



Adis Ahmetovic
Mitglied des Deutschen Bundestages

Pressemitteilung

Third speech by Adis Ahmetovic, MdB, in the German Bundestag - "Change of times in the German Western Balkans policy"

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Adis Ahmetovic, MdB
Mitglied im Auswärtigen Ausschuss
Platz der Republik 1
11011 Berlin
Telefon: +49 30 227-73194
adis.ahmetovic@bundestag.de

Wahlkreisbüro:
Im Kreuzkampe 1
30655 Hannover
Telefon: +49 511 699 805
adis.ahmetovic.wk@bundestag.de

Pressekontakt:
Jasmin Schönberger
adis.ahmetovic.ma07@bundestag.de
Telefon: 0176-22882667

<https://adis-ahmetovic.de/>

Third speech by Adis Ahmetovic, MdB, in the German Bundestag on June 22, 2022 on TOP 4 - Motion CDU/CSU "Renewing the EU perspective for the Western Balkan states with a committed policy".

- The spoken word applies -

Dear Madam President
dear Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am pleased that we are once again discussing the Western Balkans today. After a long period in which German policy on the Western Balkans focused on maintaining the status quo, the region is now receiving more attention again. This is clearly noticeable.

With the new federal government, there is movement in German Western Balkans policy - a new wind is blowing in the German Bundestag - and that is a good thing.

Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, Northern Macedonia, Serbia. These are the six small countries in southeastern Europe that we are talking about. Small - but by no means insignificant. Often these countries and the entire Western Balkans region are presented as the periphery - the backyard of Europe.

Ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you one thing, however: Southeastern Europe, the Western Balkans - this is not the backyard, but the inner courtyard of Europe and as such fundamentally important for peace and security on our continent.

Nearly four months have passed since Russia's invasion of Ukraine. A war of aggression that still deeply shocks us four months later. In close consultation with our international partners, we have responded decisively, clearly showing that we stand by Ukraine. We have declared



a "turning point in time" and this also means a turning point in Germany's Western Balkans policy.

The European Union is one of the most successful peace projects in history - a guarantor of peace, freedom and progress for its members. It is therefore our responsibility to now actively promote the rapprochement of the Western Balkans with the EU. Now is the historic moment: we must support the Western Balkan countries on their way into the EU!

What will happen if we fail to do so and continue to neglect the region is already evident:

Third countries such as China, the United Arab Emirates and, indeed, Russia have long recognized the EU's hesitancy as a geostrategic and economic opportunity. For years, they have been expanding their autocratic influence and filling the power vacuum left by the EU in Southeastern Europe.

It should worry us when state presidents from the region are courted in St. Petersburg and there is talk of friendly relations.

It should worry us when the Russian ambassador to Bosnia and Herzegovina threatens the country if it joins NATO.

It is not too late, but we must take action now.

It is not only the war in Ukraine and the pushing back of these third countries that create the current window of opportunity, but also the consent of the population. A majority of the people in the Western Balkans are still in favor of EU accession! However, they have been waiting for a long time - in some cases too long - and are disappointed by the stagnating accession process.

Ladies and gentlemen, it should be clear to all of us that without rapid progress in the EU accession negotiations, this support for the EU in the Western Balkans will collapse and the European spirit will be extinguished.

North Macedonia is a significant example of this: On its way into the EU in 2019, the country peacefully settled a years-long name dispute with Greece. An outstanding historical achievement! When accession negotiations to the EU were then to begin in 2020, Bulgaria used its veto, arguing that North Macedonia should recognize its Bulgarian roots. Dear colleagues: Such blocking behavior harms the EU!



That is why I say quite clearly: We welcome our Chancellor's proposals to reform decision-making within the EU and to put EU enlargement in Southeastern Europe back on the agenda. Not least through his trip to the region, Olaf Scholz has shown what a high priority enlargement is for the German government. That, too, is part of the turn of the times.

Turning times - that means change, which we must shape by acting decisively and daring to do something. I would like to outline once again what this means for the Western Balkans:

1. Bosnia and Herzegovina should be granted candidate status at the EU summit tomorrow.
2. visa liberalization for Kosovo should be initiated quickly.
3. 3) The accession negotiations with Montenegro, which have been ongoing since 2012 and are currently stalling, need a new dynamic and rapid, visible progress.
4. accession negotiations with northern Macedonia and Albania should be opened quickly. Bulgaria's veto must be overcome.

Dear colleagues: Let's work together to prove as early as tomorrow's EU summit that the EU is credible and capable of action.

Chancellor, dear Olaf, Foreign Minister, dear Annalena, as you can read, hear and feel, you have the backing from Parliament for this. Let us be active now.

Let us finally accept the Western Balkan states into the European Union, into the European family.

The hearts of the Western Balkans still beat for the EU. It is not yet too late - but we must become active now!

Thank you for your attention!