***PRESS RELEASE***

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***Reinforced impetus to the EU enlargement process - a crucial element for the climate and energy reforms in the neighbourhood***

**Brussels, 20 October 2021 -** The European Union released yesterday its annual [enlargement country](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_5275) reports on the progress of the Western Balkan states [on the road towards joining EU members](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/168/the-western-balkans). Focusing on climate change, the joint message for all countries is that progress is limited and more needs to be done in terms of staying in line with Paris Agreement goals. **The reports call on the Western Balkans to set coal phase out dates**, **establish a carbon pricing framework, comply with the Energy Community Treaty, and work on cohesion of the legislative framework in order to reach** [**climate neutrality by 2050**](https://berlinprocess.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Leaders-Declaration-on-the-Green-Agenda-for-the-WB.pdf)**.** Failing to do so, the region faces dire economic consequences of late fossil fuel phase-out, as well as trade barriers such as the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism.

The tasks at hand are challenging considering region wide [rocketing air pollution](https://bankwatch.org/beyond-coal/airpollution-balkans), lack of implementation of climate, environment and energy plans, heavy investments into gas infrastructure while new coal is still on the horizon. **This is precisely why the accession process requires strong EU leadership, including a clear timeline, in order to retain the momentum and motivation for reform, in particular on chapters 15 (energy) and 27 (environment and climate) of the** [**EU legislative framework**](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/conditions-membership/chapters-acquis_en)**. This means, inter alia setting a legal framework for climate action and adaptation and adopting long-term strategies with realistic action plans. Moreover, the region must introduce national platforms that will monitor, report and verify greenhouse gas emissions.**

*“While the progress reports show that the EU is providing recommendations which should help countries fully comply with the EU acquis, the messages on enlargement should be clearer and turn into time-defined action. The process should not lose momentum otherwise it risks hampering the progress made so far, including on climate and environmental policies. This of course does not mean that the Western Balkans countries should delay cooperation and obligations to transpose and enforce EU law.” says Viktor Berishaj from CAN Europe.*

Slowing down and mitigating destructive consequences of climate change is the most urgent issue of our time. Most EU states have announced coal phase-out by 2030, and are moving towards energy efficiency, renewables and sustainability. The WB region is already being substantially affected by the adverse [impacts of climate change](https://www.rcc.int/news/383/rcc-publishes-study-on-climate-change-in-the-western-balkans-alarming-increase-of-temperature-over-the-whole-territory) and needs to rapidly deploy all its efforts to minimise the current and the anticipated damage. Putting into place European Union policies will only be beneficial for this economically and socially deteriorating region, where energy poverty is escalating, and air pollution [caused nearly 12000 related deaths](https://www.complyorclose.org/) both in the region and in the neighbouring EU states.

**ENDS**

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**About CAN Europe**

*Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe is Europe's leading NGO coalition fighting dangerous climate change. With over 170 member organisations active in 38 European countries, representing over 1.500 NGOs and more than 47 million citizens, CAN Europe promotes sustainable climate, energy and development policies throughout Europe.*