



## CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

On the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launching of the Berlin Process in 2014, the Heads of Government of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, as well as the representatives of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and representatives of the European Union (EU) and of international and regional bodies and organisations as well as financial institutions met in person in Berlin on 14 October 2024 for the Summit Meeting of the Berlin Process. Hungary in its capacity as rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union was invited as an observer.

1. In the face of geopolitical uncertainties and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, the Berlin Process participants reaffirmed the key role of the Berlin Process on its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary in strengthening ties in connectivity, trade, energy, transportation, implementation of innovations, and green transition. Through its inclusive format that treats all Western Balkans countries as equals it serves as a catalyst of regional cooperation and accelerator of the EU integration process.
2. Building on the Meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Ministers of Interior, the Ministers for Economy, the Ministers of Agriculture and two additional Ministerial Meetings on the Green Agenda and on Roma Integration as well as on the Business Forum, the Youth Forum, the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum, the Gender Equality Forum, and the Joint Science Conference in the past few weeks, participants summarised developments, challenges and prospects for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans as a step toward the region's gradual integration into European Union rules and regulations.

### **Common Regional Market and Regional Investments**

3. The participants emphasised the need for increased regional cooperation through the Common Regional Market (CRM), which is an integral part of the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, as the key to promoting economic growth and improving living conditions in the region. Against this background the participants warmly welcomed the new Action Plan for the CRM 2025-2028, endorsed by the leaders of the Western Balkans Six. It is a cornerstone document that builds on the successes and previous implementations achieved by the CRM and that will further deepen regional economic integration, based on EU rules and standards.
4. The participants acknowledged the results achieved under the Common Regional Market 2021 – 2024, including freedom of movement with identity cards, mutual recognition of higher education and professional qualifications within the region, fully functional Roam

Like At Home within the Western Balkans, the reduction of data roaming charges between the EU and Western Balkan Six, progress towards Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) membership, the establishment of Green Lanes, and reduction of waiting times and applauded the efforts invested in strengthening regional cooperation.

5. The participants also welcomed the unblocking of the Central-European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) as a key pillar for the implementation of the CRM during the Joint Committee Meeting on 9 October 2024, and the adoption of ten decisions, one Additional Protocol and one Recommendation, that will concretely contribute to the development of the regional market and bring substantive benefits to the citizens in the region, including on electronic commerce, deliveries, prevention of geo-blocking, and the harmonization of intellectual property rights, recognition of Authorised Economic Operator (AEO) programmes, risk management, tourism services, car insurance and trade dispute settlement. They invited CEFTA Joint Committee to adopt decisions on professional qualifications, work permits and medicines by the end of this year.
6. Moreover, the participants commended the signing of the Agreement on Access to Higher Education and Admission to Study in the Western Balkans. This new mobility agreement aims to increase student mobility and grant them the right to study at accredited higher education institutions in the region. Together with the mobility agreements signed at the Berlin Process Summits in 2022 and 2023, this agreement will further increase opportunities for free movement in the Western Balkans. The participants underlined the need for full implementation and entry into force of all previously signed mobility agreements.
7. The participants highlighted that the new EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans is a critical tool in fostering enlargement and accelerating reforms. With the leading role of the European Commission in that respect, it provides an extra set of incentives to governments in the Western Balkans to carry out fundamental reforms, including economic and institutional reforms as well as in rule of law, democracy and human rights, needed to integrate into the single market.
8. The participants commended the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), CEFTA and the Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum for their support in the implementation of policy agendas under the CRM.
9. The participants welcomed the adoption of a Declaration on Regional FDI Screening Standards for the Western Balkan Six at the Foreign Ministers' meeting. The aim of these standards is to bring investment policy in line with EU norms and international best practices.
10. The participants welcomed the OECD's vital support to the Western Balkans through evidence-based policy analysis and advice aimed at enhancing competitiveness and fostering inclusive and sustainable economic growth.

## **Democracy and Strong Institutions**

11. The participants agreed on the crucial role of the fundamentals of the EU accession process. Democracy, rule of law, human rights such as freedom of speech and freedom of assembly are important for the development of the Western Balkans region. A vibrant and critical civil society plays a crucial role.
12. The participants received a presentation by representatives of the Youth and the Civil Society Forum at the Berlin Process Summit on 14 October 2024 and exchanged views on the involvement of Youth and Civil Society in the Berlin Process.
13. The participants welcomed the recommendations from the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum and underlined the need for the role of civil society in building a strong democracy and prosperity in the Western Balkans. The participants noted the need for focusing on expanding local ownership, improving monitoring, and increasing visibility through Civil Society Organizations-led communication, fostering bottom-up approaches and active participation of local actors.
14. The participants highlighted the role of parliamentary cooperation in achieving the goals of the Berlin Process, especially in implementing the Action Plans for the CRM and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Six through domestic legislation. The participants emphasised the need for enhancing involvement of the Parliaments of the Western Balkans countries in the Berlin Process to anchor its achievements and outcomes on parliamentary level. They welcome the second meeting of the Parliamentary Dimension of the Berlin Process on 9. October 2024 as the Forum for parliamentary cooperation.
15. The participants appreciated the proactive involvement of the Western Balkans Six Ministries of Foreign Affairs in the development of a comprehensive joint programme for young professionals in foreign affairs, set to commence in 2025. The German Federal Government will financially support this programme, underscoring its continued commitment to strengthening the region's institutional framework.

## **Bilateral Issues and Good Neighbourly Relations**

16. The Western Balkans Six participants underlined their commitment to regional cooperation in an agreed Joint Declaration to reaffirm good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation. The Western Balkan Six participants acknowledged that dialogue and constructive approaches are key to address unresolved bilateral issues. They recalled the commitments made by the Leaders of the Western Balkans Six and participating countries at the Berlin Process Summit in Vienna 2015 as well as at the Summit in London in 2018, such as resolving bilateral questions in a spirit of good neighbourliness.

## **Youth, Science and Education**

17. The Western Balkans Six participants reaffirmed their commitment in a Declaration on Science and Innovation on Infrastructure Access and Cooperation to promote research and innovation partnerships and foster a dynamic regional innovation ecosystem.
18. Participants welcomed the continuation of the Berlin Process Joint Science Conferences, co-ordinated by the German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina, and the collective efforts over the past decade to advance the EU integration of the Western Balkans' education, research, and innovation sectors. They acknowledged the need to accelerate this integration through increased domestic investments and dedicated EU funding facilities rooted in principles of solidarity and excellence. Participants recognised the importance of safeguarding public spaces for intellectual discourse to uphold European ideals and foster positive narratives in the region.
19. The participants expressed their strong support for the outcomes of the Western Balkans Youth Forum, organised by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), held on 13-14 October 2024, in Berlin, which emphasised the vital role of youth as agents of change. The participants called for their meaningful participation in decision-making processes and urged for the enhancement of reconciliation initiatives and youth mobility schemes, advancement of the regional Youth Peace and Security agenda, improved youth employability, and greater cooperation among relevant authorities to strengthen policies that address the needs and aspirations of young people and the additional emphasis it places on transport connectivity between the capitals of the participating countries.

## **Connectivity and Transport**

20. The participants welcomed the results of the High-Level Green Mobility Summit, organised in June 2024 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat and the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development. The summit endorsed the Declaration for Green Mobility of South-East European Parties and observing participants, including Clean Bus and Clean Fleet Declaration and Cycling Declaration. Additionally, the summit took into consideration the new revision of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) Regulation.
21. The participants acknowledged the initiative for Green Lanes linking the EU and the Western Balkans, taken jointly by the Transport Community's and CEFTA's Secretariats, and supported by the European Commission. The initiative is following the success of the Green Lanes in the Western Balkans, which has had significant economic benefits and proven invaluable in enabling facilitation of export within CEFTA/Western Balkans region.
22. The Summit emphasised the need for regional coordination, multilevel governance, and financial support to implement green mobility initiatives. Participants recognised the importance of adapting mobility infrastructure to climate change. These

recommendations aim to enhance sustainable transport in the Western Balkans, leveraging the Berlin Process for regional cooperation and integration.

### **Energy, Climate policy and Green Agenda for the Western Balkans**

23. The participants acknowledged the opportunities green transformation can offer the Western Balkans region to align with EU standards and advance the region's integration into the EU market. Against this background, establishing electricity market coupling with the EU and considering the establishment of carbon pricing mechanisms to offset the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) would be a necessary step forward which requires a proactive and coordinated approach from both the region's policymakers and the business sector.
24. The participants welcomed the results of the First Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB), which gathered Ministers responsible for environment and climate on 8 October 2024 in Hamburg, Germany. The Ministerial endorsed the Hamburg Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans that renewed and strengthened the commitment of the Western Balkan Six for the full and timely implementation of the GAWB and its Action Plan 2021-2030 with the vision to achieve climate-neutrality by 2050.
25. The participants welcomed the progress of the Regional Climate Partnership aimed at enhancing cooperation on the implementation of the GAWB. In order to strengthen the political significance of the GAWB, it was envisaged to establish the Ministerial Meeting on GAWB as an annual meeting within the Regional Working Group on the GAWB framework.
26. Representatives of the leading European Financial Institutions (IFIs) active in the Western Balkans, EIB, EBRD and KfW, noted the positive impact the deepening of the CRM will have on the investment climate through improved governance, simplifying regulations, leveraging the digital transition and enhancing competitiveness. The IFIs encouraged the region to continue its efforts to decarbonise their economies by accelerating renewable energy and supporting energy efficiency and infrastructure investments. The IFIs reiterated their long-standing commitment to support the Western Balkans with financing and advisory services.

### **Food and Agriculture**

27. The participants welcomed enhanced cooperation in the fields of Agriculture, Food, Rural Development and Forestry. The participants especially welcomed the endorsement by the West Balkans Six of a Joint Declaration on Food and Agriculture (Skopje Declaration) adopted at the Ministerial Meeting on 24 September 2024. They welcomed the initiative to further strengthen the cooperation framework of the Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group (SWG-RRD) through development of yearly action programs and an extension of its mandate.

28. In particular, the participants acknowledged the commitments to complete alignment with EU Law by 2030, to ensure the free movement of goods, services, people and capital related to food and agriculture. They noted that Action Plans for Climate Adaptation in Agriculture are of the highest importance and should be developed by 2025 as part of the Regional Climate Adaptation Strategy.
29. The participants welcomed the commitment of European partners to politically, technically and financially support this process.

### **Social policy, Inclusion, Gender and Equality**

30. The participants affirmed their commitment to international labour standards and the European Pillar of Social Rights and underlined the importance of social and employment reforms in the EU accession process. They expressed the need to enhance regional cooperation on employment and social policies in the Western Balkans. In particular, participants will initiate regional dialogues and exchanges of expertise on active labour market policies, the implementation of labour rights, including occupational safety and health and labour inspection, as well as on social dialogue. In these areas, participants will develop a work plan.
31. In this regard, the participants welcomed the inclusion of alignment of social security systems across the region and with the EU in the new Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025-2028.
32. The participants welcomed the recommendations put forward by the Gender Equality Forum. They recognised the importance of advancing gender equality across the Western Balkans. In response, the Western Balkan Six committed to exploring the possibilities for the establishment of a regional funding mechanism designed to support a wide array of gender equality initiatives.
33. Participants supported the institutionalization of this Gender Equality Forum as a permanent component of the Berlin Process. This could ensure that gender equality remains a central and ongoing focus within the framework, offering a consistent platform for dialogue, monitoring, and strategy development.
34. The participants appreciated progress on the implementation of the Poznan Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process. The leaders of the Western Balkan Six welcomed and formally adopted the Conclusions of the Fifth Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration held in Berlin, on 18 September 2024. These conclusions identify the intermediate steps needed to implement the commitments on Roma Integration in the fields of Employment, Housing, Education, Healthcare access and Anti-Gypsyism. The participants confirm their intention to hold a follow-up Ministerial meeting in 2025 and call on the host of the 2025 Berlin Process Summit to convene such a meeting.

## **Migration**

35. The participants agreed on the need for pursuing the issue of migration policy cooperation with the Western Balkans as addressed in the Declaration by the Chair of the Berlin Process meeting of ministers responsible for internal security and migration from 17 September 2024. The participants recognised the need of continuous dialogue and profound cooperation given their shared interest in numerous issues such as in fighting against irregular migration, smuggling of migrants and human trafficking.
36. The participants agreed that an important building block in the fight against irregular migration is to provide greater support to the countries of the Western Balkans in the area of return. The participants welcomed the Western Balkans partners' progress on harmonizing their visa policies with the EU Visa policy, in particular regarding the list of visa-free and visa required third countries and agreed that further progress in this regard is needed.
37. The participants expressed the need for exchange of information and best practices on the collection of migration data, and increased alignment of data collection. In the participants' view, establishing a connection to Eurodac as early as possible as part of the Western Balkan partners' EU accession process, would be desirable.
38. The participants agreed that capacity building, especially in the area of border management, is a proven means to support the Western Balkans region. To improve effectiveness and avoid creating duplicate structures, participants will better coordinate measures in this area.

## **Security**

39. The participants highlighted the need to strengthen the already established contacts between law enforcement authorities and examine ways of automated data exchange. The participants agreed on continuing to pursue the "follow the money" approach in the area of money laundering so that law enforcement authorities can identify, freeze and seize criminal assets.
40. The participants noted that greater international cooperation, on both political and operational level, is indispensable as a response to the transnational networks of organised crime. The participants acknowledged the linkages between gender-based violence and organised crime and instability.
41. The participants welcomed the significant progress achieved during the five years of the Western Balkans Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) Control Roadmap. The participants commended the authorities of the Western Balkans Six for the strong ownership and commitment, reinforced through the agreement on the revised text of the Roadmap for the implementation 2025-2030, which was consolidated at the SALW Control Roadmap Regional Coordination Meeting in Podgorica on 10 July 2024.

42. The participants underlined the commitment by the EU, Germany, France and the other donors to continue providing the required financial support and recognise the substantive value of the comprehensive coordination and monitoring mechanism established by the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), in cooperation with the authorities.
43. In light of the increase of hybrid threats, the participants agreed on the need to step up efforts to foster cyber resilience in a whole of region, government and society approach. They recalled that dedicated activities including capacity building in the realm of cyber diplomacy as well as incident response are key, also in light of the Joint Partnership for Strengthening Cyber Resilience in the Western Balkans established in the Berlin Process in 2022. The participants acknowledged the proposal of France, Montenegro and Slovenia that the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre strengthen the cyber pillar of the Berlin Process and act as the regional hub for cyber capacity building, with and for the benefit of the Western Balkan region.

#### **Future of the Berlin Process**

44. The participants stressed the wish for the continuation of the Berlin Process in order to harness the full potential of improved and inclusive regional cooperation.
45. They look forward to the next Berlin Process summit 2025, whose host will be presented.