

A CREDIBLE ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS

I. THE WESTERN BALKANS - AN INTEGRAL PART OF EUROPE

In his **2017 State of the Union address**, Commission President Juncker re-affirmed without ambiguity the European future of the Western Balkans partners:

"If we want more stability in our neighbourhood, then we must also maintain a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans. It is clear that there will be no further enlargement during the mandate of this Commission and this Parliament. No candidate is ready. But thereafter the European Union will be greater than 27 in number. Accession candidates must give the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights utmost priority in the negotiations."

EU Heads of State and Government consistently supported the EU path of the region, too, most recently in Conclusions by the President of the European Council of March 2017:

"The European Council reaffirmed its unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. Welcoming the progress made by the countries of the region, the European Council stresses that the EU remains committed and engaged at all levels to support them in conducting EU-oriented reforms and projects."

The Western Balkans are **part of Europe**, geographically surrounded by EU Member States. The peoples of the EU and the region have a common heritage and history as well as a future defined by shared opportunities and challenges. The EU has long been strongly engaged in the region. From the Thessaloniki European Council in 2003, it has supported the future of the region as an integral part of the EU.

Since then, the European perspective of the region has helped the countries to achieve overall political and economic reforms with improved democratic processes. Visa liberalisation and much improved regional cooperation are fostering more open societies. In 2016, the region's total trade with the EU was over EUR 43 billion, up 80% since 2008 and with significant further growth potential. EU companies are also biggest investors in the Western Balkans with over EUR 10 billion of Foreign Direct Investment in the region in the past five years done. The interlinkage and interdependence of the region with the EU was evident in the migration crises. The countries of the region are increasingly active partners on the global stage.

This firm, merit-based prospect of EU membership for the Western Balkans is in the Union's very **own political, security and economic interest**. It is a geostrategic investment in a strong, united Europe based on **common values**, it is a powerful tool to promote democracy, the rule of law and the respect for fundamental rights. A credible accession perspective is the **key driver at transformation** in the region and thus enhances our collective integration, security, prosperity and social well-being. It remains essential for fostering reconciliation and stability.

Furthermore, the EU's enlargement policy must be part and parcel of the larger strategy to strengthen the Union by 2025 set out by President Juncker in his State of the Union speech of September 2017. It is an investment in the EU's security, economic growth and prosperity and its ability to protect its citizens. However, our **Union must be stronger and more solid before it can be bigger**. This is why in line with its Roadmap for a More United, Stronger and Democratic Union the Commission will put forward a number of initiatives aimed at improving

the democratic, institutional and policy framework of the Union by 2025. Based on the current Treaties, these initiatives will include proposals to improve the effectiveness of the decision-making within the EU by enhancing qualified majority voting in policy areas as foreign policy or internal market matters.

[...]

(For the first time, their accession perspective has a best-case timeframe. With strong political will, the delivery of real reforms, and lasting solutions to disputes with neighbours, the Montenegro and Serbia should be ready for membership by 2025. [Albania, BiH, FYROM and Kosovo should also be well advanced on their European path by then.] or alternatively [Negotiations with Albania, BiH, FYROM and Kosovo should also be well advanced by them] This timeline is ambitious and is meant to be an incentive.)

All the Western Balkan countries must now urgently redouble their efforts, address vital reforms and complete their political, economic and social transformation, bringing all stakeholders on board from across the political spectrum and from civil society. Joining the EU is far more than a technical process. It is a generational choice, based on fundamental values, which each country must embrace more actively, from their foreign and regional policies right down to what children are taught at school.

The Western Balkan countries now have a **historic window of opportunity** to firmly and unequivocally bind their future to the European Union. They will have to act with determination. Accession is and will remain a merit-based process fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each country. The countries may catch up or overtake each other depending on progress made.

[...]

Everyday life in the Western Balkans should progressively closer to life within the European Union. Ultimately, citizens deserve to live in countries that are prosperous and equal, where the rule of law is strong and corruption is rooted out. This strategy sets out how with increased support from the EU, including through participation in certain Union policies and programmes, the Western Balkan countries can already benefit from an increased stability and prosperity that will in turn facilitate progress on their European paths.

II. A CREDIBLE ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE REQUIRES CREDIBLE EFFORTS AND REFORMS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS¹

The Western Balkan countries **will join the European Union** once the criteria of Article 49 of the Treaty on European Union are met. While **none meets these criteria today**, the region has come a long way since the end of the 1990s. Overall, significant progress has been made both on reforms and on overcoming the devastating legacy of war and conflict. But in order for the countries to meet all membership conditions and strengthen their democracies, comprehensive and convincing reforms are still required in crucial areas, notably on the rule of law, competitiveness and regional cooperation and reconciliation.

¹ The Commission will adopt its regular communication on EU enlargement policy together with comprehensive country reports in April 2018.

First, **the rule of law** must be strengthened significantly. Today the countries show clear elements of state capture, including links with organised crime and corruption at all levels of government and administration, as well as a strong entanglement of public and private interests. All this feeds a sentiment of impunity and inequality. There is also extensive political interference in and control of the media. A visibly empowered and independent judiciary and accountable governments and administrations are essential for bringing about the lasting societal change that is needed.

Second, critical parts of the **region's economies** are uncompetitive, with too much undue political interference and an underdeveloped private sector. None of the Western Balkans can currently be considered a functioning market economy nor to have the capacity to cope with the competitive pressure and market forces in the union. In spite of all progress on reforms, many structural issues remain which in turn affect labour markets and notably employment opportunities for younger people.

Third, there are still important **bilateral disputes** between countries in the region, which remain to be solved. The EU will not accept to import these disputes and the instability they could entail. Definitive and binding solutions must be found and implemented before a country accedes.

Last but not least: **joining the EU is a choice**. It needs political and societal consensus and the support of the hearts and minds of the people. There can be no ambiguity by leaders about where the Western Balkans belong and the direction in which they are heading. This is necessary to secure and sustain the support of their own and of EU citizens and must be reflected in leaders' communications and outreach to citizens.

The respective European paths of the Western Balkan countries are driven by the EU's Stabilisation and Association process, which is flanked by various initiatives, such as the Berlin Process², and regional actors, such as the Regional Cooperation Council.

It is now up to the countries' authorities, with the support of their societies, to take ownership and deliver on the well-known conditions for accession. To make the ambitious best-case scenario a reality, **action must be taken now**. Ultimately the region's citizens will judge their own governments on whether or not they are willing and able to deliver on their European ambitions.

1. Rule of law, fundamental rights, governance

Addressing reforms in the area of **rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance** remains the most pressing, issue for the Western Balkans. It is also the key benchmark against which the prospects of these countries will be judged by the EU. The region must embrace these fundamental EU values much more strongly and credibly. Their non-respect is also deterrent to investment and trade. Strengthening the rule of law is not only an institutional issue, it requires societal transformation.

The **independence, quality and efficiency of the judicial system** must be ensured. The independence of the judiciary and of individual judges is essential to ensure fairness and to hold

² The most recent summit of the process took place in Trieste in July 2017.

the executive and legislative branches of government to account. This is a precondition for any democratic society based on the rule of law and for its economic development.

The countries must root out **corruption** without compromise. Strong and independent institutions are crucial to prevent and tackle corruption and conduct more effective investigations and prosecutions leading to final court **rulings that are enforced**, and include **dissuasive sanctions**. Specialized prosecutorial structures to fight corruption and organised crime and judicial bodies should be significantly strengthened. This should include the allocation of special police units to prosecution offices. Measures should be pursued and enforced such as the stripping of illegally acquired assets, the loss of the right to hold public office, stricter compliance rules for public officials and accessible information and complaints mechanisms for citizens.

Countries must also put in place a strong framework for the prevention of corruption. More transparency is needed in the management of public funds especially at all stages in **public procurement**, an area particularly prone to corruption. There have been several examples in the Western Balkans of confidential procedures for procuring goods and some major contracts have been awarded without a public tender. There have been allegations of politically connected local subcontractors being favoured and of illicit payments. Countries should substantially increase the transparency, competitiveness and fairness to public procurement tenders, limit the use of confidential procedures, and introduce safeguards excluding political influence on bidders. The use of transparent, publicly accessible **e-procurement** should be fully rolled out. This should enable citizens to see clearly how their taxes are spent, from the initial tender to final execution of contracts. Managerial accountability and an internal control culture in public institutions are also crucial.

Organised crime's foothold on the Western Balkans remains strong whether in terms of trafficking human beings, drugs and weapons or risk of criminal infiltration of the political and economic systems. The authorities must **dismantle criminal networks and their economic bases** more effectively, making systematic use of financial investigations and applying more **targeted tools** like the precautionary freezing of criminal proceeds, third party confiscation, the reversed burden of proof on holding certain types of assets, non-conviction based confiscation to tackle inexplicable wealth, full ownership disclosure requirements for companies, and enhanced judicial cooperation. A **concrete and sustained track record in tackling corruption, money laundering and organised crime** should be established as a matter of urgency.

Fundamental rights are largely enshrined in the legislation of the Western Balkans countries but more needs to be done to ensure they are fully implemented in practice. Particular focus is needed to safeguard the freedom of expression and independence of media as a pillar of democracy. Decisive efforts are needed to protect minorities and fight discrimination, notably against the Roma - for whom social inclusion should be more robustly promoted - and the LGBTI community. Equality between women and men must also be ensured and domestic violence tackled.

Strengthening the functioning of **democratic institutions** is essential. This includes ensuring constructive dialogue across the political spectrum, notably within the **parliaments**. The government needs to ensure that the Opposition has the possibility to fully perform its role. And the opposition needs to engage constructively in the democratic process. Elections should be free and fair and the recommendations of election observation missions properly implemented.

The rules for the public and private **financing of political parties** also require substantive reform.

Public administration reform is paramount to strengthening governance at all levels. This includes improving the quality and accountability of administration, increasing professionalism, de-politicisation and transparency, also in recruitment and dismissals and better services for citizens. An appropriate balance between central, regional and local government also needs to be found.

Governments should ensure stakeholders can actively participate in the reform and policy making process, for example by establishing **inclusive structured dialogues on reform priorities** with the involvement of an empowered civil society. An enabling environment for civil society organisations is therefore crucial.

All these reforms remain at the heart of the region's EU path. Only with delivery of tangible and sustainable results will the necessary credible momentum be achieved.

2. Strengthening the economy

The Western Balkans region has significant **economic potential**. Growth rates are higher than that of the EU and it is an increasingly interesting market for EU goods and services that is gradually becoming part of European value chains. The level of economic integration with the Union is already very high, due to the Stabilisation and Association Agreements.

However, **further efforts** are needed to increase the competitiveness of the Western Balkans economies, to address high unemployment, especially among the young, to increase prosperity and to create business opportunities not least for local players. Stronger skills-based economies will also help to attenuate the brain drain that exists, turning it into brain circulation. The further modernisation of the regional economies will in turn attract further EU private investment and increase demand in the EU. The necessary structural reforms need to be underpinned by vigorous economic and fiscal policies.

The region's economies face many **structural weaknesses**, with inefficient and rigid markets, low productivity, limited access to finance, unclear property rights and a cumbersome regulatory environment contributing to high unemployment. Overall, the levels investment and growth rates are insufficient to significantly reduce the gap with the EU. Economic development is further hampered by an entrenched grey economy. State involvement and undue political interference in the economy remain high, while competition policy and other flanking policies are still too weak. Structural reforms based on the Economic Reform Programmes must be pursued with more rigour, including measures tackling social challenges and structural unemployment. Privatisation processes must be conducted with more speed and in full transparency. State-owned enterprises must be reformed as a priority and corruption addressed. Growth potential and competitiveness continue to be hampered by weaknesses in the rule of law and poor functioning of institutions.

Successful economic integration will only be possible with enhanced **connectivity**. Far too many obligations from regional agreements have not yet been met. The countries must fully comply with the Energy Community Treaty and Transport Community Treaty, by which they have committed to adopt the energy and transport acquis as well as related acquis (e.g. public procurement, environment and competition) well before accession.

The region should also ensure existing agreements and commitments are made operational, for example in the context of Central European Free Trade Agreement which should be reformed to better address the needs of the region. The adoption of a Multiannual Action Plan for the development of a Regional Economic Area agreed by the leaders of the Western Balkan countries in July 2017, is promising: its implementation will further strengthen trade, investment and mobility in and with the region. It will help integrate the markets into global value chains and promote the digitisation of the region's economy. It will also help accelerate enterprise and skills development, research and innovation and smart growth.

3. Applying EU rules and standards

Core issues such as the rule of law, fundamental rights strengthening democratic institutions, public administration reform, as well as economic development and competitiveness remain key priorities in the enlargement process. They form the basis for any aspiring Member State to ensure it has the necessary administrative and judicial capacity in place to properly apply EU rules and standards not only in law but in practice.

Much remains to be done across the board to align with the EU's acquis, to establish or build up the related institutions, and to ensure implementation capacity, whether in terms of single market rules, social policy, energy and transport acquis or EU environmental law.

Implementation of the obligations stemming from the Stabilisation and Association Agreements and other sectoral agreements will support preparations for meeting the requirements of EU membership. Full use should be made of the significant technical assistance available in particular institution building support through the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange Instrument.

4. Reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation – prerequisites for accession

Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations are essential for progress on the countries respective European paths. In addition to existing regional initiatives such as the Regional Cooperation Council, formats for political cooperation up to the highest level driven by the region and recent summits have provided new momentum. This needs to be further exploited in order to continue contributing to political stabilisation and to create economic opportunities. Together with improved regional cooperation further efforts towards reconciliation are crucial to firmly anchor peace and ensure lasting stability in the region. The wounds of the 1990s still need time to heal. But 25 years on, it is time to address open issues with new vigour. All countries must unequivocally commit in both word and deed to **overcoming the legacy** of the past, by achieving reconciliation and solving open issues well before their accession to the EU.

Regional co-operation, good neighbourly relations and reconciliation cannot be imposed from outside. The leaders of the region **must take full ownership** and lead by example. They must avoid and condemn any statements or actions which would fuel inter-ethnic tension and actively counter nationalist narratives. There is no place in the EU for inflammatory rhetoric, let alone for glorification of war criminals from any side. The process of **transitional justice** is incomplete. The outstanding sensitive issues such as the handling of war crimes cases including through full cooperation with the Mechanism for international Criminal Tribunals and the

Kosovo³ Specialist Chambers, the fate of missing persons, refugees and internally displaced persons as well as the identification and removal of remaining landmines in the region must be urgently addressed.

The role of **education** must be given a higher priority especially in terms of fostering greater tolerance, promoting European values and strengthening the cohesion of society. The Western Balkans should invest more in their younger generation, our future EU citizens, and give them a perspective for the future, not the past. Cooperation in the field of culture with and within the region should also be enhanced.

The EU's enlargement policy must continue to export stability. Therefore the EU cannot and will not import **bilateral disputes**. They must be solved as a matter of urgency by the responsible parties. Achieving this goal will be facilitated by an atmosphere of good neighbourly relations, but will also be a litmus test for how sound these relations really are. Where border disputes have not yet been resolved through bilateral negotiation, parties should submit them unconditionally to **binding, final arbitration**, e.g. the International Court of Justice, the rulings of which should be fully applied and respected by both parties before accession and taken into account in preparation of Accession Treaties. The Commission will pay particular attention to the process of resolving these disputes and provide support as appropriate. As a matter of principle, the frontrunners on the EU path have a strategic interest in being advocates, not spoilers, of the aspirations of their neighbours. The countries of the region are inter-dependent and will progress faster if they help each other along the way. All countries must abstain from misusing outstanding issues in the EU accession process.

Without effective and comprehensive **normalisation of Belgrade-Pristina relations** through the EU-facilitated Dialogue there cannot be lasting stability in the region. A comprehensive, legally binding normalisation agreement is urgent and crucial so that Serbia and Kosovo can advance on their respective European paths.

5. Next steps in the respective European paths of the Western Balkan countries

[...]

5.1 Indicative illustration of the steps required for Montenegro and Serbia to complete the accession process by 2025

[...]

This section sets out the key steps in accession negotiations required in view of the indicative 2025 perspective, thus realising the best case scenario. Montenegro and Serbia are the current frontrunners in this process.

➤ By the end of 2019 at the latest:

For Montenegro and Serbia, an urgent focus on meeting the **interim benchmarks in the rule of law area** is needed. This requires the leaders to tackle the existing reform challenges forcefully and with clear dedication. In Serbia's case, the interim benchmarks in chapter 35 need to be met [*PLACEHOLDER: comprehensive normalisation with Kosovo, final text to be*

³ 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.

completed once greater clarity on Dialogue timelines]. Once the interim benchmarks are met, the EU should address the question of closing benchmarks without delay and be ready to move to the second phase [?] of negotiations by 2019 at the latest.

Albania needs to achieve convincing implementation of the five key priorities including the current judicial reform. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia needs to deliver tangible reform results and resolve the "name issue". Provided conditions have been fulfilled, negotiations will be underway with both of these countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to deliver its answers to the Questionnaire *[to be updated]* the Commission will then submit its Opinion and consideration. By the end of 2019 the Council will be in a position to decide on granting candidate status.

[Serbia and Kosovo will need at the latest by this stage to have achieved comprehensive normalization of relations, which should open the way for further substantial progress by Kosovo on the path to European integration – to be updated when the timeline for Dialogue clearer]

➤ **By 2021:**

The Commission will prepare a Communication with **assessments of the effect of future integration of the Western Balkans on key policy areas** such as free movement of persons, agriculture, cohesion policy, and the budget. This will enable Member States to define EU common positions for the negotiations in the relevant chapters with a full understanding of the likely impact as well as to define any transitional measures.

➤ **By the end of 2023:**

Provided all closing benchmarks for all chapters have been met, Member States would be in a position to agree to closing overall negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia in an inter-governmental conference by the end of 2023. This requires continued progress on the reform agenda.

Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to make steady and substantive progress on reforms and functionality in order to be ready to open accession negotiations by the end of 2023.

➤ **By 2024:**

The Accession Treaty with the countries that have concluded negotiations is signed, after the opinion of the Commission, the consent of the European Parliament and the decision of the Council on the admission of the new Member States.

➤ **By the end of 2025:**

Ratification of the Accession Treaty in all EU Member States and the acceding countries is completed, allowing accession at the end of 2025.

II. A CREDIBLE ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE – REQUIRES SUPPORT FROM THE EUROPEAN UNION

The enlargement perspective of the Western Balkans is first and foremost in the hands of the countries themselves. For its part, the EU must remain credible, firm and fair, while upgrading its policies to better support the transformation process in the region. And it must fulfil its commitments as the Western Balkans fulfil theirs – in Europe's own strategic interest.

The section below, together with the Action Plan in annex, sets out a range of flagship initiatives representing a significant enhancement of the EU's engagement with the countries of the Western Balkans, in mutual interest. These initiatives will require concrete support from the European institutions as well as from the EU Member States.

The EU's enlargement policy and the stabilisation and association process and the tools and instruments these provide remain the bedrock of its support to the Western Balkans. The Commission will endeavour to ensure enhanced coordination of all relevant activities, also with other stakeholders, including International Financial Institutions, and further promote regional ownership crucial for bringing the region forward.

The EU should enhance its policy engagement with the Western Balkans, focusing on areas of joint interest such as justice and home affairs, including security and the fight against organised crime the economy and the single market energy transport and digital policy, social policy as well as on foreign affairs and defence.

Cooperation in these fields would be supported by increased participation of the Western Balkans in **informal Councils** as well as regular **Ministerial level contacts**. The Commission will, for its part, include as appropriate, the Western Balkans in technical committees and Commission working groups. Following, the Western Balkans summit in Sofia in May 2018, EU Leaders should continue to engage with their counterparts in the Western Balkans including at summit level.

Relevant EU internal policies and funding programmes should be further extended to the Western Balkans and support provided so they make better use of existing participation in these programmes and EU networks.

The Commission will enhance its technical assistance to all Western Balkan countries to help them align with EU legislation and ensure its effective implementation in practice. Exchanges with **the administrations** in the region will also be boosted and **people-to-people formats** further facilitated such as local partnerships between municipalities across the region with those in EU countries.

To pursue our shared interest in strengthening our security structured Common Foreign and Security Policy/Common Security and Defence Policy dialogues should also be expanded and deepened with increased contributions to EU missions and operations worldwide with individual partners as appropriate, as well as further developing participation in actions related to hybrid threats, intelligence, space issues, defence and security sector reform. In this context, the countries of the Western Balkans must also speed up their alignment with all EU foreign policy positions, including restrictive measures. Joining the EU is a choice and one that requires sharing the principles values and goals the Union seeks to promote in its neighbourhood and beyond.

1. Strengthened support to the rule of law

Efforts should be intensified to guide rule of law related reforms in the region, to support the ambitious steps to be taken by the countries themselves. The tools developed during the negotiations with Montenegro and Serbia under the rule of law chapters should also be used in other Western Balkan countries as a stimulus for early adoption of key reforms. This will include analysis of legislation and practice in this field, leading to the **establishment of detailed**

action plans prioritising key issues, and close monitoring of implementation and delivery of concrete results.

There is great benefit in increased Member States' and experts' contributions to support and bring pressure to bear on reform implementation. More detailed rule of law assessments should be undertaken and **advisory missions extended to the whole Western Balkans**, building on the experience of the earlier advisory missions. Monitoring of implementation and enforcement should be enhanced including through more systematic, case-based peer-reviews organised by the Commission with the participation of Member State experts. Trial monitoring in the field of serious corruption and organised crime should be introduced. Work developing indicators of reform implementation should be undertaken. Cooperation agreements with Eurojust should be finalised as soon as necessary data protection standards are in place.

The negotiating frameworks in place for Montenegro and for Serbia place particular emphasis on the need for rule of law reforms to be addressed early in the negotiations. The Commission **recommends that greater use is made of the leverage provided in the negotiating frameworks**. Accordingly, a substantial improvement should be required on the rule of law and in particular concrete results in the fight against corruption and organised crime before technical talks on other chapters of the accession negotiations can be provisionally closed.

- The Commission will bring these actions together in a flagship initiative to **strengthen the rule of law** in the Western Balkans.

2. Reinforcing engagement on security and on migration

Enhanced **strategic and operational cooperation** between the EU and the Western Balkans on **security** including through **relevant agencies** is pivotal to addressing the existing security and terrorism threats that affect the Union and the Western Balkan region effectively and efficiently. Law enforcement cooperation and information sharing at national and at regional level among Western Balkan partners should also be enhanced.

Much work is already under way at EU level to help build capacities in the Western Balkans and facilitate international police and judicial cooperation to counter threats originating from organised crime and terrorism, including radicalisation leading to violent extremism, the challenge of foreign terrorist fighters and the trafficking of firearms and explosives. This engagement should be further reinforced based on successful initiatives in the field of security and counterterrorism and be underpinned by the ongoing security policy dialogue between the Union and the Western Balkans. Western Balkan partners should – on an ad hoc basis – be more closely associated to relevant security policy discussions taking place in the EU.

EU Agencies⁴ supported by Interpol will further called on to play a prominent role in enhancing strategic and operational police and judicial cooperation, including posting Europol guest officers in the region and further promoting Joint Investigation Teams (JITs).

A reinforced engagement on **counter-terrorism and radicalization** should include strengthening strategic legislative and institutional capacities in partner countries, building on dedicated counter-terrorism dialogues and joint action plans, and continuing the deployment of Counter-Terrorism expertise in the Western Balkans. Cooperation should be enhanced along

⁴ The European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (EBCGA), the European Union's Judicial Cooperation Unit (Eurojust), the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (Cepol)

the internal-external security nexus with the help of EU Agencies and Interpol, including information exchange on foreign terrorist fighters, and extending the support of the Radicalisation Awareness Network to the Western Balkans. Coherence and synergies of actions should be ensured via the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative.

Operational cooperation on countering various types of **organised crime** in the context of the Policy Cycle should increasingly be expanded to include the Western Balkans. Particular attention will be paid to providing increased support to capacity-building in the area of **cyber-security and fight against cyber-crime**. Cooperation with relevant EU agencies such as Europol and the European Network and Information Security Agency will be enhanced.

At the same time it is essential to further step up strategic and operational cooperation with the Western Balkans is to step up strategic on **migration and border management**. This includes ensuring access to international protection, sharing of relevant information (such as risk analyses), enhancing border control, ensuring the effective implementation of readmission and return policies and the fight against irregular migration and migrant smuggling. Strengthening international and regional cooperation (including with EU agencies⁵ and the respective liaison officers in the region) and further consolidating border and migration management capacities is also necessary. The Commission therefore proposes to continue the process of concluding the European Border and Coast Guard status agreements with Western Balkans partners, providing for a clear legal framework and safeguards for closer operational cooperation. This should include the possibility of deploying and implementing joint operational activities of the competent national authorities of the EU Member States and of the Western Balkans countries together with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency. Deepening regional cooperation and enhancing the exchange of information between the Union and the Western Balkans in this area will be essential.

In order to follow up on the various actions to be taken forward by the EU Agencies related to the Western Balkans, the Commission aims to create and coordinate an EU inter-agency Task Force, in line with their respective mandates.

- The Commission will bring these actions together in a flagship initiative to reinforce engagement on security and on migration in the Western Balkans

3. Supporting socio-economic development

An investment in the Western Balkans is an investment in Europe. Investments will only increase if economic governance is strengthened and structural reforms pursued to increase competitiveness. The measures below serve to support this goal and to enhance growth and job creation in particular for the region's youth. The **Western Balkans Investment Framework** financed through the Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance will be increasingly at the core of fostering investments in the region. To that effect, it will be expanded to further attract and coordinate bilateral donors and International Financing Institutions' investment. Increased funding in the fields of transport, energy, the social sector, the environment, and the private sector development including the digital economy is foreseen. To link socio-economic development in the region to the Union's investment priorities, the Commission will also significantly **boost the provision of guarantees through the Western Balkans Investment Framework** for private investment in the region. With a view to the next Multi-annual

⁵ The work of the above-mentioned agencies is relevant as well as that of the European Asylum Support Office.

Financial Framework, the Western Balkans should also be adequately covered in possible future external lending arrangements.

The **Regional Economic Area** is an essential step for furthering economic integration between the EU and the Western Balkans and boosting the attractiveness of the regional market. The Commission will continue supporting the development of intraregional economic integration, including by mobilising its expertise to assist with the implementation of Regional Economic Area action plan, in particular in areas covered by the EU acquis.

While trade between the EU and the Western Balkans was over EUR 43 billion in 2016, there is significant further growth potential. To realize this potential, the Commission **will further facilitate EU-Western Balkans trade**. This will include developing mutual recognition programmes on the basis of Central European Free Trade Area and Regional Economic Area (e.g. Authorised Economic Operators). Membership of the World Trade Organization is prerequisite for EU accession and can spur economic growth and foster significant investment for the region. The Commission will continue assisting Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in their World Trade Organization accession process.

The development of a **robust private sector led by entrepreneurs both from within the region and from the EU** will better harness the dynamism of the region's **youth** and foster mutually beneficial economic integration. Links between the diaspora business community in the EU and entrepreneurs in the EU and the Western Balkans will continue to be encouraged including through the EU programme for the Competitiveness of Enterprises and Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (COSME). Measures are needed to increase access to finance and harness the growth potential of small and medium sized enterprises. In order to boost entrepreneurship and innovation, the Commission will roll out a scheme supporting technology transfer and start-ups across the region and support efforts aimed at smart specialisation. The EU's Framework Programmes are already open to the Western Balkans. To ensure their more effective participation, further integration into the existing knowledge networks in the EU should be foreseen, including research and innovation capacity building.

The Commission will work on supporting the professionalism and independence of **public procurement** officials and on strengthening oversight mechanisms to enable monitoring the full tender cycle. For these efforts to be efficient, a firm political commitment is needed to address corruption.

The annual **economic reform programme** exercise led by the Commission with all Western Balkan countries is a crucial tool for supporting the modernisation of their economies, and achieving closer economic coordination with the EU. The Commission will strengthen this exercise, bring it even closer in line with the existing European semester for EU Member States and provide more advanced technical assistance.

The European Pillar of Social Rights reflects principles and rights that are essential for fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. Through a **new reinforced social dimension for the Western Balkans**, the Commission will work to support employment and social policy in the region, encouraging appropriate engagement from all levels of government, social partners and civil society. This will include an increased focus on employment and social reforms through greater monitoring of relevant policies, including in the context of the economic reform programmes. The Commission proposes an annual EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Meeting on social and employment issues to exchange views. More financial

assistance should be foreseen in the social sector, notably investment in education and health to support social inclusion.

Enhanced support should be provided to education in particular **vocational education and training and skills** as well teacher training and pre-school education. Funding under the Erasmus+ programme **will be doubled** to help even more young citizens of the Western Balkans to study and gain experience in the EU thereby furthering economic development and promoting common values. A pilot mobility scheme for learners and trainers in vocational education and training will be established in close cooperation with stakeholders including the European Training Foundation.

- The Commission will bring these actions together in a flagship initiative to **support socio-economic development** in the Western Balkans.

4. Increasing connectivity

Enhancing connectivity within the Western Balkans represents a strategic interest for both sides. Increasing transport and energy connections will allow for increased competitiveness, economic growth and security of supply, and is at the same time an important prerequisite for economic integration within the Western Balkans. The Energy Community Treaty and the Transport Community Treaty as well as the European Common Aviation Area provide for advanced regulatory frameworks that can – combined with strong political cooperation in the region – largely facilitate intra-regional connectivity.

The Western Balkans are surrounded geographically by EU Member States and it is a political priority to **connect infrastructure also between the EU and the Western Balkans** and to accelerate the development of interconnected trans-European networks in the fields of transport, energy and digital services. Investment in infrastructure networks brings tangible benefits clearly recognized by citizens and business in the EU and Western Balkans alike. In addition to increased funding of these networks and the creation of a new guarantee scheme for private investment, the Commission will work to ensure more effective use of existing provisions of the **Connecting Europe Facility** for the Western Balkans countries. The Commission will explore possibilities for simplifying their participation in the next Multi-annual Financial Framework.

An energy union with the Western Balkans. To strengthen the **EU's Energy Union, all of its dimensions** should be expanded to the Western Balkans: supporting energy security, market integration and energy transition, including energy efficiency and renewable energies. In this context, each country should complete all necessary reforms and streamline their policies fully in line with the five pillars of the European Union. Capacity building of **energy regulators and transmission system operators** in the Western Balkans should be supported so that they can participate fully in EU-level networks. Work to complete the **Regional Electricity Market** in the Western Balkans should be pursued and its integration into the EU Internal Electricity Market assured.

Towards a true transport union with the Western Balkans: implementation of the Transport Community Treaty which entered into force in 2017 will be key step leading to progressive integration of the region into the EU transport market. Agreements on priority transport corridors between the EU and the Western Balkans as part of the trans-European transport network are already in place. These now need to be made a reality to ensure their contribution

to increasing the competitiveness of the continent as a whole. In addition to investments, the priority is to align with EU operational standards. This will require – among other key reforms – enhanced measures to remove **administrative bottlenecks and barriers at borders** with a view to promote integrated road and rail operations. A **new rail strategy** is needed to bring the Western Balkans into the main EU network and market. Moreover, targeted efforts will be needed to reduce the disproportionately high number of road fatalities through a **new road safety strategy**.

- The Commission will bring these actions together in a flagship initiative to support connectivity in the Western Balkans.

5. Launching a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans

The development of the **EU Digital Single Market** contributes to developing businesses, creating growth, boosting productivity, promoting innovation, transforming public services and improving citizens' quality of life. It is essential that the Western Balkans are included in the EU's efforts to embrace technological change for them to be able to benefit from digital tools, ensuring a prosperous and sustainable future for their citizens.

Together with the partners in the Western Balkans, the Commission will launch a **Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans**, including a roadmap to lower the cost of **roaming**. Support will be provided to the deployment of broadband within the Western Balkans and with the EU. The **digital society** should be developed and so support will be provided in particular to eGovernment, eProcurement and eHealth services as well as to the development of **digital skills**. The Commission will support capacity-building in **trust and security** and the **digitalisation of industry** in the Western Balkans to ensure that all sectors benefit from digital innovations. These efforts will be complemented by enhanced support for the adoption, implementation and enforcement of the acquis in the area of the digital single market.

- The Commission will bring these actions together in a flagship initiative for a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans.

6. Supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations

Fostering good neighbourly relations and reconciliation needs strong ownership in the Western Balkans and should be led first and foremost by the countries of the region. Good neighbourly relations should continue to be reinforced through regional cooperation initiatives. The Commission stands ready to continue to support this co-operation, whether on the connectivity agenda, through the WB6 format and initiatives which bring together heads of state and government from the region or other initiatives which strengthen their ownership of regional co-operation

The Commission will further extend support to reconciliation initiatives, including those that address transitional justice and seek to overcome the legacy of recent conflict. There will be a continuation of support for the work of Mechanism for International Criminal Tribunals, and the Kosovo Specialist Chambers. The Commission will also explore how best to further the work of International Committee for the Red Cross and the International Commission on Missing Persons in fostering regional cooperation to resolve the issue of missing persons and examine what more can be done to reduce the scourge of landmines.

Supporting the education and potential of young people in the Balkans is crucial for the region's further development and a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence and reconciliation. In addition to education, cooperation will be increased in the field of **culture, youth and sport**. The scope and reach of the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office** will be widened. In addition to increasing funding under Erasmus+, the Commission will continue to foster the cultural links with the region. This will include work to protect the Western Balkans cultural heritage and promote its cultural and creative industries.

- The Commission will bring these actions together in a flagship initiative to **support reconciliation and good neighbourly relations** in the Western Balkans.

III. PREPARING THE EU TO WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

I. Institutional issues

The EU now needs to ensure that it will be ready institutionally to welcome new Member States once they have met the conditions set. **The Union must be stronger and more solid before it can be bigger.**

Enhancing the qualified majority voting in the Council is a key tool that enables the necessary decisions to be taken in the European Union of 27. to ensure effective decision-making it will be necessary to at least maintain policy areas under qualified majority voting in the Council. The Commission will adopt a Communications on the possibility of further enhancing the use of qualified majority voting in the third quarter of 2018.

Being a Member State of the European Union must mean accepting and promoting its Values. When considering the future of the European Union, a more effective mechanism needs to be adopted, that allows that effective measures can be taken to tackle a systemic threat to or a systemic breach of these values by any one of the EU's Member States. The Commission will present an initiative to strengthen the enforcement of the Rule of Law in the European Union in October 2018. The accession treaties could provide a legal basis for such a mechanism to be established within the framework of the Treaties.

The accession of the Western Balkan countries will have an impact on the **existing institutional arrangements in the EU**. Proposals to address these institutional issues will be needed in advance of the closure of negotiations. When addressing the institutional arrangements for the next enlargement, account should be taken of the future membership of other Western Balkan countries. In particular, the use of qualified majority voting in the Council is a key tool that enables the necessary decisions to be taken in the European Union of 27.

Special arrangement and **irrevocable commitments** must also be put in place to ensure that new Member States are not in a position to block the accession of other Western Balkan candidates. In preparing for the future language regime, account should be taken of the **similarities between national languages** of the Western Balkans.

Well before overall accession negotiations are closed, the Commission will provide **assessments of how** key policy areas, such as agriculture, cohesion policy and the budget will be affected by the accession of a new Member State. This will enable Member States to define common positions for the relevant chapters with a full understanding of the likely impact, and to take any mitigating measures.

II. Providing financial means for a successful accession

The Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance supports the Western Balkans in their preparation for accession and facilitates regional and cross-border cooperation. Between 2007-2017, the EU has invested more than EUR 8.9 billion in the region through the Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance. In 2018, EUR 1.08 billion is foreseen. Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance funding will be even more tailored for the needs of the countries. The reinforced pre-accession strategy will require strong funding for important investments, in particular infrastructure.

Taking into account the lessons learned from previous enlargements, a **gradual and seamless transition** from pre-accession status to that of Member State should be foreseen to allow the necessary **absorption capacity to be developed**. This should entail a gradual increase of Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance funding before accession, accompanied by a phasing-in of expenditure after accession. This will effectively mean that while a new Member State cannot expect to receive full allocations of EU expenditure upon accession, its access to pre-accession funding will be correspondingly significantly boosted before it joins.

The Commission therefore envisages a gradual **increase of Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance funding for the Western Balkans until 2020** in so far as reallocations within existing envelopes allow.

This should be followed by **gradual increases of Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance funding** in the new Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) to prepare the foreseen transition to membership.

Conditionality attached to our bilateral assistance will be strengthened. Increased funding under the current and new Multiannual Financial Frameworks should be linked to progress to improving fundamental reforms and good neighbourly relations.

As the region has a relatively low Gross Domestic Product and population levels, the impact of Western Balkans accession to EU budget is expected to be very limited. However, the enlargement of the European Union has a cost. It should be clear that future enlargements would entail costs for all Member States. It is therefore necessary to take measures in order to accommodate the possibility of accession during the new **Multiannual Financial Framework**. The new Multiannual Financial Framework represents the EU's political priorities. Specific provisions on enlargement will be included in the **new Multiannual Financial Framework**. If some candidates were ready to join during the period of the new Multiannual Financial Framework, **necessary adjustments** would then need to be made.

III. Communication

For the accession process to be a success, its **opportunities and challenges** must be communicated very clearly in the region and in the EU. In the Western Balkans it is primarily the responsibility of the governments to provide adequate information to citizens and business and to build a national consensus around their strategic goal.

On the other side it is incumbent to Member States to inform their citizens and provide them with the necessary facts about the opportunities and challenges of the process. The Commission

will support these endeavours by stepping up its strategic communication in the countries and in the Union to ensure the visibility of the enlargement.

IV. CONCLUSION

The EU has long supported the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The future of the region as an integral part of the EU is in the **Union's very own political, security and economic interest**. The EU's enlargement policy is part and parcel of the larger strategy to strengthen the Union by 2025. With strong political will, delivery of real and sustained reforms and definitive solutions to disputes with neighbours, Serbia and Montenegro **could potentially be ready for membership by this date**. Accession is and will **remain a merit-based process** fully dependent on the objective progress achieved by each country.

In order to **meet the well-established membership criteria** and their own interest, the Western Balkans countries need to implement **comprehensive reforms** in crucial areas. The rule of law, fundamental rights and governance must be strengthened significantly, judicial reforms, the fight against corruption and organised crime and public administration reform needs to deliver real results and the functioning of democratic institutions seriously enhanced. Economic reforms must be pursued with vigour and structural weaknesses, low competitiveness and high unemployment addressed.

All countries must unequivocally commit, in both word and deed, to overcoming the legacy of the past, by achieving reconciliation and solving open issues well before their accession to the EU, in particular border disputes. There needs to be a **comprehensive, legally binding normalisation agreement** between Serbia and Kosovo, so that they can advance on their respective EU path.

The EU will significantly enhance its support to the transformation process in the Western Balkans. The Commission adopted an **Action Plan in Support of the Transformation of the Western Balkans** annexed to this Strategy. It includes **six Flagship Initiatives** targeting specific areas of interest for both the EU and the Western Balkan countries themselves including through a number of new measures in areas of strong mutual interest:

Initiative to strengthen rule of law: Existing negotiating tools, such as detailed **action plans**, will be expanded to all Western Balkan countries, assessment of reform implementation will be enhanced, including through **new advisory missions in all countries**. Greater will be made of **leverage provided in the negotiating frameworks** with Serbia and Montenegro.

Initiative to reinforce engagement on security and migration: Reinforced cooperation for fighting organised crime, countering terrorism and violent extremism and on border security and on migration management. **Europol liaison officers** will be posted in the region; **Joint Investigative Teams** further promoted and **status agreements with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency** concluded.

Initiative to enhance support for socio-economic development: will include a **new guarantee scheme** to boost private investment, support to start-ups and SMEs and greater trade facilitation. A new, **reinforced social dimension** will see more focus on social policies, with increased financial assistance to support the social sector, in particular education and health. Funding under **Erasmus+ will be doubled**.

Initiative to increase transport and energy connectivity within the region and with the EU, including **new investment support**. More effective use will be made of the **Connecting Europe Facility** in the Western Balkan countries. To strengthen **the EU's Energy Union, all of its dimensions** should be expanded to the Western Balkans.

Initiative for a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans: will include a roadmap to **lower roaming costs**, support to the **deployment of broadband** in the region and development of **eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth** and digital skills.

Initiative to support reconciliation and good neighbourly relations: will include supporting transitional justice, missing persons and increased cooperation in education, culture, youth and sport, and expanding the scope of Regional Youth Cooperation Office.

In March 2018, the Commission services will convene a kick-off coordination meeting with Member States in close coordination with European External Action Service to discuss the Action Plan and mechanisms for operational cooperation for its implementation.

The EU needs to be prepared to welcome new members, including from an institutional and financial perspective, once they have met the necessary conditions. The Commission will prepare impact assessments in key policy areas well before accession. In order to ensure **adequate funding to support this strategy** and a seamless transition to membership, the Commission proposes a **gradually increase funding** under the **Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance** and ensure adequate provision is made in the **next Multiannual Financial Framework** to enter for possible accessions. To ensure effective decision-making it will be necessary to at least maintain and consider enhancing policy areas under qualified majority voting in the Council. A more effective system should be put in place to tackle systemic threat to or breaches of the rule of law in any EU Member State. Communication activities will be enhanced.

The European perspective of the Western Balkans is clear and unambiguous and the conditions and criteria for EU membership are well established. Through this Strategy the EU will be able to provide **unprecedented support to this goal**. Much work lies ahead of the countries concerned to be in a position to meet these criteria. Governments must ensure more inclusive reform processes that bring all stakeholders and society at large on board. Most fundamentally, leaders in the region must have no doubt as to their strategic orientation and commitment. It is they that ultimately must assume responsibility for making this historical opportunity a reality.

Action Plan in Support of the Transformation of the Western Balkans	
Main actions	Timing
1. Strengthening support to the Rule of Law	
1.1. Support to the establishment of detailed Action Plans in the Western Balkans to address shortcomings and prioritise key issues for aligning existing legislation and practice with EU standards.	2019-2020
1.2. Extend rule of law advisory missions in the Western Balkan and encourage increased support from Member States experts.	2019-2020
1.3. Enhance monitoring of reforms through more systematic, case-based peer-review missions .	2018-2019
1.4. Introduce trial monitoring in the field of serious corruption and organised crime.	2019-2020
1.5. Encourage finalisation of cooperation agreements with Eurojust .	2019-2020
1.6. Work towards better measuring of results injustice reform .	2018-2019
1.7 Work towards better use of conditionality in the accession negotiations in particular by ensuring concrete results in judicial reform and in the light against corruption and organised crime are achieved before technical talks on other chapters can be provisionally closed.	2018
1.8 Roll-out of support for the Western Balkans through the European Endowment for Democracy in the area of independent and pluralistic media and civil society .	2018-2019
2. Reinforcing engagement on security and migration	
2.1. Step up joint work on counter-terrorism and preventing violent extremism (CVE). National CVE coordinators and offices should be created or strengthened nationally and a regional network of national CVE coordinators should be put in place with the support of the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the EU Regional CT Expert.	2018-2019
2.2. Enhance significantly operational cooperation including with EU agencies in the fight against international organised crime in particular firearms, drugs trafficking, migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings.	2018-2019
2.3. Post Eurojust liaison officers in all Western Balkan countries.	2019
2.4. Further promoting Joint Investigation Teams (JITs) involving the Western Balkans and EU Member States; promoting the establishment of regional JITs among the WB countries' relevant authorities. This should entail an active involvement of Eurojust and Eurojust in line with their respective mandates.	2018-2019
2.5. Expand the EU Policy Cycle on organised crime to the extent possible to include the Western Balkans in its operational activities. WB to be invited to take part in specific EMPACT (European Multidisciplinary Platform against Criminal Threats) projects and to COSI and PSC/COSI meetings on an ad-hoc basis when the projects are discussed.	2018

2.6. Increase support to capacity-building in the area of cyber-security and fight against cyber-crime , including cooperation with the European Cybercrime Training and Education Group (ECTEG), with a view to participation in the European Network and Information Security Agency.	2018-2019
2.7. Enhance cooperation on border control and migration management , strengthening the flow of strategic and tactical information in the prevention and fight against irregular migration and the return of third country nationals, in particular through the conclusion of status agreements with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency.	2018-2019
2.8. Further enhance cooperation between the liaison officers deployed by the (European Border and Coast Guard Agency) Member States and competent authorities of the Western Balkans.	2018
2.9. Establish national coordination centres for border control in the WB countries, connecting them via a regional network with the EUROSUR national coordination centres in the neighbouring Member States.	2019
2.10. In order to follow-up on the various actions to be taken forward by the EU Agencies, create an EU inter-agency Task Force Europol, EBCGA, Eurojust, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction, CEPOL, coordinated by the Commission.	2019
2.11. Evaluation of the Action Plan 2015-2019 on illicit trafficking in firearms to prepare its renewal in 2019 to address more effectively the supply of illicit firearms and the large stockpile of weapons .	2018-2019
2.12. Structured CFSP/CDSP dialogue expanded and deepened with the Western Balkans, with increased contribution to CSDP missions and operations worldwide.	2018
2.13. Develop further participation in actions related to hybrid threats, intelligence, space issues, defence and security sector reform.	2018
3. Supporting socio-economic development	
3.1. Introduce a guarantee scheme to boost private investments .	2019
3.2 The Western Balkans Investment Framework will be expanded to further attract and coordinate bilateral donors' and International Financing Institutions' investment.	2019
3.3. Strengthen measures to support private sector development, including a scheme supporting start-ups across the region and support efforts aimed at smart specialisation.	2019
3.4. Increase access to finance and harness the growth potential of SMEs.	2018
3.5. Further integrate the Western Balkans into the European knowledge network.	2018
3.6. Mobilise EU expertise to support the implementation of REA.	2018
3.7. Facilitate trade between the EU and the Western Balkans and in the region, including developing mutual recognition programmes on the basis of CEFTA and REA (e.g. Authorised Economic Operators)	2018
3.8. Further assist Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia in their World Trade Organization accession process	2018

3.9. Through reinforced dialogues and outreach activities, enhance assistance to the Western Balkans in view of ensuring their convergence of their export control of dual use goods.	2018
3.10. Further strengthen the economic reform programme exercise by bringing it closer in line with the existing European Semester for EU Member States, strengthening technical assistance and further integrating the priorities of the Economic Reform Programmes and the ministerial policy guidance in Instrument for pre-Accession Assistance programming.	2018-2019
3.11. Increase focus on employment and social reforms through greater monitoring of relevant policies and establishment of an annual EU-WB Ministerial meeting on these issues that will feed into the economic reform programmes.	2019
3.12. Provide more financial assistance in the social field in the Western Balkans including on health	2019-2020
3.13. Enhance support to education, in particular launch a pilot project for mobility in vocational education and training .	2019
3.14. Double funding under the Erasmus+ programme.	2019-2020
4. Increasing connectivity	
4. 1. Support increased take-up of opportunities under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) in the Western Balkans	2019
4.2. Expand all dimensions of the EU Energy Union to the Western Balkans: energy security, opening markets and energy transition – including energy efficiency and renewables.	2019-2020
4.3. Support to capacity building and facilitate the participation of the authorities and organisations of the Western Balkans in the work of the network of energy regulators and transmission and distribution system operators, notably ACER, ENTSO-E and ENTSO-G.	2018-2019
4.4. Work to complete the Regional Electricity Market in the Western Balkans, and ensure that the Western Balkans market is integrated into the EU Internal Electricity Market.	2018-2019
4.5. Further support for creation of a single regulatory space and effective energy market reform process under the Energy Community Treaty.	2018
4.6. Support to the implementation of the Transport Community Treaty and full operation of its secretariat.	2018-2019
4.7. Continue encouraging participation of the Western Balkans in different transport for a and meetings of the TEN-T committee .	2019
4.8. Support to increased competitiveness through enhanced measures to remove barriers at borders, particularly integrated road and rail border crossings.	2018-2019
4.9. Support to a new rail strategy to bring the Western Balkans into the main EU network and market.	2018
4.10. Explore possibility to allow participation of the Western Balkans in European Rail Agency (ERA).	2018
4.11. Support set-up of a road safety strategy including work to reduce road fatalities by removing road safety blackspots.	2018-2019

5. A Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans	
5.1. Launch a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans , including a roadmap to include the region in the EU's roaming policies and by increasing digital opportunities.	2018
5.2. Support to the deployment of broadband in the Western Balkans, including through integration into the Broadband Competence Office network.	2018-2019
5.3. Support the development of eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth and digital skills in the Western Balkans.	2018-2019
5.4. Support capacity building in digital trust and security, in parallel to efforts to enhance digitalization of industries.	2018-2019
5.5. Enhance support for the adaption, implementation and enforcement of the acquis in the area of Digital Single Market.	2018-2019
6. Supporting reconciliation and good neighbourly relations	
6.1. Support initiatives to foster reconciliation and transitional justice, such as the Regional Commission set up to establish facts about war crimes and other violation of human rights on the territory of the former Yugoslavia.	2018-2019
6.2. Support the fight against impunity through support to the Mechanism for the International Criminal Tribunals, both to deepen co-operation between national prosecutors and to inform the public, and to the Kosovo Specialist Chambers.	2018-2019
6.3. Work towards a regional solution to resolve the issue of missing persons and landmines.	2018-2019
6.4. Further support to reconciliation initiatives, including expanding the scope and reach of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office and introduction of intra-regional mobility scheme.	2018-2019
6.5. Enhance cooperation in culture and sport, including work to protect the Western Balkans cultural heritage, to fight the illicit traffic in cultural goods, and promote its cultural and creative industries, including participation in the Creative Europe programme.	2018
6.6. Western Balkan countries will be fully associated to the European Year of Cultural Heritage and will be involved in all relevant events and initiatives. Launch an EU-Western Balkans Heritage Route, comprising a series of events celebrating cultural heritage in all its forms.	2018