EU-Western Balkans Summit
Среща на върха ЕС-Западни Балкани
EU Leaders' Agenda, Sofia 2018

Sofia Declaration, 17 May 2018

We, the leaders of the European Union (EU) and of its Member States, in consultation with our Western Balkans partners, and in the presence of relevant regional stakeholders, today concluded the following:

1. The EU welcomes the shared commitment of the Western Balkans partners to **European values and principles**, and to the vision of a strong, stable and united Europe, underpinned by our historic, cultural and geographic ties and by our mutual political, security and economic interests.

2. Recalling the Thessaloniki Summit of 2003, the EU reaffirms its **unequivocal support for the European perspective** of the Western Balkans. Building on the progress achieved so far, the Western Balkans partners have recommitted to the European perspective as their firm strategic choice, to reinforcing their efforts and mutual support. The credibility of these efforts depends on clear public communication.

3. The EU is determined to strengthen and intensify its engagement at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation, including through increased assistance based on tangible progress in the rule of law, as well as in socio-economic reforms, by the Western Balkans partners.

4. The EU welcomes the Western Balkans partners commitment to the primacy of **democracy and the rule of law, especially the fight against corruption and organised crime, good governance, as well as respect for human rights and rights of persons belonging to minorities**. Their effective implementation of reforms rests on these foundations. Civil society and independent media play a crucial role in the process of democratisation.

5. The EU supports the Western Balkans partners pledge to continue strengthening **good neighbourly relations**, **regional stability** and mutual cooperation. This includes in particular finding and implementing definitive, inclusive and binding solutions for their bilateral disputes rooted in the legacy of the past and devoting additional efforts to reconciliation.

6. Constructing a dense web of connections and opportunities within the region and with the EU is vital for bringing our citizens and economies closer together, and for enhancing political stability, economic prosperity, cultural and social development. Building on progress made, including through regional initiatives, we pledge to enhance substantially **connectivity** in all its dimensions: transport, energy, digital, economic and human.

7. The EU agrees to promote a market- and investment-friendly environment in the Western Balkans to move faster towards a **digital economy** and to sustainable and **climate-friendly** societies in line with the Paris agreement. **Energy security** will be prioritised, including through improved energy efficiency, better cross-border inter-connections, diversification of sources and routes, as well as a balanced energy mix better integrating renewable energy.

8. Special emphasis will be put toward creating further opportunities for the **youth**, while ensuring that this contributes to the socio-economic development of the Western Balkans.

9. To that end, the EU welcomes the Western Balkans partners commitment, inter alia, to accelerate **the implementation of the acquis** under the Energy Community and Transport Community Treaties, to remove all administrative barriers at borders, to complete the Regional Electricity Market and to urgently implement the July 2017 Multiannual Action Plan for the Development of a Regional Economic Area. The EU will continue to support these efforts.

10. The EU and the Western Balkans partners share many **security challenges** that demand coordinated individual and collective action. When we work together, we are able to address these challenges effectively. Our cooperation in stemming illegal **migration flows** has demonstrated its value and will be developed further.

11. **Countering terrorism and extremism**, including **financing, radicalisation and** the return of **foreign terrorist fighters** require our increased cooperation.

12. The EU and the Western Balkans partners acknowledge that results in fighting **corruption and organised crime** are essential for the region's political and socio-economic transformation and also for regional stability and security, which are in the best interest of their citizens. The EU welcomes their commitment to take resolute action, in cooperation with the EU and with each other, against **human trafficking, drug cultivation, and smuggling of human beings, drugs and arms.**

13. The EU welcomes the contribution of the Western Balkans partners to its **Common Foreign and Security Policy** (CFSP) in all its aspects and expects a progressive deepening of cooperation in this area, especially an enhanced level of alignment, notably on issues where major common interests are at stake.

14. Disinformation and other hybrid activities will be fought together through greater collaboration in **resilience, cyber security** and **strategic communication**.

15. To accelerate improvement in the lives of our citizens in the areas of connectivity and security in view of the European perspective of the Western Balkans, today, drawing on the relevant aspects of the Commission's Communication adopted on 6 February 2018, the EU launched a **Sofia Priority Agenda** for the EU and the Western Balkans, which is annexed to this Declaration.

16. The EU welcomes the intention of Croatia to host an EU-Western Balkans Summit during its Presidency in 2020.

17. We note that our Western Balkans Partners align themselves with the above points.

Annex to the Declaration

Sofia Priority Agenda

Strengthening support to the rule of law and good governance

- Enhance support for judicial reform and efforts to fight corruption and organised crime, including capacity building for corruption prevention
- Extend **rule of law advisory missions with** increased support from Member States and from the EU
- Enhance monitoring of reforms through more systematic, **case-based peer-review missions**
- Introduce **trial monitoring** in the field of serious corruption and organised crime
- Work towards better measurement of results in justice reform
- Roll out support for the Western Balkans through the **European Endowment for Democracy** in the area of independent and pluralistic media and civil society

Reinforcing engagement on security and migration

- Step up joint work on **counter-terrorism** and preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, in coherence with the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism initiative
- Enhance significantly **operational cooperation** in the fight against international **organised crime** in priority areas such as firearms, drugs, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings
- Prepare a renewed action plan for cooperation on **firearms** to address more effectively illicit firearms and the large stockpile of weapons

- Increase support to capacity-building in the area of cyber-security and fight against cyber-crime
- Enhance cooperation on **migration and border management**
- Further enhance cooperation between the **liaison officers** deployed by the EU (European Commission and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), Member States and competent authorities of the Western Balkans
- Create an **EU JHA inter-agency Task Force** coordinated by the Commission
- Deepen and expand substantial cooperation and dialogue on **Common Foreign and Security Policy/Common Security and Defence Policy**
- Further develop cooperation in activities related to **hybrid threats**, including by enhancing strategic communication

Supporting socio-economic development and putting a special focus on youth

- Expand the **Western Balkans Investment Framework** to further attract and coordinate bilateral donors' and International Financing Institutions' investment
- Significantly boost the Western Balkans Investment Framework's **provision of guarantees** to crowd in private investment
- Enhance support to education, in particular launch a pilot project for mobility in **vocational education and training**
- **Double Erasmus+** funding for the region, including establishment of a **"Western Balkans Youth Lab"** in 2018, providing space for innovative policy-making addressing the needs of young people, and tackling brain drain

- Expand the scope and reach of the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office**, and introduce an intra-regional mobility scheme
- Ensure progress in the implementation of the Regional Economic Area, including stepping up work on recognition of qualifications, and progress on trade facilitation within the Western Balkans
- Progress of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in their World Trade Organisation accession processes

Increasing connectivity

- Launch a **new package of connectivity projects** (with significant EU grants as leverage) through the Western Balkans Investment Framework, including support to the Blue Highway and the Peace Highway (Nis-Pristina)
- Support increased take-up of opportunities under the current provisions of the **Connecting Europe Facility** in the Western Balkans
- Expand the EU **Energy Union** to the Western Balkans, focusing on energy security and diversification of sources and suppliers, including a strategy at regional level to benefit from renewables, notably hydropower
- Work to complete the **Regional Electricity Market** in the Western Balkans, and ensure that it is integrated into the EU Internal Electricity Market, including though the Central and South-Eastern European Connectivity (CESEC) initiative
- Further support the creation of a single regulatory space and effective energy market reform process under the **Energy Community Treaty**

- Sign a commitment/Memorandum of Understanding on the Bulgaria/Serbia gas interconnector
- Start the implementation of the Transport Community Treaty and full operation of its secretariat
- Sign the agreement on the Transport Community Treaty Headquarters (Belgrade)
- Endorse the Transport Ministerial Declaration from Ljubljana TEN-T Days, including the action plan for the priority border crossings list
- Endorse the Transport Ministerial Declaration on road safety from Ljubljana TEN-T Days and its Action Plan
- Support a new rail strategy to bring the Western Balkans into the main EU network and market

A Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans

- Launch a **Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans,** including a roadmap to facilitate lowering the cost of roaming
- Launch a substantial technical assistance package for the identification of **potential digital investments** (including broadband) through Western Balkans Investment Framework/Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance

Supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations in the Western Balkans

- Support the **fight against impunity** through support to the Mechanism for the International Criminal Tribunals and to the Kosovo* Specialist Chambers, through EULEX
- Open a window in the EU's **Creative Europe Programme**
- Promote deepening of links among civil societies of the Western Balkans, including through the support for the Western Balkans Fund projects

This Priority Agenda will be implemented in a status-neutral manner and without prejudice to discussions on the next Multiannual Financial Framework.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.