



**POSITION STATEMENT ON EU ENLARGEMENT STRATEGY TO WESTERN
BALKANS, UKRAINE, MOLDOVA, AND GEORGIA IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL
REALITY**

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The Balkans-Ukraine Cooperation Network (BUCN) bring together civil society organizations, groups, and activists from the Western Balkans and Ukraine, aiming to initiate and expand interaction and cooperation among different sectors in Ukraine and WB countries in accordance with the Joint Civil Society Declaration on the Western Balkans - Ukraine Cooperation. BUCN was established in October 2022 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. BUCN gathers over 20 members across six Western Balkans¹ countries and Ukraine.

We in BUCN believe the EU should:

- support full-fledged European integration of the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia and review the broken EU accession process based on common vision values and joint interests
- ensure security and prosperity on the European continent and eliminate barriers that may divide Europe.

Context

Russia's unprovoked and illegal invasion of Ukraine has a deep impact on all of Europe and the global order. Russian full-scale conventional war against Ukraine is transforming modern Europe geopolitically, economically, energy, morally, and, without any doubts, in the security sphere. The newest developments urged changing the paradigm regarding EU enlargement to ensure a practical and proactive approach for the countries with EU membership perspective - the Association Trio² of Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia (Trio), and Western Balkans Six (WB6) countries. This will complete the final unification of Europe, strengthen and expand its potential and ensure a deterrent effect on Russia's aggressive aspirations in the future.

There is a need to launch a single format for promoting the EU enlargement process with the participation of the Trio and the WB6. It is obvious that at the moment, these countries have much more in common from the point of view of European integration than the countries of the Eastern Partnership (EaP)³. Currently, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia remain part of the EaP, which was not designed with enlargement objectives in mind and the new geopolitical context inevitably downgrades the purpose of EaP and shrinks its agenda.

¹ Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo*

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

² Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia established the Association Trio format in 2021 with the aim of cooperating on EU integration issues.

³ Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine



Under the current threats and challenges, there is a need to open a direct dialogue and create linkages between the Trio and WB6 stakeholders, and to develop a multilateral platform to further collaboration and joint actions for protecting democracy, peacebuilding, economic development, and boosting EU enlargement processes in countries with EU membership perspective.

The new approach will ensure mutual reinforcement, the EU will create a homogenous and unified approach to all future members of the union, while Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and WB6 will enhance their cooperation toward democratic transformation and strengthen the geopolitical, security and economic perspectives of the European Union. This kind of synergy is indispensable for both, the EU members and the candidate countries. A strengthened approach will also create conditions for more efficient use of the European Union's financial instruments designed to support the enlargement process.

BUCN position and key recommendations:

1. The EU should set up a **Multilateral Partnership Platform** for cooperation between high-level officials, civil society, youth, and businesses from EU candidate countries - **WB6, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia**. The platform will increase connectivity and experience exchange between candidate and potential candidate countries aiming at supporting the EU integration processes.
2. The EU should support the further CSOs development within the candidate and potential candidate countries and **establish a Civil Society Partnership** to promote contacts among CSOs from WB6 and Trio countries and dialogue with public authorities.
3. The EU should support security cooperation between WB6, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia considering building it within **the framework of The Kyiv Security Compact**.
4. The EU should consider closing the development gap between the EU members and the candidate countries by enhancing economic and business development cooperation, including the investment of **the EU pre-accession funds** and offering to join **the EU single market**.
5. The EU should invest in reinforcing exchange in the sphere of education and cultural initiatives, as well as youth cooperation in WB6, Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia.



Elaborated areas of recommendations

1. *Reviving EU accession processes*

- The EU should reinvigorate EU accession processes, including **revision of the EU's Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies**, to sustain and accelerate progress for all candidate countries, keeping a credible perspective on future accession.
- The **establishment of a Partnership platform between WB6, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia** is required to ensure enhanced bilateral and multilateral coordination of all relevant activities between candidate countries as well as their interaction with the EU. The EU should develop a multilateral track to provide a new framework where common challenges of candidate countries will be addressed and a forum to share information and experience on the candidate countries' steps towards transition, reform, and modernization and give the EU an additional instrument to accompany these processes.
- The EU should provide WB6 and the Trio countries **an observer status in formal and informal Council meetings**, especially in the areas of justice and home affairs, foreign policy and defense, energy, and social policy, and other issues of common concern.
- The European Parliament should provide political support to EU enlargement by inviting parliamentarians from the candidate states of **WB6 and the Trio to the regular sessions of the European Parliament** as observers.

2. *Empowering civil society*

- Particular attention should be paid to the involvement of civil society. The EU should support the further development of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) within the candidate and potential candidate countries and **establish a Civil Society Partnership** to promote contacts among CSOs from WB6 and Trio and dialogue with public authorities. The EU should provide political, financial, and technical support to the Partnership activities.
- **Civil society perspective and expertise should be ensured** in the reinvigorating EU enlargement processes as well as monitoring and implementation of vital reforms and political, economic, and social transformation of the candidate countries.
- The EU must support CSOs from WB6, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia in strengthening partnerships and coordination for protecting democracy, enhancing **monitoring and countering hybrid threats, and building the resilience of local populations to disinformation**, including manipulation aiming at challenging the EU's credibility,



undermining public trust in democratic institutions, and deepening polarisation and ethnic divides.

- The alignment of the Candidate countries with EU values and the common foreign and security policy has grown in importance in this new geopolitical context. The EU should increase cooperation with CSOs from the WB6 and Trio to enhance their actions on **influencing policy and decision-making processes**, in particular those **aiming to align the country's policy with the EU framework**, including alignment with EU restrictive measures in response to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine.
- The institutionalised sectoral dialogue formats should be established to ensure the **effective and professional participation of civil society** in the planning and implementation of the reforms, in particular, those related to the national and regional levels to accelerate the EU integration.
- The EU should reinforce EU programmes and regional programmes to ensure **youth** from Trio and WB6 become active participants in the EU accession negotiations and the enlargement process.
- The EU should support the facilitation of experience exchanges between Western Balkans and Ukraine in post-war recovery processes, including reintegration of refugees and internally displaced persons, missing person programs, war crimes, justice, reconstruction, and other topics.

3. *Enhancing security*

- The conceptual basis of the security cooperation of the EU with Ukraine, Moldova, and the Western Balkans can be built within **the framework of The Kyiv Security Compact**, as well as based on the development of different ideas which already exist in the European expert community.
- The creation of a new security framework can begin on the basis of **the Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine** (EUMAM Ukraine) with the subsequent joining of Moldova and Georgia to this mission. In the case of expanding a similar format of cooperation to WB6, it will be possible to extend the mission with appropriate consideration of regional specifics.
- As a result of the political reformatting and fusion of Trio and WB6, we will get a tool and a framework for bringing **the wider region closer to the EU**.
- The EU should play a more active and leading role in **facilitating the transformation** of Trio and WB6 in preparation for joining the EU. In the field of security, the transition from the amorphous and **ineffective format of the Eastern Partnership** to a framework oriented to practical cooperation and completing concrete tasks will change the spirit of cooperation between the EU and the countries of the region. Based on the common



motivations, values, aspirations, and threat perception, as well as on the ideas of The Kyiv Security Compact, the new format will be the beginning of a powerful transformation of Trio and Western Balkans for joining the EU.

- The EU should support developing a joint cooperation format between WB6, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia for countering the Russia-led hybrid interferences, including **disinformation, misinformation, propaganda, activities of Russian proxies and other threats**, maintaining regular contacts with independent researchers and civil society.

4. Increasing economic and business development cooperation

- The EU should consider the investment of **the EU pre-accession funds (IPA)** to support the cooperation of WB6 and Trio in adopting and implementing the political, institutional, legal, administrative, social, and economic reforms required to comply with Union values and to progressively align to Union rules, standards, policies and practices with a view to Union membership, thereby contributing to their stability, security, and prosperity.
- The EU should support **the development and cooperation of the private sector** in the WB6, Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia, especially SMEs. Particular attention should be paid to the sustainable transformation of the energy sector, agri-food systems, rural development, utilization of transit potential, and sustainable tourism.
- The EU should consider the instruments to help to facilitate and encourage Trio and WB6 business sector presence in each other's markets as well as in the EU single market with **enhancing liberalization and the decreasing of existing bureaucratic barriers** to promote mutually beneficial business projects.
- The EU should offer the WB6 and Trio countries the opportunity to join **the EU single market**, with full accession remaining the end goal.

5. Improving educational, cultural, and youth cooperation

- The EU should consider investing in actions that **reinforce cultural exchange** and support establishing and intensifying close and continuous contact between the people and cultural institutions from Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and the Western Balkans, including through the Creative Europe program.
- The EU should support the **experience exchange** between stakeholders from the EU, WB6, and Trio working in the sphere of education and cultural initiatives, including those which deal with the past and historical inheritance.



- The EU should help to expand cooperation and exchanges between **youth organizations and educational institutions** to strengthen cultural, social, and educational relations between WB6, Trio, and the EU.

Endorsement

PROI association (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
Youth Advocacy Board (Bosnia and Herzegovina)
New Geopolitics Research Network (Ukraine)
Analytical Centre for Balkans Study (Ukraine)
NGO LEGIS Skopje (North Macedonia)
Balkans Ukraine Cooperation Platform (Ukraine)
Horizon Civitas (North Macedonia)
StopFake (Ukraine)
Center for Strategic Analysis (Serbia)
The Balkan Forum (Kosovo)
EU Policy Hub (Albania)
National Ukrainian Youth Association (Ukraine)
ADASTRA Think Tank (Ukraine)
Boris Divkovic Foundation (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

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