

Dear President,

I would like to thank you for your participation at the Bled Strategic Forum, and in particular for your memorable speech emphasising the necessity of the EU enlargement in the Western Balkans. I completely agree with you that we must be ready – on both sides – to enlarge by 2030.

It was also encouraging to hear that you expect the European Council to take a position on opening accession negotiations with Ukraine and Moldova, and that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) will be back on the agenda.

Regarding BiH, I would like to encourage you and our colleagues in the European Council to be more ambitious. I expect we will decide on opening accession negotiations with BiH by the end of this year. The arguments for such a decision are, in my view, incomparably stronger than those against. With the decision on opening EU accession negotiations, we would show our understanding of the strategic and stabilising value of the enlargement process, with both gaining relevance following the onset of war in Ukraine. We would also acknowledge the country's notable efforts to progress on its EU path.

I have learned with satisfaction that BiH has recently adopted a number of legislative proposals, which are part of the 14 EU priorities. Regardless of this development, we should not assess BiH's progress toward the EU based solely on this conditionality. To start with, this is a unique conditionality, unknown to other accession countries. Additionally, in the current political circumstances in BiH, the implementation of some conditions may ultimately challenge the political stability, and thus ultimately decrease the attention devoted to the EU integration process, which is not in our interest.

Many very important and long-standing open questions have been resolved. For example, governments at all levels of authority in BiH have been established in record time, the state-level budget has been increased after more than a decade of stagnation, a EUROPOL contact point has been established, and genocide denial rhetoric has declined. Moreover, BiH has reached close to 100% alignment with EU foreign policy, which shows its institutional commitment to the goals and values of the EU. BiH has also fostered solidarity with an EU Member State by offering assistance to my country, Slovenia, after the devastating floods through the Union Civil Protection Mechanism. We must take into account all these positive developments, while acknowledging that opening the accession negotiations would insert an additional positive dynamic into BiH's EU integration process.

Finally, with the war in Ukraine, EU enlargement has become, as I suggested also in my letter last year, a strategic choice and necessity. I am satisfied that this notion has become an important argument during our discussions on granting EU candidate status to BiH. In fact, it has ever since become a widely accepted fact, and is gaining importance with the continuous aggression against Ukraine. We should therefore continue to push back against malign actors in the Western Balkans, including in BiH, by putting the region irreversibly on the EU's path of stability and prosperity.

To conclude, we will have an opportunity to take yet another strategically important decision regarding BiH by the end of the year, and we should seize it.

Please accept, dear President, the assurances of my highest consideration.