
EU TO BACK STARTING ENTRY TALKS WITH ALBANIA, REP. OF MACEDONIA

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The European Union will recommend starting accession talks with Albania and the Republic of Macedonia, widening the blocs push into the Western Balkans, according to Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn.

The EU Commission will soon recommend, most likely by the summer, that member states begin accession negotiations with Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hahn said in an interview with Germanys Die Welt newspaper published Thursday. We believe that both countries have made important reforms in the past, and are thus qualified for this step.

The Republic of Macedonia has been a candidate for EU membership since 2005 and has recently made a push to solve a name dispute with neighboring Greece that dates back to the independence of the former region of Yugoslavia in 1991. German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Wednesday that a solution has never been as close as it is now.

Bulgarian Foreign Minister Ekaterina Zaharieva said this month that she hoped the decision on starting entry talks could be taken at an EU summit in June.

Albania, an EU candidate since 2014, has done a lot in the fight against organized crime, Hahn said.

The two countries will join Montenegro and Serbia, which started accession talks in 2012 and 2014, respectively, and could become members of the EU as early as 2025. Bosnia Herzegovina has applied but hasnt been recognized as a candidate yet.

In the Welt interview, Hahn also said that the EU Commission will highlight significant deficits in the rule of law in Turkey in an upcoming report.

The EU and Turkey should focus on the development of a strategic partnership and not on accession negotiations in the coming years, he said.

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