





Policy Paper


EU Accession Talks for Albania and North Macedonia: Mirage or Reality?

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EUROPE

*This Policy Paper was written by **Sasa Kulenovic** | 14 October 2019

 Rue de la Science 14, 1040 Brussels

 office@vocaleurope.eu

 + 32 02 588 00 14

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



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1. Introduction

Albania and North Macedonia's bid to join the European Union has gathered momentum in recent years as the two countries made progress on their quest to open accession negotiations.¹ While the European Commission has repeatedly called for the opening of accession talks,² the European Council failed to reach a decision on a starting date in June 2019 and postponed the discussions to the forthcoming EU summit to be held on 17-18 October 2019.³ While skepticism towards enlargement is still prevalent in some key member states⁴, further delays in setting a starting date could embolden anti-EU forces in the two aspiring countries and discredit their reform-oriented agendas, with pernicious ramifications.

2. Background

2.1. Current state of affairs in Albania and North Macedonia

2.1.1. Albania

In recent years, Albania has embarked on a reform oriented agenda aimed at bringing the country closer to the European Union.⁵ In 2015 Albania approved a special law banning anyone sentenced for serious crimes from holding public offices⁶ and in 2018 the country launched a vetting process for judges to root out corruption from the country's judiciary.⁷

Despite the progress in the implementation of reforms, the political polarization in the country has recently reached new heights, with increasingly violent street protests⁸ against the Socialist-led government and a long-standing boycott of parliamentary activities by opposition parties.⁹ Likewise, the opposition has not run in the recent local elections over accusations of government links with organized crime.¹⁰

A blow to the country's image occurred in June 2019 when the German tabloid BILD published six eavesdropped phone conversations highlighting apparent links between ruling party officials and crime gangs.¹¹ The scandal has in turn further emboldened the opposition and reinforced their claims against the Socialist Party. While the country has pledged to fight corruption and despite noteworthy progress in the area,¹² the problem is far from being uprooted.

¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

² <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

³ <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-delays-decision-on-north-macedonia-albania-membership-talks/30006858.html>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans/france-opposes-eu-membership-talks-with-north-macedonia-albania-diplomats-idUSKBN1WP1Z0>

⁵ file:///C:/Users/titojagodo/Downloads/COUNTRY-19-2775_EN.pdf

⁶ <https://balkaninsight.com/2015/12/18/albania-adopts-decriminalization-of-politics-law-12-18-2015/>

⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-albania-election-corruption/albania-judges-its-judges-in-pursuit-of-eu-milestone-idUSKBN19E19H>

⁸ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/03/violence-flares-up-in-albania-opposition-protest/>

⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://www.euronews.com/2019/06/30/polls-open-in-albania-as-opposition-parties-boycott-mayoral-elections>

¹¹ <https://www.bild.de/video/clip/albanien/albanien-mafia-boss-sauer-62396706.bild.html>

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

Furthermore, during the summer of 2019 initiatives to regulate online media with controversial anti-defamation laws¹³ and the cancelation of tv shows critical of the Prime Minister¹⁴, have been met with criticism as such measures impact and restrict the freedom of the media in the country.

2.1.2 North Macedonia

In recent years, North Macedonia has taken significant steps towards domestic and regional reconciliation, which has in turn enhanced its credibility among EU member states. Two achievements in particular have been the backbone of the recent reform driven agenda: the 2015 Pržino agreement¹⁵, which ended a deep political and institutional crisis and the signature of the breakthrough 2018 Prespa agreement, which settled the long-standing name dispute with Greece.¹⁶

Following the political settlement and the 2016 snap elections,¹⁷ the new government embarked on a reform agenda with a view to reviving the EU integration process. In July 2017, the 3-6-9 plan was launched, aimed at ensuring the removal of the conditional recommendations for the start of negotiations, strengthening North Macedonian image as a serious EU candidate and starting discussions regarding the beginning of accession talks.¹⁸

Following the completion of 'Plan 3-6-9', in May 2018 the government developed the so called 'Plan 18' which envisioned the further implementation of the EU reform agenda, with a special focus on judiciary, public administration and intelligence services.¹⁹

Although the political climate has improved in the country, the relations between the governing Social Democratic Party and the VMRO DPMN are still strained²⁰ and future heightened political strives should not be discounted. On the other hand, the revitalized Euro-Atlantic integration has been welcomed by the Albanian minority and has somewhat lessened inter-ethnic tensions. Furthermore, the new government has improved the status of the Albanian minority by adding a reference to the Ohrid Agreement in the Preamble of the Constitution²¹ and by adopting the much-anticipated Law on the Use of Languages.²²

Despite the general progress, the recent arrest of Katica Janeva,²³ the Head of the crime-busting Special Prosecution has destabilized the country and jeopardized the credibility of an institution tasked in 2015 with fighting high level government corruption cases.

¹³ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/07/19/censorship-bill-albania-rights-organizations-slams-anti-defamation-package/>

¹⁴ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/29/last-tv-shows-critical-of-the-government-are-closed-down-in-albania/>

¹⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/agreement-skopje-overcome-political-crisis_en

¹⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

¹⁷ <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/01/03/macedonia-2016-tedious-efforts-to-resolve-deep-crisis-12-27-2016/>

¹⁸ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/07/06/zaev-presents-3-6-9-plan-fast-reform-package-recommendation-negotiations-eu/>

¹⁹ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/07/26/macedonia-governments-plan-18-transformed-screening-plan/>

²⁰ <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3ae6a6cc10.html>

²¹ <https://meta.mk/en/zaev-there-will-be-four-amendments-to-the-constitution-including-the-ohrid-agreement/>

²² <https://www.rferl.org/a/macedonia-s-albanian-language-bill-becomes-law/29711502.html>

²³ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/08/21/north-macedonia-arrests-outgoing-chief-special-prosecutor/>

2.2. History of EU enlargement in the region.

In the early 2000's, the EU embraced a more assertive role in the Western Balkans and opened the doors of enlargement to the region with a view to completing the unification of the continent started with the fall of the iron curtain.²⁴ As years went by, complex enlargement cycles, the European sovereign debt crisis and EU internal priorities, paved the way towards the sharpening of enlargement criteria²⁵ and ultimately to enlargement fatigue.²⁶

Currently, the 2018 new credible enlargement strategy for the Western Balkans²⁷ has made enlargement cycles even less likely in the short and medium term. Although the strategy acknowledges the possibility of the accession of Montenegro and Serbia by 2025, it also stresses the very ambitious nature of this goal.²⁸ At the moment in the region, Serbia and Montenegro have started accession talks, Albania and North Macedonia are candidate countries and Bosnia and Hercegovina and Kosovo are considered as potential candidates.²⁹

The European Commission has suggested to open accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania in two consecutive reports, but the European Council has failed to reach a consensus and start accession talks with the two countries. In that regard, a number of countries expressed their opposition to the idea of starting accession talks.³⁰ The topic will be once again addressed at the October 2019 EU summit. While the allure of the EU membership has been a powerful driver of reforms in the Balkans, persistent enlargement fatigue has weakened the transformative power of the EU in the region.³¹

2.3 EU integration process of Albania and North Macedonia

North Macedonia

Following the end of hostilities in 2001,³² North Macedonia was regarded as one of the front runners for EU accession in the Western Balkans. The Stabilisation and Association Agreement between North Macedonia and the EU entered into force in 2004 and one year later the country gained the EU candidate status.³³ Ever since 2009, the Commission has recommended to the Council to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia, but the repeated Greek veto due to the name dispute prevented any advancement on the issue.³⁴

²⁴ https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_PRES-03-163_en.htm

²⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2006/nov/com_649_strategy_paper_en.pdf

²⁶ http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/DT13-2009

²⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

²⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

²⁹ https://europa.eu/newsroom/highlights/special-coverage/enlargement_en

³⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans/france-opposes-eu-membership-talks-with-north-macedonia-albania-diplomats-idUSKBN1WP1Z0>

³¹ <http://uu.diva-portal.org/smash/record.jsf?pid=diva2%3A866162&dswid=63001928>

³² <https://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=563>

³³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/republic-north-macedonia/>

³⁴ <https://www.esiweb.org/index.php?lang=en&id=562>

In recent years, North Macedonia embarked on a reforming path triggered first by the Prižno agreement which ended the political stalemate in the country and subsequently by the landmark name deal with Greece.³⁵ In light of the progress achieved, in April 2018 and May 2019 the Commission reiterated its unconditional recommendation to open accession negotiations.³⁶

Albania

Albania submitted its application for EU membership in 2009, the same year when the Stabilisation and Association Agreement entered into force.³⁷ Following a 2012 European Commission recommendation and an encouraging report on Albania's progress on judicial reform, and the fight against corruption and organised crime, the country finally became an EU candidate in 2014.³⁸

Throughout the years, Albania has continued to implement the Stabilisation and Association Agreement and work on its reform agenda.³⁹ In April 2018, the European Commission recommended to open accession negotiations with Albania, while encouraging the country to capitalize on the reform momentum, in particular in the critical rule of law field.⁴⁰ In June 2018, the Council set out the path towards opening accession negotiations in June 2019.⁴¹ As a consequence, Albania continued to implement critical reforms, in particular delivering concrete results in the conditions identified in the Council Conclusions of June 2018.⁴²

3. Current debates and positions

3.1. EU Commission's recommendations and the support for accession talks.

In May 2019, the European Commission recommended again to the European Council to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia.⁴³ In its most recent report the EU Commission has acknowledged that the two countries 'have embraced the opportunity and delivered on reforms, in particular in the areas identified as crucial by the Council in June 2018.'⁴⁴

In the wake of the report, Commissioner Johannes Hanh praised the reform-oriented agenda of Albania and North Macedonia claiming that "to remain credible, the EU must stick to its commitments and respond clearly and positively when countries fulfil theirs".⁴⁵ Likewise, the High Representative Federica Mogherini gave her support to the opening of accession talks by describing some of the achievements of the two countries as "impressive".⁴⁶ Most recently, the President-elect

³⁵ <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/423416>

³⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/countries/detailed-country-information/albania_en

³⁸ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/albania/>

³⁹ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/albania/>

⁴⁰ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/enlargement/albania/>

⁴¹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41032/background-note_gac_october-2019_en.pdf

⁴² <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

⁴³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/enlargement-package-and-european-elections-2019-may-29_en

⁴⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/news/enlargement-package-and-european-elections-2019-may-29_en

⁴⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/remarks-commissioner-hahn-extraordinary-meeting-european-parliament-afet-committee-2019-enlargement_en

⁴⁶ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/05/29/ec-recommends-accession-talks-with-albania-north-macedonia/>

of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen also gave her endorsement to the opening of accession talks with the two candidate countries.⁴⁷

3.2. North Macedonia and Albania and their EU reform agendas

Albania

The assessment of Albania in the EC report has been overall positive although remarks have been more moderate and less enthusiastic on certain issues that need to be fully addressed yet.⁴⁸ Improvements have been reported in areas such as the judiciary, where concrete results have strengthened the sector, and the public administration.⁴⁹

Progress was also made in the fight against corruption and organized crime although corruption and organized crime networks remain an issue of serious concern for the country.⁵⁰ Fundamental rights and the freedom of expression require further improvements according to the report and a number of other areas need to be addressed such as exports and regional integration, education and training, rural areas and vulnerable groups.⁵¹ Albania's ability to assume the obligations of membership has been assessed as enhanced, noting that the country is moderately prepared in many areas, such as financial control, education and culture and statistics.⁵²

North Macedonia

The General assessment of North Macedonia in the European Commission report 2019 has been very positive. The country has been praised for its strengthened democracy and rule of law, the more inclusive and open political atmosphere and the results in areas such as the judiciary, fight against corruption and organized crime, intelligence services reform and public administration.⁵³ The country has been also assessed as moderately prepared in most areas to assume the obligations of the EU membership while further efforts and more focus is needed in few areas.⁵⁴

North Macedonia proved repeatedly its commitments to an EU reform oriented agenda through its 'Plan 3-6-9' and 'Plan 18'⁵⁵ and has implemented important measures that address the concerns of the Albanian minority.⁵⁶ The country has also delivered on its promises to clean-up and reshuffle its executive whenever results are lacking as a way to improve the country's governance.⁵⁷

⁴⁷ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/10/03/joint-letter-by-presidents-tusk-juncker-sassoli-and-president-elect-von-der-leyen-to-the-eu-heads-of-state-or-government-on-the-accession-talks-with-north-macedonia-and-albania/>

⁴⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

⁴⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

⁵¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

⁵² <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

⁵³ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

⁵⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

⁵⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

⁵⁶ <https://meta.mk/en/zaev-there-will-be-four-amendments-to-the-constitution-including-the-ohrid-agreement/>

⁵⁷ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/05/27/north-macedonia-ruling-party-axes-top-officials/>

3.3 Member states opposed to accession talks

Several EU member states have been forethoughtful in supporting initiatives that might be perceived as detrimental to their domestic political gains.⁵⁸ Furthermore, at a time of rising populism⁵⁹ and increasing global threats,⁶⁰ several member states have prioritized the resolution of EU internal problems and avoided decisions that might allegedly jeopardize European unity.⁶¹ Following the 2018 Commission's unconditional recommendation to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, a decision on the issue was prudently postponed after the May 2019 parliamentary elections.⁶²

Enlargement was thus kept carefully out of electoral campaigns across European countries, pending the outcome of the ballots.⁶³ Although the majority of EU member states is supporting the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia, a number of key countries have remained skeptical towards enlargement and are expected to maintain their position at the forthcoming European Council meeting.⁶⁴

France has been one of the most vocal opponents of further enlargement in the short and medium term as EU internal reforms have been regarded as the utmost priority.⁶⁵ Before the recent EU parliamentary elections, President Emmanuel Macron avoided any discussion related to enlargement and implicitly supported the postponement of the publication of Western Balkans' country reports.⁶⁶ In the wake of the October 2019 European Council, France has once again expressed its opposition to launch membership negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania for the time being.⁶⁷

In June 2019, the Dutch parliament adopted a resolution that might de facto prevent Albania from starting EU accession talks this year, on account of a lack of progress in the fight against organized crime and corruption.⁶⁸ On the other hand, a possibility was left for North Macedonia as the country was not mentioned in the resolution⁶⁹ although the Dutch Foreign Minister Stef Blok recently said that a green light would be contingent on Skopje passing legislation to set up an independent public prosecution body.⁷⁰

⁵⁸ <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/03/21/eu-member-states-do-have-different-interests-does-not-mean/>

⁵⁹ <https://time.com/time-person-of-the-year-populism/>

⁶⁰ <https://www.iss.europa.eu/content/protecting-europe-0>

⁶¹ <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-european-parliament-election-calls-for-big-cu-changes-in-european-renaissance/>

⁶² <https://www.politico.eu/article/eu-european-union-ministers-general-affairs-council-postpone-albania-and-macedonia-accession-decision/>

⁶³ <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/05/24/failure-in-the-western-balkans-means-a-failure-of-the-european-project/>

⁶⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-enlargement/size-matters-france-deflates-eu-enlargement-aspirations-idUSKCN1TX2AA>

⁶⁵ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-enlargement/size-matters-france-deflates-eu-enlargement-aspirations-idUSKCN1TX2AA>

⁶⁶ <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/05/24/failure-in-the-western-balkans-means-a-failure-of-the-european-project/>

⁶⁷ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans/france-opposes-eu-membership-talks-with-north-macedonia-albania-diplomats-idUSKBN1WP1Z0>

⁶⁸ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/09/netherlands-welcomes-eu-talks-with-north-macedonia-not-albania/>

⁶⁹ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/13/merkel-reassures-north-macedonia-on-eu-talks/>

⁷⁰ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans/france-opposes-eu-membership-talks-with-north-macedonia-albania-diplomats-idUSKBN1WP1Z0>

Some other countries might also create obstacles to the opening of accession talks. Denmark has reportedly also expressed its doubts about opening accession talks with Albania.⁷¹ Furthermore, in an unexpected move, Bulgaria presented North Macedonia with more than 20 demands to be fulfilled in exchange for its support to Skopje's EU accession bid.⁷²

Germany, on the other hand, which has maintained a more nuanced position, has recently voted to approve the start of the talks. In June 2018 the Bundestag failed to take a decision on the start of accession talks with the two countries.⁷³ However, following the return of the Bundestag from its summer recess, German MPs voted by a large majority to set a starting date for EU accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania.⁷⁴

4. Consequences of accession talks postponement for Albania and North Macedonia.

A failure of the European Council to reach a consensus on opening negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, could have detrimental consequence for the two aspiring members and the region as a whole.⁷⁵ In North Macedonia, it will discredit the achievements of the Socialist led government and the political determination showed in reaching landmark agreements that contributed to domestic as well as regional stability and reconciliation.

Furthermore, a negative outcome from the European Council will bolster the opposition and lead to a more confrontational political discourse as North Macedonia Prime Minister Zoran Zaev warned.⁷⁶ This can in turn reopen dangerous societal cleavages, on a political as well as ethnic level, especially in view of potential snap elections and more bellicose electoral campaigns.⁷⁷

Ever since he became Prime Minister, Zoran Zaev has invested a great deal of his political capital on solving the long-standing dispute with Greece, which can backfire if progress on the EU path is not achieved.

In Albania, the postponement of opening negotiations might bolster the protest movement which has been increasingly violent and will most likely depict the failure to open talks as a political victory and an implicit approval to maintain the current confrontational stance. This will not be in any way instrumental in ending the boycott of institutions and creating an atmosphere that can favor a healthy and constructive political dialogue. Furthermore, the country could backslide on its pivotal fight against organized crime and corruption.

⁷¹ <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-eu-balkans/germany-pushes-compromise-on-eu-talks-with-north-macedonia-albania-idUSKBN1WJIRX>

⁷² <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/11/intellectuals-condemn-bulgarias-unacceptable-demands-of-north-macedonia/>

⁷³ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/07/germany-deals-blow-to-albania-north-macedonia-eu-hopes/>

⁷⁴ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/09/27/german-parliament-backs-albania-north-macedonia-eu-talks/>

⁷⁵ <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/10/csdp-eu-accession-talks>

⁷⁶ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/07/germany-deals-blow-to-albania-north-macedonia-eu-hopes/>

⁷⁷ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/10/04/north-macedonia-parties-gear-up-for-possible-elections/>

More generally, a decision not to start accession talks would question the merit-based principle⁷⁸ of EU enlargement and further hurt EU's credibility not only in North Macedonia and Albania but in other aspiring countries in the region.⁷⁹ The fact that not even an historical agreement such as the landmark name deal with Greece is sufficient to make strides on the EU integration path, will send a clear message to all the EU-sceptics and anti-EU leaders in the region and will make EU led reforms more difficult to defend and justify domestically.

Furthermore, other international actors are trying to fill the perceived gap created by the decreasing credibility and engagement of the EU in the region. Any further postponement of the accession negotiations will bolster the attempts of Russia, China and Turkey to fill that vacuum.⁸⁰

5. Pooling North Macedonia and Albania negotiations together: good or bad idea?

Discussion have been ongoing about whether linking the EU fate of North Macedonia and Albania is the proper approach.⁸¹ North Macedonia has ostensibly made more progress in recent years while Albania seems to be one step behind. That being the case, does it make sense to link the EU path of these two countries together? Skopje has protested such an approach stating that the achievements and merits of the two countries should be measured separately.⁸²

However, linking the two countries together has the beneficial externality to create a sense of shared responsibility and foster co-operation which is expected to be mutually profitable. This approach is new, since historically the EU dealt with countries from the Western Balkans bilaterally. In that regard, the hitherto used regatta principle postulates that 'each country should progress at its own pace and should be judged on the basis of its own merits'.⁸³

While the regatta principle assumes that competition between aspiring countries might be constructive and lead to better results, it was thought that this would not be the case for a post-conflict region like the Western Balkans, where cooperation and reconciliation are cardinal elements.⁸⁴ As we approach the new EU summit, the possibility that the EU path of North Macedonia and Albania could take separate ways is increasingly likely.

6. Conclusions

While North Macedonia's chances of obtaining a starting date for accession talks are more concrete, the odds for Albania remain less encouraging. Several EU member states have expressed their

⁷⁸ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

⁷⁹ <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/10/csdp-eu-accession-talks>

⁸⁰ <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2019/10/csdp-eu-accession-talks>

⁸¹ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2019/06/25/what-could-be-the-consequences-of-decoupling-north-macedonia-and-albania/>

⁸² <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/13/merkel-reassures-north-macedonia-on-eu-talks/>

⁸³ https://www.ies.be/files/repo/conference2008/EUinIA_V_1_DeCock.pdf

⁸⁴ <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/10/26/regatta-principle-best-solution/>

concern about the political polarization and the increasingly violent demonstrations in Albania.⁸⁵ Furthermore, the ongoing problem of corruption still tarnishes the image of the country in the public sphere, which makes supporting its accession talks more difficult for EU governing authorities. On the other hand, the recent arrest of Katica Janeva in North Macedonia has the potential to further destabilize the country, and has somewhat harmed Skoplje's current position and its EU accession hopes.

On the whole, a likely outcome is that accession talks will be denied to both countries at the forthcoming meeting of the European Council. While admitting the difficult task of bringing all the reluctant countries on board on opening negotiations, the incumbent President of the Commission Jean-Claude Juncker has however said that it was not a "mission impossible".⁸⁶ In that regard, although a last minute turnaround in the wake of the EU summit can be contemplated, it remains highly unlikely.

⁸⁵ <https://balkaninsight.com/2019/06/03/violence-flares-up-in-albania-opposition-protest/>

⁸⁶ <https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-pressed-membership-talks-north-macedonia-albania/29994129.html>

VOCAL EUROPE

RUE DE LA SCIENCE 14B, 1040 BRUSSELS

TEL: +32 02 588 00 14

VOCALEUROPE.EU



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