

(English version)

**Question for written answer E-004692/25
to the Commission
Sebastião Bugalho (PPE)
(26 November 2025)**

Subject: Enlargement, China and geopolitical resilience

At a time of profound global change, enlargement is an essential geopolitical tool for the European Union. Gradual accession mechanisms have been key for candidate countries' path towards the EU — especially for Albania and Montenegro, which are expected to join the EU by 2030. Their progress reflects the EU's political commitment to candidate countries and those countries' desire to become part of an enlarged Union.

China's presence in the Western Balkans is strongly felt, however. From infrastructure projects to economic and military partnerships, recently joined by closer security and defence cooperation with Serbia, Chinese influence could shape the region's path towards the EU and undermine European standards, the single market and the legitimacy of institutions required by the accession process.

Can the Commission therefore say:

1. Given China's growing influence in the Western Balkans, how will the region's engagement with the EU be ensured?
2. What diplomatic efforts will enable the accession process to be balanced with China-EU relations?
3. How can we boost influence in candidate countries and prevent other global powers from becoming those regions' primary strategic partners?

Submitted: 26.11.2025

**Answer given by Ms Kos on behalf of the European Commission
(5 June 2026)**

Enlargement is a geostrategic imperative. In this context, it is important to keep enlargement partners firmly anchored to the EU through a credible and merit-based membership perspective, deep economic integration, and close political and security cooperation.

The Commission is aware of the growing presence of China and other global actors across the Western Balkans. Enlargement partners are regularly reminded that their engagements with third countries must be transparent, financially sustainable, and compatible with EU rules and standards.

In addition to the prospect of membership, the EU's engagement with candidate countries and potential candidates focuses on gradual integration, including Single Euro Payments Area, Roam like at Home, Green Lanes, innovation hubs, critical medicines and tourism services.

Furthermore, the EU continues to be the region's largest donor and trading partner through its financial assistance. Under the current Multiannual Financial Framework, the EU has allocated over EUR 18 billion to support the region's economic development and green and digital transition.

Sectoral integration (energy, transport, security, migration, telecommunication) has been deepened and there is also ongoing work to expand opportunities for the participation of the Western Balkans partners in the Common Security and Defence Policy, other security initiatives and joint work on resilience to cyber and hybrid threats, including disinformation.

The EU closely monitors the rate of alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy of all enlargement partners, an important indicator of the region's geopolitical orientation. By systematically inviting them to align, the EU aims to ensure strong engagement with the Western Balkans, while also promoting the region's stability, security, and prosperity.
