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## **EU: Albania and North Macedonia opening accession negotiations now. Von der Leyen, “a historic moment”**

(Brussels) “This is a historic moment. Today, Albania and North Macedonia are starting negotiations to join the European Union. This is your success”. This was stated today by Ursula von der Leyen, president of the European Commission, as she met the Prime Minister of Macedonia, Dimitar Kovachevski, and his Albanian counterpart, Edi Rama. Talks on the future accession of the two Balkan countries have actually started. “This is your and your citizens’ success. You have shown such enduring commitment to our values. You have kept confiding in the accession process. You have strengthened the rule of law. You have fought corruption. You have free media and a lively civil society. You have made countless reforms and have modernised your economies. We, the European Commission, have supported you all the way. And we will keep on doing that”. Von der Leyen added: “Let me make a brief reflection on three points. First, the negotiations: right after today’s Intergovernmental Conference, the EU Commission and the negotiation teams of Albania and North Macedonia will get down to work. The screening of the EU’s acquis will begin. This is the first step in the process. Such screening will enable Albania and North Macedonia to familiarise with the rights and duties of our Union. My second point is: we will keep getting closer in the key areas. For instance, Albania will now join the EU Civil Protection Mechanism”. “North Macedonia will very soon negotiate with us the Frontex agreement. This will strengthen our cooperation in the area of migration”. “My third point is that the advantages will increase as you go on with the talks. There will be an increase in investment. There will be better trade connections. There will be closer cooperation in key industries, such as energy or transport. You will maximise the use and impact of the European Union’s funds. This means new jobs, new business opportunities. This is what your citizens had been waiting for, for so long, and which they have worked so hard for, and this is what they deserve”.

Valentina Bombelli