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Catherine Ashton to visit the Western Balkans

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the Commission will visit Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo from 17 to 19 February 2010. Ms Ashton will meet with political leaders and civil society representatives as well as with representatives of the EU Missions in the region, including the EULEX mission in Kosovo and the EUFOR ALTHEA and EUPM missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Prior to her visit, High Representative Ashton said: *"The Western Balkans is a major foreign policy priority for the EU. We remain committed to the European perspective of the entire region. But consolidating stability and progress towards the EU essentially remains the responsibility of the leadership and of the people in the region. Europe's door is open to the whole region, when the conditions have been met."*

She added: *"Bosnia and Herzegovina is at an important juncture in its political development and I am eager to underline the importance for Bosnia and Herzegovina to continue on its path towards the European Union. As far as Serbia is concerned, I look forward to discussing the next steps that Serbia intends to take to bring forward its EU membership application. In Kosovo, I am particularly interested in discussing the progress made in the rule of law, fight against corruption and organised crime as well as in good governance."*

P R E S S

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The visit takes place at an important time for the Western Balkans. 2009 was a positive year with the whole region in different ways making steps closer towards the EU. But at the same time serious challenges lie ahead. Especially the political situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina is of particular concern; lack of progress, reforms and local political dialogue puts the country at risk of lagging behind the rest of the region.

The EU missions in the region remain essential for the long term development of security and rule of law throughout the Western Balkans. With more than five thousand people working on the ground the missions provide much needed assistance and reassurance in these crucial areas and function as catalysts for reform.

[EULEX Kosovo Factsheet](#)

[EUFOR Althea Factsheet](#)

[EUPM Factsheet](#)
