

**BUNDESREPUBLIK DEUTSCHLAND**  
**DER BUNDESKANZLER**

Berlin, *AP* May 2026

**António Costa**

President of the European Council

**Nikos Christodoulides**

President of the Council of the European Union

**Ursula von der Leyen**

President of the European Commission

Dear António, dear Nikos, dear Ursula,

Enlargement of the European Union is a geopolitical necessity. However, the enlargement process takes much too long. Understandably, this creates frustration among the candidate countries – and also among the Member States.

Therefore, I am convinced that we need a new dynamic for Ukraine as well as for the Western Balkans and Moldova.

Let me start with the case of Ukraine: As we are now in the fifth year of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, we need to quickly advance with Ukraine's EU membership. Ukraine is making significant progress in the accession negotiations. And the European Commission rightfully rates the country among the top frontrunners in the EU accession processes. This is even more remarkable given the most challenging circumstances Ukraine has to deal with as a country at war.

It is obvious that we will not be able to complete the accession process shortly, given the countless hurdles as well as the political complexities of ratification processes in various Member States. However, with a view to the peace process, we do not have

time for further delays. It is now time to boldly move on with Ukraine's EU integration through innovative solutions as immediate steps forward.

We want Ukraine to become a full member of the European Union. Therefore, we should, immediately and without delay, formally open all negotiation clusters. Following-up on our discussions, also with President Zelenskyy at our informal European Council meeting in Cyprus, I suggest to further discuss the idea of what I call an "associate Membership" for Ukraine – a model which would mean a decisive step on Ukraine's path to full membership and help Ukraine on this way. It would not be a membership *light*, but go far beyond the existing Association Agreement, and further accelerate the accession process.

My idea is to make already now a unique step of direct involvement of Ukraine into the substance and structures of the European Union given the particular situation the country has been forced into. What I envisage is a political solution that brings Ukraine substantially closer to the European Union and its core institutions immediately, without affecting the ongoing accession negotiations, but rather fostering and supporting this process. It would not require the ratification of the Accession Treaty according to Article 49 of the Treaty on the European Union nor any Treaty changes, but merely a strong political agreement.

The status as an Associate Member State could include inter alia:

- Participation in meetings of the European Council and the Council of the European Union (without the right to participate in voting),
- An Associate Member of the Commission (without portfolio, fully participating except in voting),
- Associate Members of the European Parliament (without voting rights),

- An Associate Judge of the European Court of Justice (formally an “Assistant Rapporteur”) and so forth.
- The step-by-step application of the *acquis communautaire* according to Ukraine’s progress in the accession negotiations – not automatically, but after approval by the Council and with respective safeguard clauses.
- The EU budget (and the Multiannual Financial Framework) would not immediately apply in full to Ukraine. Instead, programmes under direct management could apply on a step-by-step basis according to the progress in the accession negotiations and with safeguard-clauses.
- Full alignment with the Common Foreign and Security Policy by Ukraine and a political commitment by the Member States to apply Article 42 para. 7 of the Treaty on European Union also regarding Ukraine in order to create a substantial security guarantee.
- A snap-back mechanism (alternatively a sunset-clause) in case of a backsliding in fundamental values of the European Union, notably the rule of law, or structural steps back in the accession negotiations.

Ukraine is a member of the European family and we will continue to support Ukraine in building a peaceful and prosperous future within the European Union. With this approach Ukraine would make a huge step forward, coming immediately close to full membership. We would already now offer to Ukraine a substantial equivalent to membership that exceeds by far what we could deliver in the medium term through our accession methodology, notably given the ratification process. In parallel, we would continue with the regular accession procedure to ensure that we also achieve formal accession as quickly as possible.

As discussed in Cyprus I am well aware of the fact that this proposal will raise a couple of questions on its political, technical and legal feasibility. But I am convinced that all these questions can be solved if we take a constructive approach towards this special status as it will be a strong political signal that Ukraine and its citizens so urgently need in their continuous fight against the Russian aggression.

Let me also make another point very clear: My proposal reflects Ukraine's particular situation, a country at war. It will help facilitate the ongoing peace talks as part of a negotiated peace solution. This is essential not only for Ukraine's but for the entire continent's security. It is equally clear to me that this must not and will not affect the other candidate countries in their accession processes. In fact, they too, will profit from successful peace talks and a safe and secure Ukraine.

And we should stand firm in our promise that the Western Balkans countries and Moldova can join the European Union as laid down in the Copenhagen criteria and envisaged in the Thessaloniki Agenda of 2003. Our goal has not changed: the completion of the European Union by bringing all candidate countries into the Union. I suggest that we look into innovative solutions also for those candidate countries which have been preparing for their accession already for a long time now and that we accelerate their accession process as well. Jointly with colleagues I will continue to work on this.

We could envisage also for these countries substantial steps on their way to membership, with e.g. privileged access to the Internal Market and closer ties with the European institutions in the daily decision-making process, e.g. by granting observer status to Western Balkans countries in all relevant EU institutions, and by holding joint sessions of the European Commission or the European Parliament with representatives of the Western Balkans countries related to issues directly related to the region. Gradual integration could be established by building blocs which could be the basis for full application of the respective policy areas and then be accompanied

by increased support in the process of implementing the acquis. In addition, we could enhance the aforementioned institutional integration on the basis of substantive progress. All this could bring candidate countries significantly closer to us and thus spark a new ambition for further reforms needed to achieve full membership.

I am looking forward to discussing these ideas with you and among our colleagues in the European Council. My aim would be to reach an agreement soon, and to set up a dedicated Task Force to work out the details. I am convinced that we will find a common way for Ukraine as well as for the other candidates!

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "L. D. ...". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial letter.