

# **Council of the European Union: Foreign Affairs Council**

## **STUDY GUIDE**

### **Agenda Item:**

#### **Agenda Item I:**

Reevaluating EU-China Relations in the Context of Global Competition

#### **Agenda Item II:**

Enhancing EU Cooperation and Presence in the Western Balkans

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## I Letter From Secretary General

Esteemed Participants and Honored Guests,

It is a profound honor to extend my most formal welcome to you as we convene for the 13th edition of the Bilkent University Model United Nations Conference, MUNBU'26. My name is Zehra Yıldırım, and I'm a senior year law student at İhsan Doğramacı Bilkent University. As the Secretary-General of MUNBU 2026, I welcome you not only to a forum of debate but to a tradition of academic and diplomatic excellence that has defined our institution for over a decade.

The art of diplomacy is one of patience, precision, and profound responsibility. My own commitment to this discipline has been forged over nine years of active engagement within the international circuit—a journey that has evolved alongside my formal education in the Faculty of Law. These years have instilled in me a steadfast belief that the resolution of global conflict lies in the mastery of legal frameworks and the cultivation of refined statesmanship. It is this standard of rigor and intellectual integrity that I am committed to upholding throughout our deliberations.

Bilkent University stands as a bastion of higher learning, dedicated to the pursuit of truth and the development of future leaders. It is our distinct privilege to host you within an environment that reflects the visionary principles of the founder of our Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, who declared: *"Peace at Home, Peace in the World."* Guided by this transcendent ideal, we are committed to providing you with the highest level of hospitality, ensuring that your experience is marked by the grace, professionalism, and mutual respect that our University and the Republic of Türkiye represent on the international stage.

MUNBU Conferences remain a premier platform where the complexities of the global order are met with the sharpest minds of our generation. As we embark on this 13th session, I invite you to embrace the gravity of your roles. Let us ensure that our discourse remains as sophisticated as the challenges we face, and that our hospitality remains as enduring as our commitment to justice.

I wish you all fruitful debates and a joyful conference. Should you have any inquiries, please do not hesitate to contact me via my email, [zehray@ug.bilkent.edu.tr](mailto:zehray@ug.bilkent.edu.tr)

Best Regards,

Zehra YILDIRIM

*Secretary General of MUNBU'26*

## II Letter From the Under-Secretaries-General

Dear Delegates,

It is our pleasure to welcome you to the Council of the European Union: Foreign Affairs Council for this year's conference. The Foreign Affairs Council stands at the core of the European Union's external action, shaping the Union's responses to global challenges, strategic partnerships, and regional developments. In this committee, delegates will deliberate on two highly consequential agenda items that reflect the EU's evolving foreign policy priorities.

Our first agenda item, "Reevaluating the EU-China Relations in the Context of Global Competition," invites delegates to examine one of the European Union's most complex and multidimensional external relationships. Discussions under this agenda will require careful consideration of strategic competition, economic interdependence, and global governance.

Our second agenda item, "Enhancing the European Union Cooperation and Presence in the Western Balkans," addresses a long-standing priority of EU foreign and enlargement policy. Under this agenda, delegates are expected to engage with issues such as political stability, institutional resilience, economic integration, and external influence.

We are confident that your discussions will be constructive and reflective of the responsibilities entrusted to the Foreign Affairs Council. We wish you the very best of luck in your deliberations and every success throughout the conference. If you have any further questions, do not refrain from reaching us via e-mail.

With hopes of meeting you all,

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## **1. Introduction to the Committee: Council of the European Union: Foreign Affairs Council**

### **1.1. Role and Composition of the Foreign Affairs Council**

The Foreign Affairs Council is one of the Council configurations that is responsible for the EU's external action, including its foreign policy, defence and security, trade, development cooperation, and humanitarian aid<sup>1</sup>. The Foreign Affairs Council, also known as FAC, is composed of foreign ministers from all EU member states; depending on its agenda, the Council also brings the defence ministers on issues related to standard security and defence policy, development ministers on issues regarding development cooperation, and trade ministers on the topic of standard commercial policy<sup>2</sup>. Meetings of the committee are chaired by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, who the European External Action Service assists; the current High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is Kaja Kallas<sup>3</sup>. It is important to note that when the Foreign Affairs Council discusses the common commercial policy issues, it is presided over by the representative of the EU member state holding the six-monthly rotating presidency of the Council of the EU; the regular meetings shall be held at least once a month<sup>4</sup>.

As explained by the committee, it is mainly responsible for cooperation and competition with external parties, particularly non-EU states, which is a matter of fact. Therefore, within the committee, the focus on China and the Balkans, respectively, shows the importance of external actors to the EU's perspective. The primary role of the Foreign Affairs Council is to ensure unity, consistency, and effectiveness of the EU's external action. Cohesive action in foreign policy

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<sup>1</sup> "Foreign Affairs Council configuration (FAC)", European Council, n.d., Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/configurations/fac/>.

<sup>2</sup> "Foreign Affairs Council configuration (FAC)", n.d.

<sup>3</sup> "Foreign Affairs Council configuration (FAC)", n.d.

<sup>4</sup> "Foreign Affairs Council configuration (FAC)", n.d.

requires collaborative action. Thus, together with the European Commission, and with the assistance of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, this is done in the Foreign Affairs Council<sup>5</sup>.

## **1.2. Protocol and Rules of Procedure**

With the Treaty of Lisbon, a new voting system has been established; within this system, it is essential to address voting procedures for the functioning of the committee. Depending on the issue under discussion, the Council of the EU – and its configurations (including the Foreign Affairs Council) – takes its decisions by simple majority, qualified majority, or unanimous vote<sup>6</sup>. The Council can vote only if a majority of its members is present; moreover, a member of the Council may only act on behalf of one other member<sup>7</sup>. The Council can vote on a legislative act 8 weeks after the draft has been sent to the national parliaments for examination. The national parliaments have to decide whether the draft legislation complies with the principle of subsidiarity. Earlier voting is only possible in exceptional urgent cases. The President of the Council initiates the voting procedure; a member may also initiate it, but this requires a majority of the Council's members' approval. Where the Council is not acting as legislator, it is also possible for the results of votes and explanations of votes to be made public by a unanimous Council decision<sup>8</sup>. The Council and Commission members may make statements regarding the drafted act and request that they be included in the Council minutes. However, such statements have no legal effect and are regarded as a political instrument intended to facilitate decision-making<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> "Foreign Affairs Council configuration (FAC)", n.d.

<sup>6</sup> "Voting system", European Council, January 2024, Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/>.

<sup>7</sup> "Voting system", January 2024.

<sup>8</sup> "Voting system", January 2024.

<sup>9</sup> "Voting system", January 2024.

Unanimous voting requires all members to vote in favour; it is used for politically sensitive areas such as treaty changes, EU accession processes, taxation, and the Common Foreign and Security Policy. Qualified majority voting (QMV) is the default voting rule of the system. The post-Lisbon system requires a double majority; 55% of Member States (currently 15 out of 27) and representing at least 65% of the EU's population<sup>10</sup>. Another important mechanism within the QMV system is the blocking minority. A blocking minority in the Council of the European Union is the minimum number of Member States required to prevent the adoption of a decision taken by Qualified Majority Voting. Under the post-Lisbon double majority system, a blocking minority must include at least four Member States representing more than 35% of the EU population<sup>11</sup>. This rule ensures that large Member States cannot block decisions on their own and that opposition reflects both population size and state plurality. If fewer than four states oppose a proposal, the decision may still be adopted, even if they represent over 35% of the population, thereby reinforcing the balance between large and small Member States in EU decision-making<sup>12</sup>. The qualified majority voting system is used for most internal policy areas, especially in the areas of the internal market, environment, and transport.

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<sup>10</sup> "Qualified majority", European Council, November 2025, Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/voting-system/qualified-majority/>.

<sup>11</sup> "Qualified majority", November 2025.

<sup>12</sup> "Qualified majority", November 2025.



## 2. Introduction to the Agenda Item A: Reevaluating the EU-China Relations in the Context of Global Competition

The European Union sees China as both a partner for cooperation and an economic competitor and systemic rival<sup>13</sup>. However, the relationship between the states became more complex over time due to a growing number of irritants. Due to its close ties with Russia and its increasing isolation from the world and internal repression, China underwent a significant policy shift. Resorting to economic coercion, boycott of European goods, and export controls on critical raw materials, the relations – mainly the economic relations – were affected<sup>14</sup>. Moreover, due to China's position on Russia's aggression towards the EU and Ukraine, the bilateral relations were shaped. In addition, the EU closely examines its ties with China based on human rights conditions, market access and investment, environmental issues, and foreign and security policy concerns<sup>15</sup>.

Even with the ongoing crises, the EU continues to cooperate with China. Issues in global politics, environmental problems such as climate change, economic issues such as debt relief for developing countries, and sustainable finance shape EU-China relations<sup>16</sup>. The EU-China summits shape relations; the latest summit took place on July 24, 2025, providing an opportunity to address their relationship across all aspects, particularly geopolitical issues, including the Russian war in Ukraine<sup>17</sup>. At these summits, the EU reiterates its commitment to deepen and increase its engagement with China and to enhance cooperation to address joint global

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<sup>13</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, European Union External Action, December 2023, Accessed December 29, 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-relations-factsheet\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-china-relations-factsheet_en).

<sup>14</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, December 2023.

<sup>15</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, December 2023.

<sup>16</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, December 2023.

<sup>17</sup> “EU-China summit, 24 July 2025”, European Council, July 2025, Accessed December 29, 2025, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2025/07/24/>

challenges<sup>18</sup>. As President of the European Council, António Costa stated, “We are committed to deepening our bilateral partnership and pursuing constructive and stable relations, anchored in respect for the rules-based international order, balanced engagement and reciprocity.”<sup>19</sup>

In addition to the EU-China summits, there are dialogues in various areas. In the digital, science, technology, and innovation space, we see the **EU-China High-Level Digital Dialogue**<sup>20</sup>; these dialogues allow both parties to engage in in-depth exchanges on digital regulation, artificial intelligence, and ICT standards<sup>21</sup>. In the latest dialogue, the EU and China agreed to establish a clarification mechanism to facilitate EU companies’ compliance with Chinese laws<sup>22</sup>. The parties aim to ensure a smooth and fast mechanism for cooperation. In terms of Human Rights, the 40<sup>th</sup> EU-China Human Rights Dialogue took place in June 2025. It enabled an in-depth exchange on human rights development in the EU, China, and multilateral fora. The EU aims to prevent systemic human rights violations in China and to tackle the erosion of democracy and fundamental freedoms in Hong Kong<sup>23</sup>. In the field of climate change, the EU-China High-Level Dialogue on the Environment and Climate takes place. The sixth dialogue took place in July 2025; as the EU aims to be climate-neutral by 2050, the parties are cooperating to achieve net-zero greenhouse gas emissions, zero pollution, and a healthy environment<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> “EU-China summit, 24 July 2025”, July 2025.

<sup>19</sup> “EU-China summit, 24 July 2025”, July 2025.

<sup>20</sup> “EU-China: Commission and China hold second High-level Digital Dialogue”, European Commission, September 2023, Accessed December 29, 2025, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_4488](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4488)

<sup>21</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, December 2023.

<sup>22</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, December 2023.

<sup>23</sup> “EU-China Relations factsheet”, December 2023.

<sup>24</sup> “Readout from the 6<sup>th</sup> EU-China High-Level Dialogue on Environment and Climate”, European Commission, July 2025, Accessed December 29, 2025, [https://climate.ec.europa.eu/news-other-reads/news/readout-6th-eu-china-high-level-dialogue-environment-and-climate-2025-07-15\\_en](https://climate.ec.europa.eu/news-other-reads/news/readout-6th-eu-china-high-level-dialogue-environment-and-climate-2025-07-15_en).

In addition to these areas, one of the most critical aspects of those dialogues would be foreign and security policy<sup>25</sup>. The EU-China Strategic Dialogue serves as an essential forum for bilateral exchanges in the respective areas. The 13<sup>th</sup> EU-China Strategic Dialogue took place in July 2025. In these forums, the EU focuses on various topics such as Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine, the One China policy, global and regional challenges, and the South China Sea crisis<sup>26</sup>. Another vital layer within the dialogues is the one related to trade and investment. 15,6% of China's exports in 2022 were to the EU, and 10,5% of the EU's exports were to China<sup>27</sup>. These figures illustrate the importance of both parties in the economic relations. The latest dialogue regarding economic ties took place in September 2023; the 10<sup>th</sup> High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue showed that both parties desire to enhance multilateral cooperation<sup>28</sup>. The EU raised concerns about the deteriorating business environment for EU companies in China, including persistent and new trade barriers and the importance of fair competition; in addition, the sides discussed the importance of transparent and predictable supply chains<sup>29</sup>.

Therefore, it is visible that cooperation and rivalry exist between those two entities. In the complex, globalized world, the EU and China inevitably cooperate. The growing global challenges, especially in Central Asia and the Middle East, make cooperation a must for both parties.

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<sup>25</sup> "EU-China Relations factsheet", December 2023.

<sup>26</sup> "China: High Representative/Vice President Kaja Kallas holds EU-China Strategic Dialogue with Foreign Minister Wang Yi", European Union External Action, July 2025, Accessed December 29, 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-high-representativevice-president-kaja-kallas-holds-eu-china-strategic-dialogue-foreign\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/china-high-representativevice-president-kaja-kallas-holds-eu-china-strategic-dialogue-foreign_en).

<sup>27</sup> "EU-China Relations factsheet", December 2023.

<sup>28</sup> "EU calls for greater market access and fair competition at EU-China High-Level Dialogue", European Commission, September 2023, Accessed December 29, 2025, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_23\\_4609](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_23_4609)

<sup>29</sup> "EU-China Relations factsheet", December 2023.

### 3. Economic Dimension

As stated in the introduction, EU-China relations have multiple layers; as both are essential actors on a global scale, economic ties are of utmost importance to both. Therefore, we see various topics intersecting the interests of both parties.

#### 3.1. Reducing Strategic Dependencies in Supply Chains

The stability of the EU's Single Market is no longer just a purely economic concern, but also a matter of national and Union security. For decades, the European Union benefited from the globalization of supply chains, relying on China as the 'world's factory' for everything from active pharmaceutical ingredients to rare earth magnets. However, recent geopolitical shocks, ranging from the weaponization of energy supplies to China's 2025 export restrictions on critical minerals, have exposed a high level of vulnerability<sup>30</sup>. The aim of the EU within this framework is to increase domestic production and access to inputs, diversify supplies, support multilateralism, and build targeted partnerships<sup>31</sup>. Within this perspective, the EU's approach to China is straightforward: remain economically engaged while systematically reducing the strategic dependence. The EU avoids a full trade war with China and a blanket form of protectionism; therefore, it aims for risk management, not confrontation<sup>32</sup>. Moreover, trade is unavoidable; however, there needs to be stricter conditions so that it aligns with the EU's conditionality<sup>33</sup>. To sum up, the EU's overall economic aim is to limit China's leverage over critical supply chains and reposition the EU within a trusted, rules-based trade network that excludes China from sensitive sectors; moreover, rather than replacing China with domestic

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<sup>30</sup> "EU supply chains in the era of trade fragmentation", European Parliament, November 2025, Accessed December 29, 2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI\(2025\)779227](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI(2025)779227).

<sup>31</sup> "EU supply chains in the era of trade fragmentation", November 2025.

<sup>32</sup> "EU supply chains in the era of trade fragmentation", November 2025.

<sup>33</sup> "EU supply chains in the era of trade fragmentation", November 2025.

production alone, the EU aims to diversify its supply chain toward the EU's internal markets, and trusted partners, as well as with countries that have a free-trade agreement with the EU<sup>34</sup>.

At the heart of the EU's strategy to mitigate supply chain vulnerabilities is the Critical Raw Materials Act (CRMA), which transitioned from proposal to full implementation in 2025. The Council views the CRMA as the cornerstone of strategic autonomy, moving the EU away from a passive import model to an active industrial policy. By mandating that no more than 65% of any strategic raw material originate from a single third country, the CRMA directly targets China's current near monopoly in the processing of rare earths and magnesium<sup>35</sup>. For the Foreign Affairs Council, the implementation of this Act is not merely an environmental or economic goal, but a geopolitical necessity to prevent resource coercion – the use of export licenses by Beijing as a tool of diplomatic leverage<sup>36</sup>.

### **3.2. Addressing Structural Trade Asymmetries**

China is the EU's third-largest trading partner for goods and services – after the United States and the United Kingdom. Bilateral trade in goods reached €732 billion in 2024<sup>37</sup>. The EU states that its economic relationship with China is “critically unbalanced”. However, as the EU recognizes, there is a critical imbalance. This imbalance stems mainly from asymmetries in market opening – meaning that China's markets are generally less open to EU goods, services, and investment than the EU's markets are to Chinese goods, services, and investment<sup>38</sup>. Therefore, it leads to a large EU trade deficit with China and continued challenges for European

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<sup>34</sup> “EU supply chains in the era of trade fragmentation”, November 2025.

<sup>35</sup> European Parliament and Council of the European Union, “Regulation (EU) 2024/1252 establishing a framework for ensuring a secure and sustainable supply of critical raw materials and amending Regulations (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1724 and (EU) 2019/1020” (CELEX 32024R1252, Brussels, May 3, 2024), OJ L 2024/1252, <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1252/oj>.

<sup>36</sup> European Parliament and Council, “Regulation (EU) 2024/1252 (Critical Raw Materials Act),” CELEX 32024R1252.

<sup>37</sup> “EU trade relations with China”, European Commission, n.d., Accessed December 29, 2025. [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china_en).

<sup>38</sup> “EU trade relations with China”, n.d.

companies operating in or seeking access to the Chinese market. The EU points out the structural features of China's economic model that contribute to such asymmetry, including industrial policies and state support that lead to overcapacity in key sectors; negative spillovers to trading partners from these distortions; and restrictions or discriminatory conditions for foreign companies in China<sup>39</sup>. That said, differences in trade flows due to China's economic rules tilt the competition in ways the EU considers unfair or imbalanced.

To counter such structural imbalances, the EU emphasizes priority in various areas. Reciprocity, a level playing field, and addressing asymmetries through dialogue and multilateral rules are a must for the EU to prevent them in the future<sup>40</sup>. As a result of asymmetries, the EU claims that deeper concerns exist regarding market fairness, competitive conditions, and the distribution of risks and benefits in EU-China trade; this affects the sustainability of long-term economic ties.

### **3.3. Protecting EU Competitiveness Against China's Green Tech Dominance**

The European Union's competitiveness in green technologies spans electric vehicles and renewable energy systems; however, it is increasingly challenged by China's dominance in these sectors. Dominance is not limited to final products; China also controls critical raw materials. China controls the critical raw materials that are essential for green technologies, including (but not limited to) rare earth elements, lithium, graphite, and gallium. Since modern green technologies cannot function without providing these materials, control over the raw materials

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<sup>39</sup> "EU trade relations with China", n.d.

<sup>40</sup> "EU trade relations with China", n.d.

equals control over the green transition. Thus, this creates a serious vulnerability for the EU's economy, industry, and long-term strategic autonomy<sup>41</sup>.

China's advantage comes from a whole-of-supply-chain strategy; unlike the EU, China heavily supports its green tech and raw material sectors through state subsidies across the entire value chain, creation of overcapacity to lower global prices, non-market practices such as predatory pricing, strategic investments in mining and processing in third countries. In addition, China has recently introduced export controls on several critical raw materials and even on products containing them. These controls have caused delays, uncertainty, and supply risks for European manufacturers, especially in the automotive, renewable energy, and defence sectors<sup>42</sup>. EU companies often face higher production costs due to energy prices, stricter environmental regulations, and fragmented markets. When Chinese firms are supported by positive state intervention, it offers cheaper materials or products, and European producers struggle to compete. In short, without secure access to critical raw materials, the EU risks falling behind in the global green economy<sup>43</sup>.

The EU's response to China is outlined in the RESourceEU Action Plan – focusing on reducing dependency and strengthening the internal capacity, rather than directly confronting China<sup>44</sup>. Diversifying supply chains so that the EU does not depend on a single country for more than 65% of any critical raw material; increasing domestic extraction, processing, and recycling of raw materials; supporting European projects financially to offset higher costs and investment

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<sup>41</sup> European Commission, “RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality” (COM(2025) 945 final, Brussels, December 3, 2025), pp. 1-19, [https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01c448d6-dc93-40d7-9afe-4c2af448d00c\\_en](https://single-market-economy.ec.europa.eu/document/download/01c448d6-dc93-40d7-9afe-4c2af448d00c_en).

<sup>42</sup> European Commission, “RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality” COM(2025) 945 final.

<sup>43</sup> European Commission, “RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality” COM(2025) 945 final.

<sup>44</sup> European Commission, “RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality” COM(2025) 945 final.

risks; creating demand for European-produced materials through joint purchasing and long-term contracts are among some strategies that EU aims to adopt to ensure that action plan works smoothly<sup>45</sup>. As a result of this strategy, the European green industries would become more resilient and competitive, even in a distorted global market.

As the green industry becomes one of the most crucial areas for the EU, it also aims to protect the EU's competitiveness. Therefore, the plan also includes defensive economic measures that would support stronger supply chain monitoring, screening of foreign investments in strategic raw material projects, restrictions on Chinese participation in EU-funded research on critical raw materials, and the use of trade and emergency instruments to address unfair pricing or market manipulation<sup>46</sup>. Therefore, these measures would eventually ensure that the non-market practices or geopolitical pressures do not undermine the EU's single market.

The EU also sees circular economy policies as a tool for competitiveness. Large amounts of valuable materials currently leave the EU as waste or scrap. By keeping these materials inside the EU and improving recycling, Europe can reduce dependence on external suppliers, lower costs over time, and support sustainable and innovative production. Moreover, investment in material substitution and advanced technologies can reduce reliance on scarce raw materials altogether, strengthening the EU's long-term competitive position<sup>47</sup>.

### **3.4. De-Risking Chinese Investments for the EU's Economic Security**

Foreign direct investment (FDI) has long been an essential driver of growth, innovation, and competitiveness in the European Union. However, the EU increasingly recognizes that not

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<sup>45</sup> European Commission, "RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality" COM(2025) 945 final.

<sup>46</sup> European Commission, "RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality" COM(2025) 945 final.

<sup>47</sup> European Commission, "RESourceEU Action Plan: Accelerating our critical raw materials strategy to adapt to a new reality" COM(2025) 945 final.



all foreign investments are purely economic. Some investments, particularly those in strategic sectors, may pose risks to security, public order, and financial resilience. This concern is especially relevant in the context of investments originating from state-influenced actors, including Chinese companies operating with strong links to government policy objectives<sup>48</sup>. To address these concerns, the EU has established a Foreign Direct Investment Screening Framework. This mechanism allows EU Member States and the European Commission to review, assess, and exchange information on foreign investments that could affect security or public order. The framework focuses on sensitive areas, including critical infrastructure, advanced technologies, energy, data, and key industrial assets. Its goal is not to restrict investment flows, but to ensure that foreign capital does not create strategic dependencies or expose vulnerabilities within the Single Market<sup>49</sup>.

Importantly, the EU's screening system is designed as a de-risking tool rather than an automatic prohibition mechanism. The EU remains open to foreign investment and continues to view openness as a core economic principle. Screening allows authorities to identify risks early and, where necessary, recommend mitigation measures or conditions. This approach reflects the EU's preference for risk management over protectionism, ensuring that investments contribute positively to economic development without undermining long-term security<sup>50</sup>.

Investment screening is also part of a broader shift in EU policy thinking. The European Commission has increasingly framed foreign investment control within a wider economic security strategy that links investment risks to supply-chain resilience, technological leadership, and strategic autonomy. This approach recognizes that economic openness must be balanced

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<sup>48</sup> "Investment screening, European Commission, n.d., Accessed December 30, 2025, [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/investment-screening\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/enforcement-and-protection/investment-screening_en).

<sup>49</sup> "Investment screening", n.d.

<sup>50</sup> "Investment screening", n.d.

with safeguards, particularly in a global environment characterized by geopolitical competition and the use of financial tools for strategic influence<sup>51</sup>. Within this context, Chinese investments have attracted particular attention. While China is not always explicitly named in policy documents, EU economic security discussions frequently refer to state-backed or state-influenced investments that may pursue strategic objectives beyond commercial profit. In sectors such as green technologies, critical raw materials, and digital infrastructure, such investments can raise concerns about technology transfer, market distortion, or long-term dependency<sup>52</sup>.

Overall, the EU's approach to de-risking Chinese investments seeks to strike a careful balance. Rather than disengaging from global markets, the EU aims to remain open while reducing strategic vulnerabilities. Through coordinated investment screening, enhanced cooperation among Member States, and integration of investment policy into its economic security framework, the EU seeks to protect competitiveness, resilience, and autonomy while continuing to participate in an open, rules-based international financial system.

#### **4. Geopolitic and Security Considerations**

##### **4.1. China's Position on the War in Ukraine**

At the 25th EU–China Summit in July 2025, the European Union and China addressed the ongoing war in Ukraine as part of their broader dialogue on international peace and security. The EU reaffirmed that Russia's war of aggression in Ukraine represents an existential threat to Ukraine and a challenge to the international rules-based order, and it pressed China to support a full and unconditional ceasefire and to uphold global security norms<sup>53</sup>. China, for its part,

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<sup>51</sup> "Commission proposes new initiatives to strengthen economic security", European Commission, January 2024, Accessed December 30, 2025, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_24\\_363](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_24_363).

<sup>52</sup> "Commission proposes new initiatives to strengthen economic security", January 2024.

<sup>53</sup> "EU-China summit, 24 July 2025", July 2025.

emphasized the importance of upholding the international rules-based order and promoting peace talks, but stopped short of condemning Russia's actions or providing a clear political position against the invasion. The summit underlined the shared responsibility of both the EU and China to support international law and peace, while reflecting ongoing differences in how each actor views the conflict and paths to resolution<sup>54</sup>. The EU has stated numerous times that the war of aggression is not only an existential threat to Ukraine but also to global security. Since China is one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council, it bears special responsibility for upholding the rules-based international order and the UN Charter's core principles; thus, the EU considers this cooperation crucial to its security<sup>55</sup>.

China's official stance on the war, articulated in other diplomatic statements, generally positions Beijing as a self-described neutral party that calls for peace negotiations and a political settlement without directly condemning Russia or applying pressure on Moscow to withdraw<sup>56</sup>. Beijing claims to support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states while also opposing unilateral sanctions and advocating for dialogue among all stakeholders<sup>57</sup>. This narrative reflects China's attempt to balance its global diplomatic posture with its strategic relationship with Russia, even as Western countries criticize China for not taking more explicit action against Russia's aggression.

#### **4.2. Indo-Pacific Security and Naval Access**

The European Union's Indo-Pacific Strategy is an essential framework for understanding the Union's regional approach to China. The EU recognizes that security and stability in the

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<sup>54</sup> "EU-China summit, 24 July 2025", July 2025.

<sup>55</sup> "EU-China summit, 24 July 2025", July 2025.

<sup>56</sup> "China's Position on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine", US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, November 2025, Accessed December 30, 2025,

<https://www.uscc.gov/research/chinas-position-russias-invasion-ukraine>.

<sup>57</sup> "China's Position on Russia's Invasion of Ukraine", November 2025.

Indo-Pacific region are key to global peace, prosperity, and the preservation of a rules-based international order<sup>58</sup>. The Indo-Pacific spans critical maritime routes that carry a large share of global trade and energy supplies, making maritime security and naval access essential priorities for the EU. The European Union supports freedom of navigation, safe sea lines of communication, and cooperation with regional partners to address shared security concerns<sup>59</sup>.

As part of this approach, the EU aims to build partnerships in the region, engage in security and defence dialogues, and contribute to regional stability through both political cooperation and practical engagement. While the EU does not pursue a large independent naval force like some Indo-Pacific states, it participates in naval operations and exercises with regional allies to uphold maritime security<sup>60</sup>. These engagements help to ensure that seaborne trade routes remain open, that international law is respected at sea, and that Indo-Pacific partners can work together to address evolving security challenges.

European engagement in the region reflects the understanding that maritime access and security are not solely regional issues but are closely linked to European economic interests and strategic autonomy. Through promoting security cooperation, naval presence, and joint operations, the EU aims to support a free, open, and stable Indo-Pacific; therefore, they aim to reinforce norms such as freedom of navigation while deepening defence and security cooperation with like-minded partners<sup>61</sup>.

China's expanding naval presence in the Indo-Pacific highlights the strategic importance of maritime security and naval access, reinforcing the EU's emphasis on freedom of navigation,

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<sup>58</sup> "EU Indo-Pacific Strategy", European Union External Action, November 2024, Accessed January 1, 2026. [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-indo-pacific-strategy-topic\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eu-indo-pacific-strategy-topic_en).

<sup>59</sup> "EU Indo-Pacific Strategy", November 2024.

<sup>60</sup> "EU Indo-Pacific Strategy", November 2024.

<sup>61</sup> "EU Indo-Pacific Strategy", November 2024.

adherence to international law, and cooperation with regional partners to maintain stability in vital sea lanes.

#### 4.3. Collaboration and Conflict within International Organizations

China plays a complex and multifaceted role within international organizations – this reflects both cooperation and competition within existing global governance structures. As China’s power and influence have expanded over the decades, its engagement with international institutions has shaped how these organizations function and evolve<sup>62</sup>. Unlike outright revisionist powers, China does not seek to dismantle itself from the current institutional framework completely; moreover, it has gained significantly from the existing system<sup>63</sup>. For example, its status as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and benefitting from the open global trading system can be cited here. These advantages reflect how it helps China to advance its interests.

At the same time, China expresses reservations about certain aspects of the global order, especially those that may constrain its sovereignty. It has called for changes in institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, which are seen as dominated by Western states, and has been cautious about binding international treaties that might limit its policy flexibility<sup>64</sup>.

Therefore, China has pursued a two-pronged strategy in international organizations. One would be the **engagement from within**, which emphasizes that China has actively participated in the existing organizations, such as the UN, where it seeks leadership roles and influence over

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<sup>62</sup> “Reshaping global governance: China’s strategy to influence international organizations and reframe international law”, Central European Institute of Asian Studies, November 2025, Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://ceias.eu/reshaping-global-governance/>.

<sup>63</sup> “Reshaping global governance: China’s strategy to influence international organizations and reframe international law”, November 2025.

<sup>64</sup> “Reshaping global governance: China’s strategy to influence international organizations and reframe international law”, November 2025.

the development and interpretation of norms related to sovereignty, human rights, and governance<sup>65</sup>. The other approach would be to **create alternative institutions** parallel to its internal engagement; China has supported and helped establish new multilateral groupings and forums, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, which provide additional platforms for governance cooperation and influence beyond Western-led institutions<sup>66</sup>. These initiatives are part of China's broader vision of a **multipolar world**, where no single power or group of powers dominates global rulemaking. By shaping both established and emerging institutional networks, China aims to expand its diplomatic reach and normative influence.

Within international organizations, China's presence can drive collaboration on shared challenges such as development financing, peacekeeping, or infrastructure investment; still, it can also create tension or conflict when its strategic interests diverge from those of Western actors<sup>67</sup>. China's efforts to reframe global governance discourse through promoting state-centric interpretations of international law and governance norms can conflict with the EU's and other Western actors' emphasis on liberal norms, transparency, and human rights principles.

Therefore, China's engagement within the international organizations illustrates an interplay of both collaboration and competition in changing global order, reflecting how rising powers interact with the established multilateral frameworks and sometimes reinforce them and at other times reshape them to accommodate new power dynamics and normative perspectives.

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<sup>65</sup> "Reshaping global governance: China's strategy to influence international organizations and reframe international law", November 2025.

<sup>66</sup> "Reshaping global governance: China's strategy to influence international organizations and reframe international law", November 2025.

<sup>67</sup> "Reshaping global governance: China's strategy to influence international organizations and reframe international law", November 2025.

## 5. Values and Human Rights Dialogue

The EU emphasizes its commitment to human rights as a core value in its relations with China, including the annual EU-China Human Rights Dialogue. In its 2025 International Human Rights Day statement, the Delegation of the European Union to China reaffirmed the EU's dedication to the universality and indivisibility of human rights<sup>68</sup>. It highlighted ongoing concerns about China's human rights record. Despite sustained engagement, the EU noted that the overall situation in China has not shown substantive improvement in terms of fundamental freedoms and minority rights.

### 5.1. Xinjiang

The EU specifically expressed a deep concern about the situation in Xinjiang, where numerous credible reports, including by the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), indicate serious human rights violations that may amount to international crimes, including crimes against humanity. The EU pointed to ongoing reports of forced labour and state-imposed labour transfer schemes involving Uyghurs and members of other ethnic minorities both within Xinjiang and in different provinces<sup>69</sup>. The EU strongly encourages China to uphold its international human rights obligations and to ensure that fundamental freedoms are protected for all individuals, including ethnic and religious minorities.

The EU's focus on Xinjiang reflects broader concerns raised in other forums. The EU has repeatedly urged China to cooperate more effectively with the OHCHR and other international human rights mechanisms, including towards the implementation of recommendations from the OHCHR assessment on Xinjiang and respect for international human rights law<sup>70</sup>. This includes

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<sup>68</sup> Statement of the EU Delegation in China on the International Human Rights Day", European Union External Action, December 2025, Accessed January 1, 2026, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/statement-eu-delegation-china-international-human-rights-day-5\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/china/statement-eu-delegation-china-international-human-rights-day-5_en).

<sup>69</sup> "Statement of the EU Delegation in China on the International Human Rights Day", December 2025,

<sup>70</sup> "EU Priorities for UN Human Rights Fora in 2025", European Union External Action, January 2025, Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/un-geneva/eu-priorities-un-human-rights-fora-2025>.

promoting the right to freedom of religion or belief, ending forced labour practices, and safeguarding cultural rights for minority communities.

Overall, the situation in Xinjiang remains a persistent point of both dialogue and disagreement between the EU and China. While the EU continues to engage China through structured dialogue and public statements, it also underscores that meaningful progress requires concrete improvements in the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

## **5.2. Hong Kong**

The European Union has consistently underscored the importance of fundamental rights, freedoms, and the rule of law in its relations with China, including in the context of developments in Hong Kong. In its 15 December 2025 spokesperson statement following the verdict in the Jimmy Lai case, the EU reiterated deep concerns about ongoing restrictions on civil liberties and judicial independence in Hong Kong<sup>71</sup>. The EU emphasized that the verdict against Jimmy Lai, a prominent pro-democracy media figure, reflects broader constraints on freedom of expression and the rights of dissenting voices in Hong Kong. The statement stressed that the protection of fundamental freedoms is an essential element of Hong Kong's high degree of autonomy, as guaranteed under the Joint Declaration and the Basic Law. The EU called for respect for these commitments and for Hong Kong's institutions to uphold legal protections without political interference<sup>72</sup>.

The EU also expressed its concern that legal actions perceived as politically motivated can undermine confidence in the rule of law and judicial independence, which are foundational

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<sup>71</sup> "Hong Kong: Statement by the Spokesperson on the verdict in the Jimmy Lai case (15 December 2025)", European Union External Action, December 2025, Accessed January 1, 2026, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/hong-kong-statement-spokesperson-verdict-jimmy-lai-case-15-december-2025\\_en](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/hong-kong-statement-spokesperson-verdict-jimmy-lai-case-15-december-2025_en).

<sup>72</sup> "Hong Kong: Statement by the Spokesperson on the verdict in the Jimmy Lai case (15 December 2025)", December 2025.



to Hong Kong's status as an international financial and legal centre. The statement reaffirmed the EU's belief that safeguarding human rights and civil liberties is not only a matter of values but also contributes to long-term stability, prosperity, and international trust.

### **5.3. Tibet**

The European Parliament has reaffirmed its serious concern over the deteriorating human rights situation in Tibet, particularly regarding religious freedom and cultural rights. In a resolution adopted on 8 May 2025, Members of the European Parliament strongly condemned Chinese government policies in Tibet that aim to assimilate and suppress distinct Tibetan religious and cultural traditions, calling these actions violations of universal human rights<sup>73</sup>. The resolution emphasized that respect for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law should be central to the European Union's relations with China<sup>74</sup>.

The resolution highlights troubling developments such as the death of Tulku Hungkar Dorje, a respected Tibetan Buddhist religious leader, under suspicious circumstances in March 2025, following his arrest<sup>75</sup>. It calls for an immediate, independent, impartial, transparent investigation into his death with international oversight, access to evidence and witnesses, and the return of his remains to his family. It also expressed deep concern about systematic pressure on Tibetan Buddhist leaders and the interference of Chinese authorities in the selection of spiritual leaders, including the Dalai Lama, which Parliament called unacceptable.

The resolution further condemns transnational repression by Chinese authorities, including cultural and linguistic assimilation policies that affect children in state-run residential

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<sup>73</sup> European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2025 on violations of religious freedom in Tibet" (2025/2692(RSP), Strasbourg, May 8, 2025), [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0097\\_EN.html](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0097_EN.html).

<sup>74</sup> European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2025 on violations of religious freedom in Tibet" 2025/2692(RSP).

<sup>75</sup> European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2025 on violations of religious freedom in Tibet" 2025/2692(RSP).

schools, reflecting a broader pattern of efforts to erode Tibetan identity<sup>76</sup>. Members of Parliament urged the EU to impose sanctions on officials and entities responsible for human rights violations in Tibet and to hold them accountable under international law. In addition, the European Parliament urged China to uphold its obligations under international law, end discrimination against ethnic and religious minorities, allow peaceful spiritual practice, and release all religious and political prisoners, including the rightful Panchen Lama. The resolution also called on the EU and its Member States to raise the situation in Tibet in bilateral and multilateral dialogues with China, underscoring that human rights concerns span beyond Tibet to other regions of the PRC<sup>77</sup>.

Therefore, as one can understand, the EU's position reflects a firm stance that the preservation of religious freedoms and cultural heritage in the Tibet region is not only a matter of principle but also an essential component of broader values and human rights engagement with China.

## **6. Previous Initiatives and Their Outcomes**

The history of EU-China relations over the past five decades has been defined by a transition from pragmatic economic integration to a complex, multi-layered rivalry. For much of the early 21st century, the Council of the European Union operated under the 'Change through Trade' (Wandel durch Handel) philosophy, the belief that economic engagement would inevitably lead to political convergence and a level playing field. However, the outcomes of major initiatives since 2020 have forced a fundamental re-evaluation of this premise. As the Union celebrates 50 years of diplomatic ties in 2025, it does so from a position of 'strategic realism,' in

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<sup>76</sup> European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2025 on violations of religious freedom in Tibet" 2025/2692(RSP).

<sup>77</sup> European Parliament, "European Parliament resolution of 8 May 2025 on violations of religious freedom in Tibet" 2025/2692(RSP).

which previous trade successes are now weighed against the failures of diplomatic dialogue and the rising need for defensive instruments.

### **6.1. The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI: The Frozen Deal)**

The Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI) was a landmark investment deal negotiated between the European Union and the People's Republic of China, intended to deepen economic ties and provide greater market access and investment protections for European companies operating in China and for Chinese companies operating in Europe. The political agreement was reached in principle on 30 December 2020 after seven years of negotiations, with the European Commission describing it as a significant step forward in EU-China economic relations<sup>78</sup>. Under the CAI, China had committed to eliminating certain barriers, such as joint venture requirements, forced technology transfer conditions, and equity caps, in sectors where many EU firms are active<sup>79</sup>. This would have represented an unprecedented opening of the Chinese market to European investors and reaffirmed both parties' interest in strengthening mutual economic cooperation.

However, the agreement has not been ratified and remains effectively frozen. The key reason for this impasse is the deterioration of political relations between the EU and China following a series of sanctions and countersanctions in March 2021<sup>80</sup>. These measures were linked to the EU's decision to sanction Chinese officials over alleged abuses in Xinjiang and China's subsequent sanctions on several Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) and EU entities. In response, the European Parliament voted in May 2021 to suspend the ratification

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<sup>78</sup> "EU-China agreement explained", European Commission, n.d., Accessed January 1, 2026, [https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement/agreement-explained\\_en](https://policy.trade.ec.europa.eu/eu-trade-relationships-country-and-region/countries-and-regions/china/eu-china-agreement/agreement-explained_en).

<sup>79</sup> "EU-China agreement explained", n.d.

<sup>80</sup> "MEPs refuse any agreement with China whilst sanctions are in place", European Parliament, May 2021, Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20210517IPR04123/meps-refuse-any-agreement-with-china-while-sanctions-are-in-place>.

process, stating that the environment was not conducive to advancing CAI while these sanctions were in place<sup>81</sup>.

Because ratification by the European Parliament is a mandatory step for EU agreements before they can enter into force, this vote effectively put the CAI on ice indefinitely<sup>82</sup>. MEPs argued that as long as Chinese sanctions targeting European lawmakers and critics of China's human rights record remained unresolved, the Parliament would not consider ratifying the deal. Over time, the EU's broader skepticism about China's market practices and values differences has also made a revival of CAI less likely. Recent discussions suggest that Brussels is not actively pursuing the reopening of the original CAI, focusing instead on addressing strategic trade issues and economic security concerns.

## **6.2. The Global Gateway vs. Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**

The Global Gateway and China's Belt and Road Initiative – or commonly known as BRI – represent two competing approaches to global connectivity and infrastructure development, reflecting broader differences in strategic priorities, governance models, and values.

China launched the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2013 as a global infrastructure and connectivity strategy to strengthen trade corridors by investing in ports, railways, roads, energy projects, and digital networks across Asia, Africa, Europe, and beyond. Chinese state-backed banks and institutions mainly finance the initiative and have expanded China's economic

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<sup>81</sup> “MEPs refuse any agreement with China whilst sanctions are in place”, May 2021.

<sup>82</sup> Alexander C. Koty, “European Parliament Votes to Freeze the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment”, *China Briefing*, <https://www.china-briefing.com/news/european-parliament-votes-to-freeze-the-eu-china-comprehensive-agreement-on-investment/>.

presence and influence across many regions<sup>83</sup>. China presents BRI as a platform for mutual development and economic cooperation, particularly in countries facing infrastructure financing gaps. However, the BRI has also generated significant international concerns that it may serve as a Trojan horse for China-led regional development and military expansion; as a result, these concerns have raised questions about long-term financial dependence and the strategic leverage that infrastructure projects may create for China in partner countries<sup>84</sup>.

In response to these challenges, the European Union launched the Global Gateway as its flagship international partnerships and connectivity strategy. The Global Gateway aims to support high-quality infrastructure projects across digital connectivity, clean energy, transport, health, and education<sup>85</sup>. Unlike the BRI's state-led financing model, the Global Gateway emphasizes transparent funding, sustainability, good governance, and partnership-based cooperation, while actively involving private sector investment and multilateral institutions<sup>86</sup>.

While both the Global Gateway and the BRI seek to address global infrastructure needs, they reflect different models of international engagement. The BRI underscores China's state-driven approach to connectivity and influence. In contrast, the Global Gateway represents the EU's effort to promote a rules-based, sustainable, and partner-centric approach to global development.

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<sup>83</sup> James McBride, Noah Berman and Andrew Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative", *Council on Foreign Relations*, February 2, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/chinas-massive-belt-and-road-initiative>

<sup>84</sup> McBride, Berman and Chatzky, "China's Massive Belt and Road Initiative".

<sup>85</sup> "Global Gateway", European Commission, n.d., Accessed January 1, 2026, [https://commission.europa.eu/topics/international-partnerships/global-gateway\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/topics/international-partnerships/global-gateway_en).

<sup>86</sup> "Global Gateway", n.d.

### 6.3. The 2024-2025 Anti-Subsidy Investigation

In 2024, the European Commission launched an anti-subsidy investigation into imports of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) from China, following complaints from EU producers that Chinese manufacturers benefit from distorted pricing and unfair state support<sup>87</sup>. After examining evidence of subsidies and their impact on the EU industry, the Commission imposed countervailing duties on certain BEVs imported from China in 2025. These duties aim to level the playing field by offsetting the effect of unfair subsidies that make Chinese electric vehicles artificially competitive in the EU market<sup>88</sup>.

The action reflects the EU's broader strategy to protect its industrial competitiveness and fair competition within the Single Market, especially in strategically important sectors like electric vehicle manufacturing. It also highlights growing trade tensions with China, as the EU seeks to ensure that international trade rules are respected and that subsidized imports do not undercut domestic industries.

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<sup>87</sup> "EU Commission imposes countervailing duties on imports of battery electric vehicles (BEVs) from China", European Commission, December 2024, Accessed January 1, 2026, <https://trade.ec.europa.eu/access-to-markets/en/news/eu-commission-imposes-countervailing-duties-imports-battery-electric-vehicles-bevs-china>.

<sup>88</sup> "EU Commission imposes countervailing duties on imports of batter electric vehicles (BEVs) from China", December 2024.

## **7. Points to Be Addressed By the Council Decision for Agenda Item A**

- 7.1. Reaffirming the EU's strategic approach to China as a partner, economic competitor, and systemic rival.
- 7.2. Strengthening the EU's capacity to reduce strategic dependencies on China in critical supply chains and raw materials.
- 7.3. Advancing a de-risking strategy that balances economic engagement with the protection of EU economic security.
- 7.4. Addressing structural trade asymmetries and ensuring reciprocity, fair competition, and a level playing field in EU–China trade relations.
- 7.5. Safeguarding the competitiveness of EU industries, particularly in green technologies, against distortive non-market practices.
- 7.6. Enhancing the implementation of defensive trade instruments, including anti-subsidy and anti-coercion measures.
- 7.7. Reinforcing EU investment screening mechanisms to prevent strategic dependencies and protect critical infrastructure and technologies.
- 7.8. Promoting diversification of supply chains through trusted partners, free trade agreements, and internal EU production capacities.
- 7.9. Ensuring coherence between EU economic policy, industrial strategy, and broader geopolitical and security objectives.
- 7.10. Strengthening coordination among Member States in the implementation of economic security and investment screening frameworks.
- 7.11. Upholding the rules-based international order in EU–China engagement, including respect for international trade norms and multilateral institutions.

- 7.12. Integrating human rights considerations as a core component of EU–China relations, including Xinjiang, Hong Kong, and Tibet.
- 7.13. Reinforcing the EU’s expectations regarding China’s responsibilities as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, particularly in relation to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.
- 7.14. Enhancing EU engagement in the Indo-Pacific to support freedom of navigation, maritime security, and regional stability.
- 7.15. Countering the expansion of alternative governance models and parallel institutions that undermine EU values, transparency, and international norms.



## **8. Introduction to the Agenda Item B: Enhancing the European Union Cooperation and Presence in the Western Balkans**

### **8.1. Historical Context and Strategic Importance of the Western Balkans to the EU**

The European Union (EU) published their Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP) in 1999, which is a framework regarding the relation between the EU and countries outside of the EU located in the region. This Stability Pact supported the integration of Western Balkan countries within the EU while providing not only political but also economic cooperation and free trade with the involved countries. Binding agreements regarding this Stabilization Process take the form of Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs), and is assisted by the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee (SAPC) which is a Joint Parliamentary Committee ensuring the communication and cooperation of the parliaments of the Western Balkan countries with the European Parliament<sup>89</sup>.

The EU's process of policy development on the topic of integration of the Western Balkan countries in the EU officially started on July 1, 2013. On this date, the first country to be a part of the EU became Croatia, leaving five of the other six countries with candidate status: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. While accession negotiations have been officially opened for Albania, Montenegro and Serbia, it took until the July of 2022 for these negotiations to be applicable for North Macedonia. With Kosovo submitting its application for EU membership in December of the same year, by the end of the 2022 all of the Western Balkan countries were either a member of the EU or had filed their application<sup>90</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> "The Western Balkans," European Parliament, October 2025, accessed December 16, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans>.

<sup>90</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

It is important to note that SAAs are in force in all Western Balkan countries which are candidates. However, the SAA is an EU-only agreement in the case of Kosovo which the EU Member States do not have to verify since five Member States do not officially recognise Kosovo as an independent country. Thus, the clauses of SAAs concerning trade and trade-related situations are counted as temporary agreements<sup>91</sup>.

All countries who are applicants of EU membership must fulfill certain conditions, one of which being the Copenhagen political criteria that was established in 1998 by the European Council. This criteria includes three main clauses. The first one is to maintain the stability of institutions which ensure democracy, the rule of law, human rights and protection of minorities. Second one is the condition of a functioning market economy, primarily the capability of tackling competitive pressure and market forces of the EU. Lastly, it is crucial for a EU candidate state is the ability of the State to recognize the possible obligations of membership, which include abiding the political and economic aims of the EU such as monetary union, common rules, and the standard policies constituting the body of EU law; also known as the *Acquis Communautaire*<sup>92</sup>.

Moreover, when a country wishing to join the EU earns candidate status, the Council (of the EU) decides whether negotiations should be started or not. This decision needs consensus to be taken. When the negotiation process of all chapters finishes, the terms and conditions of the membership is officially included in the accession treaty<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>91</sup> “The Western Balkans,” October 2025.

<sup>92</sup> “The Enlargement of the Union,” European Parliament, October 2025, accessed December 16, 2025, <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/167/the-enlargement-of-the-union>.

<sup>93</sup> “The Enlargement of the Union,” October 2025.

Accession of the Western Balkans into the EU being crucial has a variety of reasons. These motivations are stated in the European Commission's 2008 Communication<sup>94</sup>, Western Balkans: Enhancing the European Perspective; one of them being enhancing regional cooperation. In order to strengthen the ties between Western Balkan countries and the EU, the Communication proposes regional cooperation, as well as cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Yugoslavia, which was a United Nations (UN) court that dealt with the war crimes of 1990s during the conflicts in the Balkans<sup>95</sup>. Achieving the priorities that were priorly decided on the Accession Partnerships; concluding and implementing the SAAs with each country establish the aforementioned reasons.

## **8.2. Overview of the Current Status of Accession Talks**

### **8.2.1. Albania**

On April 28, 2009, Albania applied for an EU membership, and attained member status five years later, in June of 2014. The European Commission has witnessed Albania's progress according to European values, and recommended the initiation of accession negotiations with Albania on multiple occasions. After four years, the Council accepted the possible initiation of accession negotiations, on the condition that the conditions would be completed. Although all conditions were not yet achieved, the Council decided to accept the initiation of accession negotiations in March 2020. The draft framework of the negotiations were shared with the Member states by the Commission in July of the same year<sup>96</sup>. The negotiation process of Albania was considered at once with the negotiations of North Macedonia due to the Commission's joint and positive suggestion. The formal initiation of the negotiations had to be delayed to 2024

<sup>94</sup> "Western Balkans: Enhancing the European Perspective," EUR-Lex, November 27, 2014, accessed December 16, 2025,

<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/western-balkans-enhancing-the-european-perspective.html>.

<sup>95</sup> "International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia | United Nations International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia," n.d., <https://www.icty.org/>.

<sup>96</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

because of the problems that occurred between North Macedonia and Bulgaria regarding language, history and mainly identity. Currently, out of 35 chapters of the negotiation framework, 28 of them have been opened<sup>97</sup>.

### **8.2.2. Bosnia and Herzegovina**

In June 2008, the SAA with Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) was signed; however, due to the country's unsuccessful implementation of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR), it did not enter into force. BiH managed to create a new approach, especially in economic areas. This renovation entailed SAA to be put into force on June 1, 2015. After BiH's submission of the EU membership application, the Commission stated its opinion upon the matter with a list which includes 14 priorities to be accomplished by the country for accession negotiations to be initiated. One of which (priority number 3) states that BiH is responsible for ensuring the Stabilisation and Association Parliamentary Committee's (SAPC) efficient and appropriate functioning. Before the renovation the Bosnian government went through, the latest meeting was held unsuccessfully eight years prior to the one in October 2023. Thus, the first comprehensive meeting between the EU and BiH regarding SPAC was held in Sarajevo, the capital of the country. After this meeting, the commission decided that the third priority had been fulfilled. There had been four more SPAC meetings later to this date. Following the Russian Federation's attack on Ukraine, the EU decided to grant three countries candidate statues which were Moldova, Ukraine, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally in March 2024, the accession negotiations were officially started<sup>98</sup>. Since the country has been dealing with its severe internal political deadlock, the progress of the accession negotiations has been "limited, slow, and compounded" according to the European Parliament's fact sheets. BiH formally submitted its

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<sup>97</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

<sup>98</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

reform agenda of Growth Plan to the European Commission on 30 September 2025, which is over a year later than the deadline. This unfortunate event led to an irreversible 10% cut in BiH's funding envelope<sup>99</sup>.

### **8.2.3. The Republic of North Macedonia**

The Republic of North Macedonia, formerly known as the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, applied for EU membership in 2005, and about a year and a half later in December 2006, it was granted candidate country status. The country had ongoing disagreements with Greece because of its use of the name Macedonia. This issue had the initiation of accession negotiations delayed for several years. However, the Commission along with the support of the Parliament suggested for the negotiations to be initiated. In June 2018, the Council stated the possibility of formally initiating accession negotiations if the conditions were to be met. After the disagreement between North Macedonia and Greece resolved with signing the Prespa Agreement, the Council officially allowed the accession negotiations to be opened without setting further conditions. As mentioned before, the accession negotiations of both Albania and North Macedonia were considered jointly due to the Commission's positive suggestion. Moreover, the formal opening of accession talks were delayed until July of 2022 because of issues related to language and history, mainly identity, between Bulgaria and North Macedonia. Finally in December 2023, all screening sessions of negotiation clusters belonging to North Macedonia were completed<sup>100</sup>. Screening sessions are the first technical step of accession negotiations between the candidate country and the EU where the negotiation process is divided

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<sup>99</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

<sup>100</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

into 35 chapters under 6 different clusters<sup>101</sup>. Although screening sessions were completed in the case of North Macedonia's accession talks, the clusters or chapters have not yet been opened<sup>102</sup>.

#### **8.2.4. Kosovo**

Kosovo is the only Western Balkan country who is not an EU member or a candidate. Kosovo declared its independence in 2008 and several countries have not yet recognized it. These countries include five of the EU members: Cyprus, Greece, Romania, Slovakia and Spain, two countries which are located in the same region: Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia, three of the possible candidates: Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine, as well as two permanent United Nations Security Council (UNSC) members: China and the Russian Federation. Currently Kosovo is a potential EU candidate. In 2018, six years after the visa liberalisation topic was published, Kosovo meeting the necessary criteria was validated by the Commission. Following an external negotiation and a final European Parliament voting, Kosovan citizens became able to visit the Schengen area visa-free. The negotiations of SAA with Kosovo have been officially open since 2016. The main reasons it had to be delayed until the mentioned year is the issues between the country and Serbia. With the Brussels Agreement in 2013, it was decided on the normalization of relations between Pristina and Belgrad. Thus, both Kosovo's and Serbia's future regarding the EU integration is closely relevant to both parties' relations with one another. According to the European Parliament, this well-established relation should be stated in a binding document in a comprehensive way, on the normalisation of their bilateral relations<sup>103</sup>.

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<sup>101</sup> "Screening," EUR-Lex, n.d., <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/screening.html>.

<sup>102</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

<sup>103</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

### 8.2.5. Montenegro

Montenegro declared its independence in the year 2006. From this date on a biennial basis, the country applied for EU membership, was granted candidate status, and the accession negotiations were formally opened. The EU had a new approach for its accession processes in 2012. Thus, two specific chapters regarding the rule of law were opened prior to the rest: Chapter 23 which addresses judicial reform and fundamental rights, and Chapter 24 emphasizing freedom, justice and security. To this date, the remaining chapters have also been opened, seven of which have been temporarily closed. It is important to note that for a chapter to be opened or closed, each member of the Council must come to a consensus<sup>104</sup>. Although Montenegro's unstable political steps resulted in deceleration of its integration process in the EU, several developments have been made since the year 2004<sup>105</sup>.

### 8.2.6. Serbia

Serbia applied for its EU membership at the end of 2009. After signing the Brussels Agreement with Kosovo, Serbia was granted candidate country status in 2012. When the accession negotiations were officially opened, one of the first two chapters to be negotiated was the normalization of bilateral relations with Kosovo. Then, the crucial chapters for the EU's new approach, Chapter 23 and 24, were opened for discussions. Ultimately, 22 of the 35 chapters for negotiations have been opened while two of those were closed. Last time a chapter was opened was in 2021, when four chapters under the fourth cluster were opened. The chapters here includes green agenda and sustainable connectivity<sup>106</sup>. Since then, new chapters or clusters have

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<sup>104</sup> "FAQ for Negotiation Process," Directorate for EU Affairs, November 15, 2022, accessed December 25, 2025, [https://www.ab.gov.tr/faq-for-negotiation-process\\_44460\\_en.html](https://www.ab.gov.tr/faq-for-negotiation-process_44460_en.html).

<sup>105</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

<sup>106</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

not been opened. Similar to Kosovo, the future of Serbia's accession negotiations and integration to the EU is closely linked to its relations with Kosovo<sup>107</sup>.

## **9. Political Dynamics and Institutional Weaknesses**

### **9.1. Addressing Internal Political Instability and Ethnic Divisions**

Political instability in the Western Balkans has a variety of reasons. One of which being the fragmented party system. The first multiparty elections of the Western Balkans did not result in democratic or pluralist systems. On the contrary, they brought hybrid regimes. Hybrid regimes combine autocratic traits such as political repression with democratic ones, for instance direct elections<sup>108</sup>. Political parties maintain control through this regime, and nationalism which in most cases is used to preserve hybrid regimes, mainly while harming the opposition and minorities. Dominant parties monopolising state institutions prevent the strengthening of democracy. This issue also led to governments struggling to keep unity and resilience although it was formed by multiple political parties because of the parties involved having different priorities and ideologies over time. Especially in the 1990s, democracy was challenged in all Western Balkan countries. The usage of Macedonia creating an issue between Greece and North Macedonia, and the dispute of union between Serbia and Montenegro show the fragility of stability in the Western Balkans. When Serbia and Croatia were governed by nationalist autocratic parties, had restricted media freedom and elections; BiH and Kosovo's crucial party disputes were prevented due to constant wars can be given as further examples of democratic hindrances<sup>109</sup>.

These conflicts created a type of threat to the existence of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The CFSP is responsible for preserving peace and enhancing security

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<sup>107</sup> "The Western Balkans," October 2025.

<sup>108</sup> "Hybrid Regimes," Oxford Bibliographies, March 10, 2015, accessed December 26, 2025, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/display/document/obo-9780199756223/obo-9780199756223-0167.xml>.

<sup>109</sup> Claudia Laštro and Florian Bieber, "Democratic Patterns and Party Systems in the Western Balkans," *Zeitschrift Für Vergleichende Politikwissenschaft* 17, no. 1 (May 30, 2023): 59–75, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12286-023-00564-w>.



while underlining the importance of international collaboration under law, human rights and freedom. The EU funds the European Security and Defence College, tasks of civilian stabilisation, and actions regarding disarmament<sup>110</sup>. However, because of the political instability of the Western Balkans, specifically in the 1990s, the EU decided to launch its first Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) mission: The European Union Partnership Mission (EUPM) in BiH and Macedonia<sup>111</sup>. The CDP highlights the EU's commitment in preserving peace through enabling the Union to take joint action in crisis issues<sup>112</sup>. Hence, the Western Balkan's internal political instability not only creates a domestic governance problem, but also an obstacle for EU cooperation; furthermore, EU integration.

Another challenge of the EU integration of the Western Balkans has been ethnic divisions. Ethnic divisions directly prevent compliance within the EU's political framework, especially the Copenhagen political criteria. As previously mentioned, these criteria include ensuring the rule of law, democracy, human rights, and protection of marginalized groups<sup>113</sup>. However, ethnic division remains an issue in the Western Balkans, and this holds the risk of weakening institutional and governance stability, as well as societal cohesion. In the Western Balkans, arrangements prepared after the conflicts have partially caused the institutionalization of ethnicity. Although these frameworks aimed to prevent escalated violence, they became obstacles in the way of reform. For instance, BiH established a system which distributed powers

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<sup>110</sup> "Common Foreign and Security Policy," European Commission, n.d., [https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/common-foreign-and-security-policy\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/common-foreign-and-security-policy_en).

<sup>111</sup> "Western Balkans," European Union Institute for Security Studies, November 12, 2025, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/regions/western-balkans>.

<sup>112</sup> "The Common Security and Defence Policy," The European External Action Service, September 24, 2025, accessed December 26, 2025, [https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-security-and-defence-policy\\_en#:~:text=The%20Common%20Security%20and%20Defence%20Policy%20\(CSDP\)%20is%20a%20cornerstone,peacekeeping%2C%20and%20international%20security%20operations](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/common-security-and-defence-policy_en#:~:text=The%20Common%20Security%20and%20Defence%20Policy%20(CSDP)%20is%20a%20cornerstone,peacekeeping%2C%20and%20international%20security%20operations).

<sup>113</sup> "Accession Criteria (Copenhagen Criteria) - EUR-Lex," n.d., <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/glossary/accession-criteria-copenhagen-criteria.html>.

to different ethnic groups, and each ethnic group had veto rights to decentralize authority. This resulted in the weakening of the state, and from an EU perspective, such issues prevent progress, especially in Chapter 23 and 24 due to their requirements of independent institutions and efficient decision making process<sup>114</sup>. Ethnic divisions also contradict with the EU's focus on minority protection and equal citizenship. For instance, in Kosovo the ongoing tension between the ethnic majority, Albanians, and the ethnic minority, Serbs, raise concerns in the public eye in terms of the necessities which Copenhagen political criteria consists of. Unresolved ethnic issues are not only a domestic problem but also a regional stability risk. A similar situation can be observed in North Macedonia as well. Ethnic Macedonians as the majority population of North Macedonia were mostly dominant during the design of the constitution. The post-independence constitution defined North Macedonia as a nation-state of Macedonians. This definition downgraded the status of other ethnic groups, especially compared to the 1974 Yugoslav Constitution. Albanians, who constituted approximately 25% of the North Macedonian population as minorities, considered this change in the constitution as discriminatory<sup>115</sup>. In 2001, the Ohrid Framework was signed between the North Macedonian security forces and ethnic Albanian rebels. The Ohrid Framework aimed to prevent a possible civil war by putting an end to violence, and addressing ethnic Albanian grievances while reforming the state in order to make it more inclusive<sup>116</sup>. According to official frameworks, the minority rights align with the

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<sup>114</sup> Antonie Blumberg, "Constitutional Courts and the Preservation of Ethnic Hegemony in the Western Balkans," *Institute for the Danube Region and Central Europe* (blog), June 20, 2025, accessed December 27, 2025, <https://www.idm.at/en/constitutional-courts-and-the-preservation-ethnic-hegemony/>.

<sup>115</sup> Avdi Smajljaj, "Ethnicity Based Democratic Constitutional Structures: the Cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo," *DergiPark*, no. 4 (June 20, 2020), <https://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/balkar/article/659604>.

<sup>116</sup> "Framework Agreement" (United Nations Peacemaker, August 13, 2001), accessed December 28, 2025, <https://peacemaker.un.org/sites/default/files/document/files/2024/05/mk010813framework20agreement2028ohrid20agreement29.pdf>.

standards the EU upholds; however, the effects of the conflict between two nations still remain to this day, and the mistrust of ethnic communities weaken the effectiveness of institutions<sup>117</sup>.

Thus, in the Western Balkans, ethnic divisions shape political dynamics through encouraging party systems that are dependent on identity rather than policy. This issue enables the nationalist perspective to achieve slower progress regarding the EU related reforms.

## **9.2. Tackling Corruption, Organized Crime, and Judicial Reform**

Political dynamics of the Western Balkans which constitute reasons against integration in the EU include the ongoing corruption and organized crime in the Western Balkans. Corruption is a phenomenon undermining democracy and its principles; thus, impacting society in several ways such as social and cultural aspects, economic growth, democratic values, and high corruption rates are a direct risk for candidate countries to meet the Copenhagen criteria. Many sources including the World Bank's governance indicators and Transparency International's corruption perception index<sup>118</sup> have been continuously stating that corruption is very common in the Western Balkans region, especially more common in economically disadvantaged areas. Moreover, the US Department of State's Human Rights Practices 2016 reports<sup>119</sup> and the European Commission's enlargement reports certify this issue. According to another Transparency International report (2016), on the national integrity systems, the fight against corruption fails in two major areas: the Western Balkans and Türkiye<sup>120</sup>.

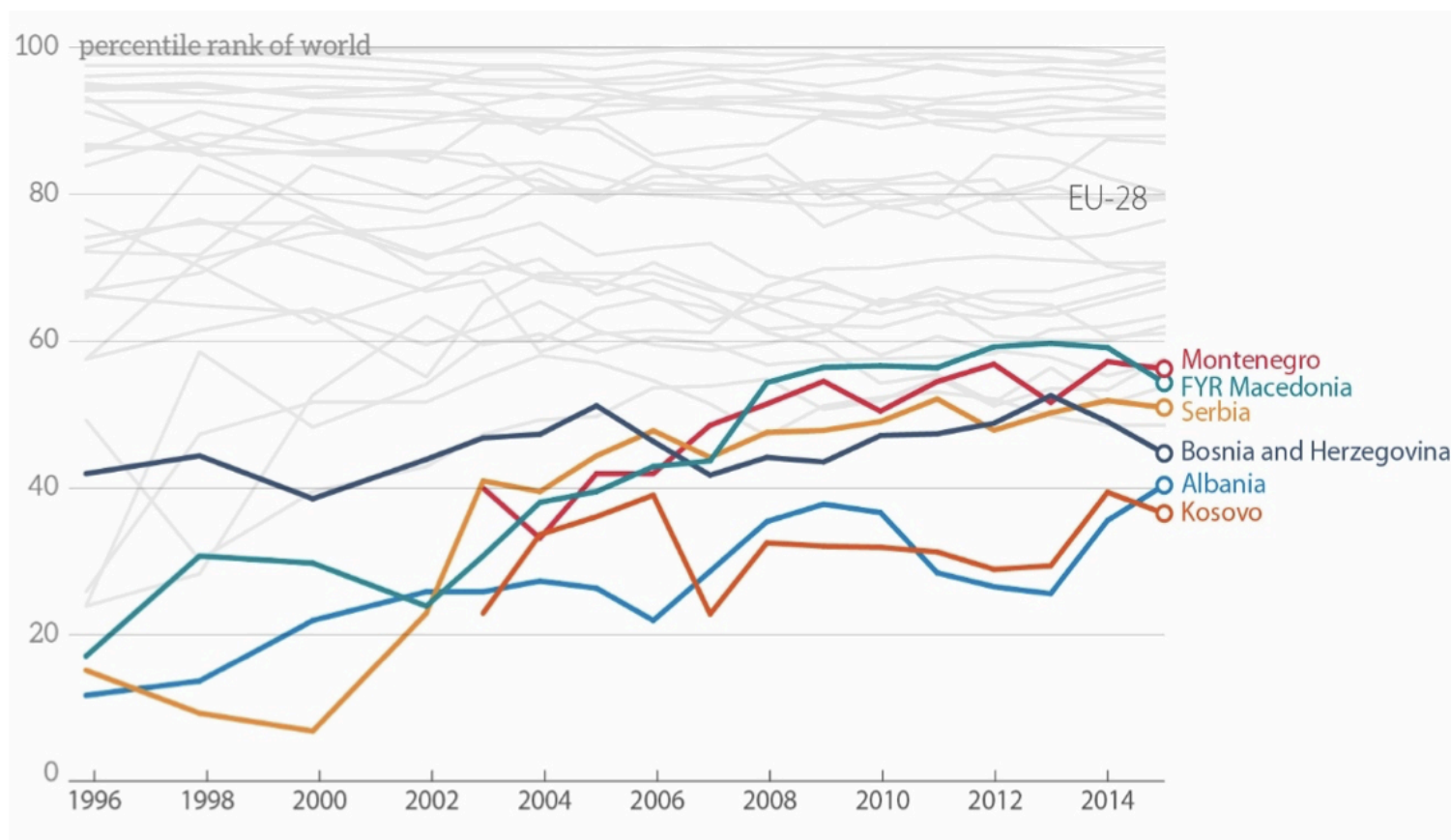
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<sup>117</sup> Smajljaj, "Ethnicity Based Democratic Constitutional Structures: The Cases of Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Kosovo," June 20, 2020.

<sup>118</sup> "Technical Difficulties," n.d., <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/>.

<sup>119</sup> "Technical Difficulties," n.d., <https://2009-2017.state.gov/j/drl/rls/hrrpt/humanrightsreport/>.

<sup>120</sup> Velina LILYANOVA, "Anti-corruption efforts in the Western Balkans," *European Parliament*, April 2017, accessed December 30, 2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS\\_BRI%282017%29599417](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank/en/document/EPRS_BRI%282017%29599417).



Source: Worldwide governance indicators, World Bank, 2016. The percentile rank (0-100) indicates the rank of a country among all countries in the world, 0 being the lowest and 100 the highest rank.

The constant high levels of corruption in the Western Balkans show that the main problem is the existence of systematic corruption. Fuel of this systematic corruption include the history and geography of the area, including causes such as the armed conflicts that took place in the 1990s, and sanctions and embargoes that were put on former Yugoslavia.<sup>121</sup>

The EU's support for candidate countries' anti-corruption efforts consists of cooperating with intergovernmental organizations such as the Council of Europe's Group of States Against

<sup>121</sup> LILYANOVA, "Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans."

Corruption (GRECO)<sup>122</sup>, and technical expertise under different projects, as well as funding through its Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance<sup>123</sup>. The EU's pre-accession funds aim at quality investments regarding the future of both the EU and its enlargement region. They support candidate countries as well as possible candidate countries to implement required actions, for instance political or economic reforms regarding the situation which provide their citizens better opportunities, and enable them to live in similar conditions to the EU citizens. These actions in a sense prepare the candidate countries and possible candidate countries to responsibilities which an EU membership brings<sup>124</sup>.

According to the European Court of Auditors (ECA), the EU's financial support for candidate countries has increased the administrative effectiveness of the region. However, funding allocated to main problems, including fighting corruption, has been very limited. Despite the structural challenges, specifically in BiH and Macedonia, visible development can be observed in areas of capacity development, institution strengthening, and awareness raising<sup>125</sup>.

All of the Western Balkan countries are signatories of crucial international conventions relevant to taking anti-corruption measures, and members of GRECO, which observes anti-corruption measures and their alignment with the Council's criteria. Involved countries have also developed their national anti-corruption strategies and frameworks.

One of Albania's five priorities for an EU-related agenda is fighting against corruption. According to a 2016 corruption monitoring report<sup>126</sup> Albania holds the highest corruption

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<sup>122</sup> LILYANOVA, "Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans."

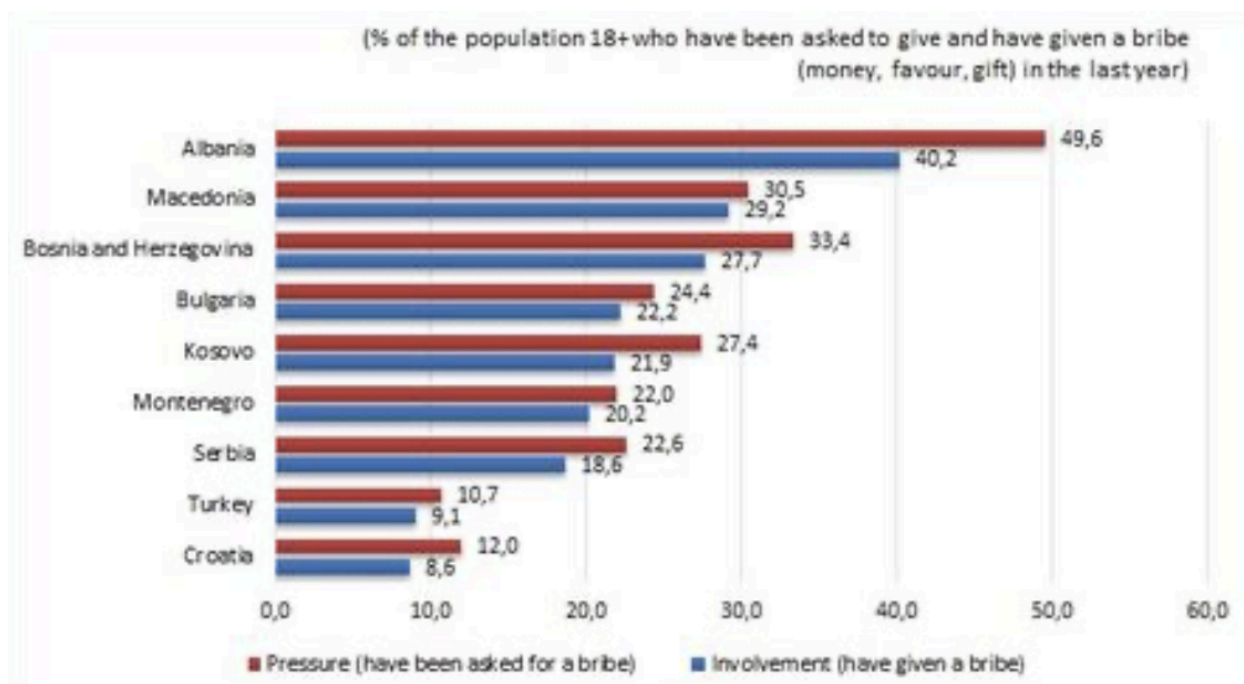
<sup>123</sup> LILYANOVA, "Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans."

<sup>124</sup> "Overview - Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance," Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood, September 4, 2025, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance\\_en](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/funding-technical-assistance/overview-instrument-pre-accession-assistance_en).

<sup>125</sup> "Overview - Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance."

<sup>126</sup> "SELDI Corruption Monitoring System in SEE: 2016 Results," SELDI.net, June 23, 2016, accessed December 30, 2025, <https://seldi.net/publications/infographics/seldi-corruption-monitoring-system-in-see-2016-results/>.

pressure put on citizens. GRECO's same year report<sup>127</sup> states that out of ten of its latest recommendations, Albania has successfully managed one of them.



Source: Southeastern European Leadership for Development and Integrity, SELDI Corruption Monitoring System in SEE: 2016 Results, 2016. The percentile rank (0-100) indicates the pressure and involvement of citizens in bribery.

Besides these reports and charts, the Commission's 2016 report<sup>128</sup> clearly acknowledges Albania's progress on fighting corruption, stating the developing positive steps. One of which being law adoptions on whistleblower protection. The country has also developed an online portal, and a text-message feedback mechanism. After a service in hospitals or real estate offices, an anonymous feedback report can be filled in case of corruption in these public institutions.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>127</sup> "Compliance Report Albania" (Group of States against Corruption, April 15, 2016), accessed December 30, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806c1be3>.

<sup>128</sup> "Albania 2016 Report" (European Commission, November 9, 2016), accessed December 30, 2025, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/20c77a35-937b-4a73-951c-3faa14410c0d\\_en?filename=2016\\_1109\\_report\\_albania.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/20c77a35-937b-4a73-951c-3faa14410c0d_en?filename=2016_1109_report_albania.pdf).

<sup>129</sup> LILYANOVA, "Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans."

BiH has several deficiency on implementing laws, including laws on whistleblower protection 2016 report of GRECO on evaluating BiH<sup>130</sup> states that BiH holds “fragmented and uncoordinated institutional framework and, more decisively, the lack of firm political will to push forward a far-reaching anti-corruption agenda.” BiH have constantly delayed and postponed effective implementations of already existing legislations. Suggestions of the EP for BiH are enhanced supervision on both political party and electoral campaign funding, transparent employment process in the public sector, and eliminating corruption practices<sup>131</sup>.

Slow developments of Albania and BiH on tackling corruption does not resemble the situations of other Western Balkan countries. For instance, North Macedonia has been backsliding in recent years. Corruption related reasons led the country to a deep political crisis which could not yet be returned. The EU came as a mediator in between political parties and assisted them to reach an agreement. Although the EU interfered, Macedonia’s fight against corruption remained weak. With this interference, a special public prosecutor was allocated in order to deal with the corruption leaks, and even started investigations against officials. However, other governance bodies did not collaborate. The President in 2016 attempted to excuse 56 individuals who have been reported to be involved in wiretaps, which resulted in public distrust, and proved the lack of effort in terms of effectively preventing political corruption<sup>132</sup>. The Commission’s<sup>133</sup> and GRECO’s<sup>134</sup> reports also confirm the situation. The

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<sup>130</sup> “Evaluation Report Bosnia and Herzegovina” (Group of States against Corruption, February 22, 2016), accessed December 30, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806c4999>.

<sup>131</sup> LILYANOVA, “Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans.”

<sup>132</sup> LILYANOVA, “Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans.”

<sup>133</sup> “The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia 2016 Report” (European Commission, November 9, 2016), accessed December 30, 2025, [https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/f9ea936c-5ddb-41dd-99ec-5ac2956aa588\\_en?filename=2016\\_1109\\_report\\_the\\_former\\_yugoslav\\_republic\\_of\\_macedonia.pdf](https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/f9ea936c-5ddb-41dd-99ec-5ac2956aa588_en?filename=2016_1109_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf).

<sup>134</sup> “Evaluation Report Bosnia and Herzegovina.”



former explains that progress has not yet been made in tackling corruption while the latter states that the country has managed to successfully fulfill 3 of their 19 recommendations.

Remaining Western Balkan countries' corruption histories are less complex. For instance, one of the requirements Kosovo had to execute in order to enable visa-free travel for their citizens inside the Schengen area was an improved record for fighting against corruption. Moreover, Montenegro, whose rule of law chapters in accession talks had been opened, has a low number of corruption and organized crime related convictions, which is constantly criticized by the EU. Although Montenegro's accession talks are the most advanced among the other Western Balkan countries, the practical effectiveness of the measures is still put into question and is considered to need developments<sup>135</sup>. Serbia's rule of law chapters had also been opened. However, GRECO<sup>136</sup> highlighted a crucial difference between Serbia's law and practice.

Country	Main preventive anti-corruption body	National Anti-Corruption Strategy
Albania	National Coordinator for Anti-Corruption (NCAC)	Inter-sectoral Strategy against corruption 2015-2020
BIH	Agency for the Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption	Strategy for the Fight against corruption 2009-2014/RS Strategy of Fight against Corruption 2013-2017/FBiH Anti-Corruption Strategy 2016-2019
FYR Macedonia	State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption	State Programme for Prevention and Repression of Corruption and State Programme for Prevention and Reduction of Conflict of Interests (2016-2019)
Kosovo	Kosovo Anti-Corruption Agency (KAA)	Anti-corruption strategy 2013-2017?
Montenegro	Agency for the Prevention of Corruption	National Strategy for the fight against corruption and organized crime (2010-2014)
Serbia	Anti-Corruption Agency	National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2013-2018

Source: European Parliament, Anti-corruption efforts in the Western Balkans,, 2017. Table - Western Balkans' national and joint anti-corruption measures.

Deeply placed corruption in the Western Balkans remains an important barrier in their EU accession roadmaps. Although the region's importance is highlighted several times, it is a fact

<sup>135</sup> LILYANOVA, "Anti-Corruption Efforts in the Western Balkans."

<sup>136</sup> "Evaluation Report Serbia" (Group of States against Corruption, July 2, 2015), accessed December 30, 2025, <https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806ca35d>.



that pursuit of anti-corruption still needs to take steps of development, especially when they are hindered by political interference.

## **10. Economic Integration**

### **10.1. History**

As mentioned earlier, economic integration, the second criterion for membership in the European Union, is one of the two most important ideas in the EU's founding philosophy. This is because the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), established with the 1951 Treaty of Paris<sup>137</sup> (the first concrete step in the EU's formation) aimed to make economic integration the most important foundation for lasting peace by placing the production of coal and steel which being the basic raw materials of the war industry, under the control of a supranational authority. Indeed, the ECSC was quite successful in its initial stages. Between 1951 and 1958, trade in coal and steel among member states increased by more than 100%, and also West Germany increased its steel production by approximately 150% during the same period<sup>138</sup>. Most importantly, no military conflict occurred between West Germany and France during this time. Considering that these two countries faced two major world wars and an internal Franco-Prussian war between 1870 and 1945, it can be clearly stated that this was a great achievement for that period. The success of economic cooperation played a significant role in accelerating these economic integration policies. With the establishment of the European Economic Community through the

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<sup>137</sup> Treaty of Paris. 2019. "Treaty of Paris." Treaty of Paris. 2019. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/treaty-of-paris>.

<sup>138</sup> Eurostat, *50 Years of the ECSC Treaty: Coal and Steel Statistics* (Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, 2002), <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-pocketbooks/-/ks-43-02-979>.

Treaty(ies) of Rome in 1957<sup>139</sup>, the creation of a common market and the expansion of economic integration were further enhanced.

## **10.2. The European Way of Economic Integration**

The European integration process has once again proven to us that economics is not limited to financial indicators and statistical graphs, but goes beyond that and is the most important tool in establishing peace within Europe. As mentioned in the previous paragraph, the success of the ECSC and the EEC laid the foundations for a new era. This new era, with the Maastricht Treaty<sup>140</sup>, moved the conjuncture of European integration beyond just economic cooperation, placing political and monetary integration under the umbrella of the European Union at the center of the union.

### **10.2.1. Euroeconomic and Eurotary Union**

The Maastricht Treaty fundamentally reformed the EU's understanding of economic integration. The most important feature of this treaty is that it fully established the goal of the Economic and Monetary Union within a formal and binding framework. With this step, European integration evolved from a common market based solely on the free movement of goods and services to a deeper integration process aiming for a certain degree of common rules governing the economic policies of member states. The best and most important example of this is undoubtedly the Euro, which allows the use of the same currency from Lisbon to Athens.

With the adoption of the Euro as the EU's currency, member states have yielded a significant portion of their monetary policy sovereignty to the European Central Bank. Simultaneously, price stability, low inflation, and predictable economic conditions have become

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<sup>139</sup> European Parliament. 2019. "Treaty of Rome." Treaty of Rome. European Parliament. 2019. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/treaty-of-rome>.

<sup>140</sup> European Parliament. 1992. "Maastricht Treaty." European Parliament. 1992. <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/about-parliament/en/in-the-past/the-parliament-and-the-treaties/maastricht-treaty>.

fundamental goals across Europe. Finally, it can be said that the Euro has significantly increased interdependence among member states.

### **10.2.2. Economic Governance and Fiscal Discipline**

While the adoption of the euro as the common currency constituted a crucial milestone in the EU's economic integration process, this step alone was not considered sufficient. For a common currency to function both healthily and sustainably, it requires not only the centralization of monetary policy but also the implementation of member states' fiscal policies within specific limits and rules. The EU did not address economic integration not only from a market and currency perspective, but also made economic governance and fiscal discipline a fundamental part of the economic integration process.

The criteria regarding budget deficits and public debt introduced by the Maastricht Treaty aimed to ensure that Member States' economic policies were implemented in a way that would not destabilize the Union as a whole. These regulations demonstrate that economic integration is not an uncontrolled liberalization, but an institutional process supported by common rules and oversight mechanisms. As economic integration deepens, it has become more apparent that a member state's fiscal policies have an impact not only at the national level but across the entire Union. Therefore, fiscal discipline and economic policy coordination have become complementary and indispensable elements of economic integration within the European Union.

### **10.2.3. Strengths and Limits of Economic Integration**

The way the European Union has chosen to integrate the economy has clearly led to great success. The common market, the euro, and similar economic policies have all led to more trade between members, more stable prices, and more predictable economic relations. In this respect, economic integration has become one of the fundamental elements supporting the economic

growth of the European Union and strengthening political stability by increasing interdependence among member states.

However, the process of economic integration has also brought certain structural limitations and problems. The fact that countries with different economic structures, production capacities, and fiscal discipline approaches are forced to operate within the same economic rules has sometimes led to financial and economic harmonization problems. In particular, the existence of the common currency, the Euro, and the transition process to it have narrowed the scope of national economic policy for Member States; this has become more visible during periods of economic crisis. An example can be given as follows: Suppose country A, an EU member using the Euro currency, is experiencing remarkable economic growth, while country B, also using the Euro currency, is struggling with very high inflation. If these countries were using their own currencies, country A could pursue increased economic growth by lowering interest rates, while country B could combat price increases by raising interest rates to reduce overall domestic demand. In other words, they could use different interest rates. However, since both countries use the same Euro currency, and the European Central Bank is the only authority that determines interest rates for Eurozone countries, this is not possible. This example has shown that economic integration does not have the same effect on every Member State and that integration can produce different results. Therefore, the European way of economic integration is not only a technical and economic process; it is also a political project requiring strong institutional structures, mutual trust, and solidarity. Despite the advantages it provides, economic integration also brings the need for continuous adaptation, reform, and coordination. In this respect, European-style economic integration can be considered a dynamic integration model containing both opportunities and challenges.

### **10.3. Economic Integration as a Precondition for EU Membership**

Economic integration is not merely a goal for countries wishing to join the EU; it is considered a prerequisite for the membership process. Indeed, the economic criteria included in the Copenhagen Criteria<sup>141</sup> require candidate countries to have a functioning market economy and develop an economic capacity capable of coping with economic competition within the Union. This approach demonstrates that the European Union views economic integration not as a process that occurs suddenly with full membership, but as a gradual and phased transformation. Candidate countries are expected to comply with the rules of the common market, implement reforms in their economic structures, and ensure macroeconomic stability before full membership. Thus, economic integration ceases to be a process that begins after membership; rather, it becomes an adaptation mechanism tested and reinforced before membership. In this context, the European Union aims not only to deepen economic integration among existing members but also to transfer this model to candidate countries during the enlargement process. For candidate countries, economic integration serves both as a way to learn the Union's operational logic and to prepare for the requirements of the common market and possible monetary integration in the long term. Therefore, for the EU, economic integration is not positioned as a natural consequence of membership, but as an indispensable part of the path to membership.

### **10.4. Economic Integration and the Western Balkans**

The European Union's approach to economic integration in the Western Balkans aims not only to strengthen existing economic ties but also to bring about long-term structural transformation in the region. In this context, the EU views the economic integration of the

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<sup>141</sup> European Commission. 2016. *EU Enlargement Strategy*. Brussels.  
[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_16\\_3041](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_16_3041)

Western Balkans as a gradual and irreversible transformation, rather than a one-off harmonization process. Gradual access to the single market, legislative harmonization, and reforms in the field of economic governance are among the key elements of this approach. Regional economic cooperation is also particularly encouraged by the European Union in this process. Liberalizing trade and strengthening economic ties among Western Balkan countries is considered important both for increasing regional stability and facilitating integration into the EU internal market.

Therefore, the EU seeks to advance economic integration in the Western Balkans not only through bilateral relations with the Union but also at the regional level. Regional cooperation serves as a kind of "preparatory area" for Western Balkan countries to comply with the rules of the common market. On the other hand, the European Union's approach to economic integration also creates a significant dilemma for the Western Balkans. On the other hand, greater economic union with the EU would give countries in the region real benefits, like access to markets, investments, and financial aid. This, however, comes with risks like more pressure on competition, strain on sectors that aren't doing well, and growing economic dependence. This situation shows that while economic integration in the Western Balkans is progressing quantitatively, it remains limited qualitatively.

So, in the last few years, the European Union has been working to make its policy for economic integration in the Western Balkans more balanced. The Growth Plan and economic investment initiatives are meant to help with more than just market integration. They also help with things like infrastructure improvements, digital transformation, and the green economy. This approach of the EU is based on the assumption that economic integration gains meaning not only through increased trade volume but also through the development of production capacity

and competitiveness. In this context, economic integration for the Western Balkans has gone beyond being a technical dimension of the EU accession process and has acquired the character of a comprehensive development and transformation process. From the EU's perspective, economic integration is seen as a strategic tool for regional stability and the sustainability of the Union's enlargement policy; for the Western Balkan countries, this process represents a multifaceted integration process encompassing both significant opportunities and serious reform obligations.

### **11. Mitigating Third-Party Influence and Upholding EU Principles**

The Western Balkans has become a region characterized by systemic rivalries due to the competition of integration models based on EU values and the transactional influence of non-western third parties. Although the EU holds the most crucial trading relations with the Western Balkan countries, the slow developments of the region's enlargement, the stagnation and delays have created a geopolitical space where non-western third parties such as Russia and China can fill. Third-parties' presence and power, although indirectly, reduce the encouragement to comply with two very important documents: the Copenhagen Criteria and the *Acquis Communautaire*. Main reasons include the necessities which come with the EU integration process and accession negotiations. Because the support of the EU leans on conditions such as judicial reforms, anti-corruption fights and the freedom of media mentioned in the Copenhagen Criteria<sup>142</sup>. However, the engagement of China and Russia do not have such requirements. This alternative enables the Western Balkans' governments to elude EU pressure on urgency of reforms which results in a delay in facing the cost of democratic backsliding. Because the Western Balkans can secure their loans from China, and get political support from Russia. The

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<sup>142</sup> "The Enlargement of the Union" (European Parliament, 2025), accessed December 31, 2025, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU\\_5.5.1.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/ftu/pdf/en/FTU_5.5.1.pdf).

lack of transparency of Chinese projects which can also avoid public procurement regulations, and the nationalist perspective of Russian influence are the downsides of these unconditional support that can hinder checks and balances system and accountability mechanisms.

When the Western Balkan countries get their investments from China rather than the EU, legal and regulatory alignment does not occur with the *Acquis Communautaire*<sup>143</sup>. Mostly, Chinese investments do not comply with the EU's competition, state laws, and standards regarding the environment and labor. In this situation, although rules aligned with EU standards are valid on paper, in practice there are alternatives alongside them. This creates scepticism towards EU norms, and reflects EU accession as optional or unnecessary.

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<sup>143</sup> "List of EU Acquis by Negotiation Chapters," Directorate for EU Affairs, September 29, 2017, accessed December 31, 2025, [https://www.ab.gov.tr/list-of-eu-acquis-by-negotiation-chapters\\_42148\\_en.html](https://www.ab.gov.tr/list-of-eu-acquis-by-negotiation-chapters_42148_en.html).



## **12. Points to Be Addressed By the Council Decision for Agenda Item B**

- 12.1. Strengthening the credibility of the EU enlargement policy as a cornerstone of long-term regional stability.
- 12.2. Promoting inclusive political processes and reconciliation to mitigate the impact of ethnic divisions.
- 12.3. Reinforcing EU conditionality in support of democracy, the rule of law, and fundamental rights.
- 12.4. Advancing the gradual integration of Western Balkan economies into the EU internal market.
- 12.5. Supporting structural economic reforms to enhance competitiveness and convergence.
- 12.6. Countering the growing influence of non-EU actors that undermine EU standards and values.
- 12.7. Safeguarding alignment with the Copenhagen Criteria and the *acquis communautaire*.
- 12.8. Enhancing transparency and accountability in external investments and infrastructure projects.
- 12.9. Strengthening monitoring and implementation of reforms under Chapters 23 and 24.
- 12.10. Reinforcing the EU's role in conflict prevention and regional stability.
- 12.11. Enhancing cooperation in countering corruption, organized crime, and hybrid threats.

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