
Metsola at the EU-Western Balkans summit: “It is time to grow”

Addressing the EU and Western Balkans leaders in Brussels, Metsola stressed that faced with today’s global geopolitical realities, it was time to move faster with regards to enlargement.

Remarks by EP President Roberta Metsola at the EU-Western Balkans Summit:

"Dear colleagues,

In the last decade, the EU has lost more Members than we have gained. For two decades, we have been unable to match our rhetoric with action when it comes to enlargement to the Western Balkans. But with the global geopolitical realities we are facing, we all need to move faster. Of course this can only be a merit-based approach with clear criteria, but there can be no substitute for real progress.

Look at Ukraine, Moldova or in Georgia. Illegal interference by Russia has made enlargement a geopolitical, strategic necessity. If Europe fails to act now, we will leave a void that others will gladly fill. It would be a strategic mistake not to seize the momentum now.

Enlargement has always been our most powerful geopolitical tool. But to get there, we need courage, political will, and reforms - on both sides.

The new staged accession process is already showing results. But we must go further. Elections in the Western Balkans are won, or lost, on the EU question. People in the Western Balkans must feel the benefits of integration, even before membership - enhancing credibility and trust.

Our institutions, decision-making processes, and funding mechanisms must evolve to prepare for a larger Union. Enlargement must be front and centre of the next MFF. The Parliament has called for these reforms, and we are ready to lead the way.

At the same time, reforms in the Western Balkans must be genuine. Countries must align with EU values, they must make use of the Growth Plan to transform their economies, and they must also resolve bilateral disputes. We must all be able to shake off the shackles of history, and look forward together, rather than back alone.

Ultimately, all eyes will be on implementation. Without proper implementation, these reforms are

only as good as the paper they are printed on.

The Parliament is ready to assist you on your EU path. We are investing in partnerships with Western Balkan parliaments, and I welcome our decision to open a European Parliament representation in the region. Early next year, I will visit the Western Balkans, and I look forward to meeting with leaders and having you all address the European Parliament to help advance this process.

Every enlargement has brought challenges - yes - but also enormous benefits. And with every enlargement, new Members have made our Union stronger.

We have a new Parliament and a new Commission, with a clear mandate for a safer, more forward-looking Union. It is time to grow and to send a clear signal that enlargement is no longer a distant pipe dream for people in the Western Balkans, or for people in Europe. Enlargement is a win-win for all of us. It will strengthen Europe and strengthen the region."

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