

ADOPTED EMERGENCY RESOLUTION

EPP CONGRESS ZAGREB, 20 – 21 NOVEMBER 2019



Emergency Resolution adopted at the EPP Congress, Zagreb (Croatia), 20th – 21st November 2019

Emergency Resolution on the necessity to reinvigorate European accession perspective for the Western Balkans

Bearing in mind the decisive role of the enlargement process in the stabilisation of the Western Balkans and recent non-opening of the EU accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, the European People's Party (EPP),

a) highlights the major achievements leading up to the positive European Commission recommendation on starting of accession negotiations by

- Commending North Macedonia for its historic settlement of difficult, open bilateral issues and the promotion of good neighbourly relations, notably through the Prespa Agreement with Greece, and the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria; calls on the Council to seriously take into consideration the positive messages of these agreements, as well as the counter-effects of its failure to agree on opening accession talks on political stability, regional cooperation and peaceful co-existence;
- Welcoming the fact that Albania has demonstrated its determination to advance on the EU reform agenda and has delivered tangible and sustained results, and also welcomes the judiciary reforms carried out by Albania; endorses the Commission's recommendation on Albania and expresses deep concern about the recurring phenomenon of people with criminal records, corruption and organised crime and urges overcoming the political crisis through all-inclusive dialogue and electoral reforms that pave the way for free and fair elections in recognition of these encouraging reform efforts;
- Considers that a swift opening of the screening process and accession talks would sustain and increase the momentum of reform; considers that the opening of negotiations would constitute a powerful catalyst for implementing reforms and consolidating democratic institutions and would contribute to enhancing EU scrutiny; recognizes that the political consensus on the EU accession process was instrumental in attaining positive recommendations from the European Commission;

b) recalls the political commitments made to the countries of the Western Balkans:

- at the 2000 Zagreb Summit, European perspective opened for the countries in the region with an aim to move closer to the European Union as part of the stabilization and association process;
- in 2003, the Thessaloniki European Council underlined its support for the future integration of the Western Balkan countries into European structures and stated that their ultimate membership of the Union is a high priority for the EU;
- at the EU-Western Balkans Summit of 17 May 2018, the EU reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans; as well as the EPP Leaders in their meeting on 16 May 2018 in Sofia in their declaration reiterated their unequivocal support for a credible enlargement and European accession perspective for and an enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans and for their future within the European Union;

c) evaluates the non-decision by the European Council due to the blocking of some Member States:

- as strategic geopolitical mistake with negative effect on the EU's credibility given that the integration of eligible countries helps the EU to uphold its international role and protect its interests,
- by recalling that the youth in particular in the region have high expectations as regards EU accession and believes that a future without a clear perspective could lead to further intensified emigration from the region;

d) highlights the prospective effect of the decision on the Southeast Europe by:

- underlining that progressing on the path towards EU accession also has a transformative effect on the candidate countries themselves; furthermore states that the dismantlement of the enlargement policy might lead to an increasingly unstable situation in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, notes with concern that this could allow other foreign actors, whose activity might not be in line with EU values and interests, to engage more closely with both North Macedonia and Albania;
- stressing that the EU's failure to open accession negotiations has resulted in snap elections being called in North Macedonia, resulting in a loss of credibility for those who have made compromises; considers that this sends a negative message for possible candidate countries regarding good neighbourly relations; underlines that all efforts need to be undertaken for free, fair, democratic and credible elections to be organized on 12 April 2020 in North Macedonia;

e) therefore, the EPP concludes that:

- The Western Balkans remains a region of strategic importance to the EU since the stability, economic and social development of the region have direct consequences for the EU;
- The incoming new European Commission should immediately take stock of the enlargement policy and assist in reverting this negative decision as soon as possible;
- Calls on the Council and Member States to acknowledge positive effects of enlargement process, as well as to recognise the back-lash of the non-decision on the region and thus the stability of the EU as well with a critical stance and to commit to taking a positive decision as soon as possible on opening accession negotiations with both countries;
- Nonetheless, efforts and continued steps need to be taken in the fight against corruption and the establishing of a functional system of rule of law and creation of an independent justice system; corruption and politicisation of the judiciary as well as the protection of human rights, including the rights of minorities and property rights remain important challenges on the European path;
- Calls on the European Council, the Council of the European Union and the European Commission to encourage reforms in Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo towards meeting the accession criteria as soon as possible;
- The EU-Western Balkans summit in Zagreb during the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the EU in May 2020 will be a unique opportunity to evaluate, reassess and reinvigorate the enlargement process, as one of the most effective policy instruments of the Union.