

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

Seven years after the first Berlin Western Balkans Summit in 2014, the Heads of Government of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, as well as the Heads of State or Government of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, and representatives of the European Union (EU) and of international and regional bodies and organisations met by video conference (in view of the ongoing challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic) in Berlin on 5 July 2021 for the Summit Meeting on the Western Balkans in the framework of the Berlin Process.

1. Building on the previous summits in Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Trieste, London, Poznań and Sofia, as well as on the outcomes of several ministerial and technical meetings in the past few weeks, the discussion took stock of progress, ongoing challenges and prospects for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans.
2. The Leaders of the Western Balkans renewed their sustained commitment to inclusive regional cooperation and recalled the 10 June Regional Summit in Tirana and the 18 June Leaders' Meeting in Vienna. They reaffirmed their commitment to the core European values of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights, as well as the centrality of reconciliation to the success of reform processes.
3. Participants emphasised that EU enlargement for the countries of the Western Balkans constitutes a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security and stability in Europe, reconfirming the longstanding view that the future of the entire region lies within the EU.
4. Participants agreed that inclusive regional cooperation is a fundamental factor for the Western Balkan partners on their path to EU membership, and not a substitute for accession. They commended the positive coordination among the projects launched within the framework of the Berlin Process and EU policies, with a specific focus on the Economic and Investment Plan, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Common Regional Market.
5. They reaffirmed the conclusions of the Poznań Summit regarding the important role of local governments as key stakeholders in regional and European integration, and appealed for the participation of local governments and local government associations to be strengthened in the EU accession process and projects funded by the EU under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).
6. Participants underlined the specific added value of the Berlin Process in promoting regional ownership to solve bilateral disputes and advancing connectivity, inclusive economic integration, reconciliation, people-to-people contacts, civil society and youth engagement and science cooperation.
7. Participants welcomed North Macedonia's proposal for the establishment of a regional programme to bring young diplomats together, in line with the Berlin Process goal of fostering mutual trust through confidence-building initiatives. They encouraged the Western Balkans to ensure quick implementation of the project.

8. Participants concluded that successful core elements of cooperation are to be continued and further developed. These elements notably include the Economic and Investment Plan with a focus on sustainable transport, clean energy and digital connectivity projects implemented through the Western Balkans Investment Framework, the activities for the development of a Common Regional Market, with special focus on the full implementation within the region of the four freedoms after the model of the EU Single Market, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans. Bilateral elements of cooperation such as the Purchasing Initiative and the activities conducted in the field of dual vocational training will also be continued.

COMMON REGIONAL MARKET (CRM)

9. Participants noted the efforts made by the Western Balkans since the Sofia Summit to make the Common Regional Market (CRM) a reality. This is a decisive endeavour in terms of building back better the economies of the region in the post-COVID-19 context and preparing opportunities for the further integration of the Western Balkans with the EU Single Market.
10. Such an ambitious project testifies to the potential of all-inclusive regional cooperation, as it will speed up economic modernisation and facilitate the convergence of the Western Balkans with EU principles and socio-economic standards. The success story of the European Union confirms that integration is a living process requiring enduring engagement and constructive commitment.
11. Participants recognised the potential of cities, towns and municipalities in the framework of the CRM.
12. Participants recalled the importance of swiftly enabling free movement of people within the Western Balkans as a concrete and tangible deliverable of the CRM for citizens of the region. In particular, the Western Balkan Leaders reiterated their commitment to adopting the agreement on free movement of people with ID cards and the agreement on third party citizens as soon as possible and before the next EU Western Balkans summit. Special attention was also devoted to adopting swiftly the agreements on the mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications, which will facilitate the movement of professionals throughout the Western Balkans.
13. It is now the task of the Western Balkan countries to conclude without delay the work undertaken and facilitated by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and under the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and to swiftly sign or adopt the relevant agreements and decisions for the benefit of citizens and companies in the region.
14. Participants welcomed the prominent role played by the private sector in the implementation of the CRM, to be developed further by means of close cooperation with the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) and by implementing specific measures across all six Western Balkan countries. In particular, they welcomed the establishment of a regional suppliers' development programme by the WB6 CIF.
15. They also reiterated that the EU accession process, the Economic Reform Programme, and analyses and recommendations for action issued by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are to remain important points of reference and benchmarks for measuring progress on necessary economic reform across the Western Balkan countries. Participants acknowledged that the recommendations of the OECD South East Europe (SEE) Competitiveness

Outlook 2021 serve as guidance and inspiration for pursuing an ambitious, inclusive and sustainable reform agenda in the Western Balkans. They agreed that the Outlook report provides a necessary and useful evidence base for the post-COVID-19 recovery of the region.

WB6 Green Lanes – Free Movement of Goods

16. Participants emphasised the achievements of the regional Green Lanes in ensuring the flow of basic medical and food supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Green Lanes were an excellent example of how inclusive regional cooperation can facilitate a quick and effective response to the devastating effects of the crisis.
17. Participants commended the extension of the Green Lanes to all intra-CEFTA crossing points and call for the swift harmonisation of the working hours of the agencies involved in goods clearance, within the region and with the neighboring EU Member States.
18. Participants welcomed the political willingness expressed by Greece to fully endorse the concept of EU-WB6 Green Lanes and the commitment to work closely with the neighbouring WB6 parties, as well as with the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community and the CEFTA Secretariat, in enabling the concept to be practically applied to the designated border-crossing points between Greece and its neighbouring Western Balkans countries – Albania and North Macedonia – with full respect for the required EU procedures, notably in the Schengen Agreement, regarding border crossing between an EU Member State and a candidate country.
19. Participants praised the key coordination role of the RCC, CEFTA and the Transport Community (TCT) in fostering the creation and further consolidation of the Green Lanes.

Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)

20. Participants commended the efforts done in the CEFTA framework and noted the completion of the technical work on several important CEFTA Decisions: e-commerce, mutual recognition of Authorised Economic Operators programmes (AEOS), mutual recognition of professional qualifications, removal of work permits. These are elements of central importance in the creation of the CRM. Participants call upon CEFTA Parties to adopt the related CEFTA Decisions as a matter of priority. They welcomed the entering into force of the Additional Protocol 6 on Trade in Service and commended the progress made in negotiating the Additional Protocol 7 on Dispute Settlement.

Digital Transformation

21. Participants welcomed the full implementation of the Regional Roaming Agreement and the start of the free roaming regime in the Western Balkans as of 1 July 2021 and expressed their willingness to continue the work on a roadmap to ensure reductions in roaming costs between the EU and the Western Balkans.
22. Participants praised the organisation of the annual regional competition, Balkathon 2.0, which concluded on 28 May 2021 and saw proposals for digital smart solutions from young people across the Western Balkans.

23. Participants welcomed the announcement by Montenegro that the next Western Balkans Digital Summit, a flagship event of the regional economic integration agenda, will be held on 11-13 October 2021.

ECONOMIC AND INVESTMENT PLAN

24. Participants underlined the importance of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) and expressed their expectations that its complementarity with the CRM and the Green Agenda will further boost economic integration and structural change in the region for a green transition and prepare the region for the integration into the Single Market. They acknowledged the key role of the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for the 2021-2027 period (IPA III) in mobilising the resources needed for implementing these two plans.
25. Participants reiterated the importance of sustainable transport connectivity as a cornerstone of the economic and social integration of the Western Balkans. Development of the TEN-T network to the Western Balkans should embrace green and digital transformation as an integral part of European ambition to achieve its decarbonisation objectives. Participants confirmed their political willingness to develop climate-resilient, intelligent and resource-efficient transport networks in the Western Balkans that should serve to transport goods and passengers in the most effective and user-friendly way, in support of sustainable mobility.
26. Participants committed to building connections between the Western Balkans and EU neighbours by creating an interoperable setup for the development of a common transport market without barriers to boost the region's prospects for doing business.
27. They acknowledged the need to foster the creation of a level playing field for competitive rail transport services in the Western Balkans, thus improving the overall efficiency of the transport services and achieving the objectives for green and sustainable mobility. They recognised that people and businesses in the region and the EU deserve safe, reliable, fast and comfortable railway connections between the Western Balkans 6 capitals and between Western Balkans 6 and neighbouring EU capitals. They therefore agreed that rail connectivity within and throughout the region must be reinforced through capital investments and comply with EU rail interoperability standards.

GREEN AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

28. Participants reiterated their commitment to ensuring the success of and achieving the objectives of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The Agenda is an important driver for the transition to carbon-neutral and climate-resilient economies, with the aim of decoupling economic growth from resource consumption and waste generation, tackling high pollution levels and safeguarding the rich biodiversity of the region.
29. Participants welcomed the progress achieved to date in the implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans and recognised RCC efforts in coordinating the preparation of the first draft Action Plan. They acknowledged that the entire process rests on regional ownership and the involvement of relevant regional organisations and civil society. Recalling the importance of the

“whole-of-economy” and “whole-of-society” approach for the successful implementation of the Green Agenda, they called on all relevant stakeholders to contribute to its implementation. They commended the EU’s role and support, including financial assistance, in facilitating the achievement of the Sofia Commitments on the Green Agenda.

30. Participants also commended the launch of the Initiative for the Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans in the first quarter of 2021.
31. The Chair highlighted Germany’s commitment to appointing a Special Commissioner for the Implementation of the Green Agenda in the Industrial and Energy Sectors of the Western Balkans.

RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

32. Participants welcomed the decision by the Chair to follow up on last year’s first meeting in the framework of the Berlin Process of Ministers of Health and organise a follow-up meeting, which took place in Berlin (by video conference) on 17 June 2021. The meeting provided an update on current national regulations and facilitated an exchange of views on cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU on the topic of safe travelling. Participants confirmed the decision by the Ministers of Health to support regional health beyond the response in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic.
33. Participants welcomed the fact that the Western Balkans 6 are now on the list for which travel restrictions should be lifted. They congratulated the Commission and Council that the EU’s Digital COVID Certificate is since 1 July operational, and welcomed the comprehensive package of financial support to be provided to the Western Balkans to join the system. This funding would support the Western Balkans to develop and/or adapt the necessary national digital infrastructure and back-end solutions to issue, verify and accept digital green certificates according to the relevant EU technical specifications, and allow the interoperability of the digital green certificates through the central EU Gateway. This will facilitate travel in and out of the Western Balkans and into the EU and contribute to further mitigate the social and economic impact of the pandemic.
34. Participants commended EU solidarity with the Western Balkans in fighting the pandemic, demonstrated by the unmatched EU support for the region, including vaccine deliveries through the EU Vaccine Sharing Mechanism. Continued EU and WHO support should enable strengthening of health systems in the Western Balkans beyond the pandemic and to ensure better preparedness for future challenges.
35. Participants agreed that the crisis sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic offers an opportunity for closer regional cooperation and further deepening of economic cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans. The significant financial resources provided by the EU and Member States to support socio-economic recovery in the Western Balkans are to be invested in measures to strengthen competitiveness of SMEs and in regional cooperation projects, such as infrastructure development. Cooperation with the EU must also be enhanced in strategic fields of development, such as the use of hydrogen or battery development, building on proposals from business associations and regional initiatives.

SECURITY

36. Participants acknowledged the shared security threats within the region and recommitted to strengthening the rule of law, criminal justice and information exchange between law enforcement agencies via the Joint Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation in the Field of Information Exchange for Law Enforcement.
37. Participants concluded that corruption, money laundering and financial crime were shared security threats, and welcomed progress made by the Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group to enhance regional and international cooperation on preventing and combating drug smuggling, people trafficking, weapons trafficking and violent extremism. The regional Illicit Finance and Anti-Corruption Roadmap agreed by the WB6 Interior Ministers will contribute to improve implementation of existing illicit finance and anti-corruption measures in line with international standards and recommendations.
38. Participants acknowledged the need for a multi-agency response, including cooperation with the private sector and civil-society organisations, to increase the effectiveness of joint work to tackle serious and organised crime, illicit finance, corruption and terrorism. The Leaders of the Western Balkans reaffirmed their commitments to the Anti-Corruption Pledges agreed in London in 2018, recognising that responsibility for building resilience to corruption lies with multiple public authorities, the private sector and civil-society organisations, and that aspects of corruption linked to organised crime groups are of particular relevance to the Ministries of Justice, Anti-Corruption Agencies, the Ministries of Finance and the Ministries of the Interior.

SMALL ARMS AND LIGHT WEAPONS

39. Participants reconfirmed the strategic importance of the timely implementation of the “Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024”. They welcomed the progress made despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. They noted with appreciation the achievements in establishing fully functioning Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Commissions and their contribution to regional cooperation, as well as their work on constantly updating national SALW strategies.
40. At the same time, participants welcomed the EU having now taken over as Chair of the initiative and acknowledged the role of Germany and France as Co-Chairs in actively pursuing work on its implementation. Likewise, they noted that the Roadmap has shaped the design of the EU Action Plan on Firearms Trafficking. They encouraged international partners and donors to continue providing financial support to this important initiative, given its crucial role in tackling potential transnational threats. In particular, they called for contributions to the funding mechanisms established for this purpose, including the UN Multi-Partner Trust Fund.

MIGRATION

41. Participants recognised the constantly changing challenges of migration within the Western Balkan region, whilst acknowledging the opportunities for economic development and societal exchange presented by migration. Working together to prevent pressure situations or to quickly mount an early, appropriate and targeted response continues to be of central importance. Also key are fair, efficient and practicable asylum and migration systems. At the same time, we need to uphold the fundamental rights of migrants and people who have applied for international protection.
42. Participants commended the activities of the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI) as a platform for discussing and developing migration policies and strategies.

RECONCILIATION

43. Participants agreed that, in order to prosper in the future, we need to continue to deal with the legacy of the past. Recalling the commitments made to further reconciliation in the Western Balkans, they reconfirmed their commitment to, inter alia, the three Joint Declarations signed in London in 2018 and made under the framework of the Berlin Process on (1) Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, (2) Missing Persons and (3) War Crimes.
44. Participants stressed the utmost importance of continuing to focus on efforts to meet expectations of change. The Western Balkan Leaders committed to finding acceptable, binding and durable solutions for all sides involved, given the negative impact on the region and its citizens of not doing so. On good neighbourly relations, participants committed to redoubling energies devoted to resolving outstanding bilateral issues, in line with the region's EU aspirations and commitments made, inter alia, at the Vienna and London Western Balkans Summits in 2015 and 2018 respectively. Bilateral differences continued to prevent the region from realising its true potential. Overcoming these impediments would advance socio-economic development and nurture peace and prosperity.

MISSING PERSONS

45. Participants welcomed the ongoing work by the Missing Persons Group comprising representatives of the domestic institutions responsible for missing persons in Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo and Zagreb, and commended progress to date in enhancing cooperation and increasing effectiveness in accounting for missing persons. They acknowledged the need to intensify work to locate and/or identify the remaining cases, to facilitate further exchanges of information on potential gravesites and excavations, and to bring closure to surviving family members. This work needed to continue. On war crimes, participants recognised the urgency of putting an end to impunity.
46. Participants reaffirmed the importance of recognising and respecting international and domestic court verdicts on war crimes, rejecting hate speech and the glorification of war criminals, supporting domestic prosecutors in bringing perpetrators to justice, supporting victims and addressing stigma, and strengthening cooperation with the UN International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals.

ROMA INTEGRATION

47. Participants welcomed progress on the implementation of the Poznań Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process. They endorsed the conclusions of the 28 June 2021 Western Balkans Roma Ministerial, identifying concrete measures that will be implemented to make progress on Roma integration in the fields of employment, housing and COVID recovery in this field. They welcomed the Western Balkans Investment Framework as a possible tool to support integration measures, such as social housing schemes for vulnerable groups, including Roma.
48. Participants noted the importance of including the Roma integration dimension in mainstream policies, including the Digital Agenda and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (enhancing digital skills, digital education, environmental justice and green transformation). They acknowledged the value of actively supporting the Roma population's transition from informal employment to the formal economy.

YOUTH AND YOUTH-RELATED POLICIES

49. Participants congratulated Mr Albert Hani on his recent appointment as the new Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) Secretary General.
50. Participants reaffirmed their support for RYCO and emphasised the important role it plays in enhancing cooperation among young citizens in the region as a key driver of good neighbourly relations, cooperation, reconciliation and peacebuilding. They welcomed RYCO efforts to establish a regional School Exchange Scheme. By ensuring continuous support in this field, RYCO will open a new dimension of youth exchange that will further contribute to peacebuilding and reconciliation in the region.
51. Participants underlined that reconciliation cannot be the task of RYCO alone, but that all governments must make increased efforts in this area by including representatives of civil society, media, educational institutions and other relevant stakeholders.
52. Participants also welcomed the cooperation between RYCO and the Franco-German Youth Office that facilitates the embedding of regional dialogue on reconciliation and cooperation in the Western Balkans into a wider European context.
53. Participants recognised the results of the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2021 and the Regional Youth Agenda developed by young people from the Western Balkans and the EU.
54. Participants reiterated the importance of young people for the future of the Western Balkans and the need to take concrete measures to develop the region as a place of opportunities for young people to stay and live by increasing the intra-regional mobility of young citizens, taking decisive steps in the mutual recognition of academic degrees and professional qualifications, strengthening vocational education and training, supporting youth entrepreneurship and innovations, fostering digital transformation and making improvements in the field of sustainable development and environmental protection. The focus should be on investing in youth empowerment, strengthening youth organisations and networks their integration into European umbrella organisations, and stimulating volunteering and community work.

55. Participants recognised the Western Balkan youth as the key force for promotion of European integration and stressed the need to involve this group to a greater extent in European processes such as the Conference on the Future of Europe.

THINK TANK AND CIVIL SOCIETY

56. Participants lauded the fact that the meetings of experts and civil-society representatives from the Western Balkans took place and delivered important recommendations despite COVID-19 restrictions. They underlined that civil society's contribution to the Berlin Process is essential and that the report by its representatives to the meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs held on 8 June 2021 delivered important insights for the Ministers' discussions.
57. The Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2021 consisted of two digital events, the first aimed at developing recommendations and the second at presenting and discussing them with policymakers. Participants welcomed the recommendations elaborated by the Forum's ten working groups, with specific regard to the stronger inclusion of citizens in EU enlargement processes, the importance of reconciliation and free and independent media, the focus on the environment and energy transition, and the full integration of Roma and minorities.

EDUCATION, SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND INNOVATION

58. Participants welcomed the holding of the 6th Berlin Process Joint Science Conference organised by the Polish Academy of Sciences and the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina and the elaboration of a "10 Point Plan to Control COVID-19 in the Western Balkans".
59. Participants noted the role of data collection, management and exchange, e-health, testing and tracing technologies, isolation procedures and mass immunisation in tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and improving regional preparedness for health crises.
60. They also underlined the key role of education, digitalization, IT development, new economic models based on smart specialisation and green technologies and of a decent health care system in boosting post-pandemic recovery and reinforcing socio-economic cohesion and resilience in the Western Balkans.
61. They reiterated the key role of education, science and research in sustaining innovation processes and moving from a "brain drain" to a "brain gain" and "brain circulation" dynamic in the region. They renewed the firm commitment to the Western Balkans Research Initiative and welcomed the preparation of a Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport to be signed following the Summit.
62. Participants stressed the importance and the Chair highlighted German commitment to implementing an institutional partnership on procurement, state-aid and competition law with the six academies offering further education for the public sector in the Western Balkans.

FUTURE OF THE BERLIN PROCESS

63. Participants reaffirmed the key role of the Berlin Process as a driver of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans within the wider context of the EU integration process. They highlighted the role of the Berlin Process as a catalyst for economic integration, investment and connectivity projects aimed at fostering reconciliation, security, growth, employment and prosperity.
64. Participants stressed the need for the continuation of the Berlin Process in order to harness the full potential of improved regional cooperation, also with a view to overcoming the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.