

---

## **EU-Balkans: Varhelyi (Commission), “enlargement is top priority”. New rules for accession negotiations**

(Brussels) “The European Union enlargement to the Western Balkans is a top priority for the Commission. We are working on three tracks. Firstly, today we propose concrete steps on how to enhance the accession process. While we are strengthening and improving the process, the goal remains accession and full EU membership. Secondly, and in parallel, the Commission stands firmly by its recommendations to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania and will soon provide an update on the progress made by these two countries. Thirdly, in preparation of the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb in May, the Commission will come forward with an economic and investment development plan for the region”. Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Olivér Várhelyi (pictured) presents a proposal aimed at driving “forward the EU accession process, by making it more credible, with a stronger political steer, more dynamic and predictable”. The Commission will provide “greater clarity on what the Union expects of enlargement countries at different stages of the process, and what the positive and negative consequences are of progress or lack thereof”. Equally, the Commission proposes measures sanctioning any stagnation or backsliding in reform implementation and in meeting the requirements of the accession process. The Commission “hopes that Member States will endorse the proposal, in parallel with the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, ahead of the European Union-Western Balkans Summit in Zagreb on 6-7 May”.

Marco Calvarese