



**THE SEIMAS OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**OPINION ON THE COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE
EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND
SOCIAL COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS, “A CREDIBLE
ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE FOR AND ENHANCED EU ENGAGEMENT WITH
THE WESTERN BALKANS” (COM (2018) 65 FINAL)**

Vilnius

7 March 2018

The Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania (hereinafter referred to as the Committee)

1. Shares the Commission’s view that a firm, merit-based prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the Union’s very own political, security and economic interest. It is a geostrategic investment in a stable, strong, united Europe based on common values. Therefore, the EU has to maintain its open door policy.
2. Takes the view that the EU should also play an active role in its Eastern Neighbourhood with regard to the countries that associate their future with Euro-Atlantic integration. In this context, the Committee stresses the need to maintain engagement of the EU, its Member States and Eastern partners in the Eastern Partnership policy and calls for the continuation of the discussions on the EU membership perspective for the aspiring Eastern Partnership countries.
3. Takes the view that conclusion of accession negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia in order for them to be ready for membership by 2025 is a very ambitious prospect. The accession process should not be automatic, Rather, it should be objective and build on each country’s real progress made. Therefore, the Committee supports the Strategy provisions on assessment of progress made by individual countries, key reforms, a clear European orientation, strategic communication, good neighbourly relations and resolution of bilateral disputes.
4. Points out the need for the Western Balkan countries to enhance their economic integration with the EU both through enhanced connectivity as well as through full conformity with the Energy Community Treaty, Transport Community Treaty, and EU rules relevant for the European Common Aviation Area, by which the countries in question have committed to adopt the energy and transport *acquis* as well as related standards well before accession.

5. Points out that EU membership is not possible without sharing the Union's principles, values and goals as well as without full alignment with the common foreign and security policy. The countries of the Western Balkans must speed up their alignment with all EU foreign policy positions, including restrictive measures. The Committee welcomes the progress made by Albania and Montenegro in fully aligning their foreign policy with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. The Committee regrets the fact that Serbia, as a candidate country, is moving in the opposite direction and increasingly failing to align its foreign and security policy with the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy (Serbia's alignment with EU positions and Council Decisions for 2017 stands at 48 %, down from 63 % in 2016 and 64 % in 2015). The Committee calls on Serbia to promptly achieve full alignment of its foreign policy with the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy.

6. Underlines the role of strategic communication in gaining more public support for further enlargement of the EU as well as in fighting against disinformation, and in enhancing dialogue and mutual understanding between the EU and the Western Balkan countries.

7. Forwards this opinion to the European Commission, the European External Action Service, the Council of the European Union, the European Parliament, as well as national parliaments and governments of the Member States.

*Approved at the Committee meeting of 7 March 2018
Minutes No 105-P-17*