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# EU Enlargement: Observatory & Integration Readiness Index

# Imprint

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# 1. What Is the Integration Readiness Index (IRI)?

## Purpose and Scope

The Integration Readiness Index (IRI) is a composite analytical tool designed to measure EU accession readiness over time, based exclusively on the European Commission's annual enlargement progress reports.

The IRI responds to a recurring challenge in the enlargement debate: while the Commission produces detailed and nuanced country assessments each year, these assessments are primarily qualitative and are not designed for systematic comparison across countries or over time. As a result, it is difficult to track trajectories, identify structural breaks, or benchmark candidates against previous accession cases using a consistent frame of reference.

The purpose of the IRI is threefold:

- **Measurement:** to translate the Commission's qualitative assessments into a stable and transparent 1–10 scale, without altering their substance or meaning;
- **Comparison over time:** to enable consistent year-on-year tracking of accession readiness over a rolling five-year period;
- **Benchmarking:** to situate current candidates' readiness relative to the last completed enlargement case, using Croatia's pre-accession position in 2011 as a neutral reference point.

The IRI is deliberately constrained in scope. It relies solely on what is explicitly stated or evidenced in the Commission's progress reports. External datasets, perception-based indicators, political conditionality not

reflected in the reports, and third-party indices are excluded by design. Where an element is not documented in the progress report, it is not incorporated into the Index.

This approach ensures that the IRI remains institutionally compatible, methodologically neutral, and replicable across countries and years.

## What the IRI measures: The Five Core Indicators

The IRI is built around five indicators, each capturing a distinct dimension of accession readiness as assessed by the European Commission. Together, they reflect both substantive preparedness and procedural momentum.

### State of Play (SoP)

The State of Play indicator captures the level of preparedness reached in a given policy area or acquis chapter. It is derived from the Commission's standard "level of preparation" assessments and reflects the structural position of a country at a given point in time. This indicator answers the question: *how prepared is the country overall?*

### Annual Progress (Prog)

The Annual Progress indicator measures change over time. It reflects the Commission's assessment of progress (or lack thereof) achieved during the reporting year. Unlike the State of Play, it does not measure level, but direction of travel. This indicator captures whether reforms are advancing, stalling, or reversing.

### Recommendation Delivery (Rec)

Where the Commission explicitly assesses the follow-through on previous recommendations, the IRI records whether these recommendations have been implemented, partially implemented, or not implemented.

This indicator captures reform execution rather than reform intent and is applied only when the report provides sufficiently explicit information.

### **Chapter Status Indicator (CSI)**

The Chapter Status Indicator reflects cumulative procedural progress in accession negotiations. It records whether acquis chapters have been opened or closed and aggregates this information across the negotiation framework. The CSI captures how far a country has advanced procedurally in the accession process, independent of substantive readiness.

### **Accession Momentum Indicator (AMI)**

The Accession Momentum Indicator captures recent procedural movement. It reflects whether chapters have been opened or closed in the recent past and distinguishes between active negotiation phases and prolonged procedural stagnation. This indicator is designed to capture momentum rather than cumulative progress.

## **From Commission Assessments to Index Scores**

The IRI does not reinterpret or reweight the Commission's assessments. Instead, it applies a fixed and transparent mapping that converts standardised Commission language into numeric scores.

Qualitative judgements such as "early stage," "moderately prepared," or "good progress" are translated into predefined score ranges. Where reports provide explicit quantitative evidence — such as backlog volumes, staffing figures, or implementation rates — these are recorded and, where possible, assessed relative to historical accession benchmarks.

All indicators are aggregated using fixed weights that remain constant across countries and years. Scores are recalculated annually, based solely on the content of the relevant progress report, without retroactive reinterpretation of past assessments.

## How to Read This Report

This report is designed as a monitoring and benchmarking instrument. To ensure correct interpretation, four points are essential:

- **What the IRI is:** a structured translation of the Commission's own assessments into a comparable, time-consistent format.
- **What the IRI is not:** a forecast of accession timelines, a political judgement, or a substitute for the Commission's qualitative analysis.
- **How to read scores:** small year-to-year changes indicate incremental movement; larger shifts typically reflect structural developments or procedural breakthroughs.
- **Why process matters:** procedural momentum and substantive preparedness are assessed separately, allowing cases of political acceleration or reform stagnation to be distinguished.

Throughout the report, results are presented against a benchmark band derived from Croatia's accession readiness in 2011 (8.8–9.2). This benchmark reflects the level of preparedness observed in the most recent completed enlargement case and serves solely as an analytical reference point. It does not constitute an accession threshold or normative target.

## 2. IRI Results at a Glance (All Countries)

This section presents a consolidated overview of Integration Readiness Index (IRI) results across all assessed enlargement countries over the 2021–2025 period. The results are derived exclusively from European Commission progress reports and are calculated using a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0).

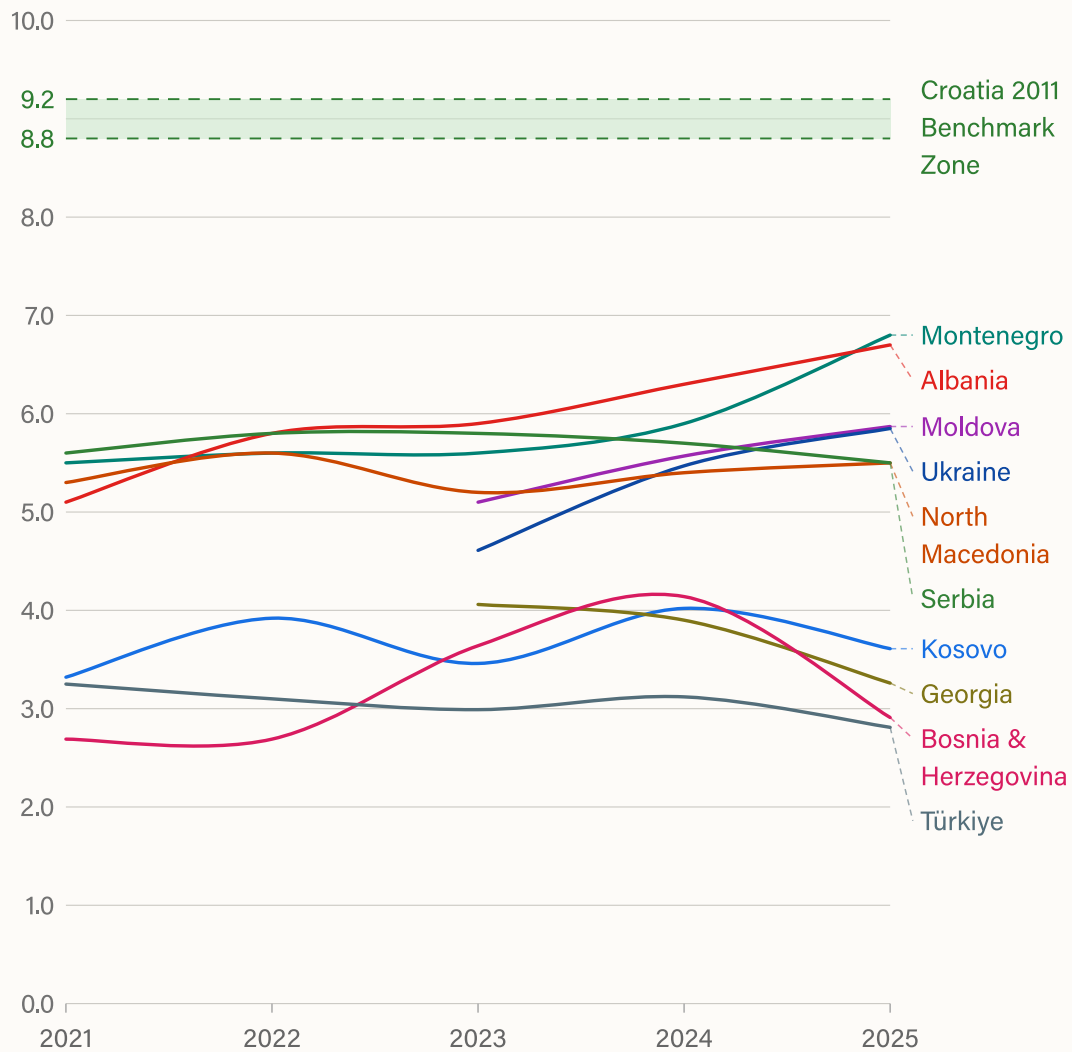
Country	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Albania	5.1	5.8	5.9	6.3	6.7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2.69	2.69	3.64	4.14	2.91
Georgia	–	–	4.06	3.90	3.26
Kosovo	3.32	3.92	3.46	4.02	3.61
Moldova	–	–	5.10	5.57	5.87
Montenegro	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.9	6.8
North Macedonia	5.3	5.6	5.2	5.4	5.5
Serbia	5.6	5.8	5.8	5.7	5.5
Türkiye	3.25	3.10	2.99	3.12	2.81
Ukraine	–	–	4.61	5.47	5.85

**Table 1** Integration Readiness Index (IRI) Scores by Country and Year

The comparative overview is intended to map relative positioning and trajectories under a common measurement framework. It does not imply political prioritisation, accession sequencing, or normative judgement.

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: All Candidate Countries

The Integration Readiness Index (IRI) measures EU accession readiness on a 1–10 scale, based exclusively on European Commission annual progress reports. Scores reflect assessed preparedness, reform progress, recommendation delivery, and procedural momentum. The shaded band (8.8–9.2) represents Croatia's 2011 accession-readiness benchmark and serves as a neutral reference line, not a target.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.  
No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC • Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports • Datawrapper

**Figure 1** All-country IRI trajectories (2021–2025)

Across the assessed set, three broad readiness bands emerge:

- **Intermediate-to-advanced readiness with positive momentum: Montenegro, Albania, Moldova, Ukraine.** These cases show sustained upward movement, with procedural activation increasingly aligned with incremental substantive consolidation.
- **Intermediate readiness with uneven convergence and constrained momentum: Serbia, North Macedonia.** These cases remain anchored in moderate preparedness but exhibit limited acceleration and/or declining momentum over time, with procedural movement insufficient to generate sustained convergence.
- **Low readiness with stagnation, volatility, or decline: Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Türkiye.** These cases display persistently low preparedness and weak recommendation delivery, combined with limited procedural movement and, in several instances, deterioration in fundamentals that outweighs any formal status effects.

In all cases, observed scores remain below the accession-ready benchmark band derived from Croatia's 2011 pre-accession performance (IRI 8.8–9.2), which is included as a neutral reference line rather than a threshold.

# 3. Western Balkans

## Regional Overview (2021–2025)

This section examines Integration Readiness Index (IRI) results for the Western Balkans over the 2021–2025 period. The region comprises six enlargement partners at different stages of the accession process, allowing for a comparative assessment of how substantive preparedness and procedural momentum interact under varying political and institutional conditions.

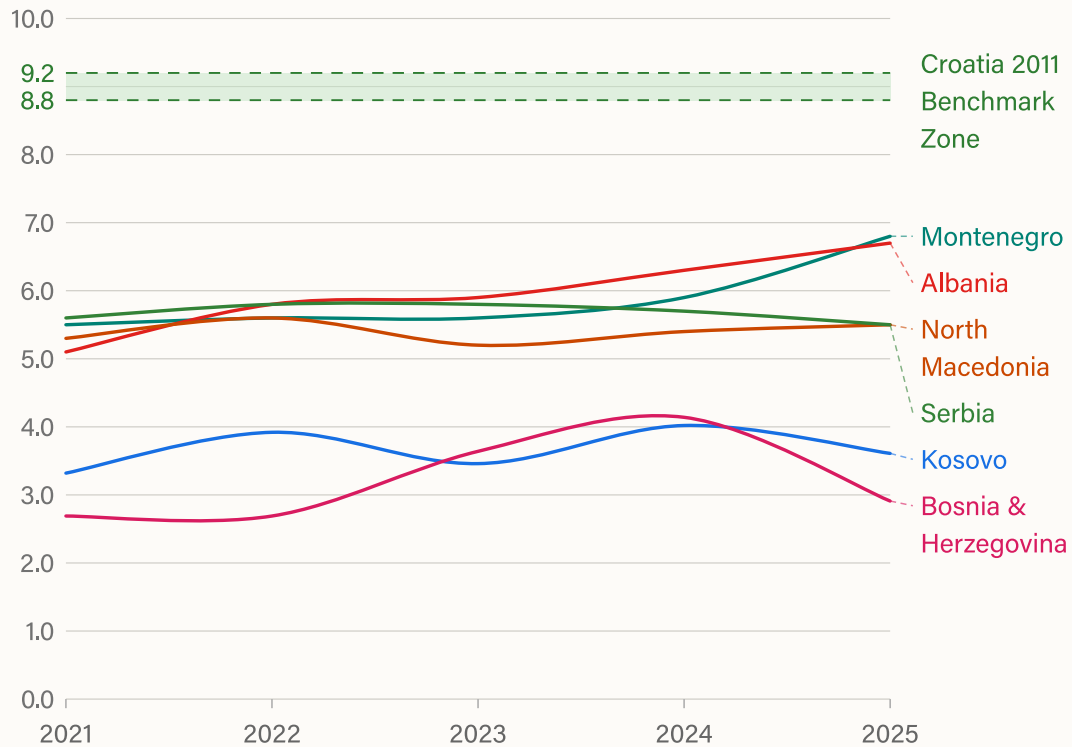
Country	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Albania	5.1	5.8	5.9	6.3	6.7
Bosnia and Herzegovina	2.69	2.69	3.64	4.14	2.91
Kosovo	3.32	3.92	3.46	4.02	3.61
Montenegro	5.5	5.6	5.6	5.9	6.8
North Macedonia	5.3	5.6	5.2	5.4	5.5
Serbia	5.6	5.8	5.8	5.7	5.5

Table 2 Western Balkans IRI Scores by Country and Year

Across the five-year window, the Western Balkans display the **widest dispersion of trajectories** among all enlargement regions. While all six countries remain below the accession-ready benchmark band defined by Croatia’s 2011 performance, their paths diverge markedly in direction, volatility, and consolidation.

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Western Balkans

The Integration Readiness Index (IRI) measures EU accession readiness on a 1–10 scale, based exclusively on European Commission annual progress reports. Scores reflect assessed preparedness, reform progress, recommendation delivery, and procedural momentum. The shaded band (8.8–9.2) represents Croatia's 2011 accession-readiness benchmark and serves as a neutral reference line, not a target.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.  
No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC • Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports • Datawrapper

**Figure 2** Western Balkans IRI trajectories (2021–2025)

Three regional characteristics stand out.

**First, moderate substantive preparedness is widespread but unevenly consolidated.** With the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, most Western Balkan countries are assessed by the Commission as being

moderately prepared across significant parts of the acquis. However, this preparedness often lacks depth in the fundamentals—particularly judiciary reform, anti-corruption policy, and public administration—limiting its capacity to translate into sustained convergence.

Second, **procedural movement acts as a decisive differentiator.**

Countries experiencing credible procedural activation—such as the launch of negotiations, screening, or chapter and cluster openings—register clearer upward shifts in their IRI trajectories. Where procedural dynamics remain stalled or symbolic, overall readiness tends to plateau or decline, even when technical capacity is relatively strong.

Third, **fragility and reversibility remain systemic risks.** Several trajectories exhibit sharp year-to-year swings, indicating that readiness gains are not yet structurally embedded. Political instability, post-election paralysis, or governance escalation can rapidly outweigh prior reform progress, producing negative reversals in the index.

Within the Western Balkans, three analytically distinct clusters emerge.

### **Upward Convergence with Reinforced Momentum**

- **Montenegro**
- **Albania**

These countries display the most coherent convergence paths in the region. Gradual substantive consolidation is increasingly aligned with procedural activation, particularly after prolonged periods of stagnation. In both cases, recent IRI gains are driven not by isolated reforms, but by the interaction between improved preparedness and credible movement within the accession framework.

### **Moderate Preparedness under Structural Constraint**

- **Serbia**
- **North Macedonia**

These cases remain anchored in moderate readiness, but without sustained acceleration. Technical capacity is relatively developed, yet reform delivery—especially in the fundamentals—remains uneven, and procedural momentum is constrained by political or constitutional conditions. The resulting trajectories are flat or gently declining, reflecting stagnation rather than regression.

### **Low Readiness with Volatility and Fragility**

→ **Bosnia and Herzegovina**

→ **Kosovo**

These countries exhibit persistently low readiness, characterised by early-stage preparedness, weak recommendation delivery, and limited or episodic procedural engagement. Temporary uplifts—often linked to political signalling or external incentives—are not consolidated and are frequently followed by renewed stagnation or decline.

These dynamics frame the country-by-country analysis that follows, which examines how each Western Balkan case combines—or fails to combine—substantive readiness and accession momentum over time.

## Albania

### Overview

This country chapter presents **Albania's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, geopolitical considerations, or forward-looking pledges.

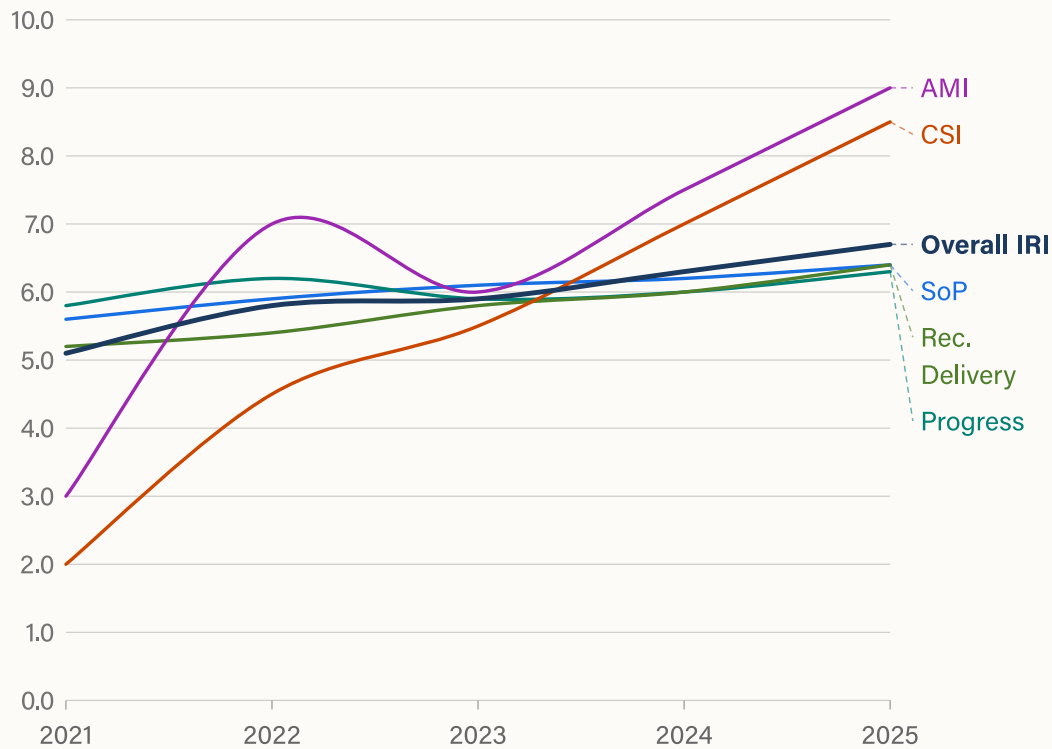
Over the five-year period, Albania displays a pattern of gradual substantive consolidation, followed by a structural procedural breakthrough once accession negotiations formally begin and clusters are opened.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	5.6	5.8	5.2	2.0	3.0	5.1
2022	5.9	6.2	5.4	4.5	7.0	5.8
2023	6.1	5.9	5.8	5.5	6.0	5.9
2024	6.2	6.0	6.0	7.0	7.5	6.3
2025	6.4	6.3	6.4	8.5	9.0	6.7

**Table 3** Albania: IRI Indicators by Year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Albania

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 3** Albania IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2021 — Moderate preparedness, pre-negotiation plateau**

*Overall IRI score: 5.1 / 10*

In 2021, Albania is assessed as moderately prepared on average across the fundamentals, economic criteria, and most acquis chapters. Commission language consistently places the country in the mid-range

of preparedness, with only a limited number of technical chapters approaching a good level of preparation.

Year-on-year progress is predominantly described as some progress, though several areas—particularly within the rule of law and implementation capacity—record limited progress. Reform efforts are present but uneven in impact.

Recommendation follow-through is referenced in narrative form, but implementation status is not expressed systematically enough across chapters to support a fully stable recommendation delivery indicator. Procedurally, Albania remains outside formal negotiations, though the Commission confirms that conditions for the first Intergovernmental Conference have been met, signalling readiness without momentum.

---

## **2022 — Structural transition into negotiations**

*Overall IRI score: 5.8 / 10*

The 2022 assessment confirms continuity in substantive preparedness, with Albania remaining moderately prepared overall and incremental improvements noted in several policy areas. No systemic upgrade in readiness is recorded, but reform delivery appears more consistent than in 2021.

Progress assessments strengthen slightly, with some progress clearly dominating and a higher incidence of good progress in technical chapters. Reform activity is described as administratively sustained, though results are still developing.

Recommendation delivery improves modestly, with more frequent references to partially addressed recommendations, allowing for a stable mid-range recommendation indicator.

Crucially, July 2022 marks a structural turning point, with the first Intergovernmental Conference and the formal launch of the screening process. This transition significantly lifts Albania's procedural and momentum scores, even as substantive readiness evolves gradually.

## **2023 — Screening momentum without categorical upgrade**

*Overall IRI score: 5.9 / 10*

In 2023, Albania's overall preparedness profile remains moderately prepared, though Commission language increasingly uses intermediate formulations (e.g. between moderate and good preparation) in selected chapters.

Progress assessments soften slightly compared to 2022, with some progress remaining dominant but fewer “good progress” findings. The report links uneven reform delivery to implementation capacity constraints rather than political blockage.

Recommendation follow-through becomes more visible, with explicit “partially implemented” references appearing regularly, though not uniformly across chapters.

From a procedural perspective, the screening process advances across multiple clusters, reinforcing structural momentum, even in the absence of chapter openings during the year.

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## **2024 — Substantive consolidation and first cluster opening**

*Overall IRI score: 6.3 / 10*

The 2024 report marks a clear consolidation phase. A growing number of chapters approach or reach a good level of preparation, and the fundamentals cluster shows greater institutional stability than in previous years.

Progress assessments improve accordingly. Some progress becomes the modal category, with fewer instances of limited progress and more explicit acknowledgment of reform results.

Recommendation delivery strengthens further. The Commission increasingly notes that recommendations have been partially or largely addressed, particularly in priority governance areas, though gaps remain.

Procedurally, the completion of the screening process and the opening of Cluster 1 (Fundamentals) represent a structural upgrade. Under the IRI's strict rules, this constitutes a clear improvement in accession momentum.

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## **2025 — Alignment of preparedness and momentum**

*Overall IRI score: 6.7 / 10*

In 2025, Albania records its strongest performance of the five-year period. A substantial share of chapters is now assessed at a good level of preparation, with the overall readiness profile reflecting systemic improvement rather than isolated gains.

Progress assessments shift decisively upward. Some to good progress dominates across most clusters, with several technical areas registering very good progress, indicating more predictable and coordinated reform delivery.

Where recommendation follow-through is explicitly assessed, implementation is increasingly described as largely or partially implemented, with fewer references to persistent non-delivery.

Most importantly, the procedural dimension accelerates. Multiple clusters are opened within the reporting window, triggering a high accession momentum score and making 2025 the first year in which substantive preparedness and procedural movement fully reinforce each other.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Albania as a gradually consolidating candidate whose accession trajectory is characterised by incremental substantive improvement followed by decisive procedural activation once negotiations begin.

Unlike prolonged stalled cases, Albania's trajectory shows early alignment between institutional readiness and process mechanics, allowing momentum to compound once formal barriers are lifted. While the 2025 score remains below the accession-ready benchmark defined by Croatia's

2011 performance (8.8–9.2), the direction of travel indicates credible convergence, conditional on sustained reform delivery and continued procedural follow-through.

This profile should be read as a measurement of Albania's position based strictly on Commission reporting, and as a baseline for future trend analysis under a fixed and replicable framework.

## Bosnia and Herzegovina

### Overview

This country chapter presents **Bosnia and Herzegovina's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, geopolitical considerations, or forward-looking pledges.

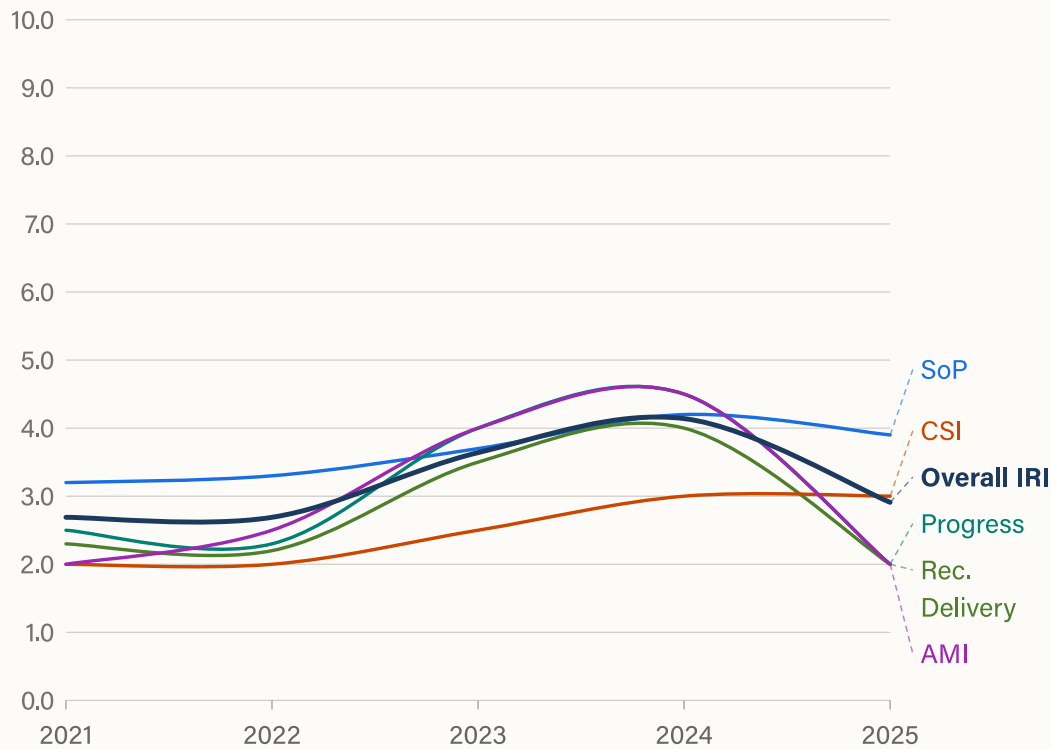
Over the five-year period, Bosnia and Herzegovina displays a **stop-start trajectory**, characterised by prolonged low readiness and weak reform delivery, a temporary uplift following candidate status and the opening of negotiations, and a sharp reversal in 2025 driven by political escalation and reform paralysis.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	3.2	2.5	2.3	2.0	2.0	2.69
2022	3.3	2.3	2.2	2.0	2.5	2.69
2023	3.7	4.0	3.5	2.5	4.0	3.64
2024	4.2	4.5	4.0	3.0	4.5	4.14
2025	3.9	2.0	2.0	3.0	2.0	2.91

**Table 4** Bosnia and Herzegovina: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Bosnia and Herzegovina

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 4** Bosnia and Herzegovina IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2021 — Low preparedness, pervasive stagnation**

*Overall IRI score: 2.69 / 10*

In 2021, Bosnia and Herzegovina is assessed predominantly at an early stage of preparation across the fundamentals and a wide range of acquis chapters. The Commission explicitly places core areas—public

administration reform, judiciary, anti-corruption policy, economic criteria, and acquis alignment—at early-stage or low-preparation levels.

Year-on-year progress is dominated by no progress and limited progress assessments, particularly in rule-of-law-related areas. Structural governance fragmentation and institutional blockages are repeatedly identified as binding constraints.

Recommendation follow-through is weak. Core enabling instruments, including the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA), remain pending, and reform initiatives fail to translate into sustained implementation. Procedurally, Bosnia and Herzegovina remains outside candidate status and accession negotiations, resulting in very low accession momentum.

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## **2022 — Standstill under political blockage**

*Overall IRI score: 2.69 / 10*

The 2022 assessment confirms continuity rather than change. The Commission describes an almost complete standstill in reforms for much of the year, driven by political polarisation and institutional blockage.

State-of-play assessments remain anchored in early-stage or between early-stage and some-level-of-preparation formulations, with no systemic upgrading across chapters. Progress assessments remain overwhelmingly negative, particularly in judiciary reform, anti-corruption policy, and public administration.

Recommendation delivery remains weak. Key recommendations are reiterated without evidence of meaningful follow-through, and the absence of an adopted NPAA continues to undermine reform coordination. While political signals toward the EU path emerge late in the year, they are insufficient to alter the overall readiness profile.

## **2023 — Candidate-status uplift with partial delivery**

*Overall IRI score: 3.64 / 10*

In 2023, Bosnia and Herzegovina registers its first clear upward movement in the five-year series, reflecting the post-candidate-status environment and a more functional state-level configuration.

Progress assessments improve relative to previous years, with limited progress remaining dominant but accompanied by identifiable forward steps in selected operational and security-related areas.

The Commission highlights concrete actions linked to candidate-status steps, including developments in organised crime, AML-related measures, Europol cooperation, and migration management.

Despite these improvements, core fundamentals remain weak.

Key horizontal enablers—including the NPAA and constitutional and electoral reforms—remain outstanding. Procedurally, candidate status generates modest improvements in process indicators, but without chapter movement.

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## **2024 — Negotiations opened, fragile reform window**

*Overall IRI score: 4.14 / 10*

The 2024 report represents the high point of Bosnia and Herzegovina's five-year IRI trajectory. The Commission records tangible reform outputs between late 2023 and early 2024, including the adoption of legislation related to integrity, AML, and conflict of interest.

Most significantly, the European Council decision in March 2024 to open accession negotiations constitutes a major procedural upgrade. This decision, combined with front-loaded reform activity, lifts both progress and momentum indicators.

At the same time, the Commission stresses that the reform dynamic stalls during the remainder of the reporting period. Many adopted measures remain incomplete, and further reforms are required to reach the necessary degree of compliance for negotiation progress. The resulting

profile is one of real but narrow advancement that remains fragile rather than consolidated.

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## **2025 — Political escalation and reform paralysis**

*Overall IRI score: 2.91 / 10*

In 2025, Bosnia and Herzegovina's trajectory reverses sharply. The Commission describes reforms as stalled and highlights severe political tensions and escalation counter to the EU path, including actions undermining the constitutional and legal order.

Progress assessments deteriorate markedly, with stagnation or no progress recorded across multiple fundamentals. Recommendation delivery weakens further, with repeated references to non-implementation of previously agreed priorities.

Although accession negotiations remain formally open, the process is effectively frozen. No chapters are opened or closed, and negative momentum dominates the overall readiness profile, outweighing prior procedural gains.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Bosnia and Herzegovina as a low-readiness candidate whose accession trajectory is highly volatile and politically reversible. The decisive constraint throughout the period is not the absence of isolated legislative outputs, but the lack of sustained institutional consolidation and predictable reform delivery, particularly in the fundamentals.

The temporary uplift observed in 2024 reflects a narrow reform window and a major political decision to open negotiations. The subsequent decline in 2025 demonstrates that procedural status does not substitute for readiness and can coexist with deep stagnation or regression when governance conditions deteriorate.

Bosnia and Herzegovina remains far below the accession-ready benchmark defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2). The defining analytical feature of the trajectory is fragility: progress emerges episodically but fails to convert into durable convergence.

This profile should be read as a measurement of Bosnia and Herzegovina's position based strictly on Commission reporting, and as a baseline for future trend analysis under a fixed and replicable framework.

# Kosovo

## Overview

This country chapter presents **Kosovo's** EU integration readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability or forward-looking pledges.

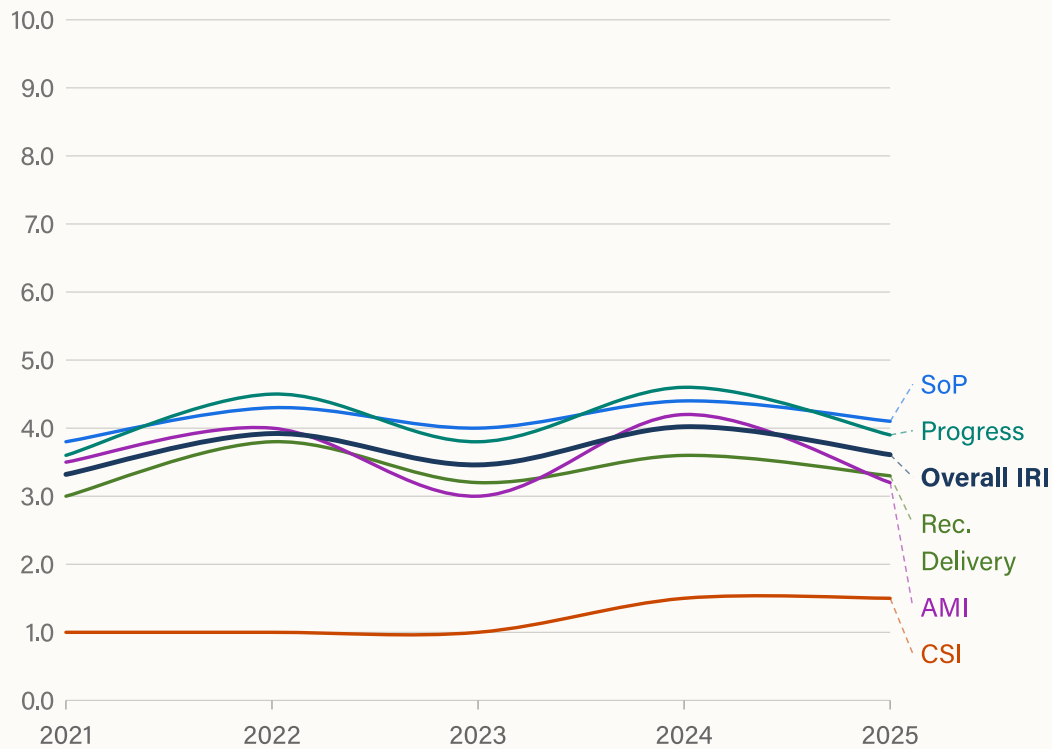
Across 2021–2025, Kosovo displays a low and fragile readiness trajectory. Improvements in annual progress and procedural engagement are episodic and weakly consolidated, while fundamentals remain predominantly at early-stage levels. A temporary uplift in 2024 linked to visa liberalisation and engagement with EU frameworks is followed by renewed stagnation in 2025 amid post-election institutional paralysis.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	3.8	3.6	3.0	1.0	3.5	3.32
2022	4.3	4.5	3.8	1.0	4.0	3.92
2023	4.0	3.8	3.2	1.0	3.0	3.46
2024	4.4	4.6	3.6	1.5	4.2	4.02
2025	4.1	3.9	3.3	1.5	3.2	3.61

**Table 5** Kosovo: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Kosovo

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 5** Kosovo IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2021 — Post-instability baseline**

*Overall IRI score: 3.32 / 10*

In 2021, Kosovo is assessed predominantly at an early stage of preparation across the fundamentals and a broad range of acquis areas. The Commission links weak reform delivery to political instability

and repeated elections, which constrained legislative continuity and administrative capacity.

Annual progress is largely characterised as limited, with isolated preparatory steps insufficient to generate structural change. Recommendation follow-through is weak, particularly in public administration reform and rule-of-law areas. Procedurally, Kosovo remains outside candidate status and accession negotiations, resulting in low accession momentum.

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## **2022 — Partial stabilisation, uneven progress**

*Overall IRI score: 3.92 / 10*

The 2022 report reflects a degree of political stabilisation under a solid parliamentary majority, accompanied by increased legislative activity. Preparedness assessments show limited upgrading, with fundamentals still anchored at early stage or some level of preparation.

Annual progress improves modestly, with the Commission recording some progress in areas such as anti-corruption legislation and elements of the rule-of-law framework. Recommendation delivery remains partial, and implementation gaps persist across key files. Accession momentum improves slightly but remains fragile.

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## **2023 — Governance stress and momentum loss**

*Overall IRI score: 3.46 / 10*

In 2023, Kosovo's readiness trajectory weakens. The Commission highlights governance tensions, security-related crises in the north, and institutional disruption as binding constraints. Public administration reform is explicitly described as lacking progress, and fast-track legislative procedures raise concerns regarding process quality.

Annual progress reverts predominantly to limited progress, with some instances of backsliding noted. Recommendation delivery deteriorates further, with previous recommendations not sufficiently implemented. Accession momentum turns negative amid internal crises.

## **2024 — Procedural uplift without consolidation**

*Overall IRI score: 4.02 / 10*

The 2024 report represents the high point of Kosovo's five-year IRI series. The Commission records notable procedural and policy developments, including the entry into force of visa-free travel and the adoption of a Reform Agenda under the EU Reform and Growth Facility.

Despite these developments, preparedness levels remain largely unchanged, with early-stage assessments continuing in core fundamentals. Annual progress improves modestly, including stronger performance under the economic criteria, but recommendation delivery remains weak. Accession momentum improves but remains front-loaded rather than structurally embedded.

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## **2025 — Post-election stagnation**

*Overall IRI score: 3.61 / 10*

In 2025, the Commission reports a slowdown in reforms linked to post-election gridlock and prolonged caretaker governance. Preparedness assessments show no structural improvement, and annual progress again tilts toward limited outcomes across multiple areas.

Recommendation delivery is constrained by delayed institutional formation, affecting implementation of the Reform Agenda. Accession momentum weakens as institutional paralysis dominates the reporting period.

## **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Kosovo as a low-readiness accession partner whose progress remains highly contingent on political stability and institutional functionality. Improvements in annual progress and accession momentum are episodic and weakly consolidated, while recommendation delivery consistently lags behind Commission expectations.

The temporary peak in 2024 reflects procedural and policy milestones rather than a structural upgrade in fundamentals. The subsequent decline

in 2025 confirms that procedural engagement does not substitute for sustained readiness and can coexist with stagnation when governance conditions deteriorate.

Kosovo remains far below the accession-ready benchmark defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2). The defining analytic feature of the trajectory is fragility: progress emerges intermittently but fails to convert into durable convergence.

## Montenegro

### Overview

This country chapter presents **Montenegro's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability or forward-looking pledges.

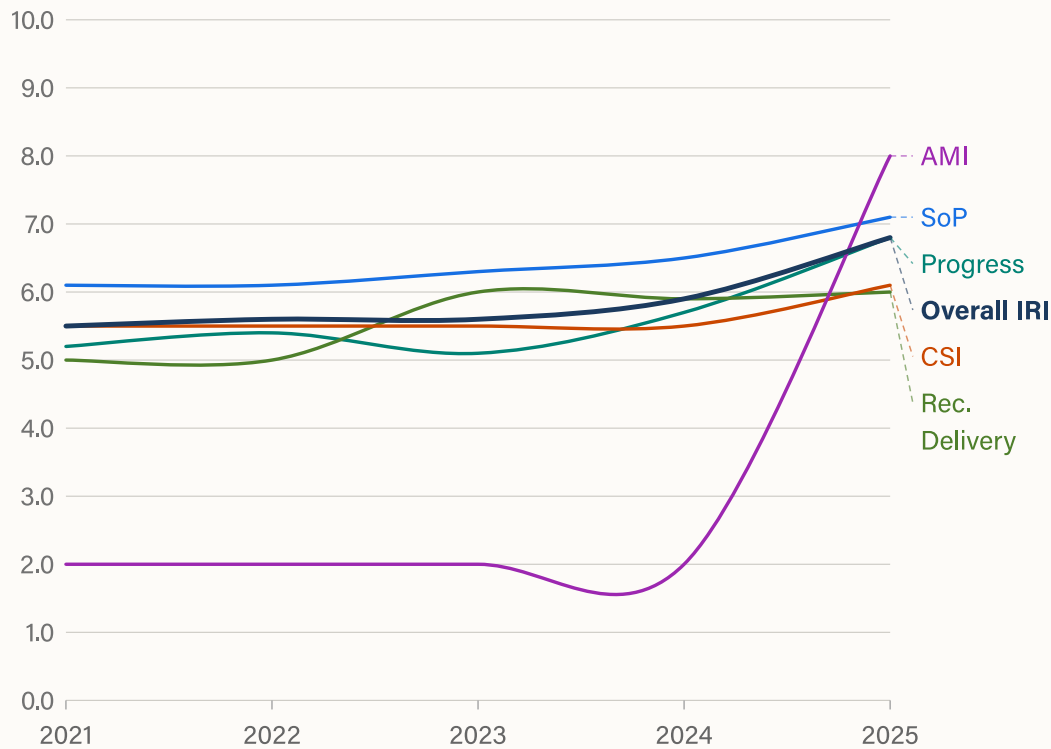
Over the five-year period, Montenegro displays a pattern of stable but initially stalled preparedness, followed by a clear structural improvement in substance in 2024 and a combined substance–process breakthrough in 2025.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	6.1	5.2	5.0	5.5	2.0	5.5
2022	6.1	5.4	5.0	5.5	2.0	5.6
2023	6.3	5.1	6.0	5.5	2.0	5.6
2024	6.5	5.7	5.9	5.5	2.0	5.9
2025	7.1	6.8	6.0	6.1	8.0	6.8

**Table 6** Montenegro: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Montenegro

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 6** Montenegro IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2021 — Stable preparedness, stalled process**

*Overall IRI score: 5.5 / 10*

In 2021, Montenegro is assessed as moderately prepared on average across the acquis and political and economic criteria. The Commission's language consistently places core areas—such as public administration

reform, the judiciary, and fundamental rights—at a mid-range level of preparation. Only a limited number of technically advanced chapters reach a good level of preparation.

Year-on-year progress is mixed and leans toward limited to some progress, with several key areas registering no progress, particularly within the fundamentals cluster. While reform structures are formally in place, delivery remains uneven.

Recommendation follow-through is referenced throughout the report, but implementation status is not expressed in a sufficiently systematic manner to support a stable recommendation delivery indicator for this year. Procedurally, all chapters are open, but only three are provisionally closed, and no opening or closing events occur during the year. Accession momentum is therefore low.

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## **2022 — Marginal improvement, continued stagnation**

*Overall IRI score: 5.6 / 10*

The 2022 assessment confirms continuity rather than change. Montenegro remains moderately prepared overall, with incremental technical improvements acknowledged in several areas but without a systemic upgrade in readiness.

Progress assessments show a slightly stronger signal than in 2021, though limited progress and no progress remain frequent formulations. Political and institutional instability is repeatedly cited as a constraining factor for reform implementation.

As in the previous year, the report reiterates outstanding recommendations but does not provide a consistent classification of implementation status across chapters. Procedurally, the negotiation framework remains unchanged, with no chapter openings or closures, reinforcing the picture of a stalled accession process.

## **2023 — Holding pattern under institutional blockage**

*Overall IRI score: 5.6 / 10*

In 2023, the Commission's assessment begins to show incipient qualitative movement in preparedness, reflected in more frequent intermediate formulations. However, this does not translate into a clear categorical shift.

Progress assessments weaken compared to 2022. Limited progress dominates, particularly in rule-of-law-related areas, and the report explicitly links weak reform delivery to political deadlock and institutional dysfunction.

For the first time in the five-year window, the report more regularly refers to recommendations as partially implemented in specific areas. While coverage remains uneven, this supports a stable mid-range recommendation delivery signal at an aggregate level. Procedurally, the negotiation framework remains static, and the process is explicitly characterised as stalled.

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## **2024 — Substantive improvement without procedural movement**

*Overall IRI score: 5.9 / 10*

The 2024 report marks a clear qualitative improvement in substantive preparedness. A larger number of chapters are assessed at a good level of preparation, and the fundamentals cluster shows visible institutional consolidation compared to previous years.

Progress assessments improve accordingly. Some progress becomes the dominant formulation, with fewer instances of no progress. Reforms in judicial governance and public administration are explicitly acknowledged.

Recommendation delivery strengthens. The Commission increasingly notes that recommendations have been partially addressed or largely met in priority areas, though implementation gaps persist.

Procedurally, formal chapter status remains unchanged within the reporting year. The report highlights the fulfilment of interim benchmarks for Chapters 23 and 24 and the adoption of closing benchmarks, signalling

the opening of a new phase. Under the IRI's strict process rules, however, the absence of actual chapter closures keeps accession momentum formally low.

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## **2025 — Alignment of substance and momentum**

*Overall IRI score: 6.8 / 10*

In 2025, Montenegro records its strongest performance of the five-year period. A significant share of chapters is now assessed at a good level of preparation, with some approaching well-advanced status. The overall readiness profile reflects systemic improvement rather than isolated gains.

Progress assessments shift decisively upward. Many chapters register some to good progress, and several technical and internal-market areas record very good progress, indicating more consistent and coordinated reform delivery.

Where recommendation follow-through is explicitly assessed, implementation is increasingly described as largely or partially implemented, with fewer references to non-delivery.

Crucially, the procedural dimension also moves. The report confirms additional provisional chapter closures, bringing the total to seven. Closures occurring within the current or immediately preceding year trigger a high accession momentum score, making 2025 the first year in which substantive preparedness and procedural progress reinforce each other.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Montenegro as a structurally prepared but long-stalled candidate, with meaningful reform acceleration emerging only after 2023. The decisive change occurs when institutional readiness gains are matched by procedural movement, highlighting the importance of aligning substantive reform delivery with the mechanics of the accession process.

While the 2025 score remains below the accession-ready benchmark defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2), the trajectory indicates that Montenegro has shifted from prolonged stagnation to a phase of credible convergence, conditional on sustained delivery and continued procedural follow-through.

This profile should be read as a measurement of Montenegro's position based strictly on Commission reporting, and as a baseline for future trend analysis under a fixed and replicable framework.

## North Macedonia

### Overview

This country chapter presents **North Macedonia's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, expectations, or forward-looking pledges.

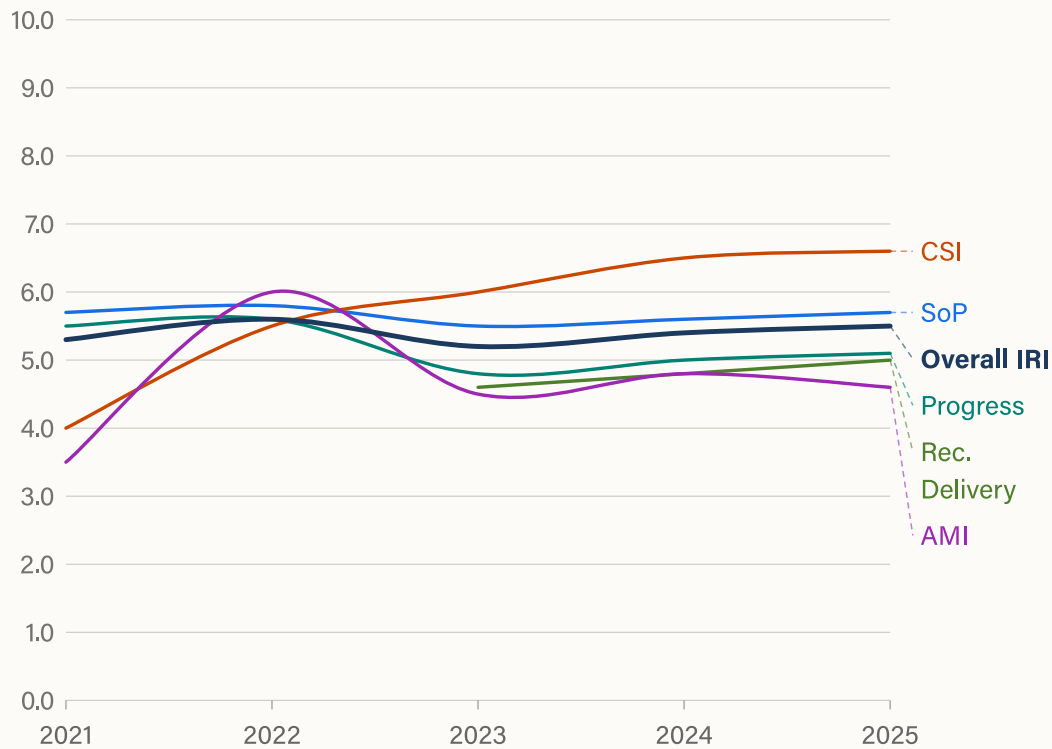
Over the five-year period, North Macedonia displays a pattern of stable but constrained preparedness, marked by a procedural breakthrough in 2022 followed by renewed stagnation driven by weak rule-of-law delivery and unresolved political conditions, despite the completion of technical screening.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	5.7	5.5	NA	4.0	3.5	5.3
2022	5.8	5.6	NA	5.5	6.0	5.6
2023	5.5	4.8	4.6	6.0	4.5	5.2
2024	5.6	5.0	4.8	6.5	4.8	5.4
2025	5.7	5.1	5.0	6.6	4.6	5.5

**Table 7** North Macedonia: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: North Macedonia

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 7** North Macedonia IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2021 — Stable preparedness, blocked accession path**

*Overall IRI score: 5.3 / 10*

In 2021, North Macedonia is assessed as moderately prepared on average across the acquis, political criteria, and economic criteria.

The Commission's language consistently places the fundamentals cluster—judiciary, anti-corruption policy, and public administration—at a mid-range level of preparedness, with only a limited number of technical chapters reaching a good level of preparation.

Year-on-year progress is dominated by limited to some progress, with several key areas registering no progress, particularly in rule-of-law-related chapters. While institutional frameworks are largely in place, reform delivery remains uneven and weakly enforced.

Recommendation follow-through is referenced throughout the report, but implementation status is not expressed in a sufficiently systematic manner to support a stable recommendation delivery indicator for this year. Procedurally, accession negotiations are not formally launched, and no screening or chapter-level movement occurs. Accession momentum is therefore low.

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## **2022 — Procedural breakthrough without substantive acceleration**

*Overall IRI score: 5.6 / 10*

The 2022 report marks a clear procedural turning point with the First Intergovernmental Conference and the formal launch of accession negotiations, including the start of the screening process. This restores short-term political momentum and is reflected in higher process indicators.

Substantively, however, preparedness remains broadly unchanged. The Commission continues to assess most chapters as moderately prepared, and core rule-of-law weaknesses persist. Progress assessments remain mixed, with limited and some progress dominating the language.

As in 2021, outstanding recommendations are reiterated without a uniform classification of implementation status. The overall profile is one of procedural activation without corresponding reform acceleration.

## **2023 – Substantive regression and loss of momentum**

*Overall IRI score: 5.2 / 10*

In 2023, North Macedonia records its weakest performance in the five-year window. The Commission highlights no progress in key areas, particularly judiciary reform and anti-corruption policy.

The report explicitly criticises amendments to the Criminal Code that reduce penalties for corruption-related offences, noting their negative impact on the fight against high-level corruption. This marks a qualitative deterioration in rule-of-law credibility.

For the first time, recommendations are more regularly described as not addressed or only partially addressed, allowing for the cautious introduction of a recommendation delivery signal at a low level. Procedurally, screening continues, but no chapter openings or closures occur, and accession momentum dissipates following the 2022 breakthrough.

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## **2024 – Technical consolidation without political resolution**

*Overall IRI score: 5.4 / 10*

The 2024 report shows partial stabilisation after the 2023 deterioration. Judicial reform strategies are adopted, and certain administrative reforms are acknowledged, but these steps do not translate into a qualitative upgrade in overall preparedness.

Progress assessments improve marginally, with some progress becoming more frequent, though no progress remains common in corruption-related areas. Recommendation delivery strengthens slightly, with more frequent references to partial implementation, but systemic gaps persist.

From a process perspective, the completion of the screening process in December 2023 marks a significant technical milestone. In the absence of chapter openings or closures, accession momentum remains formally constrained under the IRI's strict process rules.

## **2025 – Stabilisation under continued political blockage**

*Overall IRI score: 5.5 / 10*

In 2025, North Macedonia maintains a stable but limited readiness profile. Preparedness remains broadly moderate, with incremental improvements in administrative and technical areas but no qualitative shift in the fundamentals cluster.

Progress assessments reflect incremental rather than transformative reform delivery. Recommendation follow-through continues to be described mainly as partial, with no evidence of systematic implementation across priority areas.

The report explicitly notes the absence of any attempt to adopt the constitutional amendments required under the negotiation framework. No chapter openings or closures occur. Despite completed screening and technical readiness, accession momentum remains structurally stalled.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict North Macedonia as a technically prepared but politically constrained candidate. The accession process is characterised by episodic procedural activation rather than sustained convergence. The decisive constraint lies not in administrative capacity, but in unresolved political and constitutional conditions that prevent procedural advancement and undermine reform incentives.

While North Macedonia remains below the accession-ready benchmark defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2), the IRI series clarifies that stagnation is structural rather than cyclical. Without alignment between substantive reform delivery and the mechanics of the accession process, further convergence is unlikely under current conditions.

## Serbia

### Overview

This country chapter presents **Serbia's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, geopolitical considerations, or forward-looking pledges.

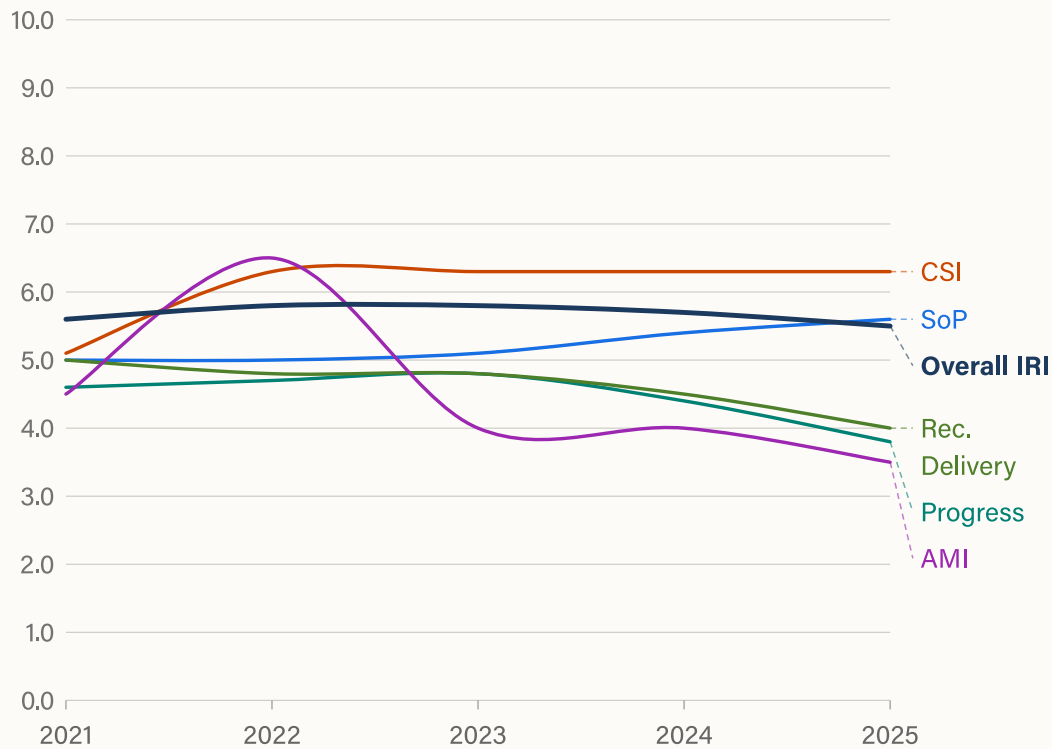
Over the five-year period, Serbia exhibits a pattern of moderate but uneven preparedness, characterised by procedural continuity without substantive acceleration, followed by a gradual erosion of momentum after 2022.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	5.0	4.6	5.0	5.1	4.5	5.6
2022	5.0	4.7	4.8	6.3	6.5	5.8
2023	5.1	4.8	4.8	6.3	4.0	5.8
2024	5.4	4.4	4.5	6.3	4.0	5.7
2025	5.6	3.8	4.0	6.3	3.5	5.5

**Table 8** Serbia: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Serbia

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 8** Serbia IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2021 — Moderate preparedness with limited delivery**

*Overall IRI score: 5.6 / 10*

In 2021, Serbia is assessed as moderately prepared overall across the acquis, with repeated mid-range formulations in core areas such as public

administration reform, judiciary, and fundamental rights. Several technical chapters reach higher preparation levels, but fundamentals remain uneven.

Progress assessments are mixed, with limited progress and some progress appearing in roughly equal measure. In rule-of-law areas, reform delivery is repeatedly described as slow or constrained by political influence and institutional weaknesses.

Recommendation follow-through is referenced inconsistently. While recommendations are reiterated, the report does not provide a sufficiently systematic classification of implementation status to support a stable recommendation delivery indicator. Procedurally, accession negotiations remain unchanged, with 18 chapters open and two provisionally closed. Accession momentum is therefore low.

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## **2022 — Procedural uplift without substantive upgrade**

*Overall IRI score: 5.8 / 10*

The 2022 report records a procedural change rather than a structural one. Serbia's number of opened chapters increases to 22 out of 35, while the number of provisionally closed chapters remains unchanged.

Substantively, overall preparedness remains moderate. Incremental improvements are acknowledged in selected areas, but the fundamentals cluster continues to attract cautious language, particularly regarding judicial independence, media freedom, and checks and balances.

Progress assessments show slight strengthening compared to 2021, but remain largely within the limited-to-some progress range. Recommendation follow-through is more frequently mentioned than in 2021, but still lacks the consistency required for full aggregation. The increase in opened chapters produces a temporary rise in accession momentum, making 2022 the strongest procedural year in the series.

## **2023 — Stagnation under deteriorating fundamentals**

*Overall IRI score: 5.8 / 10*

In 2023, Serbia's preparedness profile remains broadly unchanged in categorical terms. Most chapters continue to be assessed as moderately prepared, with few clear upgrades.

Progress assessments weaken relative to 2022. Limited progress becomes the dominant formulation, particularly in rule-of-law-related chapters. The report explicitly highlights concerns regarding political pressure, media environment deterioration, and insufficient follow-through on key reforms.

Recommendation delivery becomes more visible at the textual level, with references to partial implementation in selected areas. However, coverage remains uneven and does not offset the broader weakening of progress signals. Procedurally, the negotiation framework remains static, and accession momentum is assessed as low.

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## **2024 — Substantive erosion without procedural change**

*Overall IRI score: 5.7 / 10*

The 2024 report marks a negative qualitative shift in several fundamentals. While some technical chapters maintain stable preparedness, the Commission identifies stagnation or backsliding in areas related to the rule of law, media freedom, and democratic governance.

Progress assessments further weaken. No progress and limited progress appear more frequently, and the report adopts more explicit critical language in politically sensitive domains.

Recommendation follow-through is referenced, but implementation is often described as partial or delayed. Procedurally, chapter status remains unchanged, reinforcing the perception of a stalled accession process.

## **2025 – Declining momentum under persistent constraints**

*Overall IRI score: 5.5 / 10*

In 2025, Serbia records its weakest performance of the five-year period. While some chapters retain moderate or good levels of preparation, the overall readiness profile reflects fragmentation rather than consolidation.

Progress assessments remain subdued. Several key areas, including judiciary reform, public administration, and freedom of expression, are explicitly assessed as having made no progress or very limited progress.

Recommendation follow-through is increasingly referenced, but often in negative or qualified terms, highlighting implementation gaps rather than completion. Procedurally, no chapter openings or closures occur, and accession momentum continues to erode.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Serbia as a moderately prepared but structurally constrained candidate whose accession trajectory is characterised by procedural continuity without sustained substantive convergence.

The temporary uplift observed in 2022 reflects negotiation mechanics rather than reform acceleration. Subsequent years show that, in the absence of deeper reform delivery—particularly in the fundamentals cluster—procedural gains do not translate into durable readiness improvements.

Unlike Montenegro, Serbia does not experience a phase in which substantive preparedness and procedural momentum reinforce each other. The trajectory instead points to a gradual erosion of accession momentum, underscoring the importance of aligning reform substance with credible movement in the accession process.

# 4. Eastern Partnership: Regional Interpretation

## Regional Overview (2023–2025)

This section examines Integration Readiness Index (IRI) results for the Eastern Partnership countries covered in this report over the period 2023–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission’s annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, “Golden Standard”).

Country	2023	2024	2025
Georgia	4.06	3.90	3.26
Moldova	5.10	5.57	5.87
Ukraine	4.61	5.47	5.85

Table 9 Eastern Partnership IRI Scores by Country and Year

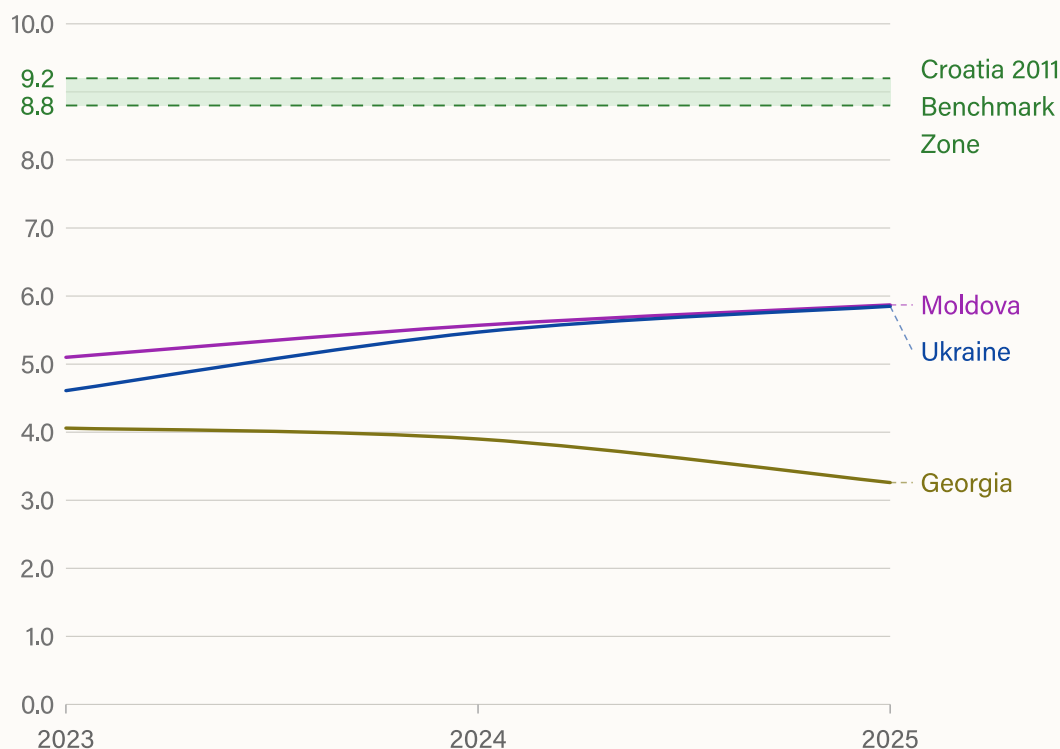
Across the period under review, the Eastern Partnership displays high divergence in trajectories. While all three countries remain far below the accession-ready benchmark band defined by Croatia’s 2011 performance, their paths differ sharply in direction, momentum, and the degree to which procedural engagement translates into readiness gains.

Three regional characteristics stand out.

First, **procedural activation is a major driver of short-run IRI movement**, but its effect depends on whether it is accompanied by sustained substantive consolidation. The opening of accession negotiations and the launch of screening generate strong momentum signals and are reflected in marked score increases where reform delivery remains sufficiently credible.

## Integration Readiness Index 2023–2025: Eastern Partnership

The Integration Readiness Index (IRI) measures EU accession readiness on a 1–10 scale, based exclusively on European Commission annual progress reports. Scores reflect assessed preparedness, reform progress, recommendation delivery, and procedural momentum. The shaded band (8.8–9.2) represents Croatia's 2011 accession-readiness benchmark and serves as a neutral reference line, not a target.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.  
No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 9** Eastern Partnership IRI trajectories (2023–2025)

*Note: Croatia (2011) is included as a benchmark reference band, not as a scored country.*

Second, **the fundamentals operate as a binding constraint**, even when procedural engagement is high. Where the Commission's assessment highlights democratic backsliding, rule-of-law regression, or persistent institutional deficiencies, negative progress and recommendation-delivery signals can outweigh formal status effects.

Third, the region demonstrates that formal status upgrades are not mechanically associated with readiness improvement. Candidate status or negotiation milestones may raise process indicators, but the overall index remains sensitive to the balance between procedural movement and substantive performance.

Within the Eastern Partnership set covered here, three analytically distinct patterns emerge.

### **Upward trajectories anchored in procedural engagement**

- **Moldova**
- **Ukraine**

These cases show clear upward movement over the 2023–2025 period. In both, major procedural developments—opening of negotiations and screening progress—coincide with gradual improvements in preparedness, progress language, and recommendation follow-through. While overall readiness remains at an intermediate stage relative to accession-ready benchmarks, the direction of travel is positive and increasingly process-anchored.

### **Declining readiness under deterioration in fundamentals**

- **Georgia**

Georgia displays a low and declining trajectory. A formal status upgrade does not translate into readiness gains and is followed by further deterioration in Commission-assessed fundamentals and accession momentum. Over the period, negative progress and recommendation-delivery signals dominate the index outcome.

## Georgia

### Overview

This country chapter presents **Georgia's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2023–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, forward-looking pledges, or external expectations.

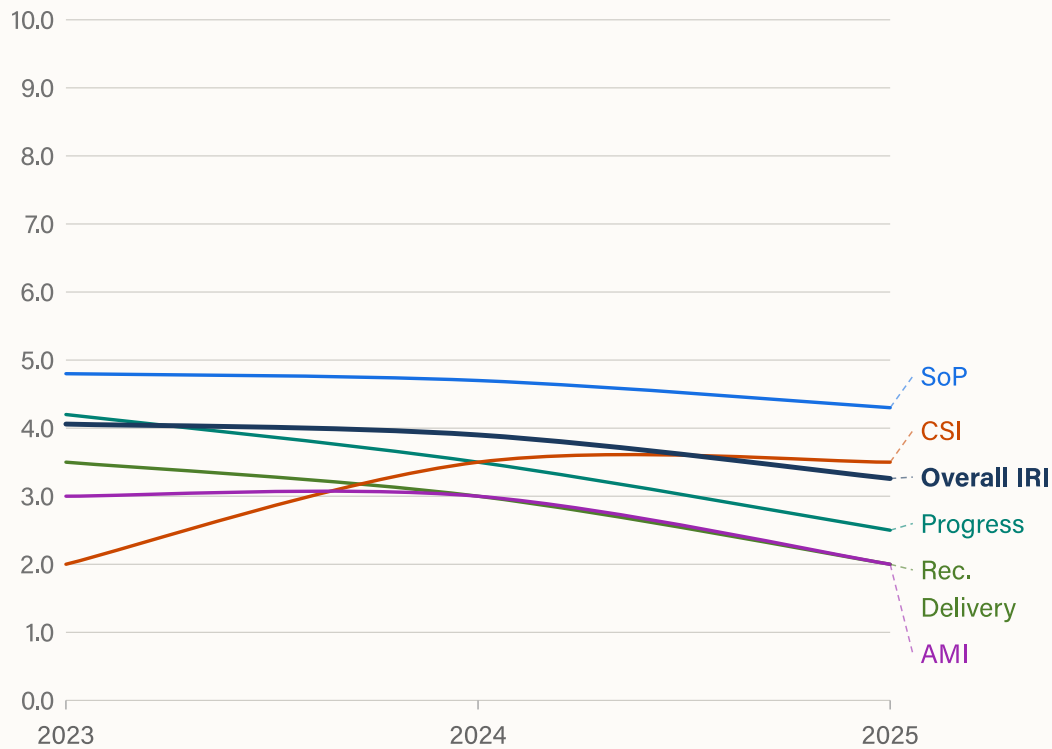
Over the three-year period, Georgia displays a pattern of low and declining integration readiness. An initial phase of stagnation in 2023 is followed by a formal procedural upgrade in 2024 that is not matched by substantive reform delivery, culminating in a marked deterioration in 2025 driven by democratic backsliding and a de facto halt in the accession process.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2023	4.8	4.2	3.5	2.0	3.0	4.06
2024	4.7	3.5	3.0	3.5	3.0	3.90
2025	4.3	2.5	2.0	3.5	2.0	3.26

**Table 10** Georgia: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2023–2025: Georgia

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 10** Georgia IRI trajectory (2023–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2023 — Low preparedness under constrained reform capacity**

*Overall IRI score: 4.06 / 10*

In 2023, Georgia is assessed as remaining largely at an early stage or some level of preparation across the political criteria and most acquis chapters.

While certain sectoral areas show moderate technical alignment, systemic weaknesses—particularly political polarisation, limited institutional checks and balances, and governance constraints—continue to weigh on overall preparedness.

Year-on-year progress is uneven. The report contains a substantial share of limited progress and no progress assessments, alongside explicit references to backsliding in core democratic areas. Isolated instances of some or good progress are noted, but they do not alter the overall trajectory.

Recommendation delivery remains weak. Implementation of priority steps and other recommendations is framed as partial at best, with several remaining unaddressed. Procedurally, Georgia has not yet obtained candidate status, negotiations are not open, and no screening or chapter activity has begun. Accession momentum is therefore low and fragile.

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## **2024 — Formal status upgrade amid substantive regression**

*Overall IRI score: 3.90 / 10*

The 2024 assessment is characterised by a divergence between procedural developments and substantive performance. On the one hand, Georgia is granted EU candidate status, representing a formal step forward in the accession framework. On the other hand, the Commission's narrative is dominated by concerns over democratic backsliding and deterioration in the fundamentals.

State-of-play assessments remain largely unchanged compared to 2023, with most areas still placed at early stage or some level of preparation and no chapter reaching a good or well-advanced level. Structural deficiencies across key institutions persist.

Progress assessments weaken relative to the previous year. Backsliding becomes more prominent, particularly in democratic governance and fundamental rights, while no progress and limited progress dominate other areas. Recommendation delivery also deteriorates, with most

priority recommendations assessed as not implemented or only partially implemented.

Despite candidate status, negotiations are not opened, screening does not begin, and no chapters are opened or closed. Accession momentum is therefore mixed: a single positive procedural signal is outweighed by negative substantive developments and explicit Commission warnings that Georgia's trajectory risks undermining its EU path.

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## **2025 – Democratic backsliding and halted accession process**

*Overall IRI score: 3.26 / 10*

In 2025, Georgia records its lowest IRI score of the period. The Commission places overwhelming emphasis on democratic regression and erosion of accession fundamentals, to the extent that sectoral and acquis-specific analysis is explicitly subordinated to the political context.

Preparedness assessments show no qualitative improvement and, in practice, stagnation. Most areas remain at early or basic levels of preparation, with no evidence of systemic upgrading. Progress assessments deteriorate sharply, with substantial and significant backsliding identified in democratic governance, electoral processes, and fundamental freedoms.

Recommendation delivery declines further. Previously identified priorities remain largely unimplemented, and the Commission limits the issuance of new recommendations. Procedurally, Georgia retains candidate status but does not advance to negotiations or screening, and no chapter activity takes place. Accession momentum turns clearly negative, reflecting a de facto halt in the accession process.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Georgia as a candidate with persistently low integration readiness and a deteriorating trajectory over the period under review. Unlike cases where technical preparedness accumulates before procedural breakthroughs occur, Georgia's experience

between 2023 and 2025 is defined by weak reform delivery, democratic backsliding, and ultimately a loss of accession momentum.

The granting of candidate status in 2024 represents a formal recognition of potential rather than demonstrated readiness. As reflected in the IRI, this procedural step does not translate into higher overall readiness and is followed by further decline when substantive reforms fail to materialise.

When benchmarked against Croatia's 2011 accession-readiness band (8.8–9.2), Georgia remains far below the level associated with accession completion. The gap is structural rather than technical, rooted in the fundamentals of democratic governance, rule of law, and credible reform commitment.

This profile should be read as a measurement of Georgia's position based strictly on Commission reporting, and as a baseline for future trend analysis under a fixed, transparent, and replicable framework.

# Moldova

## Overview

This country chapter presents **Moldova**'s EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2023–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, pledges, or external projections.

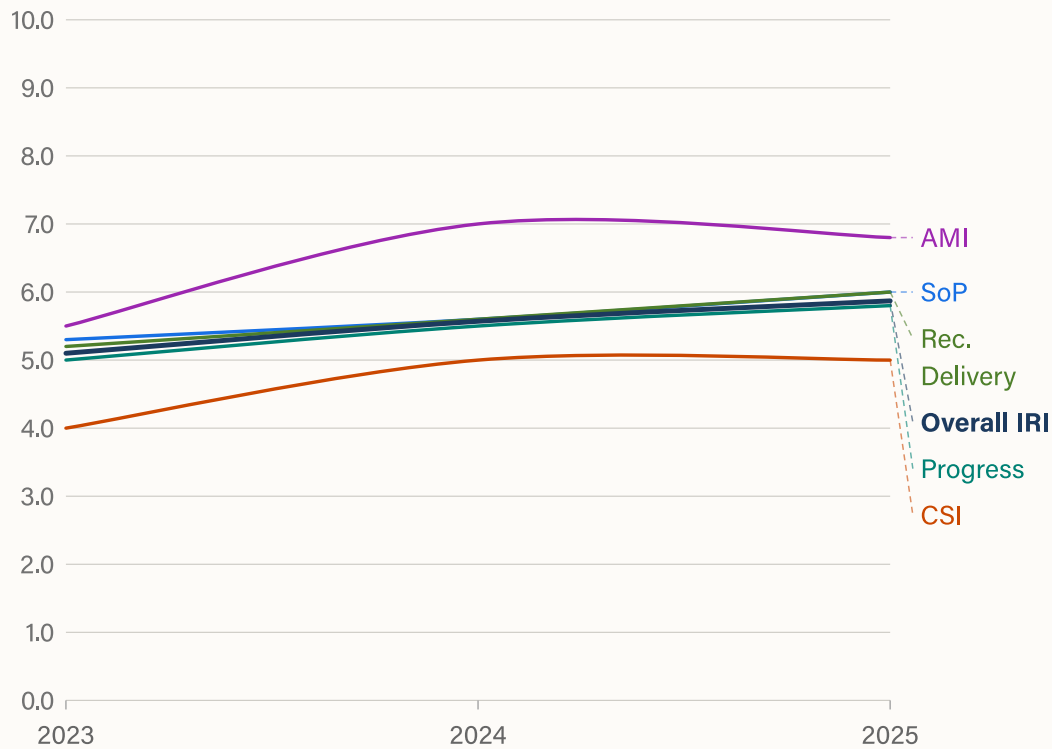
Over the three-year period, Moldova displays a clear upward trajectory, moving from early candidate consolidation in 2023, through a procedural breakthrough in 2024, to substantive–procedural consolidation in 2025.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2023	5.3	5.0	5.2	4.0	5.5	5.10
2024	5.6	5.5	5.6	5.0	7.0	5.57
2025	6.0	5.8	6.0	5.0	6.8	5.87

**Table 11** Moldova: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2023–2025: Moldova

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC • Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports • Datawrapper

**Figure 11** Moldova IRI trajectory (2023–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2023 — Candidate consolidation under uneven delivery**

*Overall IRI score: 5.10 / 10*

In 2023, Moldova's preparedness profile is mixed. Across the acquis, the Commission most frequently assesses the country as being at an early stage or some level of preparation, with pockets of moderate

preparation in selected internal market and economic areas. Structural constraints—particularly limited administrative capacity and uneven enforcement—remain prominent.

Progress assessments are dominated by limited to some progress, with isolated instances of good progress and explicit references to backsliding in sensitive rule-of-law areas. The report links uneven reform delivery to institutional fragility and the broader security environment.

Recommendation follow-through is present but uneven.

Most recommendations are described as partially implemented, with a non-negligible share remaining unaddressed. Procedurally, Moldova remains pre-negotiations throughout the reporting year, with no screening or chapter activity. Accession momentum is therefore modest and largely political rather than process-driven.

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## **2024 — Procedural breakthrough, gradual substantive improvement**

*Overall IRI score: 5.57 / 10*

The 2024 report marks a clear procedural shift. Moldova formally opens accession negotiations and begins screening, fundamentally altering its accession status compared to the previous year. Substantively, preparedness improves incrementally, with a larger number of chapters assessed at some level of preparation to moderately prepared.

Progress assessments strengthen. Some progress becomes the dominant formulation, complemented by good progress in selected technical areas. Notably, no instances of backsliding are recorded in the report.

Recommendation delivery also improves. While partial implementation remains the prevailing assessment, the Commission increasingly records concrete follow-up, particularly in economic governance and administrative reform. Despite the absence of chapter openings or closures, the procedural milestones achieved in 2024 translate into a markedly higher accession momentum score.

## **2025 – Consolidation of readiness and momentum**

*Overall IRI score: 5.87 / 10*

In 2025, Moldova consolidates both substance and process.

The Commission more frequently assesses chapters as moderately prepared, with several reaching a good level of preparation, reflecting improved institutional coordination and acquis-alignment mechanisms.

Progress assessments stabilise at some to good progress across most areas, with no recorded backsliding. Reform delivery appears more predictable and less dependent on ad hoc political impetus.

Recommendation follow-through strengthens further. A growing share of recommendations is described as implemented, with most others partially implemented, indicating improved execution capacity. Procedurally, screening advances significantly, though no chapters are opened or provisionally closed. Accession momentum remains positive but shifts from acceleration to managed consolidation.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Moldova as a rapidly advancing early-stage candidate whose accession trajectory has shifted from symbolic to procedural credibility since 2024. The opening of negotiations and screening anchors reform efforts more firmly within the EU accession machinery and supports incremental improvements in preparedness and delivery.

Despite this positive trajectory, Moldova's overall readiness remains well below the accession-ready benchmark represented by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2). The remaining gap reflects persistent structural constraints in administrative capacity, rule-of-law enforcement, and implementation depth.

The 2025 results indicate consolidation rather than acceleration. Further convergence will depend on translating procedural engagement into measurable chapter-level outcomes, including the opening and eventual provisional closure of chapters.

## Ukraine

### Overview

This country chapter presents **Ukraine's** EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2023–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, wartime solidarity considerations, or forward-looking pledges.

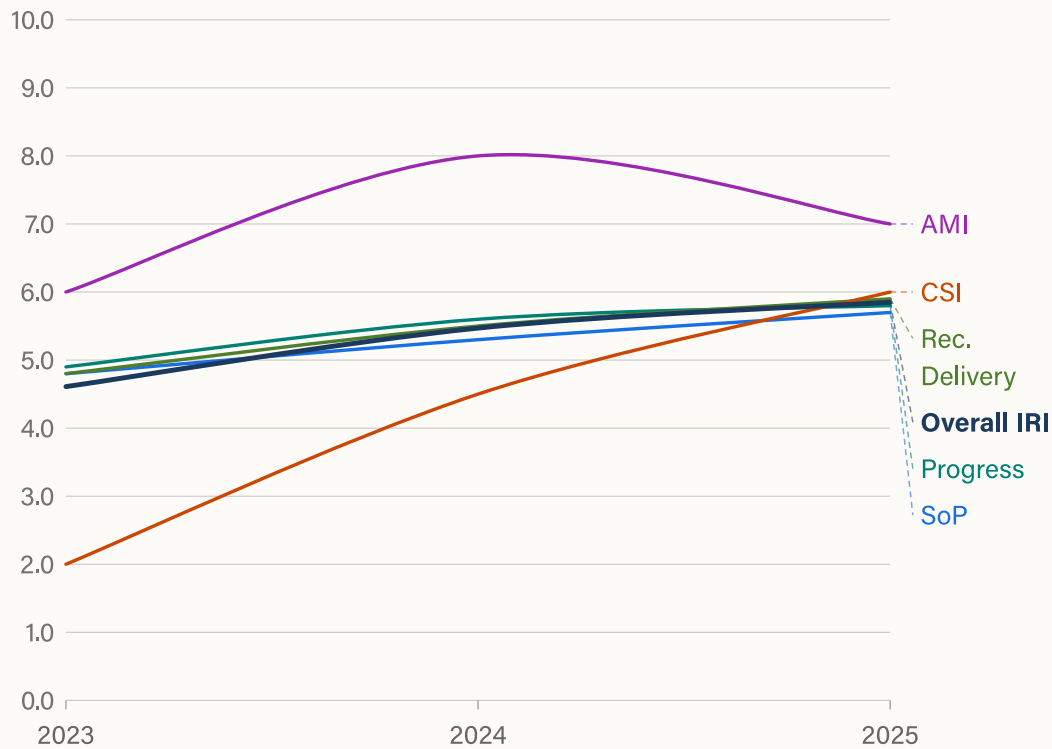
Over the three-year period, Ukraine displays a pattern of accelerated procedural engagement following candidate status, paired with gradual substantive consolidation under wartime conditions. While readiness improves steadily, overall performance remains well below the accession-ready benchmark band defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2).

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2023	4.8	4.9	4.8	2.0	6.0	4.61
2024	5.3	5.6	5.5	4.5	8.0	5.47
2025	5.7	5.8	5.9	6.0	7.0	5.85

**Table 12** Ukraine: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2023–2025: Ukraine

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 12** Ukraine IRI trajectory (2023–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### **2023 — Consolidation under wartime constraints**

*Overall IRI score: 4.61 / 10*

In 2023, Ukraine is assessed predominantly at a some level of preparation across the fundamentals and most acquis areas. The Commission consistently frames institutional capacity and enforcement as constrained

by the ongoing war and the application of martial law, with several policy fields remaining at an early stage.

Year-on-year progress is mixed. While reform activity continues and some progress is noted in selected areas, limited or no progress remains frequent across internal-market and governance-related chapters. Recommendation delivery is referenced largely as partial, with persistent gaps in follow-through. Procedurally, Ukraine holds candidate status but has not yet entered accession negotiations, keeping accession momentum moderate despite strong political commitment.

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## **2024 — Procedural breakthrough with uneven substance**

*Overall IRI score: 5.47 / 10*

The 2024 report marks a qualitative shift. Ukraine's preparedness improves modestly, with a growing number of chapters approaching moderate or good levels of preparation, though fundamentals remain uneven.

Progress assessments strengthen relative to 2023, with some progress becoming the dominant formulation and instances of good progress appearing in specific technical areas. Recommendation delivery improves but remains largely partial.

The decisive change is procedural. Accession negotiations are opened, the first Intergovernmental Conference is held, and bilateral screening begins. These developments generate a strong accession-momentum signal, lifting the overall IRI despite remaining substantive gaps.

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## **2025 — Screening completion and conditional consolidation**

*Overall IRI score: 5.85 / 10*

In 2025, Ukraine's readiness profile shows continued consolidation. Preparedness remains centred on the some-to-moderate range, with clearer institutional structuring through adopted roadmaps and the launch of the National Programme for the Adoption of the Acquis.

Progress assessments remain positive overall, with several areas recording good progress. At the same time, the Commission flags concerns—most notably regarding anti-corruption safeguards and prosecutorial independence—which temper the upward trend.

Recommendation delivery strengthens incrementally but stops short of systematic implementation. Procedurally, bilateral screening is completed and reports advance through the Council, sustaining high momentum even in the absence of chapter openings or closures.

### **Interpretation**

Taken together, the IRI results depict Ukraine as a candidate with rapidly advancing procedural integration and gradually improving substantive readiness, operating under exceptional wartime conditions. The sharp rise between 2023 and 2024 reflects the opening of negotiations and the start of screening, while the 2025 score shows consolidation rather than acceleration.

Relative to the accession-ready benchmark band defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2), Ukraine remains at an intermediate stage of convergence. The trajectory indicates credible forward movement, but sustained progress will depend on translating procedural momentum into consistent delivery across the fundamentals, particularly in rule-of-law and anti-corruption areas.

This profile should be read as a measurement of Ukraine's position based strictly on Commission reporting, and as a baseline for future trend analysis under a fixed and replicable framework.

# 5. Türkiye

## Overview

This country chapter presents Türkiye's EU accession readiness as measured by the Integration Readiness Index (IRI) over the period 2021–2025. The assessment is based exclusively on the European Commission's annual progress reports and applies a fixed, progress-report-only methodology (IRI v1.0, "Golden Standard").

The IRI translates the Commission's qualitative assessments into a consistent 1–10 scale, enabling year-on-year comparison and benchmarking against the last completed enlargement case (Croatia 2011). Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability, geopolitical relevance, or forward-looking commitments.

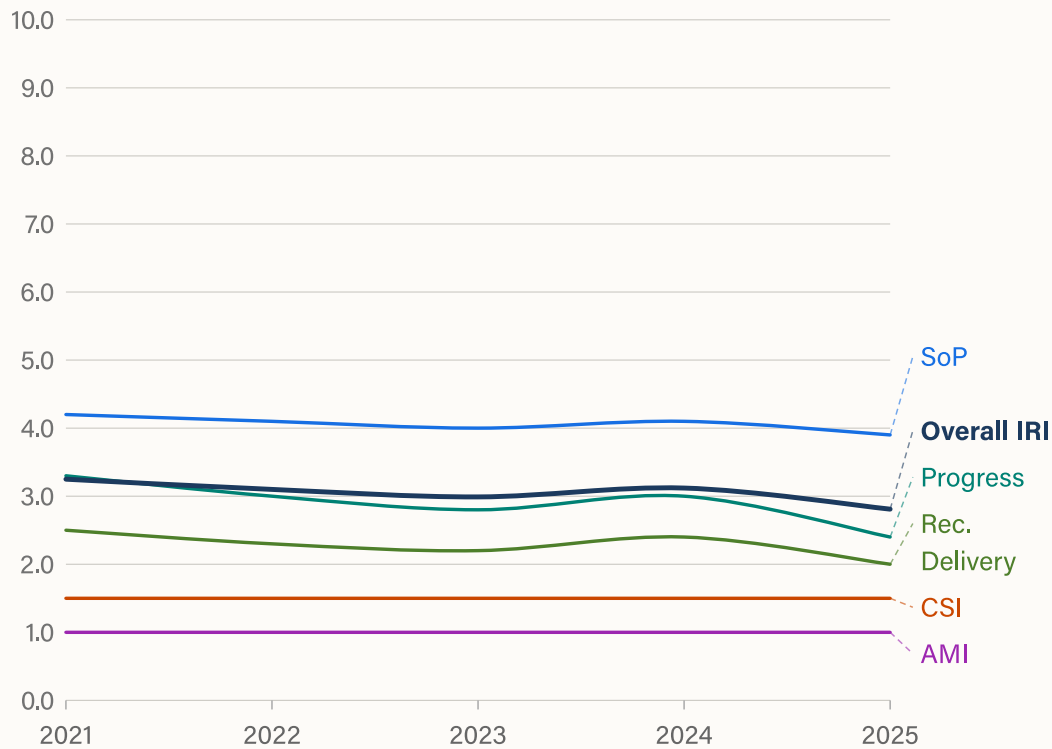
Over the five-year period, Türkiye displays a pattern of persistently low and structurally constrained preparedness. Limited improvements in economic governance do not translate into sustained convergence and are repeatedly outweighed by deterioration in democratic standards, rule of law, and fundamental rights, combined with a prolonged procedural standstill.

Year	State of Play (SoP)	Progress	Recommendation Delivery	CSI	AMI	Overall IRI
2021	4.2	3.3	2.5	1.5	1.0	3.25
2022	4.1	3.0	2.3	1.5	1.0	3.10
2023	4.0	2.8	2.2	1.5	1.0	2.99
2024	4.1	3.0	2.4	1.5	1.0	3.12
2025	3.9	2.4	2.0	1.5	1.0	2.81

Table 13 Türkiye: IRI indicators by year

## Integration Readiness Index 2021–2025: Türkiye

The IRI aggregates five indicators: State of Play (SoP), Annual Progress, Recommendations Delivery (Rec.), Chapter Status (CSI), and Accession Momentum (AMI). Scores reflect assessed readiness and process dynamics, not forecasts or political commitments.



*IRI v1.0. Scores are comparable over time within the same framework.*

*No forecasts or forward-looking assumptions are included.*

Chart: EPIC · Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports · Datawrapper

**Figure 13** Türkiye IRI trajectory (2021–2025)

### Year-by-Year Assessment

#### 2021 — Low readiness under entrenched backsliding

*Overall IRI score: 3.25 / 10*

In 2021, Türkiye is assessed as having low overall preparedness across the acquis and political criteria. The Commission consistently places

the fundamentals—democracy, judiciary, fundamental rights, and the fight against corruption—at an early stage of preparation, with repeated references to serious and long-standing deficiencies.

Progress assessments are predominantly negative. Backsliding and no progress dominate the fundamentals cluster, while limited progress is confined to technical or operational areas, notably migration management and certain security-related fields.

Although the economic criteria are assessed more positively in structural terms, these strengths are explicitly constrained by governance weaknesses and institutional unpredictability. Procedurally, accession negotiations remain effectively frozen, resulting in very low accession momentum.

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## **2022 — Continued deterioration without compensatory reform**

*Overall IRI score: 3.10 / 10*

The 2022 assessment confirms continuity rather than change. Türkiye remains at a low level of readiness overall, with further backsliding identified in democratic standards, judicial independence, and respect for fundamental rights.

Progress assessments remain weak. No progress and backsliding dominate in politically salient chapters, while limited progress is sporadic and largely technical in nature. Economic capacity remains comparatively stronger, but concerns regarding monetary policy credibility, state intervention, and transparency intensify.

Outstanding recommendations from previous years remain largely unimplemented. Procedurally, the accession framework remains unchanged, reinforcing the picture of a fully stalled accession process.

## **2023 — Consolidation of the standstill**

*Overall IRI score: 2.99 / 10*

In 2023, Türkiye's IRI falls marginally below the 3.0 threshold. The Commission's language becomes more explicit in stating that the country has continued to move away from the EU.

Serious concerns persist regarding the rule of law, selective judicial practices, non-implementation of ECtHR judgments, and shrinking civic space. Progress assessments weaken further compared to 2022, with limited progress becoming less frequent and backsliding remaining dominant, particularly in the fundamentals cluster.

Some references to partial implementation of recommendations appear in non-fundamental areas, but coverage remains uneven and insufficient to alter the aggregate recommendation delivery signal. Accession negotiations remain formally frozen.

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## **2024 — Economic stabilisation without political recovery**

*Overall IRI score: 3.12 / 10*

The 2024 report marks a modest and fragile improvement in Türkiye's IRI score. This adjustment is driven primarily by the economic dimension, where the Commission acknowledges some progress following a shift toward tighter monetary policy, improved macroeconomic coordination, and partial restoration of policy credibility.

Local elections held in March 2024 are assessed as largely respecting the will of the people, contributing to a slightly more nuanced evaluation of the electoral process. However, the underlying structural features of the political system—centralisation of power, weak checks and balances, and pressure on opposition actors—remain unchanged.

The fundamentals cluster shows no structural improvement. Accession negotiations remain frozen, limiting the impact of economic stabilisation on overall readiness.

## 2025 — Renewed backsliding and index deterioration

*Overall IRI score: 2.81 / 10*

In 2025, Türkiye records its lowest IRI score of the five-year period. The Commission explicitly notes renewed backsliding, particularly in the judiciary and fundamental rights.

Judicial and administrative pressure on opposition figures intensifies, elected mayors are removed and replaced by trustees, and prosecutions of journalists and political actors increase. Although the economic criteria continue to register some progress, these gains are insufficient to offset deterioration in democratic standards and rule of law.

With accession negotiations still frozen and no credible momentum signals, substantive regression combined with procedural paralysis produces a clear downward adjustment in Türkiye's IRI.

### Interpretation

Taken together, the IRI results depict Türkiye as a candidate with entrenched structural constraints, where prolonged deficiencies in democratic governance, judicial independence, and fundamental rights impose a persistent ceiling on accession readiness.

Unlike candidates characterised by gradual convergence punctuated by temporary stagnation, Türkiye's trajectory reflects institutional divergence with episodic economic correction. The temporary stabilisation observed in 2024 does not amount to structural convergence and is reversed in 2025 by renewed political backsliding.

The distance between Türkiye's performance and the accession-ready benchmark defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (8.8–9.2) remains wide and has not narrowed over the period under review. This profile should be read as a measurement of where Türkiye stands based strictly on Commission reporting, and as a baseline for future trend analysis under a fixed, transparent, and replicable framework.

## 6. Cross-Regional Comparison: Patterns, Convergence, and Constraints

This section synthesises Integration Readiness Index (IRI) results across all countries covered in the report, with the aim of identifying cross-regional patterns, convergence dynamics, and structural constraints. The analysis compares three groups:

- Western Balkans
- Eastern Partnership
- Türkiye

All results are benchmarked against the accession-ready reference band defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (IRI 8.8–9.2).

At an aggregate level, no country in any region approaches the accession-ready benchmark band. However, trajectories diverge markedly in direction, volatility, and the relationship between procedural momentum and substantive readiness.

The regional IRI trajectories highlight three distinct integration dynamics within the EU's current enlargement landscape.

The **Western Balkans average** displays a slow but discernible upward trend over the period. While overall readiness remains well below the accession benchmark defined by Croatia's 2011 performance (IRI 8.8–9.2), the trajectory suggests gradual consolidation rather than regression. Improvements are uneven and episodic, but the region as a whole shows a capacity to translate procedural engagement into modest gains in assessed readiness, particularly where negotiations are active.

The **Eastern Partnership average** follows a markedly more volatile path. Initial gains associated with candidate status decisions and procedural activation do not translate into sustained convergence. Instead, divergence among countries and instability in the fundamentals produce a flat-to-declining regional trajectory by the end of the period. At the aggregate level, the EaP profile illustrates how procedural recognition alone is insufficient to anchor integration readiness in the absence of consistent reform delivery.

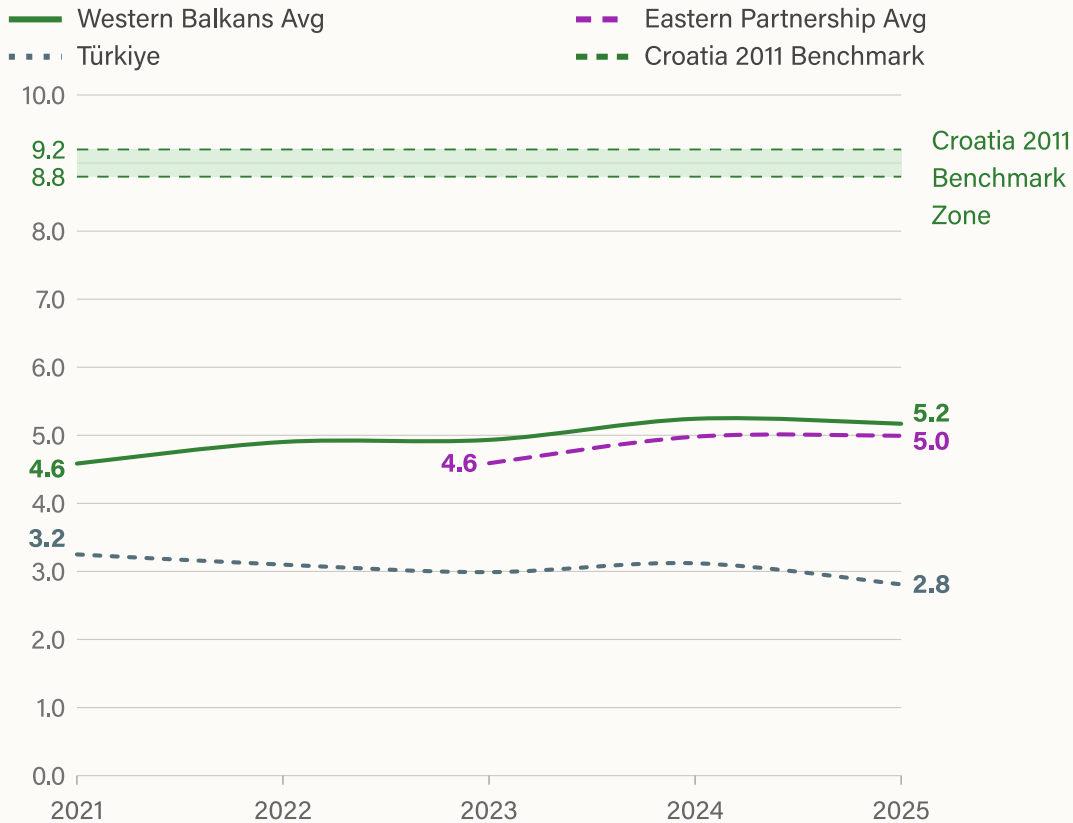
Country	Region	Latest Year	IRI Score	Direction of Travel	Dominant Constraint
Albania	Western Balkans	2025	6.7	↑	Process → Substance
Bosnia and Herzegovina	Western Balkans	2025	2.9	↓	Governance
Kosovo	Western Balkans	2025	3.6	→	Institutions
North Macedonia	Western Balkans	2025	5.5	→	Political conditions
Montenegro	Western Balkans	2025	6.8	↑	Near-ceiling process
Serbia	Western Balkans	2025	5.5	↓	Fundamentals
Georgia	Eastern Partnership	2025	3.3	↓	Democratic backsliding
Moldova	Eastern Partnership	2025	5.9	↑	Implementation depth
Ukraine	Eastern Partnership	2025	5.9	↑	Rule of law
Türkiye	Türkiye	2025	2.8	↓	Structural divergence

**Table 14** Cross-Regional Comparison (Latest IRI Scores)

*Note: Direction of travel reflects the net movement over the most recent three-year window*

## EU Integration Readiness Index (IRI): Regional Trajectories (2021–2025)

This chart compares the composite IRI trajectories of the Western Balkans, the Eastern Partnership, and Türkiye over time. The shaded benchmark band reflects Croatia's estimated accession-readiness range (IRI 8.8–9.2).



*Western Balkans and Eastern Partnership: simple averages of country-level IRI scores. IRI measures Commission-assessed readiness, not political desirability or accession timelines.*

Chart: EPIC • Source: European Commission annual enlargement progress reports (2021–2025) • Datawrapper

**Figure 14** IRI Regional Trajectories (2021-2025)

**Türkiye's trajectory** stands apart. Despite long-standing engagement with the accession framework, the IRI series shows stagnation followed by decline. Periodic improvements in economic governance do not offset persistent deterioration in democratic standards and rule-of-law performance. The result is a structurally capped readiness profile,

increasingly disconnected from accession-level benchmarks and from the dynamics observed in both the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership.

Taken together, the regional comparison underscores a central finding of the IRI framework: **procedural activation, political signalling, and geopolitical relevance do not mechanically translate into integration readiness**. Sustained convergence depends on the alignment of reform substance, institutional delivery, and credible process momentum—an alignment that remains partial in the Western Balkans, fragile in the Eastern Partnership, and absent in Türkiye.

# Methodological Annex — Integration Readiness Index (IRI v1.0)

## A. Purpose and scope

The Integration Readiness Index (IRI) is a composite measurement framework designed to quantify EU accession readiness over time, based exclusively on European Commission enlargement progress reports. The Index is intended for:

- **Measurement:** translating qualitative Commission assessments into a stable 1–10 scale;
- **Comparison over time:** tracking trajectories consistently across years;
- **Benchmarking:** contextualising readiness against the most recent completed enlargement case, defined as Croatia’s pre-accession position (2011).

The IRI deliberately excludes external datasets, perception surveys, media reporting, and political conditionality not explicitly reflected in Commission reporting. If an element is not stated or evidenced in the progress report, it is not incorporated in the Index.

## **B. Source material and evidence base**

### **B.1 Exclusive reliance on Commission reporting**

The IRI uses only:

- Annual European Commission country/enlargement progress reports;
- Explicit tables, annexes, and narrative judgements contained within those reports.

No supplementary sources (Council conclusions, screening reports, national reporting, or third-party indices) are used. This constraint ensures institutional compatibility, neutrality, and replicability.

### **B.2 Evidence eligibility rule**

Eligible evidence types are limited to:

1. **Ordinal Commission judgements**
  - “State of play / level of preparation”
  - “Progress this year”
2. **Recommendation follow-through statements**
  - “Implemented / partially implemented / not implemented” (or equivalent)
3. **Explicit quantitative metrics**
  - counts, percentages, budgetary figures, rates, staffing numbers, backlog figures, enforcement statistics, etc.
4. **Explicitly completed actions**
  - adoption or entry into force of legislation, strategies, action plans, or institutional reforms
  - drafting alone is not treated as completion unless explicitly framed as such by the report

Evidence is extracted and coded only when stated explicitly in the report text.

## **C. Unit of analysis and coverage**

### **C.1 Units scored**

The IRI scores annually:

- **Political criteria / Fundamentals**
- **Economic criteria**
- **Acquis chapters (1-33)**

Where Commission reporting is structured by clusters, chapter-level evidence is reconstructed using chapter-specific narrative in the report.

### **C.2 Time dimension**

- Annual scoring
- Rolling multi-year time series (country profiles presented for 2021–2025 or 2023–2025 depending on available scoring window)
- No retroactive reinterpretation of past reports

## **D. Indicator structure**

The IRI consists of **five indicators**, divided into substantive and procedural components.

### **D.1 Substantive indicators**

These indicators are derived from Commission assessments at chapter/criteria level and aggregated into country-year scores.

### D.1.1 State of Play (SoP)

Derived from Commission “level of preparation” language.

Fixed mapping to 1–10 scale:

Commission assessment	Score
Early stage	2
Some level of preparation	4
Moderately prepared	6
Good level of preparation	8
Well advanced	9

Intermediate phrasing (e.g. “between moderate and good”) is mapped using midpoint values.

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### D.1.2 Annual Progress (Prog)

Derived from Commission annual progress assessments.

Fixed mapping:

Commission assessment	Score
Backsliding	1
No progress	2
Limited progress	4
Some progress	6
Good progress	8
Very good progress	9

This indicator captures direction of travel rather than level.

### D.1.3 Recommendation Delivery (Rec)

Applied only where the report explicitly assesses implementation of prior recommendations. Mapping:

Recommendation status	Score
Implemented	9
Partially implemented	6
Not implemented	3
Not stated	NA

Where recommendation status is not stated in a sufficiently consistent manner, Rec is coded as **NA** and excluded from aggregation with weights renormalised (see Section F).

## D.2 Procedural indicators

These indicators capture accession process momentum independently of substantive preparedness.

### D.2.1 Chapter Status Indicator (CSI)

Measures cumulative procedural progress:

- Closed (including provisionally closed) = 1.0
- Opened = 0.5
- Not opened = 0

CSI is computed across chapters and mapped linearly onto a 1–10 scale, using Croatia 2011 as the ceiling reference.

## D.2.2 Accession Momentum Indicator (AMI)

Measures recent procedural movement using a rolling time window.

Indicative scoring logic:

- Chapter closed in current year: 9
- Chapter closed  $\leq 1$  year ago: 8
- Chapter closed 2–3 years ago: 6
- Chapter opened in last year: 5
- No movement for 2–3 years: 3
- No movement for  $\geq 4$  years: 1–2

Only documented opening/closing events are counted. Process signalling without formal procedural events is not treated as chapter movement.

## E. Benchmarking logic: Croatia 2011

Croatia's 2011 pre-accession position is used as a benchmark reference because it represents the most recent completed enlargement case under a modern chapter-based framework and provides comprehensive, chapter-level evidence.

Benchmarking is applied as follows:

- Croatia 2011 defines the **upper performance band** for hard metrics where comparable numeric indicators exist;
- “Well advanced” language in Croatia 2011 anchors the high-end calibration of preparedness;
- The benchmark is displayed as a **band (8.8–9.2)** to reflect variation across chapters and the methodological decision to reserve score 10 for performance consistent with or exceeding historical accession conditions.

The benchmark band is used as a **reference line**, not a threshold or target.

## **F. Weighting and aggregation (locked)**

### **F.1 Overall structure**

Total Index = 100%:

- **Substantive preparedness: 85%**
- **Accession process momentum: 15%**

### **F.2 Substantive preparedness (85%)**

Within each chapter/criterion:

- SoP: 50%
- Progress: 30%
- Rec: 20% (renormalised if Rec is NA)

In the overall index, substantive components are weighted as:

- SoP: 42.5% ( $0.85 \times 0.50$ )
- Progress: 25.5% ( $0.85 \times 0.30$ )
- Rec: 17.0% ( $0.85 \times 0.20$ )

### **F.3 Process momentum (15%)**

- CSI: 10%
- AMI: 5%

Weights are fixed and unchanged across countries and years. Any future change requires a new methodology version.

### **Baseline equation (Rec available)**

$$\text{IRI} = 0.425 \cdot \text{SoP} + 0.255 \cdot \text{Prog} + 0.170 \cdot \text{Rec} + 0.10 \cdot \text{CSI} + 0.05 \cdot \text{AMI}$$

## G. Missing data and renormalisation rules

Where Recommendation Delivery is coded **NA** due to insufficient explicit implementation classification in the report, the Rec component is excluded and substantive weights are renormalised proportionally across remaining substantive components for that year.

No imputation is applied. Missing evidence is treated as missing rather than inferred.

### Renormalised equation (Rec = NA)

When Recommendation Delivery is not explicitly assessed and therefore excluded, the substantive component is renormalised across SoP and Progress only:

$$\text{IRI} = 0.85 \cdot \left( \frac{0.50}{0.80} \cdot \text{SoP} + \frac{0.30}{0.80} \cdot \text{Prog} \right) + 0.10 \cdot \text{CSI} + 0.05 \cdot \text{AMI}$$

Which simplifies to:

$$\text{IRI} = 0.53125 \cdot \text{SoP} + 0.31875 \cdot \text{Prog} + 0.10 \cdot \text{CSI} + 0.05 \cdot \text{AMI}$$

## H. Methodological safeguards

The IRI is governed by the following safeguards:

- No subjective expert scoring
- No country-specific calibration
- No year-to-year weight changes
- Strict adherence to Commission language
- Full transparency and auditability through indicator tables and extraction volume reporting

Any methodological modification requires a new version number and an explicit revision note.

## I. Interpretation guidance

- Scores reflect Commission-assessed readiness and momentum, not political desirability or accession probability.
- High substantive scores with low momentum indicate prepared but procedurally stalled cases.
- High momentum with low substance indicates procedural activation without readiness convergence.
- The Index is designed for trend analysis and benchmarking, not automatic accession decisions.

