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**HAHN: COMMISSION WILL RECOMMEND OPENING OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH ALBANIA AND NORTH MACEDONIA**

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European Commissioner for Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations Johannes Hahn expressed his confidence that the Commission will recommend opening of negotiating chapters with Albania and North Macedonia at the end of May, Handelsblatt reported on Friday.

According to Hahn, the recommendation will be made on the basis of criteria mutually agreed upon by EU member states. The decision will then be passed to the members themselves.

Hahn believes that both Albania and North Macedonia have deserved the opening of negotiations, which was postponed in June last year.

Historical agreement on ending the name dispute with Greece and friendship accords with Bulgaria are pathbreaking signals to the entire region that resolutions of long-standing disputes are possible. (North Macedonia) has also made good progress when it comes to internal reforms. The country has deserved a green light for the opening of accession negotiations as early as possible – before the summer break, stated Hahn.

As for Albania, Commissioner Hahn believes that the country has also deserved the start of negotiations due to internal reforms, most especially judiciary reform, but that it also needs to further tackle the problems of corruption and organised crime.

EUs trustworthiness is on the line, he reminded.

Not recognizing objectively achieved progress would have dramatic consequences for candidate countries and the entire region \* What motivation would Western Balkan countries have to implement hard reforms, or resolve bilateral disputes, such as the one between Serbia and Kosovo, if they cannot make further steps on their EU path?, Hahn emphasised.

Asked about today's Western Balkan Summit in Berlin, Hahn stated that he expects that the dialogue between Kosovo and Serbia will be unblocked, as well as that all EU member states will support the resolution of the issue of Kosovo.

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