# Briefing Note

## Securing the Western Balkans' Stake in the EU's €2 Trillion Budget (2028–2034)

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**Executive Summary**

The proposed (almost) €2 trillion EU Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) for 2028–2034 allocates only 2.2% (€42.6 billion) to Enlargement and Neighbourhood policies—spread across ten countries, including the six Western Balkans. This briefing argues that limited envelope threatens to dilute support, stall reforms, and weaken integration, especially as the enlargement agenda expands.

Western Balkans governments must act collectively and urgently to influence MFF negotiations before their conclusion in late 2027. Key requests should include a strengthened and flexible IPA IV+, a new Pre-Accession Transition Facility for near-term joiners, and ringfenced civil society funding.

A coordinated regional strategy in this regard is essential to ensure a credible EU integration path, safeguard regional stability, and counter external influence.

### I. Background and Context

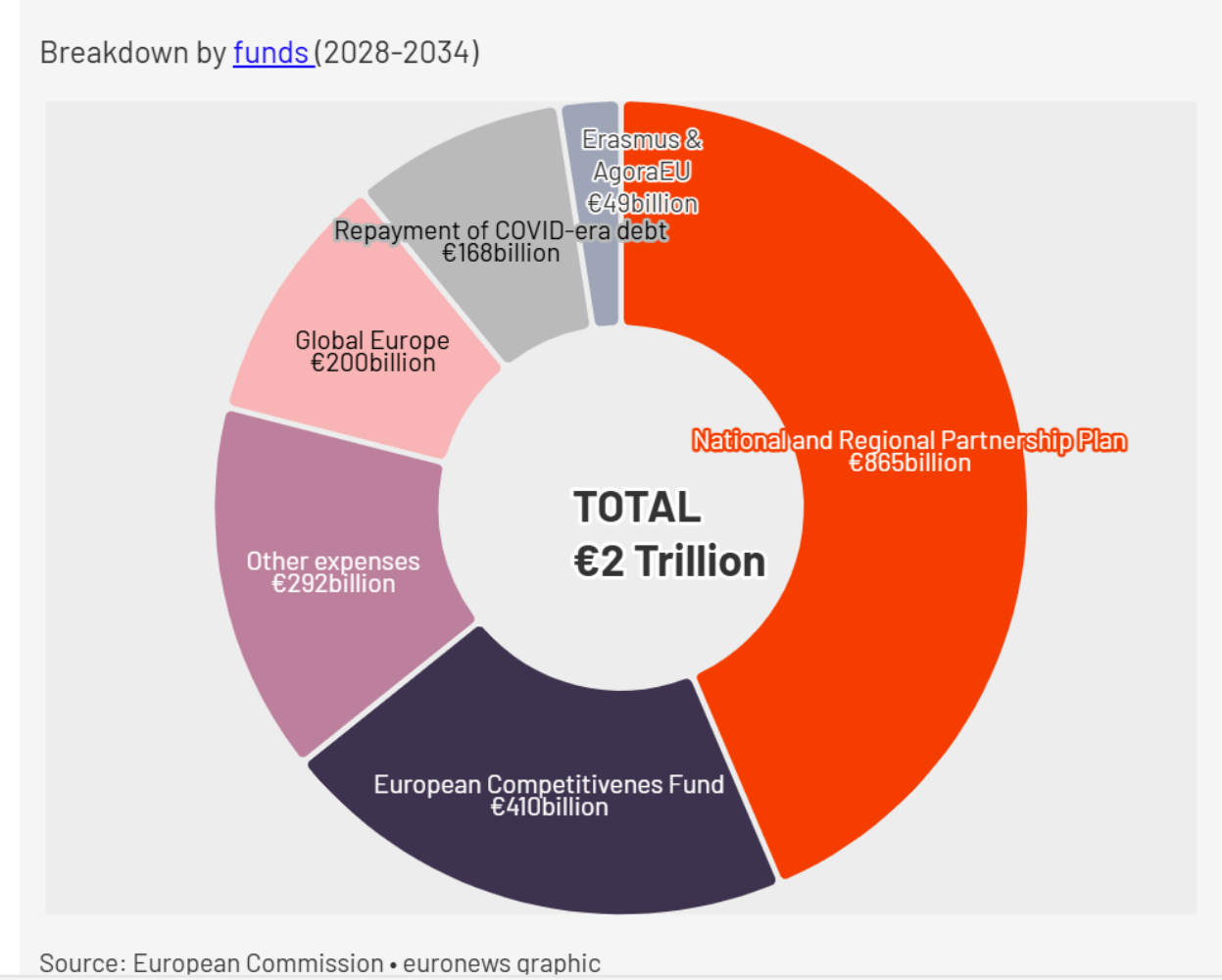
On 16 July 2025, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen unveiled the proposed €2 trillion MFF for 2028–2034, emphasizing its strategic orientation to address contemporary challenges. She stated, "The Western Balkans are not just our neighbors; they are our future partners in building a stronger, more united Europe. Enlargement is a geopolitical necessity and a cornerstone of our commitment to peace and stability on our continent."

Despite this strategic emphasis, the draft MFF allocates only €42.576 billion—approximately 2.2% of the total budget—to the Enlargement and Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI). This funding is to be shared among ten countries, including the six Western Balkans, Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, and Türkiye. As the EU expands its enlargement agenda, the available funds risk becoming further diluted, potentially undermining the region's integration progress and reform momentum.

President von der Leyen acknowledged the need for flexibility in the budget to respond to unforeseen crises, stating, "The new budget will be more flexible to cope with unforeseen crises… "We are investing more in our capacity to respond and more in our independence."

The blueprint is remodeling the budget's structure along three main pillars:

- **€865 billion** for agricultural, fisheries, cohesion and social policy.
- **€410 billion** for competitiveness, including research and innovation.
- **€200 billion** for external action, including humanitarian aid.




However, without a significant increase in the allocation for enlargement and neighborhood policies, the Western Balkans may face challenges in maintaining their trajectory toward EU integration.

The MFF negotiation process is politically complex and front-loaded, with major decisions expected between 2025 and late 2027. Without coordinated and proactive engagement at both national and regional levels, the Western Balkans risk being marginalized in this crucial process, potentially compromising their European perspective for years to come.

## II. Key Risks for the Western Balkans

1. Diminishing Financial Share per Country

- As the enlargement track expands to include Ukraine, Moldova, and potentially Georgia, the already limited funding pool will become even more diluted.
- The per-country share of pre-accession support could fall below previous levels, undermining reforms and EU integration momentum.

2. Limited Time to Influence the MFF

- The EU budget process is highly political and front-loaded. Most decisions will be shaped between 2025 and late 2027.
- Without coordinated and high-level engagement, Western Balkan partners risk missing the opportunity to shape instruments that will affect their integration trajectory for the next decade.

3.Lack of Tailored Instruments

- The current IPA structure does not provide a transition mechanism for countries that might complete negotiations before 2034 but will not yet be full members.
- Civil society funding, already fragile, risks further marginalization without explicit provisions.

## III. Strategic Recommendations

*1. Act as a Regional Bloc*

Western Balkan countries must coordinate their demands and speak with a unified voice. Regional platforms and instruments such as the “Berlin Process”, “Common Regional Market” should be leveraged to present joint positions in Brussels. A unified Western Balkans platform could advocate for a “fair share of the MFF”, reflecting the region’s strategic importance.

*2. Push for an Upgraded IPA (IPA IV+)*

IPA III has been vital but insufficient. The 2028–2034 framework must deliver a significantly increased and flexible IPA IV. Funding should align with the EU’s strategic goals: digital and green transition, rule of law, youth, infrastructure, and social inclusion. Conditionality should be balanced with predictability and frontloading of support for frontrunners.

*3. Advocate for a "Pre-Accession Transition Facility"*

For countries that complete accession negotiations during this period but are not yet formal members, a "transition facility" is essential. This would ensure gradual access to EU funds and institutions, helping prevent a stagnation phase between negotiation closure and membership.

*4. Ensure Structured Civil Society Funding*

A ringfenced civil society envelope should be created under IPA, with simplified access and long-term support. Watchdogs, thinktanks, independent media, and grassroots organizations must be empowered to support reforms and democratic consolidation.

## IV. Why This Matters: A Strategic and Political Imperative

- Credibility of Enlargement: Without adequate funding, the EU risks weakening its own enlargement credibility, already under pressure from delays and inconsistency.
- Geopolitical Competition: The Western Balkans remain a target for external actors (Russia, China, Gulf states). Underinvestment may open doors to rival influence.
- Internal Stability: Economic stagnation, low youth engagement, and rising disillusionment threaten long-term regional stability if EU prospects become financially unsupported.

## V. Timeline and Critical Path (2025–2027)

| **Milestone** | **Description** |
|---|---|
| Q3–Q4 2025 | Commission internal drafts of MFF proposals; early lobbying and positioning |
| 2026 | Commission proposal published; interinstitutional dialogue begins |
| 2027 | Final MFF negotiations between Council, Parliament, and Commission |
| December 2027 | Adoption of final MFF by the European Council |

**The time to act is "now". Without immediate and coordinated efforts, the Western Balkans risk being marginalized in the most consequential EU budget process of the next decade.**

## VI. Conclusion

The €2 trillion EU budget will shape Europe's future until 2034. It will also define who is included and who is left behind. Without immediate, united advocacy, the Western Balkans risk being excluded from vital support mechanisms. To stay on the EU path, the region must move from passive recipient to strategic actor. A proactive, united, and strategic approach is essential. The next 24 months are "make or break". If the Western Balkans are not visible in the process, they will be invisible in the outcome.

Author: Elda KALAJA