GRADUAL INTEGRATION

November 2026



Closer integration brings tangible benefits to citizens and businesses in both the EU and candidate countries, ahead of accession. It also supports the enlargement partners on their path to the EU.

WHAT IS IT ?

Ahead of accession, the EU offers enlargement partners the possibility to take part in selected EU policies. Gaining gradual access to the EU internal market brings direct opportunities both for citizens and businesses in the EU and in the enlargement partners.

Gradual integration supports enlargement partners' preparations for membership. It also complements and reinforces the accession process, builds administrative capacity and mutual trust.

Participation is merit-based, conditional and reversible, and depends on policy readiness and strategic alignment.

WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED ?

SEPA

Banks in Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and Moldova joined the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA), enabling **cheaper and faster euro payments**.

Roam Like at Home

Ukraine and Moldova are part of the EU's Roam like at Home area since 1 January 2026, allowing for **no extra roaming charges**. Work is ongoing to extend this also to the Western Balkans.

Green Lanes

Fast-track lanes for goods between the Western Balkans, Moldova and EU countries result in shorter waiting times and smoother trade.

Cooperation with EU agencies

More than **20 EU agencies support the partners**, mainly in aligning policies and regulatory frameworks in key areas over 14 accession chapters.

Erasmus +

Between 2021 and 2025, Erasmus+ enabled **around 25,000 university students and staff from enlargement partners** to study or teach in the EU.

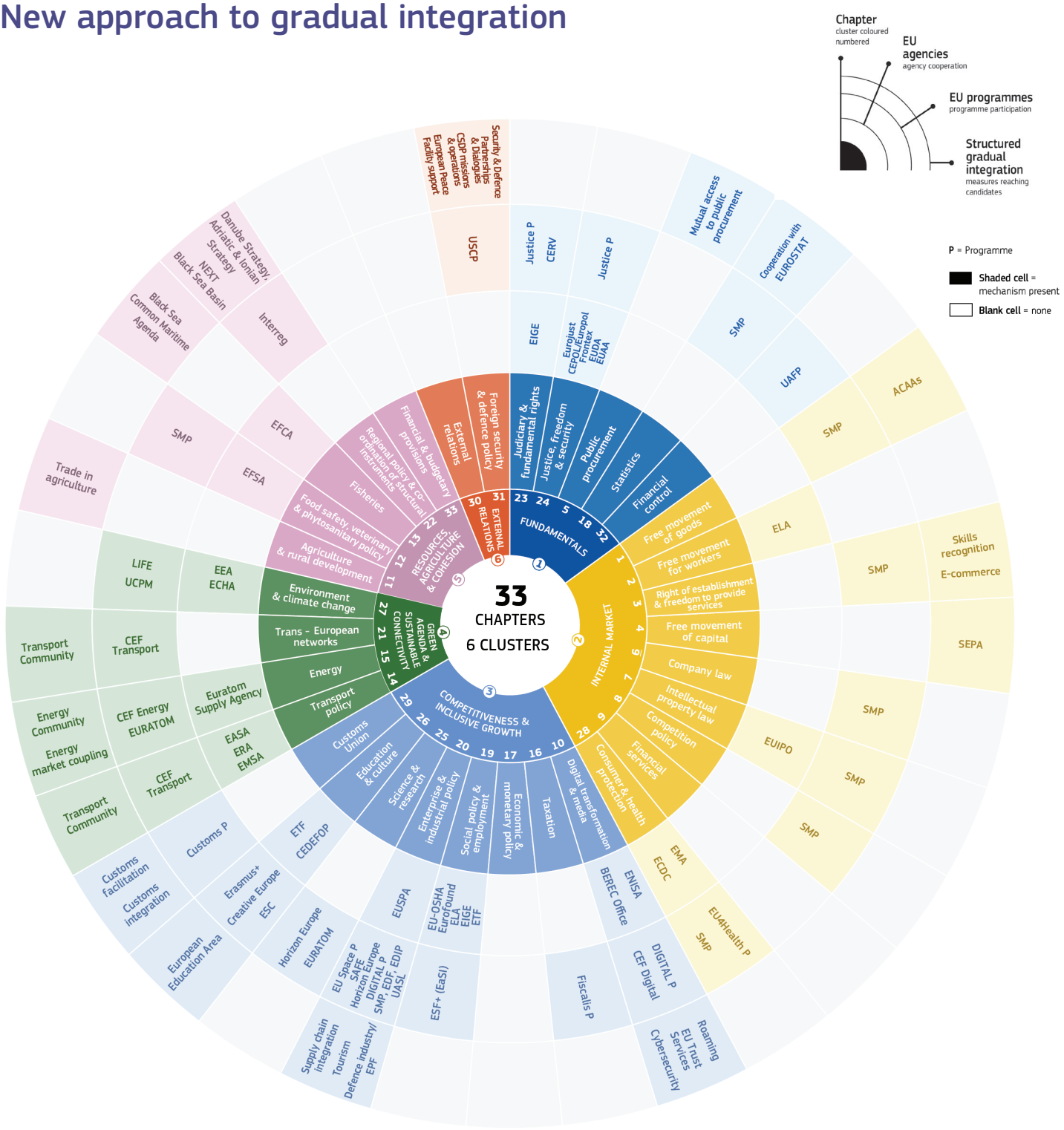
Development of trans-European corridors

Investments in transport and energy connectivity are making the region more **competitive and better connected** with the EU.

WHAT'S NEW ?

- The Commission **presented the mapping** of new opportunities to further enhance gradual integration, directly anchoring them in the dedicated enlargement chapters.
- Every partner **advancing on its EU path will gradually gain access** to these opportunities.
- **Annual gradual integration dialogues** between the Commission and enlargement partners will drive this process.

New approach to gradual integration



EU PROGRAMMES

CEF Digital	Connecting Europe Facility - Digital
CEF Energy	Connecting Europe Facility - Energy
CEF Transport	Connecting Europe Facility - Transport
CERV	Citizens, Equality, Rights and Values Programme
Creative Europe	Creative Europe
Customs P	Customs Programme
DIGITAL P	Digital Europe Programme
EDF	European Defence Fund
Erasmus+	Erasmus +
ESF+ (EaSI)	European Social Fund Plus (Employment and Social Innovation strand)
EU4Health P	EU4Health programme
EURATOM	Euratom Research and Training Programme
EU Space P	EU Space Programme
ESC	European Solidarity Corps
Fiscalis P	Fiscalis Programme
Horizon Europe	Horizon Europe
Interreg	Interreg
Justice P	Justice Programme
LIFE	Programme for the Environment and Climate Action
SMP	Single Market Programme
UAFP	Union Anti-Fraud Programme
UCPM	Union Civil Protection Mechanism
USCP	Union Secure Connectivity Programme

EU AGENCIES

BEREC Office	Agency for Support for the Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC Office)
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CEPOL	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training
EASA	European Union Aviation Safety Agency
ECDC	European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control
ECHA	European Chemicals Agency
EEA	European Environment Agency
EFCA	European Fisheries Control Agency
EFSA	European Food Safety Authority
EIGE	European Institute for Gender Equality
ELA	European Labour Authority
EMA	European Medicines Agency
EMSA	European Maritime Safety Agency
ENISA	European Union Agency for Cybersecurity
ERA	European Union Agency for Railways
ESA	European Space Agency
EUAA	European Union Agency for Asylum
EUDA	European Union Drugs Agency
EUIPO	European Union Intellectual Property Office
EU-OSHA	European Agency for Safety and Health at Work
Europol	European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation
Eurofound	European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions
Eurojust	European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation
EUROSTAT*	Statistical Office of the European Union, support provided through IPA III funds
ETF	European Training Foundation
Frontex	European Border and Coast Guard Agency
Euratom Supply Agency	Euratom Supply Agency

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