Doubts about the European Union’s commitment to extending membership to the western Balkans are being reinforced by the slow pace of reform in many of the candidate countries. Europe’s World asks a cross-section of decisionmakers and opinion-formers for their ideas on how to get the accession process firmly back on track.

“People in the Balkans need to feel the tangible benefits of EU accession”
EU enlargement on its own is not a credible foreign policy*
by Kurt Bassuener, Senior Associate of the Democratization Policy Council

Balkan countries may have to accede to the EU en bloc to avert growing bi-lateral tensions
by Erhard Busek, Co-ordinator of the South-Eastern Co-operative Initiative (SECI) and former Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

The rationale for further EU enlargement must not become the focus of dispute
by Vladimir Drobnjak, Croatia's chief negotiator for accession negotiations with the EU

The test of leadership will be in how it seeks to create viable multi-ethnic societies
by Pieter Feith, EU Special Representative to Kosovo

The EU must provide guidance and encouragement through tangible initiatives
by Franco Frattini, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Italy

The four C-words: credibility, consistency, commitment, courage*
by Stefan Füle, EU Commissioner for enlargement and neighbourhood policy

Balkan countries need to engage with the EU in more predictable and effective partnerships
by Venera Hajrullahu, Executive Director of the Kosovar Civil Society Foundation

The greatest obstacles to enlargement are unresolved bi-lateral disputes
by Werner Hoyer, Minister of State at the German Foreign Office

EU accession is simply an opportunity that can't be missed
by Skender Hyseni, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Kosovo

Coherent public messages must to explain to Europeans why Balkan integration is so important
by Valentin Inzko, EU High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina

The EU should enter into a long-term and neutral engagement over Kosovo
by Oliver Ivanovic, Serbia's State Secretary for Kosovo and Metohija

EU enlargement has been the only viable policy for the western Balkans
by Goran Jandrokovic, Croatia's Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration

The key to the enlargement is maintaining the right political temperature
by Eduard Kukan, Former Foreign Affairs Minister of Slovakia

Better management of domestic demand is key to next stage of economic growth
by Philippe Maystadt, President of the European Investment Bank

Even Iceland’s candidacy is expected to create positive momentum for the Balkans
by Antonio Milošoski, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia
The independence honeymoon is over

When Kosovo declared its independence from Serbia in February 2008 there was great optimism among the territory's ethnic Albanians, if not among ethnic Serbs. A year later, and despite international recognition for independent Kosovo, a Gallup survey revealed growing disillusion with the new status among those who had been so hopeful. Although three-quarters of Kosovo Albanians said they felt independence had been a good thing, this was considerably fewer than the 93% who had greeted the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008. Ethnic Serbs, meanwhile, became yet more convinced that independence had been a mistake: 80% said it was a 'bad thing' in 2009, compared to 74% a year earlier.

Doubts also grew within both communities about the possibility of peaceful coexistence. In 2008, over seven out of ten Kosovo Albanians had said that they could live peacefully with ethnic Serbs. This fell to six out of ten in 2009. Kosovo Serbs, always sceptical on the question, became even more so: in 2008, 17% thought peaceful coexistence was possible, but by 2009 this had shrunk to 12%.

No deal on Kosovo home-rule in exchange for EU membership, say Serbs

Would Serbia be prepared to trade sovereignty over Kosovo for membership of the EU? Not according to a Gallup poll in which 70% opposed the suggestion that Serbia relinquish its claim over its southern province in return for joining the EU. About the same proportion felt that Kosovo 'has to remain a part of Serbia' and said that Serbia would never recognise Kosovo. This fell to six out of ten in 2009. Kosovo Serbs, always sceptical on the question, became even more so: in 2008, 17% thought peaceful coexistence was possible, but by 2009 this had shrunk to 12%.

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