

ADDRESS BY FEDERAL CHANCELLOR CHRISTIAN STOCKER

Press Conference on the Occasion of the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit

Miločer, 22 October 2026

Dear Milojko,
Dear Friedrich,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for Austria to assume the Presidency of the Berlin Process once again in 2027. This demonstrates that we are a reliable partner for the Western Balkans, just as our German friends are.

The Berlin Process has proven its value. It has brought the Western Balkans closer to the European Union, strengthened regional cooperation and demonstrated that European integration delivers tangible benefits for citizens even before accession.

Our priorities during the Presidency will be young people, reconciliation and regional cooperation. The next generation needs a clear European perspective. That is why we want to connect young people across borders and overcome historical divisions.

The region must build and strengthen ties, both among its countries and with the European Union. Neither can be achieved without the other. There can be no shared future without confronting the past and building trust between our societies. This requires political courage, patience and concrete action.

Austria has set ambitious goals. Nevertheless, the decisive steps must be taken by you, within the region itself. We stand ready to work closely with all our partners to make 2027 a successful year for the Western Balkans. We count on your support!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me to say a few more words about our host.

For the first time since 2013, the accession of a new EU Member State is within reach.

Dear Milojko, Austria fully supports Montenegro as it approaches the final stretch of its accession journey.

Your country's accession to the EU in the near future would be more than deserved. At the same time, it would provide fresh impetus for the entire region and serve as an important demonstration of the European Union's credibility.

The promise made in Thessaloniki 23 years ago must finally be fulfilled.

Until accession itself, we want to use gradual integration to bring all Western Balkan countries into the Single Market step by step, enabling citizens to experience the benefits of EU membership already today.

This must also include the Western Balkans finally becoming part of the EU roaming area. There is simply no justification for the six Western Balkan countries to remain at a disadvantage compared with Ukraine or Moldova.

More than 500,000 people in Austria have roots and family ties in the Western Balkans. Communication between them and their loved ones must become easier and more affordable.

In this context, it would also be important for all six countries to join the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) as soon as possible.

And I am happy to reiterate here what I said last week at the European Council in Brussels: bilateral issues must not be allowed to affect the accession process. They must not be allowed to slow down this process, which is of immense geopolitical importance.

Dear Milojko, let me thank you once again, from the bottom of my heart, for the invitation and for organising this summit.