



2026 **ANNUAL PROGRESS REPORT**

Simplification, Implementation & Enforcement

Marta Kos

*European Commissioner
for Enlargement*



1. Introduction

In my role as **European Commissioner for Enlargement**, I drive forward the European Union's **enlargement process** and the EU's relations with countries in the region, including the **Western Balkans, Ukraine and Moldova, the South Caucasus and Türkiye**.

My core priorities are:

- working with candidate countries and potential candidates on their merit-based path to join the EU, by supporting the required **structural reforms**, their respect for the **rule of law and fundamental values**, and strengthening their **resilience and preparedness**;
- leading the Commission's **continued support of Ukraine**, in particular efforts on Ukraine's reconstruction and accession;
- continuing exchanges with **Türkiye** to improve cooperation on political, economic and trade matters;
- implementing the **Black Sea Strategy**, together with the High Representative/Vice-President;
- supporting the countries of the **Southern Caucasus**, in particular on **regional connectivity**.

The present Annual Progress Report covers simplification, implementation and enforcement activities undertaken at my direction by the Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood in the period **1 August 2025 to 31 July 2026**.

2. Executive Summary

Between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026, my service continued to contribute to the Commission-wide commitment to simplification measures and the better implementation of EU policies. On **simplification**, the new rules for the **EU External Action Guarantee** were put into effect, allowing surplus resources from legacy instruments to be redeployed more efficiently, increasing available guarantee coverage and freeing resources for other external priorities. The **EU blending framework** for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries (combining EU grants with loans from banks) was also streamlined to reduce the administrative burden for partner financial institutions while preserving the quality of project assessment.

On **implementation**, key milestones were met in **advancing the accession processes** of Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and Moldova. Moreover, delivery advanced under the **performance-based Facilities** supporting enlargement partners, with funds released for the benefit of the Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine against the verified delivery of reform steps. The EU's ambitious **investment mobilisation agenda** also continued to be implemented on the ground, with the organisation of **dedicated investment conferences** in Albania, Montenegro and Moldova and the launch of additional **calls for expressions of interest** for private sector investments. The period also included an **Implementation Dialogue with civil society**, which confirmed the continued relevance of the current enlargement methodology and highlighted the need for more structured and inclusive stakeholder engagement in the accession process.

3. Delivering Results: Key Measures

A. Simplification and costs savings

In the [2025 Annual Progress Report](#), I reported that my service had contributed to the so-called **Omnibus Decision on the simplification of the EU's External Action Guarantee**. Since then, the relevant Regulation was successfully adopted and published¹. The Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood is now working in close cooperation with other Commission services on its implementation – in particular the assignment

¹ Regulation (EU) 2026/995 of the European Parliament and the European Council of 29 April 2026 amending Regulation (EU) 2021/947 as regards increased efficiency of the External Action Guarantee, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2026/995>.

of surpluses from the legacy European Fund for Sustainable Development (EFSD) to its successor instrument, the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus (EFSD+).

I also reported in 2025 that my services would work on the **streamlining the EU blending framework**. The steps taken since then in this regard have focused on the **simplification of the application form** for blending proposals, with the aim to **reduce the administrative workload** for our partner financial institutions, while at the same time ensuring that the Commission receives clear and adequate information to be able to effectively assess the project proposals for EU funding.

As part of the Commission's commitment to **significantly lighten the regulatory load** for people, businesses and administrations, my services participated in the Commission-wide **screening of empowerments** for delegated² and implementing³ acts for 2025-2026. It confirmed that all Commission decisions to be initiated under my responsibility to the end of 2026 are Implementing Acts **that serve only to put existing EU laws into practice**, namely through individual financing decisions which determine the amounts, methods and conditions for EU spending on its political and policy priorities in the ENEST countries.

B. Implementation

On 12 November 2025, I held my [second Implementation Dialogue](#), this time addressing the **role of civil society** in the EU's enlargement policy. The substance of the discussions centred around the ways in which the enlargement policy can better support **cooperation between governments and civil society in the accession process** and an enabling environment for civil society more generally. The exchange also aimed to identify best practices for civil society to **promote EU values and foster positive narratives** about EU enlargement. The discussion confirmed the relevance of the current [enlargement methodology](#), with its 'fundamentals first' approach⁴, is fit for purpose, but that **more structured, inclusive and meaningful dialogue** with the Commission is needed to ensure a fully credible and whole-of-society accession process.

The reporting period saw a number of important milestones in the **accession processes of Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine and Moldova**.

Montenegro provisionally closed [eleven additional chapters](#) in its accession negotiations over the reporting period, bringing the total to 18 chapters out of 33. At the same time, **Albania** saw the **opening of negotiations** for the two remaining thematic clusters ([Cluster 4](#) – Green agenda and sustainable connectivity and [Cluster 5](#) – Resources, agriculture and cohesion) of sectoral chapters and was also deemed to have **met the interim benchmarks on the fundamentals** – the critical precondition to begin provisionally closing negotiation chapters. Subsequently, [three chapters](#) were provisionally closed with Albania on 14 July. The Council also decided to **open accession negotiations** with **Ukraine** and **Moldova** for Cluster 1 (fundamentals) and Cluster 6 (External Relations), formally launching substantive discussions on their alignment with EU laws and standards in two thematic areas.

The European Commission's assessment of candidate countries' alignment with the EU *acquis*, allowing for the opening of Clusters and provisional closure of Chapters in the negotiations, is being aided by the development of the **eAccession** tool. eAccession is an internal AI assistant that helps to **compare candidate countries' legislation with the EU acquis**, identify possible gaps, prepare structured recommendations and generate concordance tables. The tool can also support the translation and drafting of missing legal elements.

In addition to helping the implementation of the EU's enlargement policy, eAccession also helps to **simplify acquis screening**, allowing the Commission's policy and legal experts to focus on validation, legal judgement and policy dialogue by reducing repetitive legal comparison work. Final assessments of *acquis* alignment by the Commission remain **fully under human expert control**. The eAccession tool is currently operational in Montenegro, Moldova, Ukraine, North Macedonia and Serbia. It has also been piloted in support of other simplification use cases (e.g.

² Under Article 290 of the Treaty on the functioning of the EU (TFEU), delegated acts may supplement or amend certain non-essential elements of a legislative act if the latter act delegates such powers.

³ Where uniform conditions for implementing legally binding Union acts are needed, those acts shall confer implementing powers on the Commission under Art. 291 TFEU.

⁴ The revised enlargement methodology, adopted in 2020, placed an even stronger focus on the fundamental reforms essential for success on the EU path, requiring that negotiations on the fundamentals – including rule of law and functioning of democratic institutions – will be opened first and closed last, and that progress on these will determine the overall pace of negotiations.

verifying Member States' alignment with Directives and identifying overlaps in the *acquis*), in cooperation with the Secretariat-General and the Publications Office.

Under the [Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans](#), the [second](#) and [third](#) releases of funds were made to Albania, Montenegro and North Macedonia in October 2025 and May 2026, respectively, while the [first release of funds](#) was made to Serbia in January 2026. [Prefinancing](#) for Kosovo was also released in April 2026. These releases, in the form of loans to the state budget and non-repayable grants to support infrastructure investments through the [Western Balkans Investment Framework](#), bring the total amount released to **EUR 673.57 million** against the proven delivery of **90 reform steps**⁵. The [Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina](#) was approved in December 2025.

Implementation of the EU's **performance-based Facilities** in enlargement countries also advanced significantly during the reporting period.

Under the [Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova](#), the Commission made the [first](#) and [second](#) regular payments in September 2025 and March 2026, respectively, bringing the total amount released to **EUR 503.73 million** in loans to the state budget and non-repayable grants to support infrastructure investments through the [Neighbourhood Investment Platform](#). The releases were made against the proven delivery of **28 reform steps**.⁶

Under the [Ukraine Facility](#), the Commission made the [fourth](#), [fifth](#), [sixth](#) and [seventh](#) regular payments under Pillar I (support to Ukraine's state budget through the Ukraine Plan), against the proven delivery of **46 reform steps**. This brings total disbursements under the Ukraine Facility to approximately **EUR 29.5 billion** since its entry into force in March 2024.⁷

Over the reporting period, my services have organised a series of **open and transparent calls for expressions of interest** for EU, EEA and local private sector companies, with the objective to identify potentially impactful strategic investments in Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries and connect companies with the appropriate EU financial tools. As a concrete follow-up to my [Implementation Dialogue on private sector investments](#) in June 2025, further calls have since been launched for [Moldova](#) and [Armenia](#), with assessments conducted and dialogues initiated for proposals received under the earlier calls for Ukraine and the Western Balkans.

My services have also continued to organise dedicated **business fora and investment conferences** – building on the feedback received during my Implementation Dialogue –, bringing together leading companies, political leaders and financial institutions to **drive forward our ambitious investment agenda and identify solutions to investment constraints**. In this respect, the [EU-Western Balkans Investment Forum](#) was organised in Tirana on 13-14 October 2025, resulting in the co-signature of 7 investment declarations by companies, the European Commission, and investment agencies from the region. The Forum was also an opportunity to engage in active dialogue with private investors on 24 projects identified as potentially promising under the [Western Balkans call for expressions of interest](#), referred to in my 2025 report. The regional event was followed by the [Montenegro Investment conference](#) on 14-15 October, where ten Memoranda of Understanding were signed between EU-based and Montenegro-based private sector companies and the government of Montenegro, alongside the announcement of four sustainable investment partnerships. The [EU-Ukraine Business Summit](#) on 22-23 April, where the Commission unveiled a **EUR 1.2 billion** investment package to support infrastructure projects, strengthen energy resilience and boost small businesses, saw the participation of over 1000 business leaders, policymakers, and investors. Finally, on 4 June, the [EU-Moldova Investment Conference](#) saw the announcement of investment plans and project initiatives worth up to **EUR 641 million** in strategic sectors like energy, digital infrastructure, education and sustainable agriculture.

The combination of open, transparent calls for expressions of interest with dedicated business and investment events is having an important positive impact on the **implementation of the EU's ambitious political and economic agenda in Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries**. Thanks to these tools, our financial support is reaching new and transformational projects that might otherwise have been missed or not been viable, all while crowding in millions of Euros in private and public investments.

Under the **strategic prioritisation of Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX)**, we are giving priority to activities that directly support partner countries in meeting EU *acquis* benchmarks under the accession negotiations and in meeting Reform Agenda obligations, or that support the gradual integration of partner countries

⁵ Releases under the Reform and Growth Facility for the Western Balkans can be viewed on our [public scoreboard](#).

⁶ Releases under the Reform and Growth Facility for Moldova can be viewed on our [public scoreboard](#).

⁷ Releases under Pillar I of the Ukraine Facility can be viewed on our [public scoreboard](#).

with the EU's internal market. TAIEX has been particularly instrumental in supporting **Montenegro** in meeting its **closing benchmarks** under chapters of the accession negotiations (nine chapters have been provisionally closed with Montenegro over the reporting period) and assisting **Albania** in meeting its **interim benchmarks on the fundamentals** – the precondition to start provisionally closing chapters in the negotiations.

In order to put this prioritisation into practice, my services have jointly developed **TAIEX Roadmaps** with the national authorities of 9 enlargement countries plus Armenia. These internal documents represent an important efficiency gain in the implementation of TAIEX activities and our pre-accession support more generally, allowing us to **respond more effectively to increased demand** for assistance from partner countries while at the same time aligning more closely to the Commission's priorities.

Finally, steps have also been taken to improve the implementation of the **Connectivity Agenda**, notably as concerns coordination of activities. On 23 June, the [Connectivity Agenda Platform](#) was launched in Brussels, extending the coordination mechanism of the Trans-Caspian Transport Corridor Platform, established in Central Asia in 2024, to the Black Sea and South Caucasus regions. The result is a **single, coherent development framework** along the entirety of the corridor linking Europe and Central Asia to monitor progress of strategic investments and enhance cooperation between the EU, governments, private sector and international financial institutions.

C. Enforcement

The DG for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood is responsible for handling complaints submitted by citizens and pre-infringement dialogues related to the implementation by Member States of the EU-Türkiye Association Agreement. Between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026, the DG received 35 related petitions, of which two have been closed. The remaining 33 are under assessment.

For more information, a [Public Register](#) illustrates the Commission's enforcement activities and Member States' compliance with EU law in general through interactive maps and customisable graphs.

4. Way forward

As part of my ongoing commitment to delivering greater impact for every Euro of EU financial assistance, I will continue to engage broadly with stakeholders to enhance the **implementation** of the EU's Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood policies. In this respect, I will convene **two more Implementation Dialogues** in the coming months. The first, provisionally planned for November 2026, will be held jointly with Commissioner Sikela, focusing on the **Connectivity Agenda** – namely, how we can work together with financial institutions and private sector to mobilise investments and implement strategic infrastructure between the EU, the South Caucasus and Central Asia. For the second, provisionally planned for January 2027, I will meet with representatives from the implementing agencies of EU Member States – key partners in the delivery of EU financial assistance in Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries – as well as National Contact Points for TAIEX and Twinning to discuss the **implementation of public sector capacity building support**.

Further engagement with private sector will continue, with a view to better target EU financial support for the **implementation of strategic investments in Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries**. My service will continue to critically assess the investment proposals received through our open and transparent **Calls for Expressions of Interest**, including those received by the 4 June deadline for the Moldova call, as well as those arising from the Armenia call, which is open until 5 May 2027. Additional **investment conferences** are also foreseen.

Finally, DG ENEST will **further develop and scale eAccession** as an AI assistant.

Annex: examples

Technical Assistance and Information Exchange (TAIEX)

Over the reporting period, the EU's flagship institution-building instrument, TAIEX, continued to deliver **targeted support to the implementation of the enlargement policy**. Between 1 August 2025 and 31 July 2026, **489 TAIEX events** were organised for the benefit of Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood countries, including a large number of activities specifically tailored to support candidate countries in meeting their benchmarks under the EU accession negotiations.

For example, TAIEX has supported **Albania** in meeting its **interim benchmarks on the 'fundamentals'** (Cluster 1), which is a prerequisite that needs to be fulfilled before negotiating chapters can start to be provisionally closed. In this respect, TAIEX experts have notably reviewed key draft laws and strategic reforms in areas such as the Criminal Code, drugs, the anti-corruption prevention framework (donations and sponsorships), as well as fundamental rights (anti-discrimination, freedom of expression, child protection).

TAIEX has also supported **Montenegro** in its progress towards meeting the relevant **closing benchmarks** across the whole of the EU *acquis*. Examples include strategic Peer Review Missions to assess the administrative and supervisory capacity of Montenegro's financial services authorities (Chapter 9 – Financial Services) and to assess the effective implementation of the country's Company Law and Law on registration of businesses (Chapter 6 – Company Law, provisionally closed in December 2025). Expert missions also supported the provisional closure in June 2026 of Chapter 28 (Health and Consumer Protection) by assisting the finalisation of Montenegro's Action Plan on Substances of Human Origin (SoHO).

Further support has been provided to assist Montenegro in meeting its closing benchmarks under Chapter 24 (Justice, freedom and security), including on management of external borders, visa policy, and anti-drugs frameworks, as well as Chapter 23 (Judiciary and fundamental rights), namely in relation to the fight against corruption. These two Chapters are the last two Chapters to be provisionally closed under the EU's enlargement methodology, making progress towards these closing benchmarks especially vital in Montenegro's accession process.

ENEST Global Gateway Investment Hub

In order to improve implementation and better connect businesses and financial institutions with EU policy and financial support tools for investments in the Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood regions, DG ENEST has launched a dedicated [ENEST Global Gateway Investment Hub](#) page on its website. The Hub also contributes to simplification objectives. It is conceived as a **one-stop-shop** bringing together information on **all potential support available to private companies** interested in investing in the Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood regions, including calls for expressions of interest, business fora, and assistance provided by EU-funded projects.