



# **DECLARATION OF THE S&D WESTERN BALKAN LEADERS SUMMIT**

8 December 2022, Vienna

- We, the S&D Group and the progressive Western Balkans Leaders, reaffirm our strong commitment to the Western Balkans path towards the EU, where fully-fledged European Union Membership for all Western Balkan countries remains our goal.
- We stand behind a progressive vision for enlargement, in which we fight for the extension of area of democracy, peace and prosperity across our continent, transformation to a green economy and a strong social dimension in the reforms linked to the accession process. We strongly believe that women's equal political voice and participation needs to be a guiding principle in the process. More attention must be paid to the situation of young people as they represent the future of the region. We stress the importance of an inclusive process of enlargement, in which citizens are meaningfully involved and their concerns are heard.
- We welcome the opening of the negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia, for which we have been calling for a long time. We are hoping for a speedy progress in the individual chapters.
- We welcome that EU member states finally moved forward with the long overdue visa liberalisation for Kosovo and welcome the legitimate European aspirations of the government of Kosovo to apply this month for EU candidate status.
- We regret the continuing political tensions slowing down the progress of EU-related reforms in Montenegro, which is still the furthest in the EU's accession process.
- We support granting candidate status to Bosnia and Hercegovina, but the country's leaders must deliver on the necessary reforms to transform BiH into a fully functional state, with a European future.
- We regret the persisting deficiencies in the area of rule of law and lack of progress on EU-related reform in Serbia, whose government is also playing a double game by refusing to fulfil their obligations as a candidate for EU membership.
- We welcome the recent initiative of a European Political Community as a useful forum for exchange; however, we insist that by no means this can be an alternative to a fully-fledged enlargement process. We call on the Commission to make the enlargement more transparent, by including clear benchmarks. Merits and clear criteria remain key.
- In the light of Russia's illegal unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine, our cooperation on foreign, security and defence policy is more important than ever. The alignment with EU CFSP is part of the process of adopting the EU acquis, but also an expression of commitment to EU norms and values such as peace and multilateralism. Hence, we call on Serbian new government to adopt the EU sanctions against Russia. The changed geopolitical situation calls for increased cooperation on defence against hybrid threats such as cyber-attacks or disinformation.
- We highlight the importance of cooperation between the S&D Group and the progressive Western Balkan parties along their path to the EU as our European family is not complete without our partners. Together, we will continue to work on building a common progressive perspective for the EU.
- Finally, we welcome the results of the Tirana Summit of 6 December 2022, in particular the agreement on roaming, but insist also that we need to be even more ambitious in the future.