next steps

The elements of the revised enlargement methodology will be presented to each of the two candidate countries at the next meeting of the respective intergovernmental accession conference at ministerial level.