

# ... And Beyond

## The Western Balkans: A Regional Overview

**T**he Balkans are sometimes referred to as Southeastern Europe. In its report titled "Western Balkans: Enhancing the European Perspective," the EU concludes that the Western Balkans shall include the countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, (the former Yugoslav Republic of) Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, as well as Kosovo under UNSC Resolution 1244/99.



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In December 2007, the European Council reaffirmed that "the future of the Western Balkans lies within the European Union." It declared its willingness to move forward in the pre-accession process and even to accelerate it where justified by the efforts of a particular partner country.

In February 2008, the council reiterated its commitment to fully and effectively support the European perspective for the Western Balkans. It asked the commission to use community instruments to promote economic and political development.

For a long time the Western broadband industry looked East for new market opportunities. The Balkans were avoided and considered as less favorable. Why is it that a market of about 25 million people has been overlooked? What is happening with respect to its broadband developments? In future articles we will look at what is happening below the radar screen of many.

After a relatively slow start in the early years of 2000, Internet usage has been picking up. There is a remarkable pro-EU attitude and a high degree of acceptance of EU products and services. The Euro is

a well-accepted currency and some countries even adopted the Euro as their national currency (Montenegro and Kosovo) thus stabilizing their economies (low inflation) and lowering entry barriers for investors (no exchange rate risks).

Almost all cable TV networks are built as "tree and branch," above ground and combine fibre and coaxial technologies (HFC). Many operators dream of the ultimate fibre-to-the-home (FTTH) network, but today's reality is that the fibre reaches nodes, each connecting a few hundred houses via traditional coaxial technologies.

History of the Balkans has not been helpful: cable TV networks have been built in an entrepreneurial "trial and error" spirit. Professional training in broadband technologies, network calculation or installation

was not available. CENELEC, not even as a reference, was used. Since 2008, U.K. SCTE has offered a new and modernized series of professional training courses — Installation Technician (RF and fibre), Service Technician and Network Technician.

To create awareness and interest for membership and to support the roll out of their training program the SCTE organized the annual Balkan Conference and Exhibition. The next event will be held in Skopje, Macedonia, on April 8, 2010. The program format is based on the successful mix of the conference with national and international keynote speakers, meet and greet the exhibition (where customers and suppliers meet and greet) and breakout training session where vendors demonstrate their newest technologies for a captured audience.

	Inhabitants	Internet users (2008)		EU status	Capital city
<b>Albania</b>	3.6 million	500,000	31%	Potential member	Tirana
<b>BIH</b>	4.6 million	1.4 million	30%	Potential member	Sarajevo
<b>Croatia</b>	4.5 million	1.8 million	40%	Candidate member	Zagreb
<b>Macedonia</b>	2 million	850,000	43%	Candidate member	Skopje
<b>Montenegro</b>	650,000	300,000	46%	Potential member	Podgorica
<b>Serbia</b>	7.5 million	3 million	40%	Potential member	Belgrade
<b>Kosovo</b>	1.8 million	1 million	56%	Potential member	Pristine
<b>Total</b>	24.65 million	8.85 million			



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