

EU-WESTERN BALKANS

SIX FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES

May 2018



SIX NEW FLAGSHIP INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS

Through six flagship initiatives, the Western Balkans Strategy sets out the EU's unprecedented support to the transformation process in the Western Balkans, targeting specific areas of interest for both the EU and the Western Balkans countries:



INITIATIVE TO STRENGTHEN THE RULE OF LAW

Existing tools, such as detailed action plans, will be expanded to all Western Balkans countries. Assessment of reform implementation will be enhanced, including through developing impact indicators, trial-monitoring, case-based peer-review missions and new advisory missions. Greater use will be made of leverage provided in the negotiating frameworks with Montenegro and Serbia.



INITIATIVE TO REINFORCE ENGAGEMENT ON SECURITY AND MIGRATION

Reinforced cooperation on fighting organised crime, countering terrorism and violent extremism and on border security and migration management. Europol liaison officers will be posted in the region while coordination between liaison officers posted in the region by the Commission, other EU Agencies and EU Member States will be strengthened; Joint Investigation Teams further promoted and status agreements with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency concluded.



INITIATIVE TO ENHANCE SUPPORT FOR SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

This will include expanding the Western Balkans Investment Framework, putting in place a guarantee fund, supporting start-ups, access to finance of SMEs and research and innovation. It will also mobilise expertise to support the development of the Regional Economic Area and strengthen the Economic Reform Programme exercise, including increased focus on employment and social reforms. Support to the social sector, in particular education and health, will be increased including a doubling of funds under Erasmus+.



INITIATIVE TO INCREASE CONNECTIVITY

Within the region and with the EU, including new investment support. Increased funding in the fields of transport, energy, including the digital economy, will further enhance the economic integration within the region and with the EU. Better connections will allow for increased competitiveness, economic growth and security of supply. The EU's Energy Union should be expanded to the Western Balkans.



INITIATIVE FOR A DIGITAL AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

This will include 5 areas of action: a roadmap to facilitate lowering roaming costs; support to the deployment of broadband; the development of eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth and digital skills; capacity building in digital trust and security in parallel to efforts enhancing the digitalisation of industries; and enhanced support for the adoption and implementation of the acquis. Achievements so far include a roadmap on lowering roaming prices and the first ever Western Balkans Digital Summit in Skopje.



INITIATIVE TO SUPPORT RECONCILIATION AND GOOD NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS

This will include support to transitional justice, missing persons and increased cooperation in education, culture, youth and sport, and expanding the scope of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office. The Western Balkans will be fully associated to the European Year of Cultural Heritage; the EU - Western Balkans Heritage Route was launched in February.