

**Áron James Miszlivetz**

## **New Commission but Old Challenges: Can It Deliver on Faster Integration?**

The new line-up of Commissioners will define the next half-decade and will determine the path the European Union will follow in different policy areas, including new and existing ones. Enlargement seemed to slow down with the new membership of Croatia and even reversed with Brexit in 2016. Later, other challenges such as managing Covid and the war in Ukraine seemed to take over the agenda of European leaders. What can the new EU Commissioner on Enlargement continue of its predecessor's work to be successful, and what obstacles will he or she need to overcome for countries from the Western Balkans to join the EU?

This week under the United Nations High Level panels, leaders from all around the world gathered to discuss the state of the world. On an informal side-event, the EU High Representative met with Western Balkan leaders from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. The meeting was relevant for the candidate countries in order to resolve their bilateral disputes, e.g. Serbia–Kosovo dialogue as well as between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. While Bulgaria wants North Macedonia to recognise<sup>1</sup> its citizens as those who took part in its state-building including them in the constitution, the latter is reluctant to do so.

Soon after the incident, the Hungarian Prime Minister<sup>2</sup> Viktor Orbán met with its North Macedonian counterpart to offer a solution as an honest broker to resolve the dispute with pragmatic solutions on the table. During the meeting of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (Coreper) Albania received a green light to continue, however, due to its dispute with an EU member, North Macedonia did not receive a positive answer. A possible solution would be a legal agreement between the two countries, including Bulgarians in the constitution and at the same time letting the country move forward with EU integration. During her speech at the UN General Assembly, the President of

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<sup>1</sup> NIKOLOV 2024.

<sup>2</sup> Euronews 2024b.

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North Macedonia further echoed the comments saying that EU membership was like “waiting for Godot”.<sup>3</sup>

It will be the task of the new enlargement commissioner Marta Kos,<sup>4</sup> a Slovenian diplomat to find a quick solution to this new dispute. The EU will also need to decide how it will make decisions with 30+ members; institutional reforms will need to take place as well as the restructuring of the common agricultural policy. The next five years will also be a challenge for the EU: First, regarding how Russia’s war in Ukraine will end. Second, how can it keep up competitiveness with new members joining, and third, should it give back more national decision-making regarding economic policies to Member States, especially to those who are smaller?

The EU – as always – is in a time of crisis management; however, it will need to come up with radical changes<sup>5</sup> if it wants to become a global economic player. Citizens will need to have better social and transport infrastructure, better access to services, radically cut red tape for small businesses, starting reindustrialisation of certain sectors (pharmaceuticals, car industry, robotics, biotechnology) as the backbone of the economy, while at the same time boosting green investments in other sectors. The mergers of big companies should become much easier on a European level to boost startup unicorns in the continent. If the EU wants to win the 22<sup>nd</sup> century it will need to change how it sees Member States and their citizens as well as first becoming a leader on the continent, only then can it have a say in global affairs.

30 September 2024

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<sup>3</sup> Euronews 2024a.

<sup>4</sup> VINOCUR–HAJDARI 2024.

<sup>5</sup> European Commission 2024.

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