

# WESTERN BALKANS

## Report on the preparation of post-2020 strategy



RegionalCooperationCouncil



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POST-2020 STRATEGY IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

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# Abbreviations

<b>ACER</b>	Agency for the Cooperation of Energy Regulators
<b>ADA</b>	Austrian Development Agency
<b>AEO</b>	Authorised Economic Operators
<b>AIDS</b>	Acquired immune deficiency syndrome
<b>AIRE</b>	Advice on Individual Rights in Europe
<b>ALB</b>	Albania
<b>Bosnia and Herzegovina</b>	Bosnia and Herzegovina
<b>CAA</b>	Civil Aviation Agency
<b>CAP</b>	Common Agricultural Policy
<b>CC</b>	Climate Change
<b>CCI</b>	Chamber of Commerce and Industry
<b>CEE</b>	Central and Eastern Europe
<b>CEF</b>	Center for Excellence in Finance
<b>CEFTA</b>	Central European Free Trade Agreement
<b>CIF</b>	Chamber Investment Forum
<b>CLLD</b>	Community lead local development
<b>COVID-19</b>	Coronavirus Disease 2019
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>DG AGRI</b>	Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development
<b>DG MARE</b>	Directorate-General for Maritime Affairs
<b>DG MOVE</b>	Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport
<b>DG NEAR</b>	Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations
<b>DG REGIO</b>	Directorate-General for Regional and Urban Policy
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EEA</b>	European Economic Area
<b>EFTA</b>	European Free Trade Association
<b>EnC</b>	Energy Community
<b>ENTSO</b>	European Network of Transmission System
<b>ERI SEE</b>	The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe
<b>ERP</b>	Economic Reform Programme
<b>ETF</b>	European Training Foundation

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<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EUD</b>	European Union Delegation
<b>EUMS</b>	EU member states
<b>FAO</b>	Food and Agriculture Organisation
<b>GEF</b>	Global Environment Facility
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>GRECO</b>	Group of States against Corruption
<b>GWP</b>	Global Water Partnership
<b>GWPO</b>	Global Water Partnership Organisation
<b>HR</b>	Human resources
<b>IFC</b>	International Finance Cooperation
<b>IMWG</b>	Inter-Ministerial Working Group
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
<b>IPSAS</b>	International Public Sector Accounting Standards
<b>IRBM</b>	Integrated River Basin Management
<b>IT</b>	Information Technologies
<b>ITC</b>	International Trade Centre
<b>IWRM</b>	Integrated Water Resources Management
<b>KDZ</b>	Zentrum für Verwaltungsforschung
<b>KIESE</b>	Key Indicators for Employment, Skills and Education
<b>LGBT</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
<b>MAP REA</b>	Multiannual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area
<b>ME</b>	Monitoring & Evaluation
<b>MFF</b>	Multi-Financial Framework
<b>MKD</b>	Macedonia
<b>MNE</b>	Montenegro
<b>MoU</b>	Memorandum of understanding
<b>MRA<sub>s</sub></b>	Mutual recognition agreements
<b>MS</b>	Member state
<b>NALAS</b>	Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe
<b>NAP</b>	National adaptation plan
<b>NBSAP</b>	National Biodiversity Strategy with the Action Plan (NBSAP)
<b>NDS</b>	National Development Strategy
<b>NERP</b>	National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP)
<b>NGO<sub>s</sub></b>	Non-governmental organisations
<b>NHC</b>	National Health Coordinators
<b>NPAA</b>	National Programmes for the Adoption of the Acquis
<b>NPEI</b>	National Plan for European Integration

<b>NPISAA</b>	National Programme for Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement
<b>NSDI</b>	National Strategy for Development and Integration
<b>NSOR</b>	National Sustainable Development Strategy
<b>NTM<sub>s</sub></b>	Creating non-tariff measures
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>PA</b>	Public administration
<b>PAR</b>	Public administration reform
<b>PFM</b>	Public financial management
<b>PIFC</b>	Public internal financial control
<b>PM</b>	Prime minister
<b>PSSM</b>	Physical security and stockpile management
<b>RACVIAC</b>	Regional Arms Control Verification and Implementation Assistance Center
<b>RAI</b>	Regional Anti-corruption Initiative
<b>RCC</b>	Regional Cooperation Council
<b>RDC<sub>s</sub></b>	Regional Dimension Coordinators
	Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 2001
<b>RECOM</b>	Regional Commission Tasked with Establishing the Facts about All Victims of War Crimes and Other Serious Human Rights Violations Committed on the Territory of the Former Yugoslavia from 1 January 1991 to 31 December 2001
<b>REMIT</b>	Regulation on Wholesale Energy Market Integrity and Transparency
<b>ReSPA</b>	Regional School for Public Administration
<b>RHDC<sub>s</sub></b>	Regional Health Development centres
<b>RWG-Env</b>	Regional Working Group on Environment
<b>RYCO</b>	Regional Youth Office
<b>SAA</b>	Stabilisation and Association Agreement
<b>SALW</b>	Small arms and light weapons
<b>SAP</b>	Strategic action programme
<b>SDC</b>	Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation
<b>SDG</b>	Sustainable Development Goals
<b>SEE</b>	South East Europe
<b>SEE2020</b>	South East Europe 2020 Strategy
<b>SEEHN</b>	South-eastern Europe Health Network
	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC)
<b>SEESAC</b>	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC)
<b>SGG</b>	Secretariat General of the Government
<b>SIDA</b>	Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency
<b>SIGMA</b>	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
<b>SKGO</b>	National Association of Local Authorities in Serbia

<b>SMEs</b>	Small and medium-sized enterprises
<b>SWG</b>	Standing Working Group
<b>SWOT</b>	Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats
<b>SWP</b>	German Institute for International and Security Affairs
<b>TA</b>	Technical assistance
<b>TCT</b>	Transport Community
<b>TDA</b>	Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis
<b>TDM</b>	Trade defence measure
<b>UHC</b>	Universal health coverage
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNCAC</b>	United Nations Convention against Corruption
<b>UNCTAD</b>	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>UNECE</b>	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
<b>UNFCCC</b>	United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
<b>UNMIK</b>	United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo*
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime
<b>USAID</b>	United States Agency for International Development
<b>VET</b>	Vocational education and training
<b>VINFIL</b>	Validation of informal and non-formal learning
<b>WB</b>	Western Balkans
<b>WB6</b>	Western Balkans six economies
<b>WB6 CIF</b>	Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum
<b>WHO</b>	World Health Organization
<b>WTO</b>	World Trade Organisation

## Executive summary

The purpose of this report is to provide input into the development of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)'s South East Europe (SEE) 2030 strategy for the Western Balkans (WB). It provides cross-analysis of findings from relevant post-2020 strategies of six Western Balkan economies: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia (hereafter the WB6). Moreover, it provides comparative analysis of linkages between strategic priorities of the Western Balkan economies with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It also addresses the priorities of the European Commission (2019-2024) and their relevance for the Western Balkans, as well as the interlinkages between the national priorities of the WB6 and EU post strategic 2020 agenda, including information relevant in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, this report provides information on the plans, scope of work, and priorities of relevant regional organisations and initiatives in the period after 2020 in order to identify opportunities for synergies between them and the RCC and to avoid possible overlaps going forward.



All WB6 economies have underdeveloped strategic planning systems, which negatively affect efforts to draw parallels and extrapolate commonalities between various strategic priorities in the period after 2020, as well as to track the implementation records of existing frameworks. The necessity for the harmonisation of policy planning systems represents an opportunity for the South East Europe (SEE) 2030 strategy (SEE 2030 hereinafter) to serve as a reference point, or a framework, for future actions of the WB6 in rationalising their policy planning systems. In this respect, the RCC could liaise with OECD/SIGMA, which is deeply involved in assisting the economies of the region in this endeavour. These two actors could jointly influence efforts to render strategic frameworks of the WB6 more coherent and harmonised.

The COVID-19 pandemic will have a significant impact on the plans and priorities of the relevant regional organisations, and is expected to shape national strategic frameworks as well. Due to the timing of writing of this report, it only rudimentarily grasps the effects of the pandemic on future strategic planning. The

\* 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.

research conducted so far found that 2020 is a cut-off planning year for many regional organisations, as well as for a large number of national strategic documents and plans for monitoring the implementation of SDG targets. This fact could indicate the mainstreaming of planning based on the particularities of the COVID-19 pandemic in the future.

The findings and conclusions presented in this report call for greater attention to public health and food security. The RCC's post-2020 strategic document should feature these two policy areas more prominently, along with the experience of COVID-19 and first economic projections. Likewise, the "local dimension" should be a greater focus of the RCC's upcoming strategic framework, instead of being observed as a cross-cutting issue. In this respect, the expertise and advocacy potentials of relevant regional organisations can be exploited in terms of monitoring the achievement and "localisation" of the SDGs – i.e. raise awareness and advocate for active role of local players, as well as supporting them in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. The same goes for IPA III planning, in which many organisations observe the RCC as an ally in improving the upcoming pre-accession instrument. Furthermore, the RCC should continue its engagement in initiatives for the mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications at the regional level. Relevant regional organisations have demonstrated considerable resources and demand for joint action in this policy area. Developments in this field are expected to boost economic growth and alleviate negative economic indicators in the region in the post-COVID pandemic context.

The context of the COVID-19 pandemic offers opportunities for boosting relationships between the EU and the Western Balkans. The RCC should advocate for their greater interdependence and connectivity, building on its existing results and the achievements within the framework of the Berlin Process. The RCC should support the opinion that the EU is likely to become a more resilient and autonomous global actor if it invests itself more in its immediate neighbourhood and thus lowers its dependence on other global actors. The EU's increased political and economic investment in the WB region will also help the achievement of the RCC's mission and the strategic objectives. Finally, when it comes to the alignment of the WB6 with the SDG targets, the RCC should, in the upcoming period, investigate untapped potentials of the civil society sector in this domain and advocate for its greater involvement at the national and regional levels. Given the worrying state of democracy and media in the region, as well as the scarcity of independent and fully functioning institutions, empowering civil society and grassroots initiatives seems like a sustainable approach in helping the recovery process and building progress. In addition, given its mandate and resources, the RCC could help in fostering dialogue between the Governments and civil society actors, by promoting and mainstreaming transparent, timely and inclusive policymaking.

# I. Introduction and purpose of the report

This report aims to provide input into the development of a post-2020 Strategy for the Western Balkans of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). Namely, the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEEC) Summit entrusted the RCC with the task of preparing a post-2020 strategic vision in line with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in July 2019. In autumn 2019, the RCC has initiated the development of the strategic framework for a post-2020 strategy, working along with key regional and international partners, the European Commission, national administrations, and a wide array of organisations and initiatives from civil society, academic institutions, the media, and the private sector. The objective of this process is to develop an all-encompassing strategy that would reflect the acute need for the continuation of reforms to transform society in the Western Balkans and aid in the growth of competitiveness and socio-economic progress.

More precisely, this report provides cross-analysis of findings from the relevant post-2020 strategies of the WB6 economies. It does so by extrapolating commonalities found throughout the WB6, together with an overview of regional post-2020 targets, and mapping of all relevant information on SDGs that are of particular importance for the WB (Chapters 2.3 and 2.4). Furthermore, it provides analysis of the political priorities of the incumbent European Commission (which will last from 2019 to 2024) and their relevance for the Western Balkans, as well as the interlinkages between the WB6's national priorities regarding post-2020 and EU post-2020 agenda, including information relevant in the context of COVID-19 (Chapter 2.1). Finally, the report provides information on the plans, scope of work, and priorities of the relevant regional organisations and initiatives in the post-2020 period in order to identify opportunities for synergies and avoid possible overlaps in the coming period (Chapter 2.2). The report ends with a reflection on the findings of each chapter and recommendations for the best course of action in the development of a post-2020 Strategy (Chapter 3).

The methodology for development of this report is mainly based on desk research, with the collection of primary sources through direct, semi-structured interviews, and data analysis. Primary sources include, but are not limited to, documents pertaining to activities of relevant regional organisations regarding their priorities in the post-2020 framework, strategic documents from the WB6 economies for the post-2020 period, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, the EU 2030 Sustainability Agenda, Political Guidelines for the new European Commission (2019-2024), "A Union that Strives for More, My agenda for Europe" of the newly-elected EC President Ursula von der Leyen, and others (see Annex IV for more details). The main secondary source for information is processed data delivered by national consultants from each WB6 economy.

The development of this report coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has implications on the usefulness and validity of present findings. Nevertheless, this analysis sought to incorporate the most reliable and recent information in the context of COVID-19, as this information might be relevant for future steps in the development of the RCC's SEE 2030 Strategy.

## 2. Current state of play

### 2.1 EUROPEAN UNION'S PRIORITIES VIS-À-VIS THE WESTERN BALKANS

This section analyses the priorities of the incumbent European Commission (2019-2024) that are considered relevant to the Western Balkans region (WB). Its structure follows the six priorities presented in July 2019 by the then-European-Commission-president-designate (whose commission took office on 1 December 2019) Ursula von der Leyen (VDL) in the exposé entitled “My Agenda for Europe”. The report also refers to relevant strategic documents in connection to the exposé, including some that have been published or announced as a result of the priorities listed in it, as well as statistical data and secondary sources relevant to the context of the WB.

Given that this analysis coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the report also refers to the first official responses in tackling its consequences. Following the analysis of “My agenda for Europe”, the report goes on to provide details from the EU’s “Roadmap for Recovery” from the pandemic, and the extent to which this crisis will influence the EU’s course of action in the upcoming period. In addition, this section provides a summary of the post-COVID 19 vision of the EU by the EU’s High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, which he elaborated in an essay published by the European Council on Foreign Relations. Moreover, this section further links the World Bank’s first economic projections for the Western Balkans in the COVID-19 context with the EU’s economic priorities and their relevance for the region.

The section continues with the analysis on the relevance of the EU 2030 Sustainability Agenda for the Western Balkans, and finishes with the commentary on the European Commission’s proposal for revised EU accession process<sup>1</sup>, presented in February 2020 and endorsed by the European Council in March 2020. It concludes with the overview of EU’s assistance to the region for tackling immediate and long-term needs in the COVID-19 context and refers to the relevant conclusions from the virtual EU-Western Balkans Summit held on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020.

#### “My agenda for Europe”, 2019-2024

##### 1. The Green Deal

The **“Green Deal”** is the flagship and most ambitious initiative of the newly-elected European Commission (EC), envisaging Europe as the first climate neutral continent by 2050 and drastic changes to the way in which resources are produced and consumed. The Green Deal was announced as the exposé’s first priority, while a roadmap for its implementation was published in December 2019 as a communication from the Commission.<sup>2</sup> In a nutshell, its core elements include:

- The goal of a zero pollution and toxic-free environment
- Preserving and restoring ecosystems and biodiversity
  - The EC is expected to propose a new biodiversity strategy by 20 May 2020
- From “Farm to fork”: a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system
  - A food strategy is expected to be presented in spring 2020<sup>3</sup>
- Accelerating the shift to sustainable and smart mobility
- Improving the EU’s climate and climate ambitions for 2030 and 2050
  - In relation to this objective, the EC presented a draft Regulation, the so-called “European Climate Law” and launched public consultations on 4 March 2020<sup>4</sup>
- Supplying clean, affordable and secure energy
- Mobilising industry for a clean and circular economy:
  - In relation to this priority, the Commission plans to adopt an EU industrial strategy to address the twin challenges of the green and digital transformations, which has been delivered on 10 March 2020
- Building and renovating in an energy and resource-efficient manner:
  - The creation of the “Just Transition Fund” to support, among others, the transition of fossil and carbon-dependent EU regions to low-carbon and “climate resilient” solutions
  - Rigorous enforcement of energy performance of buildings legislation, development of long-term renovation strategies and engaging in a “renovation wave” of public and private buildings

This communication also stresses the potential contributions of digital technologies to attaining the goals of Green Deal package. It notes that “the Commission will explore measures to ensure that digital technologies such as artificial intelligence, 5G, cloud and edge computing and the internet of things can accelerate and maximise the impact of policies to deal with climate change and protect the environment. Digitalisation also presents new opportunities for distance monitoring of air and water pollution, or for monitoring and optimising how energy and natural resources are used. At the same time, Europe needs a digital sector that puts sustainability at its heart [...]”<sup>5</sup> (see also “Section 3 – Europe fit for Digital Age”).

The Green Deal is also an integral part of the EC’s strategy to implement the United Nation’s 2030 Agenda and sustainable development goals (SDGs).

With 47 wider policy measures envisaged, the likelihood of the Green Deal to be implemented is far from being certain. One can expect to see West-East divisions within the EU along the green versus coal lines, for instance, as well as between the civic and industrial sectors. Moreover, the manner in which the EU will pursue recovery from the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will also affect the Green Deal and its elaboration.

<sup>3</sup> Roadmap for the “From farm to fork strategy” available at: <file:///C:/Users/Sena%20Maric/Documents/Downloads/090166e5c-c33ee51.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> Proposal available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission-proposal-regulation-european-climate-law-march-2020\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/commission-proposal-regulation-european-climate-law-march-2020_en.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> Green Deal communication, op. cit.

<sup>1</sup> Proposal available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_181](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_181)

<sup>2</sup> Green Deal communication: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf)

## Implications for the Western Balkans

Given the transnational character of environmental and climate issues, the elements featured in the Green Deal will impact the Western Balkans, and the Western Balkans will have to transpose these elements. In fact, the EC's communication on Green Deal explicitly mentions the region:

“The EU will put emphasis on supporting its immediate neighbours. The ecological transition for Europe can only be fully effective if the EU's immediate neighbourhood also takes effective action. Work is underway on a green agenda for the Western Balkans.”<sup>6</sup>

Julian Popov (fellow at European Council on Foreign Relations) believes that there are at least four strong incentives for involving the WB to maximum extent in the design and implementation of Green Deal-related initiatives.

“Firstly, the energy systems of the Western Balkans are already partly integrated with those of the EU. This integration is set to expand regardless. Secondly, the Western Balkans have large, developed renewable energy capacity as well as further potential to contribute to European energy CO<sub>2</sub> reduction goals. Thirdly, the region has a significant developed hydro-energy capacity, which is both a good dispatchable match for renewables and offers potential for large-volume energy storage. And, finally, leaving the Western Balkans outside the European Green Deal could lead to electricity price disparity with EU economies, due to the higher carbon price in the EU, which is absent in the neighbourhood.

The Western Balkans has attractive assets for supporting Europe's energy transition: large coal mining areas with excellent grid infrastructure that can be used for industrial solar; lower labour costs; engineering skills; and geographic proximity to advanced industrial economies with high energy demand. With the right incentives, these assets could attract investments in the new wave of low-carbon industries and further contribute to the European industrial transition.”<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, he indicates that several mechanisms for involving the region in the Green Deal are available, including:

- The Energy Community
- The European Network of Transmission System Operators for Electricity
- The Regional Cooperation Council
- The Central and South Eastern Europe Energy Connectivity
- The Berlin Process

One of the issues in which the interdependence of joint environmental and climate challenges is most conspicuous is that of air pollution. According to 2019's “Chronic coal pollution report” made by several NGOs (including HEAL, CAN Europe, Sandbag, CEE Bankwatch Network and Europe Beyond Coal), 16 inefficient and substandard coal power plants in the Western Balkans emit a greater amount of air pollution than all other EU power plants together, impacting the health of people across the continent.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Green Deal communication, op. cit., p.20

<sup>7</sup> [https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary\\_european\\_green\\_deal\\_bring\\_in\\_the\\_western\\_balkans](https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_european_green_deal_bring_in_the_western_balkans)

<sup>8</sup> [https://bankwatch.org/press\\_release/eu-action-on-western-balkans-chronic-coal-pollution-is-a-unique-opportunity-to-improve-health-and-productivity](https://bankwatch.org/press_release/eu-action-on-western-balkans-chronic-coal-pollution-is-a-unique-opportunity-to-improve-health-and-productivity)

Given the alarming data on air pollution in the region, strongly correlated with the region's dependence on carbon and the fossil fuel industry (which in turn affects achieving the priorities set in the Green Deal), the idea of extending the mentioned Just Transition Fund to the WB can be further explored. Moreover, the existing mechanisms included in the region's commitments under the economies' membership in the Energy Community could serve as a potential means to address this common challenge in the future.

Finally, it should be mentioned that, in the framework of the EU accession process of the WB economies, regulatory activities based on policy proposals stemming from the Green Deal will become an integral part of the EU's *acquis communautaire* and subject to legal alignment for economies negotiating EU membership under Chapter 27 (Environment).

## 2. An economy that works for the people

In her agenda for the 2019-2024 Commission, von der Leyen states her intent to make the EU's economy more prosperous and socially fair, viewing the social market economy as crucial to achieving climate-neutrality and restructuring the operation of the European economy and industry.

To facilitate innovation by making it easier for small businesses to be involved in the innovation process, the agenda proposes creating a SME strategy that will reduce red tape and improve market accessibility and ensure SMEs have enough financial support to function and develop.

Attracting investment and growth, pushing a “more growth-friendly fiscal stance”,<sup>9</sup> as well as working towards convergence and boosting competitiveness are priorities, with the goal of building a more connected economic and monetary union.

Measures are proposed to support the workforce, including fair minimum wages, support for those who lose jobs due to external events, measures to foster social dialogue and improve labour conditions of platform workers, and the creation of a European unemployment benefit reinsurance scheme. A “European Child Guarantee” is also proposed, ensuring access to basic rights for every child.<sup>10</sup> Other aims include reducing the gender employment gap, fighting child poverty and youth unemployment, and improving childhood education and care systems.<sup>11</sup> Fighting cancer is also laid out as a significant goal of this agenda.

Gender equality is seen as “a critical component of economic growth.”<sup>12</sup> To this end, measures are proposed to improve gender parity in the economic sphere, including anti-discrimination legislation, creating a European gender strategy ensuring equal pay and pay-transparency, and measures to improve the gender balance of company boards. Measures are also proposed to prevent domestic violence, violence against women, and to protect victims and punish offenders.

Finally, the agenda points to the necessity of reforming the EU and international corporate tax systems, fighting tax fraud, taxing big tech companies, and consolidating a common corporate tax base.

<sup>9</sup> Von der Leyen, Ursula. “A Union that strives for more: My agenda for Europe”, p.9

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. p.10

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid. p.11



## Results in the first 100 days<sup>3</sup>

In the first 100 days since implementation, the majority of the agenda's goals have been met only to a certain extent, and are deemed to fall short of promises. Consultations on "fighting wage dumping" have been initiated but remain "a far cry from concrete legal proposals" in terms of creating a fair minimum wage, while drawing criticism from Italy and the Nordic states. A more positive step is the agenda's delivery on its pledge for a reviewed fiscal policy, with promising initial steps taken and high chances of survival, though eliciting a "mixed reception along the Eurozone's North-South divide". A gender-equality strategy has so far been produced, but it has drawn criticism for using "weak language and (offering) a lack of [...] legislative proposals" and measures on pay transparency. The introduction of an SME strategy has, so far, been postponed, and a draft strategy promising a public-private fund lacks in "scope, scale and concreteness", with concerns that the strategy is insufficient. Overall, progress towards meeting the listed goals is limited; reactions thus far are mixed, with some opposition, and survival rates are weaker for some initiatives and stronger for others.

## Comparison: VDL's Agenda vs. the Europe 2020 Strategy

It is clear that both VDL's Agenda and the Europe 2020 Strategy focus on tackling some similar issues. Both focus on issues such as the creation of growth, investment and social inclusiveness, improving business conditions for SMEs, increasing competitiveness, improving educational attainment, tackling poverty, youth unemployment, and promoting gender equality, among others.

There are, however, disparities on two levels. Firstly, while both documents focus on similar issues, their attentions are divided differently. While VDL's agenda focuses significantly on the social market economy and inclusivity, this is only a small part of the Europe 2020 Strategy<sup>14</sup>, and the Europe 2020 Strategy focuses much more extensively on issues of productivity, innovation and strengthening the economy than VDL's agenda. Secondly, the two agendas wish to achieve different overall goals: while VDL aims for a more inclusive, socially-fair and prosperous economy, the Europe 2020 Strategy aims to strengthen the economy itself,<sup>15</sup> improve the EU's competitiveness,<sup>16</sup> and draw lessons from the preceding 2008 economic crisis,<sup>17</sup> with its social aspect only a means to that end rather than an end in itself. In short, VDL's Agenda is much more focused on the social market economy and implementing the so-called "Social Pillar", while Europe 2020 prioritises recovery, growth and strengthening the economy.

## Priority Areas – Comparison of the EU and Western Balkans

The Western Balkans region has seen improvements in key economic sectors but remains far from EU standards.

Both **unemployment and youth unemployment** have fallen in the region, though there is still a significant lag relative to EU levels: there is an unemployment rate of **19%**<sup>18</sup> (in 2017) in the WB compared to

<sup>13</sup> Politico, "The Commission's 100-day report card", available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/the-commissions-100-day-report-card/>

<sup>14</sup> European Commission, "Europe 2020", p.16

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. p. 15

<sup>17</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>18</sup> Regional Cooperation Council, "SEE2020 Progress Tracker", available at: <https://www.rcc.int/seeds/results/see2020-progress-tracker>

the EU's **6.6%**,<sup>19</sup> (2018) with **40.1%**<sup>20</sup> youth unemployment (2017) to the EU's **14.2%**.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, there is a reduction in the **gender employment gap**, though again far from EU standards, at **18.9%**<sup>22</sup> (2017) in the WB region compared to **11.8%**<sup>23</sup> in the EU (2018). The region's **average monthly minimum wage** is steadily growing, having reached approximately **€296**,<sup>24</sup> still vastly lower than the **€934**<sup>25</sup> paid on average in the EU. In terms of **poverty**, **15.9%**<sup>26</sup> of the population suffer from material deprivation in the WB region (2019), almost three times more than the **5.9%**<sup>27</sup> in the EU (2018). Finally, **SMEs** have a slightly higher share of **99.6%**<sup>28</sup> of all businesses in the Balkans (2017), compared to **99%**<sup>29</sup> in the EU.

The predictions for 2020 are that economic growth in the WB region will be slow but stronger than in the EU and CEE,<sup>30</sup> and that maintaining this growth is crucial for catching up to the EU. However, the region also suffers from low competitiveness and a dependence on foreign investment. Furthermore, the region's economies suffer from underlying vulnerabilities and structural deficiencies, including low youth employment, low productivity, weak business environments, and others, which hamper their growth.<sup>31</sup> To combat these weaknesses and to catch up with EU member states, the WB6 need to implement structural reforms and improvements that will strengthen anticorruption mechanisms, boost human capital and preserve fiscal stability, as well as focus on regional and international trade.<sup>32</sup>

## The Economic and Social Impact of COVID-19

Following the outbreak of the pandemic in the spring of 2020, WB economies were forced to implement severe restrictions on their economies and social lives in order to combat the spread of the virus.

The outbreak has serious consequences for the Western Balkan economies, putting them under "unprecedented strain."<sup>33</sup> As the World Bank Western Balkans Regular Economic Report notes, aggregate demand and aggregate supply are both significantly dropping. Among the hardest hit businesses are those that require inter-personal interaction to operate – hospitality, retail, travel, tourism and manufacturing have all either ground to a halt or been severely crippled. "Essential sectors like medicine, the food supply chain, the public sector and sectors [able to] shift to telework" are somewhat more resilient.

<sup>19</sup> Eurostat, "Unemployment Statistics", available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment\\_statistics](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Unemployment_statistics)

<sup>20</sup> Regional Cooperation Council, "SEE2020 Progress Tracker"

<sup>21</sup> Trading Economics, "European Union Youth Unemployment Rates", available at: <https://tradingeconomics.com/european-union/youth-unemployment-rate>

<sup>22</sup> International Labour Organization, "Gender gap in labour force participation rates", available at: <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women#global-gap/labour-force>

<sup>23</sup> Eurostat, "Gender Employment Gap", available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tesem060&plugin=1>

<sup>24</sup> International Labour Organization, "Gender gap in labour force participation rates", available at: <https://www.ilo.org/infostories/en-GB/Stories/Employment/barriers-women#global-gap/labour-force>

<sup>25</sup> Eurostat, "Monthly minimum wages", available at: [https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=earn\\_mw\\_cur&lang=en](https://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=earn_mw_cur&lang=en)

<sup>26</sup> World Bank Group, "Western Balkans Regular Economic Report"

<sup>27</sup> Eurostat, "Severe Material Deprivation Rate", available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tespm030&plugin=1>

<sup>28</sup> "SME Policy Index: Western Balkans and Turkey 2019", p. 11

<sup>29</sup> Von Der Leyen, Op. cit., p. 8

<sup>30</sup> World Bank Group, op. cit. p. 29

<sup>31</sup> Ibid. p. 30

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank Western Balkans Regular Economic Report (No.17, Spring 2020), available at: <https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/33476>

The current crisis differs in that it is a shock on a large scale that demands a halt to activities in order to fight it. Depending on the efficiency of containment measures, capacity of the healthcare system, as well as speed of research towards a cure, these activities could be halted for a prolonged period of time. Furthermore, “economic policy alone cannot end this crisis”, but it can help save jobs and reinforce social safety. Finally, while rapid economic recovery is possible, it is by no means guaranteed. In order to reduce the fallout of the crisis, Western Balkan economies have prepared fiscal packages to support citizens and businesses.

As the crisis started to unfold, Western Balkan economies had various strong and weak points.

- The informal and temporary labour markets with disproportionate self-employment now face job destruction. The epidemic will most likely “reverse the job creation gains of recent years.”
- Many Western Balkan economies are heavily reliant on tourism, and thus significantly more susceptible to the effects of the crisis. Overall, more than 10% of employment in the Western Balkan economies stems from the retail, hospitality and entertainment sector, which was severely hit by the crisis.
- Western Balkan economies do not have much fiscal space for the necessary fiscal policy support measures needed to help the private sector. While there is some space for higher deficits, fiscal policy is “expected to be inhibited by concerns to keep debt under control and secure financing from markets and official creditors.”
- There are not many options in terms of monetary policy for Western Balkan economies. Most vulnerable in this sense are Kosovo\* and Montenegro, which unilaterally adopted the Euro. As currencies depreciate due to international capital pulling back, and price competitiveness gains offer very little, central banks need to intervene to provide liquidity and support.
- The crisis will test the “generally solid” capital and liquidity buffers in the financial sectors. While the sectors are deemed “more resilient than before” due to previous reforms, many current borrowers are in danger of liquidity issues which will force them to stop repayment and banks become cautious about further loaning.
- Major current account deficits will need to be addressed. The Western Balkans trade deficit was 13.8% of GDP in 2019, and the key exports of “international tourism, manufactures and extractives” are all vulnerable to the crisis. In financing the external imbalances, “foreign currency reserve buffers are likely to be crucial.”

The ongoing crisis will put the resilience of the Western Balkan economies to the test, as they all come under massive pressure and strain. “The longer the economic freeze lasts, the deeper the economic ramifications of [the crisis] are likely to be.”

The economies must utilise all available options to surmount the crisis. With limited resources, however, the support must be “timely, time-bound, targeted and transparent.” When the crisis starts to subside, the Report stresses that the policy must then shift to restarting the economy, “normalising balance sheets and bringing down the debt accumulated during the crisis.”

### Economic Reform Programmes (ERPs)

“As of 2015, all candidates and potential candidates submit annual Economic Reform Programmes (ERP) to the European Commission. [...] The ERPs contain medium-term macroeconomic projections, [...]

budgetary plans [...] and a structural reform agenda.”<sup>34</sup> The ERPs identify key issues preventing growth, propose concrete steps to be taken in these spheres and make predictions of potential outcomes.

The principal focuses outlined in individual economies’ ERPs tend to overlap with some of the priorities defined by VDL, such as encouraging SMEs and investment, supporting workers and work-seekers, reducing unemployment, supporting young people, and improving gender parity in the workforce. There is also a focus on improving the competitiveness of individual economies, with the goal of improving export capacities. In addition, the ERPs also outline plans for structural reform, primarily aimed at stimulating growth and competitiveness. Notably all ERPs highlight measures to sustain and strengthen annual growth – a necessity for economic convergence with the EU.

The need to reconcile the WB6’s demand for growth and economic convergence with the necessity for social convergence could potentially be overcome by taking an approach similar to what the Europe 2020 Strategy refers to as “sustainable recovery”<sup>35</sup> – strengthening competitiveness and boosting productivity through smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.<sup>36</sup> This could potentially help the WB6 by providing much-needed growth coupled with overcoming the socio-economic issues<sup>37</sup> preventing convergence, bringing conditions in the region closer to those of the EU and those prioritised by VDL’s agenda.

The WB6’s drive to improve competitiveness and increase exports clashes, to an extent, with VDL’s ambition to make the EU itself more competitive. While the WB6 enjoy decent access to the EU market, including autonomous trade preferences for the majority of goods they export into the EU,<sup>38</sup> the WB6 should focus on exporting products they produce most efficiently, such as mineral and manufactured goods, machinery and agricultural products. Above all, continuing along the path of integration brings increasingly better access to the European market.

### 3. A Europe fit for the Digital Age

Digital matters are intrinsically detached from the logic of territorial boundaries. For this reason, the “Europe fit for Digital Age” plan of the European Commission’s President Ursula von der Leyen is also likely to have an impact on the WB, especially in the COVID-19 context.

Designed to take advantage “of the opportunities of the digital age within safe and ethical boundaries”, this ambitious new e-economy strategy contains two key aspects. Firstly, it pushes for a renewed interest in technology and innovation in the form of increased combined investments from private and public partners with the support and involvement of the EU and its own financial capacities. Secondly, it emphasises stringent but innovative digital regulation in the wake of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) adopted in 2018. This new wave of regulations will be designed to strengthen legal certainty and legal protections for citizens in the digital era, notably by ensuring the EU’s digital sovereignty in terms of

<sup>34</sup> European Commission, “Economic Governance”, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/policy-highlights/economic-governance\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/policy-highlights/economic-governance_en)

<sup>35</sup> European Commission, Op. cit. p. 6

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 3

<sup>37</sup> European Western Balkans, “Worst-case scenario for the WB economic growth – political tensions”, available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2017/09/26/worst-case-scenario-wb-economic-growth-political-tensions/>

<sup>38</sup> European Commission, “Western Balkans: Trade Picture”, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/western-balkans/>

technological standards and frameworks' enforcement, while enhancing its legal and normative leadership in the technology industry at the global level. This last point will certainly be problematic for Serbia. In fact, the economy already cooperates closely with the Chinese giant Huawei, a relationship that is quite controversial for most EU top officials.<sup>39</sup> This is due to suspicions of potential diversion of data to the Chinese government. In fact, Chinese officials possess legal means to access data from Chinese big tech companies.<sup>40</sup> "If there's a risk that the data of civilians or companies can be tapped into on the basis of this law, then we can't accept that," von der Leyen told German weekly *Der Spiegel*.<sup>41</sup>

The European Commission's diligence in establishing a 5G regulation is most likely motivated by the same concerns about Chinese investments in European 5G networks. This is why the new Commission will most probably vie for strict regulation and scrutiny over non-EU companies with investments in the EU economy, such as Huawei, which currently has a strong presence in Serbia, seen as a gateway to the European market.

The enabling framework entered into force in April 2019 but will only be applied from November 2020. The framework is designed to allow the EU to screen purchases by foreign companies that target Europe's strategic assets.

This measure will likely have a major impact on the region, as Western Balkan economies involved in the EU accession process will need to align their national legal frameworks with the EU's evolving legislation on this dossier (Chapter 10 of accession negotiations, focused on the information society and media, deals with this topic). In the current context, the region has committed itself to alignment with the EU's Digital Single Market provisions, notably through the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and its monitoring entity, the EU-Western Balkans ICT Dialogue.<sup>42</sup> Furthermore, as part of the "Telecom package",<sup>43</sup> the implementation of a regulatory framework for electronic communications will be critical, since it is constantly updated, reformed and amended. In fact, one of its major provisions in the Framework Directive<sup>44</sup> is, namely, the "control over powerful companies on the market and the [...] application of solutions". Again, its enforcement in the economies of the WB will have implications on the previously-mentioned Huawei arrangements in the case of Serbia.

European 5G standardisation policy will most likely influence digital policy in the WB, already structured on EU-based principles, projects and protocols, such as with the EU 5G cross-border corridor (between Bulgaria, Greece and Serbia).

39 Cerulus, L. (2019, April 18). EU commissioner: 'We have to be worried' about Huawei. Retrieved from <https://www.politico.eu/article/ansip-we-have-to-be-worried-about-huawei/>

40 Yang, Y. (2019, March 5). "Is Huawei compelled by Chinese law to help with espionage?" Retrieved from <https://www.ft.com/content/282f8ca0-3be6-11e9-b72b-2c7f526ca5d0>

41 Spiegel, D. (2019, December 27). 5G-Netzausbau: Ursula Von der Leyen hat Bedenken, Huawei zu beteiligen - DER SPIEGEL - Politik. Retrieved from <https://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/5g-netzausbau-ursula-von-der-leyen-hat-bedenken-huawei-zu-beteiligen-a-1302873.html>

42 "European Commission launches Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans". Retrieved from [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news\\_corner/news/european-commission-launches-digital-agenda-western-balkans\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news_corner/news/european-commission-launches-digital-agenda-western-balkans_en)

43 "Package" composed of 6 directives:  
Directive 2002/20/EC or 'Authorisation Directive';  
Directive 2002/19/EC or 'Access Directive';  
Directive 2002/22/EC or 'Universal Service Directive';  
Directive 2002/58/EC or 'Directive on privacy and electronic communications';  
Regulation (EC) No 1211/2009 establishing a Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC);  
Regulation (EU) No 531/2012 on roaming on public mobile communications networks.

44 Directive 2002/21/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services ('framework directive'), available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32002L0021>

In the context of the GDPR regulation, concerns over data ownership have emerged. Data ownership is part of the announced European strategy for data.<sup>45</sup> The objective of this strategy is to "democratise" non-personal data, thanks to the creation of a "single market for data".<sup>46</sup> Businesses and individuals will be affected in terms of rules for accessing data, as well as protection of privacy while enjoying a unique cloud infrastructure. It is expected that binding regulation from the announced data strategy will be incorporated in the EU accession process of the WB economies as anticipated legislation will become an integral part of *acquis communautaire*.

Furthermore, as part of the digital transformation agenda, the Commission presented a communication on "Shaping Europe's digital future" on 19 February 2020.<sup>47</sup> Policy proposals on the ethical implications of artificial intelligence, and in particular "high-risk" technologies such as facial recognition, are likely to have strong influence on policy in the Western Balkans, bearing in mind the expected dissemination and replication of European norms and standards.

#### 4. Protecting our European way of life

The section on "**Protecting the European way of life**" is very relevant for the WB, even though the region is not explicitly mentioned. Initiatives to improve the monitoring mechanisms with respect to rule of law in EU member states (by additional comprehensive rule of law mechanism and linking the rule of law to the Multi-financial Framework) will evolve in parallel to enhanced EU monitoring of reforms undertaken by EU candidates in the WB in the context of their accession/integration processes. Although these two processes are not correlated at this moment, they should be seen as two sides of the same coin, given the growing awareness in the EU on the impact of rule of law related questions on the Union's overall functioning. Furthermore, one might even expect that these two processes could become interrelated, in the context of the announced Conference on the Future of Europe, for example, should the WB be included. At the moment, expert discussion is underway in the EU policy community on how to make the best of the current "window of opportunity" created with the revision of the EU accession process and in the context of the upcoming Conference on the Future of Europe, whose purpose and structure is still to be defined.

The WB economies are directly involved in the EU's border and migration policy, addressed in this section, as they are signatories of multiple status agreements with Frontex.<sup>48</sup> Under these agreements, Frontex is allowed to assist economies in the region in border management, to carry out joint operations, and to deploy teams in the areas that border the EU. The entry into force of the agreements is still pending and subject to the approval of the European Parliament. With a wide and comprehensive array of competences conferred by the economies of the region to the EU's border agency, the WB and the EU have become better connected in terms of managing the EU's external borders. Nevertheless, the content and nature of these status agreements call into question the EU's intentions towards the WB when it comes to efforts to combat intercontinental migrations towards the EU. The upcoming period, which will see the actual implementation of these agreements, will reveal the answers to this question. Furthermore, as related to the EU membership perspective of this region, its economies should closely follow anticipated reforms to EU asylum policies and the so-called Dublin regulation.

45 <https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy>

46 Shaping Europe's digital future: Commission presents strategies for data and Artificial Intelligence. (n.d.).

47 [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/shaping-europe-digital-future\\_en#documents](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/shaping-europe-digital-future_en#documents)

48 <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2019/11/19/border-management-eu-signs-agreement-with-serbia-on-european-border-and-coast-guard-cooperation/>

## 5. A stronger Europe in the world

The Western Balkans are explicitly mentioned as a priority in the **“Stronger Europe in the world”** section, in which the president reconfirmed the European perspective of the region. Von der Leyen more specifically declared “I want to reaffirm the European perspective of the Western Balkans. We share the same continent, the same history, the same culture and the same challenges. We will build the same future together”, and referred to the necessity to open accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania.<sup>49</sup>

Giving such a place to the WB in this document suggests that the EC sees the WB enlargement as a foreign policy issue rather than as internal policy. Moreover, when this document is complemented with the statements given in the “Political Guidelines for the next Commission”, the “Main principles of the working methods”, and the “Mission Statements” given by von der Leyen to the commissioners-designates, it can be concluded that the EC will increase its focus on external action, strengthen the position of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and more closely monitor the rise of external actors in the region during VDL’s mandate.<sup>50</sup> In fact, a mission letter addressed to the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement<sup>51</sup> suggests that the main rationale for enlarging to the WB is the perceived impact and influence of non-EU actors in the region.

## 6. A new push for European democracy

The section entitled **“A new push for European democracy”** is relevant for the WB as it is where the president announced the Conference on the Future of Europe. The main motive behind this initiative is to give EU citizens an opportunity to provide input and receive feedback on the Union’s priorities, as well as to provide proposals for making EU policymaking structures more functional and democratic. The conference was initially planned to be launched on Europe Day, 9 May 2020, and run for two years.

To date (May 2020), there are still many uncertainties regarding the conference, including:

- its level of ambition (the president claimed in this document that she is open to Treaty change, the idea which many member states are reluctant to)<sup>52</sup>
- its purpose (whether it has participatory or communicative objectives, or both) and its available instruments<sup>53</sup>
- and whether the WB will take part in it (the European Parliament resolution on this dossier explicitly calls the conference to seek “ways of involving representatives of the EU candidates in discussions on the future of Europe”)<sup>54</sup>

49 “My agenda for Europe”, op. cit. p. 18.

50 S. Subotic, “A ‘Geopolitical’ Commission – What’s in the Name?”, CEP, September 2019, available at: <https://cep.org.rs/en/blogs/a-geopolitical-commission/>

51 Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-laszlo-trocsanyi\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/mission-letter-laszlo-trocsanyi_en.pdf)

52 <https://euobserver.com/political/146913>

53 <https://www.epc.eu/en/Publications/Preparing-for-the-Conference-o-2fb4e4>

54 [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0010\\_EN.html\\_paragraph\\_19\\_](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2020-0010_EN.html_paragraph_19_)

## EU’s roadmap for recovery from COVID-19 consequences

In April 2020, the EU institutions adopted a joint comprehensive outline of actions for recovery from the consequences of COVID-19 pandemic, in a document entitled “A roadmap for recovery - Towards a more resilient, sustainable and fair Europe”. The document states that the current crisis is an unprecedented challenge to the EU, “with huge effects on every aspect of [...] society.”<sup>55</sup>, which requires response based on “determination, unity and solidarity.” The document states that the response should be based on the following core principles:

1. While the shock of the crisis is symmetric, the key is to “avoid the recovery becoming asymmetric.” The recovery plan must be formed on the basis of “solidarity, cohesion and convergence.”
2. As the crisis is still unfolding, the response should be sufficiently flexible and agile to be able to evolve as time goes by.
3. It is crucial that the recovery is a team effort, based on inclusivity and co-ownership.
4. The European values and rights, as well as the respect for rule of law, must be upheld and “are not negotiable.”

To ensure a successful recovery in the medium and long term, the document further states that the action must be focused on the following key areas:

1. Functioning and revitalised Single Market:

As the Single market is the key to European prosperity and resilience, special care must be taken to ensure its strengthening. Value and supply chains must be re-established. Furthering the Green transition and Digital transformation should also be prioritised as it will contribute to creating jobs and growth, as well as giving the EU an edge in “the global race to recovery.” Strategic autonomy must be ensured. Completing the Banking Union and Capital Markets Union also gain importance as the financial sector is crucial to recovery.

2. Unprecedented Investment Effort:

There is a need for a “Marshall-Plan type” effort to “fuel the recovery and modernise the economy.” This involves investment in the Green and Digital transitions and the circular economy, as well as “policies such as cohesion and the Common agricultural policy.” The role of the future Multinational Financial Framework (MFF) and the EIB will be crucial toward achieving this goal.

3. Acting Globally:

The EU cannot act alone, and has a “responsibility to help frame a global response” to the crisis, based on multilateralism and “rules-based international order.” Working with international partners and re-establishing trade flows and supply routes is key, along with providing assistance to states in need. Of particular importance is the EU’s neighbourhood, most notably Africa, where the Union should help establish health defences and invest long term in infrastructure.

55 European Council, “Roadmap for Recovery”, 21 April 2020, available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43384/roadmap-for-recovery-final-21-04-2020.pdf>

#### 4. Functioning System of Governance: a crucial factor in dealing with the crisis.

The EU must be resilient, respecting the principle of subsidiarity as Institutions and Member States work together. Efficiency and effectiveness are crucial, and executive capacity and coordination must be strengthened. The EU's principles and values must remain the core of the approach to ensure "strong, robust and inclusive recovery." The Union must "reflect on its own rules and ways of functioning" and learn from the crisis.

There is no doubt that the COVID-19 pandemic will have a profound influence on the EU priorities in the upcoming period. Based on the measures outlined in the Roadmap for recovery, it can be concluded that the priorities listed in "My Agenda for Europe" will either be shifted or further strengthened, as a result of the pandemic. The calls for greater solidarity, unity, upgrade of the single market and pan-EU investment plans come against the backdrop of hasty handling of the COVID-19 pandemic: distorted single market and the Schengen area, questionable solidarity among the member states at the outbreak of the crisis and significant rifts between the member states on proposals for budgetary post-recovery mechanisms. Therefore, it seems too early to anticipate the direction in which the EU will evolve in post-pandemic world, in terms of strategic priorities and the level of ambition for joint action.

### Multi-Financial Framework (MFF) and Next Generation EU

Following one of the longest negotiations in European Council's history - the new Multi-Annual Financial Framework (MFF) and Next Generation EU (NGEU) - a financial instrument proposed by the Commission to help economic recovery from the consequences of the pandemic, were agreed upon on 21 July 2020. On the one hand, the MFF was agreed at EUR 1.074 trillion, a EUR 60.3 bn (5.3%) decrease of the Commission's 2018 original proposal, with significant cuts to the sector of research and innovation. On the other hand, the NGEU will involve the Commission borrowing EUR 750 billion on the financial markets, to be repaid between 2028 and 2058. These resources will be divided between the Member States in the form of both grants and loans. The NGEU is an unprecedented move, as it involves the first real instance of debt mutualisation in the EU, whereby the Union borrows on behalf of all the Member States. This means that the debt would be borne by the EU, and as such it is a decisive step towards further fiscal integration.

Although the total size of the NGEU proposal remained the same, negotiations resulted in the decrease of the proportion of grants (from EUR 500 bn to 390), while the share of loans was increased (from EUR 250 bn to 360). Furthermore, up to 70% of the recovery funds will be committed in 2021 and 2022, with the remaining 30% to be implemented by the end of 2023. It was also agreed that the recovery funding to member states will be tied to their national recovery plans, obliging member states to present individual reform agendas in order to unlock the funding. Moreover, the distribution of funds would be linked to the economic damage individual member states have suffered as a consequence of the pandemic, rather than pre-crisis growth and unemployment figures.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>56</sup> The agreement on MFF is still subject to approval by the European Parliament, whose members have already threatened to withhold their consent unless the agreement is improved. However, considering how difficult it was for EU27 leaders to agree on the existing proposal, no significant changes that could cause protraction are expected, as finalising the work on all legal acts needs to be done by the end of this year.

### "Post-coronavirus world is already here" by Josep Borrell

This part provides a summary of the post-COVID 19 vision of the EU by the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, as this policy brief is considered relevant from the aspect of future potential interdependence and connectivity between the EU and the WB in the post-corona world.

Borrell refers to the ongoing Covid-19 crisis as "an existential moment in time for the EU,"<sup>57</sup> stating that the EU's response and approach to overcoming the crisis will significantly shape its future. He outlines three principal dynamics that could be affected by the crisis.

#### I. The future of globalisation and neoliberalism:

While the crisis will not bring about an outright end to globalisation, it will change it significantly, questioning its current modalities and assumptions. The supply chains, to which globalisation owes much of its growth will shrink and adapt. He points to the need of diversifying sources of supply, especially in the health sector, and limiting dependence on exporting economies for essential products, while simultaneously avoiding "giving way to protectionism." To shorten the supply chains, a number of activities might be relocated closer to home – economies in the immediate vicinity of Europe should be prioritised, to mutual benefit. It is in the interest of the EU "not to rely too much on foreign powers that could [...] exact a heavy toll for our dependence on them." This is where the Western Balkans might have an additional value to the EU. The rise of alternative technological processes, such as 3D printing and use of robots could also impact supply chains.

He warns against the dangers of protectionism – a balance must be found to prevent a "protectionist drive that would result in a global depression." What is necessary is to come up with a model for a new type of globalisation balancing between open markets and interdependence, and between "the sovereignty and security of countries."

Ecologically speaking, it becomes clear that the crisis was exacerbated by an overload of the EU's ecosystems. For this reason, the struggle to preserve biodiversity is pivotal in the fight against climate change. Therefore, it might be expected that the elements of the "Green Deal" might gain greater weight in the post-corona context.

The core neoliberal tenet of state shrinkage will also need to change. As demand for increased state action is on the rise, it becomes evident that "countries with strong social protections are better equipped to deal with the crisis." At the same time, according to Borrell, the state must not become a nanny state. The state's capacity to "anticipate and prepare society for challenges of this kind" must nevertheless be restored, as a post-crisis priority – one that might be difficult to reconcile with the EU's single market.

While member states reduced protection to help shape the single market, "Europe forgot to build collective protection." As talk of tighter control of foreign investment and competition distortion grows, especially vis-à-vis non-European countries such as China, Europe will need to learn from the "asymmetric nature" of their relationship with partners like China, revealed by the current crisis. It is

<sup>57</sup> Josep Borrell, "Postcorona world is already here", ECFR, 30 April 2020, available at: [https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the\\_post\\_coronavirus\\_world\\_is\\_already\\_here](https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_post_coronavirus_world_is_already_here)

this necessity to come to an agreement between the often-divergent imperatives of the single market, and the interests and traditions of the nation-states. “Europe cannot be the only region of the world to follow competition rules while others fail to do so.”

To ensure the security of nations in face of a changing globalisation, Borrell proposes the concept of “strategic autonomy”, based on six pillars:

- Reducing dependency in healthcare and future technologies
- Preventing extra-European players from controlling strategic activities
- Protecting critical infrastructure against cyberattacks
- Ensuring decision-making autonomy is protected against the offshoring of economic activities and subsequent dependence
- Extending regulatory powers to cover future technologies
- Showing leadership in areas lacking global governance and an effective multilateralism

## 2. Restoring global governance:

As the failings of global governance become increasingly evident, so too does the “blame game between the US and China” which is damaging global leadership, in contrast to the unified global governance in previous crises such as the AIDS and Ebola epidemics. As a consequence of disagreements and disinterest among countries, the UN has become unable to reach a consensus during the pandemic – unprecedented during its existence.

Thus there is an overwhelming need for coordination, a “game-changer” in such situations – something that will benefit all sides and bring about a swifter and more effective solution to the crisis. This coordination will also be necessary as countries lift the lockdown measures, in order to prevent “global chaos that would again affect international trade.”

The crisis has also further strained Sino-American relations and exposed the threat the multi-dimensional conflict between these two powers can pose for international security, as well as have negative repercussions on some regions such as Africa.

In order for the EU to set an example, it must implement the practice of solidarity at home, though it is still far from a unified approach on the basis of solidarity. The fact that the EU is “not yet a political union or even a real economic and monetary union despite the progress” makes the limits of European solidarity visible. What Europe needs is a sort of “Marshall Plan” that will rebuild that which has been destroyed. In the case of the current crisis, this means “meeting the immediate needs of healthcare systems, providing an income for people who cannot work, and giving businesses guarantees and allowing them to postpone payments to prevent the production system from collapsing.”

## 3. The resilience of democracies:

This crisis is also a political test for Europe’s democracies. In a crisis such as ours, the strengths and weaknesses of a society are shown. Today the three competing political narratives are the populist one, the authoritarian one, and the democratic one. While populism and totalitarianism thrive in times of uncertainty and crisis, the truth is that “well organised democratic countries have, so far,

had the greatest success in terms of containing the crisis.” The democratic decision making process is inherently based on “doubting, questioning, deliberation and debate” which “hinder swift and effective action.” Nevertheless, the EU needs to be seen by its people as “a player that is able to make a difference.” The European model will only have meaning to the people of the world if it successfully promotes member state solidarity.

## Linkages with the EU 2030 Sustainability Agenda

The findings of the national reports reveal significant connection between the achievement of the UN SDGs and EU 2030 Sustainability Agenda, and the requirements related to the EU accession process of the WB. The two processes are complementary and interconnected. There is room for synergy, in particular, in the five chapters that have the greatest impact on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Chapter 27 on Environment, Chapters 23 and 24 on Justice, Fundamental Rights, Rule of Law, Security and Freedoms, Chapter 15 on Energy and Chapter 19 on Social Policy and Employment. The announced clustering of negotiating chapters in the framework of the revised EU accession process (see next section) is likely to facilitate potential synergies between the two processes or at least monitoring of the achievement of results therein.

## Proposal for a revised EU accession process, February 2020<sup>58</sup>

After the EU failed to open accession talks with North Macedonia and Albania in autumn 2019, the reform of the existing enlargement methodology was set as a priority. The French, as the instigators of this process, were the first to propose a model for the renewal of the negotiation process. Encouraged by this move nine other EU member states made another joint proposal, echoing certain ideas that the French proposed. Yet, they insisted that consolidation of the EU should not be a precondition for the EU’s enlargement to the region. The European Commission was thus put on the spot to come up with an official proposal for a refreshed enlargement approach – and in only a couple of months. On 5th February 2020, the Enlargement Commissioner Oliver Varhelyi officially presented the proposal “Enhancing the accession process - A credible EU perspective for the Western Balkans”.<sup>59</sup>

The first overall impression of this document is that it is a small masterpiece of European compromise. The Commission has managed to put together a sensible, even innovative, proposal, while at the same time not aggravating any of the member states. It uses all the key words, especially those from the French proposal, and even accommodates some of the persistent demands of the Western Balkan civil society. Ergo, the narrative rightfully focuses on the fundamentals, that is, on the importance of rule of law, as well as the functioning of basic democratic institutions, public administration reform and economic governance. So far, civil society in the region has often warned that the existing rule-of-law negotiation framework has been ineffective when it comes to truly tackling the deeper issues of state capture and democratic backsliding. In this light, the Commission makes an important step forward by proposing roadmaps for two additional fundamental issues – functioning of democracy and public administration reform – to be developed side by side with the roadmaps for the two “traditional” rule-of-law chapters (23 and 24).

<sup>58</sup> The commentary is an updated version of the article co-authored with colleagues Milena Lazarevic and Strahinja Subotic, available at: <https://cep.org.rs/en/blogs/yet-another-credible-eu-perspective/>

<sup>59</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP\\_20\\_181](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_20_181)

What appears to be the most innovative element of the proposal is the clustering of 33 out of 35 negotiation chapters into 6 thematic groups. The negotiations on clusters would now be opened at once, though individual chapters are still to be closed separately. Compared to following progress in dozens of individual technical chapters, communication of reforms and accession progress to citizens through thematic clusters might be easier and more intuitive. Clustering can also help focus reform efforts and the capacities of the candidates' administrations. However, even if this may prove to be true, for the new packaging to be effective the key is likely to be proper enforcement of a few other major elements of this proposal.

One such key aspect is what the paper dubs “a stronger political steer”, which can indeed provide true dynamism for the process if all parties agree to use it for good rather than for evil. The recent turmoil among member states, instigated by the French insistence on reforming the process before it could go on, revealed deep differences of opinion among EU members on the question of further EU expansion. Therefore, by encouraging all actors on the EU side to speak with one voice, the Commission seeks to push the EU as a whole to reaffirm its genuine commitment to enlargement. By inviting member states to take a much more active role in the overall process, the Commission now seems to be telling them: “If you want to play a role in enlargement policy, take political responsibility for it!” Adopting this logic might help reveal which EU members are willing to step up their efforts (and even pay the bill) in support of EU enlargement, while it will also put on the spot those that only nominally support the process. Moreover, by encouraging members to make the question of Western Balkans' EU accession a matter of informed national debates, the Commission clearly wishes to give greater public legitimacy to the cause. The extent to which EU governments will engage with their citizens on this issue and address public perceptions will be a litmus test of their political courage. At the same time, the proposal envisages new means to instigate and check the devotion of the region's authorities to the EU membership goal. These include regular annual assessments of public political commitment; annual inter-governmental conferences for each candidate as well as greater transparency within the accession process by both the candidates and the EU. Altogether, this promises to facilitate the “naming and shaming” of those who hold the process back, thus keeping governments publicly accountable.

Along with stronger political impetus, another precondition to ensure that clustered chapters will reinvigorate the process is a renewed incentives scheme, or “carrot” for the process. The region's think tanks have argued that the existing process has fallen short of introducing short-term political rewards which would better align with the brief electoral cycles. Essentially, in terms of tangible benefits for both politics and the people of the region, once accession negotiations are opened there is little to show until the very point of accession. The new proposal makes an important – though insufficiently emphasised and vaguely spelled out – step in the direction of fixing this fault. It does so by announcing possible increases in funding and “phasing-in” to individual EU policies based on progress in negotiations. Yet, it can hardly go unnoticed that this is the part of the paper with the most numerous caveats and “buts”, including inconclusive phrases such as “while ensuring a level-playing field”, which casts doubts on the sincerity of these offers.

The “stick” in the proposal also has added power. Coupled with the newly defined approach for addressing the fundamental reform areas, the simplified procedure for applying reversibility instruments in cases of serious backsliding paves the way for rewarding genuine political will and, by the same token, punishing its absence. The previously existing reversibility instruments were barely ever invoked, whereas with the new approach they would become more automatised, giving the exclusive power of initiation to

the Commission and requiring a “blocking minority” in the Council to counter such proposals. Similarly, the prospects of decreasing pre-accession assistance as a result of underperformance by a candidate government might help keep their actions in check. Yet, a crucial precondition for this mechanism to work is that the available funds for the Western Balkans are greatly increased, which would make them more significant in political terms.

While recognising that the Commission's proposal primarily targets the economies lined up to open accession talks (particularly North Macedonia and Albania whose stakes are the highest at present) Commissioner Varhelyi has already pointed out that he would welcome Montenegro and Serbia opting in to the new methodology. It could help if, at this point, the Commission and the member states were to offer the candidates realistically assessed target years, accompanied by biannual, independent (read: apolitical) assessments on whether they are progressing towards those targets (e.g. 2025) or if sluggish reforms have caused the target to move away (for example, to 2026). Such a process would additionally boost dynamics and provide clarity about the “blame” for delays in the accession process, which has too frequently been placed with the EU.

The EU member states endorsed the Commission's proposal in European Council conclusions on enlargement and stabilisation and association process and acknowledged that the future enlargement process to the WB should be continued on the basis of this document. It also emphasised its intention to remain autonomous in decision making, which calls into question the likelihood of Commission's proposal regarding reversed qualified majority vote on the decisions related to the accession process. The Commission is now supposed to concretise the proposals laid out in this document. A test exercise for the revised accession methodology will be the Negotiating Frameworks for North Macedonia and Albania.

## EU assistance to the WB in the context of COVID-19 pandemic

In the most recent Commission Communication on Support to the Western Balkans, dated 29<sup>th</sup> of April, the EU Commission has reiterated its commitment to “providing essential and unparalleled support to the Western Balkans” in tackling the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>60</sup> A package worth €3.3 billion has been mobilised, including “reallocations from the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance...” and “a €1.7 billion package of assistance from the European Investment Bank.”

The Communication also mentions the activation of the Union Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM) available to Serbia, North Macedonia and Montenegro, as well as the initiative of joint procurement of medical equipment, the exemption of the region from the export authorisation scheme and the supply of testing material. Technical assistance and information exchange is available through the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, and the WB6 are invited as observers to the EU Health Security Committee and are given access to the Early Warning and Response System. Other initiatives, such as the Joint European Roadmap and “green lanes” are also listed.

Beyond the COVID-19 crisis, the Commission also plans an extensive Economic and Investment Plan for the recovery of the region, including among other things a large portion of the new Pre-Accession Instrument III. The Commission outlines its commitment to supporting the Western Balkan economies

<sup>60</sup> European Commission, Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery Commission contribution ahead of the EU-Western Balkans leaders meeting on 6 May 2020, [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-support-western-balkan-regions-covid19-recovery\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-support-western-balkan-regions-covid19-recovery_en.pdf)

in a variety of aspects, and supporting the reform efforts in the WB6 economies. The Economic and Investment Plan, announced in the Zagreb Declaration of 6<sup>th</sup> May 2020, is expected in autumn 2020.<sup>61</sup>

The conclusions from the EU-Western Balkans summit, materialised in the Zagreb Declaration, met mixed interpretations by the expert community and the media. The media attention was focused on the fact that, like the 2018 Sofia summit Declaration, it misses to mention “enlargement”, which again calls into question the EU’s genuine commitment to intensify the EU accession process of the region. At the same time, several experts stressed that convening this meeting in the COVID-19 context was already a success, and that the indicators such as the agreement on the opening of accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania, the consensus on the necessity to revise the accession process, and the EU’s financial assistance mobilisation towards the region, should not be overlooked and signal EU’s continuous commitment to bringing the region closer to EU.<sup>62</sup>

## 2.2 SCOPE OF ACTIVITIES AND PRIORITIES OF REGIONAL ORGANISATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-2020 STRATEGY

This section looks into the post-2020 work plans of the relevant international organisations and EU agencies which are focused on the Western Balkans. For each identified organisation, it gives an overview of its mission and scope of activities, and then continues to describe the principal post-2020 directions and work plans, to eventually outline the first inputs for potential synergies with the RCC in the post-2020 framework. The information provided in the first sub-section (mission and scope of activities) of each entry is directly extracted from their respective official websites. The two remaining parts (principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 framework; partnerships and potential synergies with RCC) are based on the interviews with the representatives of each organisation<sup>63</sup>, conducted in March and April 2020, as well as on the internal documents these representatives were willing to share for the purpose of writing this report. Each interview was tailored so as to gather relevant information on organisation’s post-2020 priorities that could not be found on official website. Moreover, each interviewee was asked to provide comment or input that he/she considers relevant for making the best of RCC’s post-2020 strategy and areas of intervention.

The conduct of the research and the interviews coincided with the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic. For a small number of listed organisations (Transport Community, SWG) it was possible to already collect initial information on how they will adjust their work and scope of activities in the post-pandemic context. In the meantime, practically all organisations announced on their websites COVID-19 responses they are undertaking, while some have shifted their activities to the online format (like Center for Excellence in Finance).

The pandemic outbreak and its yet unknown consequences limit the pertinence and quality of the findings presented in this report, given that it will inevitably influence the work plans and even shift the rationale of

61 Zagreb Declaration, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43776/zagreb-declaration-en-06052020.pdf>

62 <https://europeanwesternbalkans.rs/poruke-sa-samita-eu-zapadni-balkan-prosirenje-sakriveno-iza-eufemizama-ali-dalje-bitno/>

63 The list of interviewees is available in Annex I.

some of the listed regional organisations. The second limitation relates to the interviewees’ responsiveness during the interviews, which varied in terms of openness and the level of details the interviewees were willing to share. For that reason, the information provided for each organisation varies in terms of depth and content.

### I. CEFTA

#### Mission and scope of activities

Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) is a regional free trade agreement signed by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia<sup>64</sup>, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia and the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo\* (UNMIK), back in 2006. The agreement seeks to boost trade and investment in the region by assisting the economies of the Western Balkans in preparation for the competition of the EU single market.

CEFTA is governed by the Joint Committee, composed of each party’s representatives – ministers in charge of trade, with the main function to supervise and administer the implementation of the Agreement. CEFTA Secretariat provides technical and administrative support to the functioning of the Joint Committee, subcommittees and expert groups.

Top priorities identified by CEFTA are:

- providing support to facilitation of trade through rationalisation and simplification of trade-related procedures and documentation
- ensuring progressive liberalisation and mutual opening of the services markets among CEFTA parties through a formal agreement, reducing barriers to the temporary movement of selected professionals, improving the quality of statistics
- securing investment
- developing and deploying transparency tools for public and private sector.

CEFTA is one of the key actors entrusted to facilitate the completion of the Regional Economic Area. Namely, the 2017 Trieste Summit in the framework of the Berlin Process resulted in request of the Western Balkans Six Prime Ministers to prepare a “proposal for a joint approach to furthering economic cooperation in the Western Balkans” - Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans (MAP REA). MAP REA foresees the implementation of far-reaching interventions and actions in the fields of trade, investment, mobility and digital integration. CEFTA oversees and contributes to the fulfilment of the interventions in the trade component.

#### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

In the area of Facilitation of Free Trade in Goods, CEFTA Parties are to adopt a framework agreement on dispute settlement by the end of 2021. New mechanism should be more effective and streamlined, specifically from the point of view of efficient implementation of undertaken commitments.

64 Croatia ceased to be part of the Agreement by becoming a member of the EU in 2013.



The Parties will continue with the activities in terms of extension of the scope of the current Proposal for mutual recognition of border documents for fruits and vegetables to all agricultural products. Similar activities will be conducted for non-agricultural products as well.

The Decision on Mutual Recognition of Authorised Economic Operators, whose text was agreed on technical level among the Parties, is still to be adopted by the Joint Committee.

When it comes to improving joint risk management, the Joint Strategy is agreed but still needs to be adopted by the Joint Committee. Following the adoption, the Strategy should be fully implemented in the area of the customs procedures, and in the future its scope is to be extended to other border agencies. Additionally, Parties are to continue to develop, where appropriate, timeframe for joint border controls, one-stop shop controls and sharing border control equipment and after adoption of the timeframes to adopt and implement strategies in these fields.

To that end, by mid-2020 the Parties should assess the existing risk management systems of border agencies as well as of the actions necessary for including them in an integrated risk management system with electronic data exchange. Based on the results received the Parties should develop Action Plans by end of 2020 for border agencies to introduce or improve their risk management system according to agreed standards and EU best practice. Extended/newly developed Strategy on Risk Management should be adopted by the Joint Committee by the end of 2021.

The Parties are to develop a timeframe for mutual cooperation between market surveillance authorities and to map the regulatory requirements for Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in one supply chain. The Parties should select supply chain/group of products by mid-2020, while the Decision of the Joint Committee should be adopted by mid-2021.

Creating non-tariff measures (NTMs) and trade defence measure (TDM) free region is one of the goals of the MAP. The first Report on NTMs and NTBs within the CEFTA should be developed by the end of 2020. Based on the results of the Reports the Parties should adopt the Action Plan for elimination of NTBs by mid-2021 and continue with the implementation of the actions.

When it comes to the Competition and State Aid, the Parties are to develop instruments for information exchange between the respective authorities to enhance their cooperation and to ensure full and sustainable reporting of state aid including state aid schemes and measures.

When it comes to trade in services, the Parties will work on identifying regulatory barriers in this matter and setting up transparency instruments (such as databases) to aid regional businesses in overcoming these barriers. Furthermore, they will kick off interregional regulatory dialogue with a view of removing or reducing impact of the regulatory barriers through application of soft law, international or EU standards, MRAs or development of disciplines on domestic regulation.

With regard to regulatory dialogue, the pilot is expected to start in the first half of 2020. The first (pilot) dialogue is expected to produce proposal of the measures to be adopted or recommended by CEFTA Joint Committee taking place in 4<sup>th</sup> quarter of 2021. In line with the global efforts to regulate electronic commerce, CEFTA Parties are to launch dialogue on regulatory issues in this area. Considering the complexity of the issue in question the Parties are to identify barriers to e-commerce, assess existing geo-

blocking measures (and in this context potential for cooperation on intellectual property rights) aimed to ensure investment and innovation, launch regional dialogue to increase trust of the public in online services, establish recognition of certificates of electronic signature and facilitation of cross-border certification services, ensure liability of intermediary service providers with respect to the transmission or storage of information based on EU compliance and address treatment of unsolicited electronic commercial communications. E-commerce regulatory dialogue should be launched by 2020.

In relation to other three pillars of the MAP REA, CEFTA will contribute to full implementation of the investment policy commitments through its engagement in the joint working group on investment. In relation to removal of obstacles to recognition of professional qualifications, CEFTA will support the efforts towards mutual recognition agreement of professional qualifications for doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers and explore possibilities in other areas as stipulated in the Additional Protocol 6. Finally, it will seek synergies between activities in pillar I and pillar IV of MAP REA.

### Partnerships and potential synergies with the RCC in the post-2020 framework

It is important to note that the Chairmanship of CEFTA – the economy which is presiding over CEFTA for a one-year period – has a strong influence on the annual planning. The current Chairmanship of Bosnia and Herzegovina plans to stay in close cooperation with the RCC in terms of coordinating the implementation of MAP REA. In order to clarify the delineation of work between the CEFTA Secretariat and the RCC, the Chair will support the conclusion of a MoU between both organisations. In implementation of this broad set of activities, CEFTA will seek partnerships with other organisations, in particular with the RCC to complement and benefit from synergies with activities under digital and investment component of MAP REA.

“The implementation of the MoU between CEFTA, GIZ and WB6 CIF will be in the core of the horizontal implementation of activities, providing the public-private dialogue on the priority topics and the promotion of the adopted measures to the economic operators. The continuation and strengthening of the CEFTA LSEE Academic Network will enhance the participation of the academic community in the development of the activities.

In the framework of the implementation of its Chairmanship Work Programme, the Chair in Office will continue to work in close cooperation with the Transport Community, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), World Bank, European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), International Finance Cooperation (IFC), United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), International Trade Centre (ITC) and World Trade Organisation (WTO) whose technical advisory is of substantial importance to undertake the activities by the CEFTA Structures. Furthermore, the Chair in Office will continue to cooperate with the European Commission and GIZ which have so far been playing major facilitating role in the implementation of CEFTA Chairmanship Work Programmes. Under this priority, the Chairmanship will organise the donor coordination meeting.”<sup>65</sup>

<sup>65</sup> Priorities of the CEFTA chairmanship 2020, internal document

## 2. Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF)

### Mission and scope of activities

Center for Excellence in Finance (CEF) is international organisation with the mission to support capacity development for finance officials in South East Europe through learning. CEF works with its constituency to support their public financial management, tax policy and administration, and central banking reform efforts. They do this through innovative, participatory, and practical learning solutions. The CEF serves as a knowledge hub for the region. They combine topical expertise and in-depth knowledge of economies in the region with a good comprehension of how reforms take place.

The CEF currently serves Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia and Turkey.

### Thematic Areas:

1. Accounting: Puts a strong emphasis on International Public Sector Accounting Standards (IPSAS) and on helping SEE economies strengthen their accounting systems by moving to accrual-based accounting.
2. Auditing: Focuses on the Public Internal Financial Control (PIFC) [...] to guide candidates and potential candidates in reforming their public internal control systems, or in introducing an internal control system across their public sector to insure good governance and protect public resources.
3. Budget Preparation and Execution: Supports [their] constituency's efforts in establishing sound public financial management (PFM) systems that foster flexible, efficient and output oriented management of public resources.
4. Central Banking: Supports [their] constituency's efforts in ensuring strong and credible institutions, a developed financial and economic environment, and a sound and resilient financial system.
5. Data and Analysis for Designing Policies: supports [their] constituency's efforts in enhancing policy development by enabling officials to provide high quality data and carry out analysis to support policy making.
6. Leadership for Managing Reforms: Encourages finance officials across different institutions to innovate, share their knowledge and encourage colleagues to try out new or alternative approaches while mitigating the risks related to novel ideas and initiatives.
7. Tax Policy and Administration: supports governments in collecting taxes legally due as effectively and efficiently as possible and in setting policies on what taxes to levy, in what amounts, and on whom.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

CEF's most recent work plan is laid out in the "2020 Learning Program for Finance Officials in South East Europe"<sup>66</sup> The strategic plan covers also 2021, but this year CEF started developing ideas for 2026 Strategy.

<sup>66</sup> Center of Excellence in Finance (CEF), "2020 Learning Program for Finance Officials in South East Europe", available at: [https://www.cef-see.org/files/CEF\\_Learning\\_Program\\_2020.pdf](https://www.cef-see.org/files/CEF_Learning_Program_2020.pdf)

No major changes are foreseen, as they had already been made in 2014 when CEF established itself as a knowledge hub for soft skills and technical development. Soft skills have proven to be necessary and useful as the driver of change in the public sector, therefore the planned activities across thematic areas will further tackle this topic. CEF covers two SDGs – 16 and 17 (and occasionally 8).

### Partnerships and potential synergies with the RCC in the post-2020 framework

CEF is satisfied with the incumbent RCC Strategy. CEF views the RCC as the umbrella for their work on technical assistance level and capacity building to institutionalise it region-wide. In addition, CEF recognises the need for tighter cooperation.

The region-wide recognised diplomas are potentially good topic to discuss with RCC on how to establish mobilisation of knowledge and HR region-wide.

CEF has also tightened cooperation with RESPA, as two knowledge sharing institutions. They are currently thinking of developing joint publications and events.

## 3. Education Reform Initiative for South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE)

### Mission and scope of activities

The Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) is a regional platform for cooperation in the area of education and training. Since January 2019, ERI SEE Secretariat operates as an independent international organisation.

The main goal of ERI SEE is supporting national reform processes in education and training through regional activities, facilitating regional cooperation and fostering European standards in the field of education and training in its members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, Moldova, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia. Kosovo\* is the observer to ERI SEE.

The main objectives are the following:

1. Continue the support of national education reform efforts in SEE
2. Actively promote regional cooperation at system, expert and civil society level through capacity building and know-how transfer
3. Facilitate information exchange and cooperation between the education and the research sector in SEE
4. Support national activities of its members related to the priorities of the Education & Training 2020, the Copenhagen Declaration and follow-up communiqués (Copenhagen process) and the Bologna Declaration and the follow-up communiqués.

The most recent work plan is the Work Plan for 2019-2020.<sup>67</sup>

The principal sectors of ERI SEE's two-year work plan are VET, general education and higher education. Adult education and pre-school education are still not on the agenda, though in the coming period they will be considered, depending on the financial and human resource conditions. The principal sectors are decided on by the Governing Board on the proposal of the ERI SEE Secretariat.

ERI SEE is guided by strategic documents of member states and the recommendations from the EC. One of its primary tasks is to help with the EU integration process. ERI SEE will continue to focus on human capacity building through regional activities focusing on quality education. Another goal is the support of processes of quality higher education, in accordance with European guidelines and RCC activities.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 framework

ERI SEE plans to continue activities relating to qualification recognition where it partners with RCC. As agreed with the RCC and endorsed by the Western Balkan economies, in 2020 ERI SEE will contribute to the mutual recognition of diplomas initiative in the field of pre-doctoral and doctoral studies, together with all the necessary tools for supporting the process.

ERI SEE intends to continue its work in vocational education and training – it plans to build cooperation with agencies for vocational education and Chambers of Commerce to support skills that are essential for the labour market.

General education remains a key area, especially the training of teachers and digitalisation. Studies show that teachers lack transversal and some key competences - entrepreneurial skills, digital skills, communication, civic skills, societal participation, etc. ERI SEE therefore wishes to continue their regional activities in ensuring general education quality. Changes in education are long-term changes – and when this is conducted on the regional level, the process takes adequate preparation and time. According to ERI SEE interlocutor, enough time and resources must be allocated for achieving certain results on the regional level, as these are systemic reform processes that take time.

### Partnerships and potential synergies with the RCC in the post-2020 framework

According to the ERI SEE interlocutor, the role of Regional Dimension Coordinators (RDCs) and their relationship with RCC have not been sufficiently clear within the incumbent strategy. The RDCs are expected to contribute to the achievement of the strategic goals, however in many cases the financial mechanisms for RDC did not exist. One of the mechanisms to ensure greater involvement of RDCs in the implementation of the strategic regional goals could be to have some grant schemes for them by EC or RCC. Furthermore, the ERI SEE representative believes that the upcoming steps in the development of the post-2020 strategy should be transparent.

<sup>67</sup> Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe, "Work plan 2019 – 2020", available at: [http://www.erisee.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ERI-SEE\\_Work\\_plan\\_2019-2020.pdf](http://www.erisee.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ERI-SEE_Work_plan_2019-2020.pdf)

ERI SEE also plans to explore possibilities of cooperation with other regional organisations, such as Regional Youth Office (RYCO), and continue cooperation with GIZ, Regional School for Public Administration (ReSPA), Austrian Development Agency (ADA), etc.

ERI SEE has had joint activities with ReSPA, focusing on educational workers as part of the public servants – this being the common denominator between ERI SEE and ReSPA. Future cooperation depends on ReSPA's activities and its possibility to organise activities for educational workers.

ERI SEE and RYCO focus on different areas, as the latter focuses on Civil Society and NGOs. However, potential joint conferences could be considered, combining formal and in-formal education. WB Funds has some funding available, oriented towards education and research. Potential project is being explored within this funding scheme.

Furthermore, ERI SEE is cooperating with WB6CIF on one project, ERI SEE being the lead partner.

In terms of ERI SEE's inputs for IPA III, ERI SEE pledges for decision-making process to be more transparent, as there is not much information currently available on how the grants are awarded or how this dynamic functions.

## 4. Energy Community

### Mission and scope of activities

The Energy Community (EnC hereinafter) aims at extending the EU's internal energy market to SEE and the Black Sea region, specifically Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo\*, Serbia and Ukraine, which are known as the contracting parties.<sup>68</sup>

The main objectives of the Energy Community are the following:

- attracting investment in power generation and energy networks to ensure a stable and continuous supply
- creating an integrated energy market that allows for cross-border trading, including building new infrastructure
- enhancing security of supply by making it easier for economies to trade energy with each other;
- improving the environmental situation in relation to energy
- boosting competition at regional level to exploit economies of scale

The latest strategic document published is **Energy Community Work Programme 2020** by the Regulatory Board, which encompasses specific topics of regulatory relevance in the Energy Community.<sup>69</sup> The general work plan for the upcoming period is not a public document but instead is integral part of the

<sup>68</sup> European Commission, "Energy Community", available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/energy/en/topics/international-cooperation/international-organisations-and-initiatives/energy-community>

<sup>69</sup> Energy Community, "Strategic Documents", available at: <https://www.energy-community.org/documents/strategic.html>

EnC budget. The following paragraphs summarise the relevant information from the internal work plan, which was kindly shared by EnC interlocutors, together with their comments and remarks.

## Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

To promote and support the EnC goals and activities, the EnC institutions will in the following period work on the provision of legal and technical assistance to all EnC institutions within the scope of their competences linked to the implementation of the Energy Community Treaty; assistance to the competent institutions and Parties with the implementation of decisions and recommendations; enforcement in cases of non-compliance with Energy Community law, and support and promotion of the amicable settlement of disputes; coordination of the work of working groups and task forces; and on the donor coordination activities by the European Commission. However, many planned activities for 2020 and 2021 will be postponed for the upcoming period due to the COVID-19 outbreak.

In the years to come, the Contracting Parties and the Energy Community institutions are expected to work to support the energy transition in the Energy Community in line with global and European mainstream energy policy developments. The main instrument to support the Contracting Parties with catching up and progressing towards a comparable level to the EU is the full implementation of the *acquis*, both existing and new.

The EnC is getting more involved in the application of the rules in individual cases. This includes, *inter alia*, supporting of infrastructure and generation projects, cross-border cost allocations decided by EBRD, environmental and strategic impact assessment procedures for individual projects, adequate follow-up on complex competition law and State aid, e.g. in connection with small hydropower or coal-fired electricity generation, assessment of risk of interruption of energy supply and its mitigation and reduction, etc.

The EnC will have to be even more involved in the creation of legal and institutional frameworks for organised markets. Full implementation of the *acquis* related to cross-border market integration will require guidance and concrete assistance, e.g. in the area of electricity balancing, day-ahead and intraday markets (market coupling), forward capacity allocation and system operation, etc.

Beyond the existing *acquis*, the adoption of the parts of the Clean Energy Package related to the electricity systems, namely the Electricity Directive, the Electricity Regulation and the Risk Preparedness Regulation, is also expected to take place during 2020-2021. Moreover, the *acquis* on gas security of supply is going to be updated by incorporation of the latest Regulation 1938/2017.

## 5. European Training Foundation

### Mission and scope of activities

The European Training Foundation (ETF) is the EU agency supporting economies surrounding the European Union to reform their education, training and labour market systems. Its mission is to help transition and developing economies harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of

education, training, and labour market systems, in the context of EU external relations policies. It works in the economies covered by the EU's Eastern Partnership; Western Balkans and Turkey; Russia and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

ETF is working with the economies in the Western Balkans to modernise VET and Skills. This work includes modernising qualifications and qualifications systems and progress has been achieved with the development and implementation of national qualification frameworks at different levels as well as the validation of informal and non-formal learning (VINFIL). Quality assurance is paramount, and all economies are looking to improve the quality of learning processes and provision, with the continuing professional development of vocational teachers and trainers. There has also been progress in developing work-based learning policies and in the introduction of entrepreneurial learning into curricula. Regular monitoring of these policies is necessary in view of the EU Commission communication in February 2018, which affirms this region as central to the EU's Enlargement Policy, part of the larger strategy of strengthening the EU by 2025.

The ETF is implementing activities in the economies in the region to enhance their institutional capacity and improve educational outcomes and bring stakeholders together for exchange of experience and practice as well as for capacity building across the issues that are priority for the whole region. This capacity building includes supporting ministries to improve the relevance of skills for the labour market and to ease young people's transition to work.

Since 2010, ETF has been implementing the Torino Process, which is a periodical review of VET systems in the wider context of human capital development and inclusive economic growth. While providing a quality assessment of VET policy from a lifelong learning perspective, the Torino Process builds on four key principles: ownership, participation, holistic approach and evidence-based analysis.

## Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

The ETF's incumbent Strategy covers the period from 2020 to 2027 and coincides with the EU's next Multi-financial Framework (MFF) 2021-27. The ETF 2027 Strategy aims at fulfilling the objective set out in Article 1 of the ETF's founding regulation "to contribute, in the context of EU external relations policies, to improving human capital development".

The ETF aims to broaden its thematic scope, specifically supporting a holistic approach to skills development through lifelong learning. It also aims to support inclusive skills development policies, access to learning opportunities and innovation targeting skills. The ETF's expertise will be consolidated in three clusters.

- I. Skills relevance and anticipation.** The ETF will focus on tackling challenges and demands facing education and training systems as they aim for employability, innovation and inclusiveness. The ETF will also work on innovation and specialisation in both traditional and emerging sectors. It will target inclusiveness and innovation as key drivers of its actions, focusing on increased use of data and digital and online tools to amplify expertise and reach. Furthermore, the ETF will focus on the systemic level targeting support to inclusion and equity, quality, diversification of provision and innovation.

2. **Skills development and validation.** In order to keep up with the changes in demand for skills and their development and making education and training systems more effective, the ETF will focus on provision within and beyond schooling, and promoting policies for the development of key competences. This will be achieved by focusing on policy level actions with systemic impact, through leveraging partnerships and working with civil society, public and private sectors.
3. **Performance and quality of education and training policies.** The ETF will focus on including non-traditional actors in the skills policy dialogue, continue to support public-private partnerships and reinforcing cooperation mechanisms. It will promote policy coaching to support economies aiming for meaningful reforms with strong ownership and evidence base supporting decision making.

Furthermore, the ETF will use its expertise in EU methodologies and external assistance tools to support EU services for project and programme cycle management on economy and cross-economy levels.

The core services ETF will offer in the future period include: policy advice and policy coaching in the area of education and training; reliable monitoring and diagnostics; and to act as a global knowledge hub and good practice exchange.

### Priorities and activities related to the Western Balkans

When it comes to the Western Balkans region, the regional report for SEE and Turkey for 2018-20 in the framework of Torino Process shows steady progress in these economies in terms of their focus on priorities in education and training in response to EU developments, benchmarks and on devising consolidated strategies. The strongest inspiration comes from EU financial support and pan-European agreed policies, the EU Pillar of Social Rights, and several EU policy orientations, tools and instruments.

Priorities and developments differ across economies – embedding work-based learning, expanding internships and apprenticeships, and reinforcing competencies. Skill transparency and mutual qualification recognition have been improved. Quality assurance and practices of monitoring and evaluation show only modest progress. Training and retraining opportunities have a limited reach. Better outreach, diversity and territorial coverage of LLL have moved up in the agenda, with limited results. Skill forecast and policy impact monitoring have only been partially addressed.

The mentioned regional report for SEE and Turkey for 2018-20 in the framework of Torino Process shows that despite progress, reforms need to continue. The potential of VET is still not sufficiently exploited. VET should focus on outreach, monitoring, quality and inclusiveness at all levels – VET can address shortcomings and insufficient foundation level-skills at lower education levels or incomplete upper secondary studies. Innovativeness and attractiveness are a key to building skill sets link to economic requirements while preparing learners to adapt to changing markets. Efforts must be made in equipping vocational graduates with skills needed for a knowledge economy, fostering competencies – especially entrepreneurial and digital skills – as well as addressing the fact of ageing staff in education, employment and social services. Online/digitalised service delivery can help to shorten delivery time and reallocate resources to improve outreach. Resourcing VET provision systems is needed to increase diversity of target groups and qualification levels/systems. The overall recommendation for the economies post-2020 strategy framework is to prepare for

holistic and result-oriented strategies with clear and achievable goals, supported by costing and delivery responsibilities. Broadly, the ETF identifies three avenues for further reflection and action in the ongoing strategy cycle:

1. Improving quality and relevance of education outcomes for inclusive and innovative economies
2. Addressing the large need for up-skilling and re-skilling
3. Developing skills intelligence systems and consolidation of monitoring and evaluation in education<sup>70</sup>

These are, in fact, 3 avenues based on which the ETF will plan its activities towards the WB region in the framework of the incumbent 2020-27 Strategy.

Furthermore, the ETF will support WB economies in the collection and systematisation of Key Indicators for Employment, Skills and Education (KIESE) and will closely work with Eurostat and Eurofound as regards statistical evidence and methodological development. KIESE are a collection of statistics that are part of a broader set of indicators proposed by the ETF to enable an assessment of developments in the field of human capital in the partner economies. They include data on VET, skills, employment and labour market outcomes. The indicators provide an overview of VET, skills and labour markets in the ETF partner economies. KIESE describe issues that influence human capital development and VET policies in the partner economies. The indicators are compiled annually for all ETF partner economies, and allow the ETF partner economies to reference themselves against the European Union.<sup>71</sup>

Moreover, ETF conducted the Skills Mismatch Surveys for Serbia, Montenegro and North Macedonia.<sup>72</sup> These surveys look into the incidence of skills mismatches [in the target economies], with two objectives: (1) to identify regular data sources; and (2) to develop and test a series of indicators fit to capture various angles and implications of skills mismatches. Skills mismatch is recognised as one of the major challenges by policymakers and stakeholders in education and employment. In transition economies, like Serbia, mismatches are consequences of economic restructuring, technology advancement and demographic factors such as ageing and outmigration. The findings of these reports will feed into the ETF's future plans for engagement and activities with these economies. Furthermore, in the case of Montenegro ETF is finalising a study that looks into skills mismatch and provision in the area of renewable energy and health tourism. For now, there are no plans in sight for producing similar reports for the remaining WB economies.

Furthermore, in the case of Montenegro ETF is finalising a study that looks into the implications of smart specialisation for skills demand and skills development programmes in the area of renewable energy and health tourism. On the basis of the research done in Montenegro, Moldova and Ukraine, the ETF will produce a toolkit and methodological guidance in 2021 that can be used by economies to replicate such analyses.

<sup>70</sup> ETF, Torino Process 2018-2020 Guidelines, available at: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2018-10/Torino%20Process%202018-20%20guidelines.pdf>

<sup>71</sup> The latest KIESE report for 2019 is available at: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/key-indicators-education-skills-and-employment-2019>

<sup>72</sup> Reports available at: <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/skills-mismatch-measurement-etf-partner-countries>

Finally, there are several studies in the ETF's pipeline or already published with the relevance to the future planning for the RCC post-2020 strategy. Those are:

- Riga Report (2014-2020): for candidate economies and MS progress with VET reforms and the next steps, published in June 2020<sup>73</sup>
- "ETF Youth Study", concerning Western Balkans Six and Turkey (forthcoming, autumn 2020)
- "ETF Migration Study and Impact on Human Capital Development" (forthcoming)
- 'ETF Skills Mismatch analysis / report' (early 2021)

## 6. Global Water Partnership (GWP)

### Mission and scope of activities

The Global Water Partnership (GWP) is a multi-stakeholder action network and intergovernmental organisation dedicated to working with economies towards the equitable, sustainable and efficient management of water resources. GWP comprises 3,000+ partner organisations in over 180 countries. Its network of 65+ Country Water Partnerships and 13 Regional Water Partnerships convenes and brokers coordinated action by government and non-government actors. A long-time advocate for integrated water resources management, GWP draws on implementation experience at the local level and links it across its Network and to global development agendas.

The Global Water Partnership's vision is for a water secure world. Its mission is to advance governance and management of water resources for sustainable and equitable development.

GWP Strategy 2020–2025<sup>74</sup> addresses coordination and motivation challenges by leveraging political systems, technological change, and private sector drive. The GWP's anchor areas include: Water solutions for the Sustainable Development Goals; Climate Resilience through Water; Trans-boundary Water Cooperation; Engaging the Private Sector; Contributing to Gender Equality; and Mobilising Youth for Water Resource Management. In these areas, key global or regional policy frameworks bring leadership focus, progress measurement, development partner action and potential for financing.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

When it comes to GWP Med regional partnership, all six WB economies are beneficiaries of their projects and initiatives: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. More information on GWP-Med's recent and current activities in the region is presented below.

<sup>73</sup> Report available at <https://www.etf.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/publications/importance-being-vocational-challenges-and-opportunities>

<sup>74</sup> Global Water Partnership (GWP), "Mobilising for a Water Secure World: Strategy 2020-2025", available at: <https://www.gwp.org/globalassets/global/about-gwp/strategic-documents/gwp-strategy-2020-2025.pdf>

## I. Enabling Transboundary Cooperation & Integrated Water Resources Management in the extended Drin River Basin (Budget \$5.5 M)

The GEF Drin Project aims at promoting joint management of the shared water resources of the transboundary Drin River Basin. About 1.5 million people rely on the Drin basin's freshwater resources for drinking water. They also rely on economic activities that use Drin's water such as agriculture, fisheries, industry, hydropower generation and tourism. Project objective is to be achieved through: (i) building consensus among economies on key transboundary concerns and drivers of change; (ii) facilitating the agreement on a shared vision and on a programme of priority actions; (iii) strengthening technical and institutional capacities.

The Project developed a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis to identify, quantify and set priorities for environmental problems that are transboundary in nature.

Following the request by the Drin Riparians, GWP-Med is developing a Study for an appropriately scaled legal and institutional arrangement to enable coordinated and sustainable management of the Drin Basin in the framework of the GEF Drin Project. A draft International Agreement will be developed for the Riparians to negotiate.

A Flood Micro-insurance Project in the areas of Skadar/Shkoder Lake–Buna/Bojana River and Struga in Ohrid Lake is one of the six pilot activities and aims to assess the feasibility of introducing flood/natural disasters insurance as one of a suite of flood risk transfer mechanisms for the basin.

To sustainably manage the lake and its natural resources, the Drin Project is developing the Lake Ohrid Watershed Management Plan in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive. The Plan will lead to enhanced coordination between the littoral economies and address the root causes of the pressures. It is the second management plan in a transboundary basin in accordance with the EU Water Framework Directive, after the one of the Sava River Basin developed by the ISRBC.

In terms of public awareness, one of the actions to raise this is an annual celebration of Drin Day, aiming to inspire collective and transboundary actions towards protecting the Drin River Basin and its freshwater ecosystems. These celebrations include organised events and invite NGOs to propose activities on a range of topics such as biodiversity, drought, plastic pollution, etc. The project also organises annual stakeholder conferences with over 120 representatives of ministries, NGOs, academia and water users as a forum to present progress in implementing the Drin MoU and discuss issues of importance for the Basin.

## II Nexus and transboundary related activities (Budget \$2 M)<sup>75</sup>

The overall aim of "Regional Nexus and Transboundary Basins Policy Dialogue Process in South East Europe" project is to support the Nexus-related Strategy Action of Dimension Environment of the Sustainable Growth Pillar of the South East Europe 2020 (SEE2020) Strategy.

<sup>75</sup> The Nexus approach starts from the realisation that water, energy, agriculture and natural ecosystems exhibit strong and multi-dimensional interlinkages, and that under a traditional fragmented approach, attempting to achieve resource security independently would not only be sub-optimal, but will often endanger sustainability and security in one or more of the other sectors.

Activities developed as part of the dialogue process include:

- Three Regional Nexus Roundtables held back-to-back with meetings of Nexus-related Ministry representatives (Belgrade, June 2017; Skopje, October 2018; Tirana, October 2019);
- Regional Nexus Mapping Study which identified the level of institutional and policy integration in the water, energy, land and environment sectors in each economy and at the regional level, identified key inter-linkages and potential synergies and trade-offs, and provided the background for discussions during the roundtables and meetings.
- Preparation of an outline of a Nexus Roadmap for the Region (to be finalised in 2021), including the key components-pathways of actions to promote the adoption of the Nexus approach in SEE.

The Project “Promoting the Sustainable Management of Natural Resources in Southeastern Europe, through the use of Nexus approach” aims to catalyse action for the adoption and implementation of the Nexus approach in SEE by enabling the identification of Nexus-related issues to be addressed with priority, in the geographical areas that its activities focus on.

The Nexus Assessments for the Drin and Drina river basins will use quantitative and modelling tools to explore benefits from a Nexus approach in priority interlinkages. In the case of Drin, the issues to be explored are i) increased cooperation among hydropower plants on the river to address flood risk management and ii) sustainable forestry and use of biomass. In the case of Drina, the issues to be explored include the options for diversification of the energy mix and renewable energy beyond hydropower while ensuring the resilience of ecosystems and natural resources. In the case of Albania, a qualitative assessment will explore the nexus-related interlinkages and how they can be addressed in the implementation of the National IWRM Strategy and the National Sectoral Programme on Water. Based on the outcomes and recommendations of the assessments, a Nexus Roadmap will be developed in each case.

Nexus-related capacity development workshops will also be held in each of the transboundary basins, while for four of the priority issues to be identified in the context of the Policy Dialogues, respective Concept Notes and Project Documents will be developed, also exploring financing options by development partners and/or financing institutions.

### III: Climate change adaptation in the Adriatic Basin in Montenegro

The Project’s aim will be to improve climate change resilience in the water sector by improving knowledge, development and priority implementation of scientifically based, tailor made mitigation and adaptation measures in the watersheds of the Moraca, Zeta and Cijevna rivers, addressing two important issues: floods and water scarcity. Readiness and investment project proposals are under development. It has been foreseen that readiness proposal would be submitted to the GCF Secretariat in second half of 2020.

## 7. NALAS

### Mission and scope of activities

Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) was established in 2001 under the auspices of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the Council of Europe. The Network consists of 14 associations, representing approximately 9000 directly elected local authorities providing services for more than 80 million people.

The mission of NALAS is to advocate for and contribute to a modern and efficient local self-government, decentralisation, increased democracy and stability in the region, thereby contributing to the process of EU integration.

The main objectives set out by NALAS are the following:

- promotion of decentralisation
- promotion of reconciliation and stabilisation in the region
- assisting associations to become viable representatives of local authorities vis-à-vis central government

Main fields of action are fiscal decentralisation, urban planning, solid waste and water management, sustainable tourism, institutional development and energy efficiency.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 outlines four strategic objectives:

1. Creating sustainable local communities based on smart and innovative growth through quality services and job creation
2. Contributing to stable, safe, inclusive and resilient communities
3. Improving services through knowledge and evidence-based policy making
4. Ensuring sustainability of the Network<sup>76</sup>

NALAS’ strategic document for 2018-2022 took one year to develop and required a thorough assessment of other strategies, including RCC and SDG 2030. NALAS had an exchange with national associations, created a planning group and gathered information from respective task forces; all of which was a basis for the SWOT analysis. For the first time NALAS introduced two thematic priorities (Objective 1 on sustainable local communities and Objective 2 on resilient communities). In the past, NALAS’s vision was to create a knowledge centre. NALAS introduced some changes, one being the introduction of a sectoral working group – an advisory consilium, as multi-sectorial, supra-group. This working group features the top performing members of all six task forces. This core group is the content back-up for NALAS’ work.

<sup>76</sup> Strategy available at: [http://www.nalas.eu/AboutUs#key\\_nalas\\_documents](http://www.nalas.eu/AboutUs#key_nalas_documents)

Another change was to increase the impact on national level, as the organisation cannot work on this level, but its members can. Here NALAS created a new system to increase the impact by triangular partnerships between NALAS, national associations and third partners, focusing on key local government priorities, including, for example, fiscal decentralisation. NALAS supports the advocacy efforts of its member associations through regional knowledge exchange on best practices and by providing timely, reliable, accurate and comparative data and information on specific topics to its member in South East Europe on a regular basis. Furthermore, NALAS started to decentralise its staff, and now has staff who do not necessarily reside in Skopje but also in other economies (MNE, ALB). For more than a decade, the Network has operational part-time knowledge management assistants in each member LGA. Another development is the introduction of e-learning scheme as another way to make the knowledge more accessible to local governments.

Even when it comes to e-learning, NALAS uses the opportunity to implement this activity with associations, believing that this may create more opportunities for deeper national impact. The outcome thus far is that it took NALAS a year to create new structures related to e-learning and make the whole e-system work. Following the second year of implementation, results are becoming visible. NALAS focuses on sustainable development and resilience, where there are already some results.

In the first year of Strategy implementation a lot of energy has been put into the business development and some big opportunities are yet to be utilised. NALAS developed a proposal for a grant scheme for local governments to be funded by EUD in Albania, with NALAS as the main applicant. Should it receive the grant, it will be a significant change in the type of contribution that NALAS would provide to its members in terms of convergence towards EU standards and EU integration.

In NALAS they believe that the local aspect in the EU accession process should not be treated as a cross-cutting issue. The main claim NALAS is making is that with the prolongations of the EU accession process and the membership perspective, there should be adjustments of pre-accession support. What is worrisome is the trend where, in the case of CEE states, the local governments had much greater role to play in pre-accession period. After they became EU members, they could use the structural funds more easily. The recent trend is to remove the local government dimension from the agenda, as the approach of the EC is to build the economies institutionally. What suffers the most from this approach is the quality of public services and social and hard infrastructure; the economies have been facing the decrease in quality of public services while at the same time, the EUMS have been regenerating and keeping the fast pace of modernisation of the public sector. This makes a significant difference in the quality of life and with the removal of local governments as an active partner for building up economies for membership, this gap will grow bigger and will continue to exacerbate the issues of emigration and brain drain, perhaps their most pressing challenges. Therefore, it is high time to reconsider IPA III regarding the investment in public services on the local level.

NALAS sees depopulation as the biggest threat to the local economy, which comes as a result of the unsatisfactory quality of life. What is expected of the RCC is to develop a specific programme – a pillar which will assess the quality of life and modernisation of the economy's public national and local sector.

If the EC introduces programmes similar to the cohesion funds on a smaller scale into the new MFF, with lower amounts, this would push the local governments to develop their own capacities.

NALAS has introduced a comprehensive methodology to monitor and inform decentralisation and local government reform efforts at regional, national and local level. It involves a scanning methodology in four dimensions – local government autonomy (legislative, administrative, fiscal decentralisation, which is lagging behind); quality of public services; citizen participation (without which there is no difference between the national and local government) and government responsiveness. There is also focus on inter-governmental dialogue. NALAS is still conducting trials as their goal is to make it a basis for healthy debate about the future of decentralisation.

In terms of SDGs, NALAS has been active in helping local self-governments and associations play their national role of localising the SDGs. There are few countries in Europe that are going very fast in this respect. Within the SEE region, awareness is being raised further. Local authorities are not involved with the national development of SDGs - with the exception of SKGO, Serbia. According to NALAS, neglecting the local aspect makes the implementation of SDGs impossible.

NALAS has developed a guideline for national associations on how to localise SDGs. The mayor of Bijeljina is very active, and NALAS has included their experiences in the guide. They have also provided Training of Trainers for municipal staff in implementing the guide. The overall conclusion is that the principal focus for NALAS should remain on raising awareness.

NALAS contributes to the annual SDG report. NALAS also produces annual reports, based on their monitoring system.

### Potential synergy with the RCC within the post-2020 framework

The following topics were identified by NALAS: how to improve the quality of life of citizens, what are the “quick wins” to identify together, and how to adjust the pre-accession instruments, where the RCC is considered an important ally.

When it comes to IPA III planning, NALAS believes the next multiannual programme should include strengthening of institutions and decentralisation as transversal and mandatory sectors. This would open a window of opportunity for LGs to be eligible/participate in all support activities of specialised interventions in the frame of IPA III.

## 8. Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI)

### Mission and scope of activities

Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI) is an intergovernmental organisation focusing on anti-corruption issues in the region. RAI's mission is to support and facilitate coordination of national efforts in fighting corruption, organised crime and money laundering. It is composed of nine members (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania and Serbia) and three observers (Slovenia, Poland and Georgia).



The priority measures to fight corruption identified by RAI are the following:

- taking effective measures on the basis of existing relevant international instruments
- promoting good governance
- strengthening legislation and promoting the rule of law
- promoting transparency and integrity in business operations
- promoting an active civil society

RAI, as a Regional Coordinator for the Anti-Corruption Dimension of SEE 2020 Strategy, has incorporated key strategy directions and objectives in its Work Plan (2018-2020). RAI will actively contribute to the preparation of the post-2020 SEE Strategy in the field of anti-corruption, based on the identified national targets and in line with the anti-corruption pledges expressed in the latest EU and international initiatives and documents.

RAI Work Plan 2018-2020<sup>77</sup> outlines the strategic direction of the organisation, with respect to national anti-corruption agendas. The implementation of actions is a shared responsibility between the Secretariat of the organisation and its members.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

New RAI Work Plan 2020-2022 is in a process of preparation. It will continue with further developing of the main strategic objectives contained in the already developed programmatic actions and projects. Due consideration will be given to the available human and financial resources as well as available capacities of the members, observers and partners.

The following part describes RAI's ongoing projects and initiatives, which will be implemented in the next two to three years. They concern the topics of asset recovery, protection of whistle-blowers, capacity building of anti-corruption agencies and young anti-corruption practitioners.

SEE Regional Programme on Strengthening the Capacity of Anti-corruption Authorities and Civil Society to Combat Corruption is implemented by the RAI in partnership with the UNODC and with financial support by the ADA. RAI continuously supports anti-corruption agencies in the SEE and their capacities for creating and implementing objective anti-corruption strategies and plans. Within its platform, RAI assists national authorities in implementation the recommendations from the UNCAC reviewing cycles, especially from the on-going Review Cycle Two related to Chapter II of the UNCAC in the fields of promoting preventive tools.

RAI provides targeted support to the anti-corruption agencies in developing preventive corruption tools, methodologies and innovative digital tools on corruption risk assessment, corruption proofing of legislation and capacities of the civil society for active contribution to implementing the UNODC Review cycle recommendations and for establishing a partnership with national governments. The new Regional Programme is under preparation.

<sup>77</sup> Regional Anti-corruption Initiative, "RAI Work Plan 2018 – 2020", available at: <http://rai-see.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/20171124-FINAL-RAI-Work-Plan-2018-2020-on-Website.pdf>

In line with UNCAC Article 43, para 1, and the Resolution 6/4 of the sixth Conference of the States Parties to the UNCAC from 2015, RAI facilitated the process of preparation, development and signing of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data in Asset Declaration, as a new instrument for international data exchange by integrity bodies. The Signing Ceremony to be hosted by the Federal Ministry for Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of Republic of Austria and with the support of the RAI Secretariat has been postponed due to the pandemic outbreak.

### Regional Asset Recovery Project in partnership with AIRE Center (UK Government & Konrad Adenauer Foundation)

RAI implements a regional project on asset recovery with a goal of advancing the knowledge and skills of national LEAs and judiciaries in conducting financial investigation and regional and international cooperation in freezing and confiscation of criminal assets. Comparative analysis, handbooks and manuals for practitioners have been developed in the framework of the Project, (published on the RAI website). The Project will be continued.

### IPA Regional Programme "Breaking the Silence: Enhancing the Whistleblowing Policies and Culture in Western Balkans and Moldova"

RAI was granted a three-year regional project for enhancing the whistleblowing policies in WB and Moldova. The objectives are to strengthen the capacities, peer-to-peer and cross-sectoral exchanges with and among selected public institutions, free legal aid providers and other identified CSOs for safe disclosure channels and protection of whistleblowers. RAI will also act as a Regional Platform for sustaining and strengthening the Southeast Europe Coalition for Whistleblower Protection and its members in delivering strong and efficient whistleblowing policies, membership expansion and diversification. One of the objectives is to improve awareness of the general public, professional community and public institutions, making them more sensitised and informed about whistleblowers, by organising a public awareness campaign which will seek to be interactive and engage young adults, students particularly. To this end, RAI has begun cooperating with Law Faculties in order to introduce the basics of corruption and anti-corruption in the university curricula. The implementation of the Project has started on 1st April 2020.

### Summer School for young anti-corruption practitioners

The School gathers judges, prosecutors, representatives of the police and anti-corruption agencies with up to 5 years of experience from RAI members and observers on an intensive training to promote their knowledge in anti-corruption topics as well to exchange experience and good practices. It also serves as a platform for future Alumni networking.

As a leading regional coordinator in the field of anti-corruption, RAI is fully committed to the anti-corruption pledges reflected in the documents and conclusions adopted by the Berlin Process summits (Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Trieste, London and Poznan). RAI is maintaining partnership relations with the UNCAC, OECD, Transparency International, OSCE, USAID, and many other regional and international organisations and initiatives in the field of developing anti-corruption indicators, new teaching and training methodologies and instruments for efficient regional cooperation.

In the upcoming period, RAI will continue to apply a multi-stakeholder approach, strengthen the capacities of anti-corruption agencies, their independence and professionalism, strengthen the integrity of public officials and also improve their independent status and political support in terms of laws regulating the status of independent institutions. Simultaneously, the focus will be on expanding the role of civil society as partners, strengthening their capacities in regard to monitoring the implementation of UNCAC Convention and reviewing the mechanism. Another goal is to encourage institutions to implement GRECO recommendations.

## Partnerships with other organisations and potential synergies with RCC in post-2020 framework

RAI cooperates with RESPA and they have their annual meetings. RESPA is now focusing more on strengthening institutional capacities. RAI has discussed potential cooperation on the topic of integrity with RESPA. RACVIAC focuses on the security sector, and has invited RAI to provide experts in the field of fighting corruption in the security sector. Furthermore, RAI has ambitions to cooperate with OECD on an anti-corruption performance indicator.

Aside from a lack of political will, key difficulty in ensuring better regional results is the staff turnover in the beneficiary economies. That said, RAI needs to work with more officials to ensure institutional sustainability in the beneficiary economies, and thus circumvent negative effects of staff turnover due to political reasons/politicization of civil service.

## 9. ReSPA

### Mission and scope of activities

Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) is a joint initiative of the Western Balkan economies and the European Commission. It was established with a mission of improving regional cooperation in the area of public administration, and with a vision to create a modern, effective, accountable and professional public administration in the region. The ReSPA Members are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia.

The general objectives set out by ReSPA are the following:

- improving regional cooperation in the area of public administration
- strengthening the exchange of the Western Balkan economies with Member States of the European Union (EU) and the European Economic Area (EEA)
- strengthening the administrative capacity of the public administrations needed by the European integration process
- developing human resources in the public administration in line with the principles of the European Administrative Space

## Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

The main strategic goal identified in the **Strategy 2019-2024**<sup>78</sup> is to contribute to the effective response of the public administrations of ReSPA members to the needs of citizens and businesses.

Three specific objectives outlined in the Strategy are:

1. Improved implementation of Public Administration Reform and Public Finance Management Strategies in the Western Balkans
2. Improved professionalization and depoliticization of the Senior Civil Service
3. Improved quality of public services

ReSPA is producing its two-year Programme of Work in cooperation with its working groups from five economies. The Working Group members<sup>79</sup> are actively involved in designing ReSPA Monitoring & Evaluation (M&E) system, which is currently in progress.

The draft M&E framework, which together with the M&E toolkit makes the M&E system, was initially produced during the ReSPA Strategy development. Developing the M&E framework is quite complex due to a large number of actors involved. ReSPA aims to increase the focus on measurement of the indicators and their fulfilment. At the moment, ReSPA is revising its indicators in cooperation with the working groups, since they are the ones to be in charge of meeting these indicators.

The indicators are linked to the biannual Programme of Work (the one for 2019 and 2020 is currently in force). ReSPA wants to increase ownership of the stakeholders involved, since it is up to them to feel the benefits of ReSPA's activities.

The working groups were involved during the preparation of the Strategy as well. They also provided inputs for concrete activities during that stage.

In August 2020 ReSPA plans to start developing the new work plan for 2021-22 period and the working groups will be involved.

Initially, ReSPA was launched as the training institution. In the meantime it evolved and its current focus is on exchange of experience and peer learning. Together with SIGMA, ReSPA plans to initiate PA Award to promote best practices in Public Administration across the region. ReSPA will continue producing analyses and recommendations in cooperation with its beneficiaries and, to a lesser extent, implementing limited number of training.

ReSPA introduced the following mechanisms of support for its Members: national support mechanism, mobility scheme and peer-to-peer mechanism. National support mechanism provides expert support to the beneficiary economies. Experts are deployed for the period of up to 60 days per economy to help the

<sup>78</sup> Regional School of Public Administration, "ReSPA Strategy 2019-2024", available at: <https://www.respaweb.eu/11/library#strategic-documents-18>.

<sup>79</sup> The Working Group of Centre-of-Government Institutions, The Working Group on Better Regulation, The Working Group on Human Resource Management and Development, The Working Group on E-Governance, and The Working Group on Quality Management.

beneficiary economies in meeting their needs regarding PAR. The national support is available through submitting application by the economy and requesting support in contributing to solving certain issue. Also, peer-to-peer mechanism is introduced as novelty. For example, if one beneficiary economy noticed a good case example in the other, it can invite the expert from the given economy and field to transfer the knowledge to the other economy through workshop, training, etc. or provide hands-on support. ReSPA coordinates and financially supports all mechanisms of support.

## Partnerships and potential synergy with the RCC within the post-2020 framework

So far ReSPA established partnership and signed MoU with a number of partners: RCC, RAI, Nottingham University, CEF, GIZ, etc.

In cooperation and through joint funding with the Nottingham University, ReSPA is developing a manual dubbed *How to make merit based recruitment work*. Outside the scope of European Commission support, with the Austrian KDZ ReSPA is implementing a two-year project on quality management that has been financed by ADA.

## 10. RYCO

### Mission and scope of activities

Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) was founded by Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. RYCO aims at promoting the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in six members.

RYCO's programme focuses on creating opportunities for young people to engage in activities that build mutual understanding and reconciliation in the civic, social, educational, cultural and sports domains. RYCO initiates and participates in policy making and advocates for reform. It supports the development of a political and social environment that empowers and facilitates youth exchange. In pursuing its mission, RYCO will demonstrate its commitment to human rights, human dignity and the building of peace based on mutual respect and trust.

RYCO's activities are directed towards:

- Support for youth engagement in change
- Support to civil society organisations
- Support for the young people with the fewest opportunities

## Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

Strategic Plan for 2019-2021 outlines three strategic priorities<sup>80</sup>:

1. Delivering high quality, high impact programmes with and for young people, focusing on their access to mobility, exchange and regional cooperation
2. Building demand and a viable environment for youth focussed programming with a wide range of stakeholders which influence and determine public policy, attitudes and behaviour
3. Investing in RYCO's competences to ensure it delivers on its mandate and to the highest international standards of governance, leadership, representation, management and delivery

Since it was established, one of RYCO's major focuses was internal capacity development and organisational consolidation. From the initial 7 staff, nowadays RYCO employs 43 persons and its annual budget has increased significantly. These internal constraints have influenced the level of ambition proclaimed in their Strategic Plan for 2019-21, as the proclaimed goals therein were thought to be realistic given the organisation's early stage of development. Over 100 stakeholders participated in the design of the Strategy back in 2018.

Out of the three proclaimed strategic goals, the second one, which has a strong advocacy component, has seen the weakest results. The reason lies in the lack of genuine political will and endorsement from the participating economies' authorities, as the economies of the region seem to be simulating their commitment to regional reconciliation – the experience has shown that their level of commitment remains on declaratory level. RYCO's secretariat intentionally decided to somewhat neglect the advocacy component, since it considered the current state of affairs between the participating economies as too fragile to fully implement the RYCO's mandate. Instead, it wants to fulfil its mission by applying gradual approach and carefully choose its 'battles'.

The composition of the Governing Board is one of the hurdles in fulfilling RYCO's mandate (line ministers for youth + citizen's representatives).

### Partnerships and potential synergy with RCC in post-2020 framework

In the upcoming period, it will be important for the organisation to maintain its integrity and independence vis-à-vis the donor-driven needs, as RYCO's rationale and mission are attractive for many donors. So far, RYCO has managed to secure projects funded by the EU, the UN, Germany, France and Norway; and negotiations are currently under way with Swedish SIDA.

The important goal in the future will be to communicate well the purpose of RYCO by clearly explaining that RYCO is not supposed to deal with all youth-related issues. Instead, it wants to promote a constructive approaching in dealing with history and addressing stereotypes. It has not set out to determine the facts of the history (which is the role of RECOM). In that sense, the French-German youth office founded in 1963 is the role model for RYCO.

<sup>80</sup> Regional Youth Cooperation Office, "RYCO Strategic Plan 2019-2021", available at: <https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Ryco-Strategic-Plan.pdf>

Furthermore, RYCO wants to increase support to its potential grantees – the grassroots or “field” organisations. One of the topical areas concerns the pupil exchanges and the organisation wants to ensure such grants exist on permanent basis. The idea is to have a permanently open call for applications, where the role of RYCO would be to match the schools and manage these projects. The schools would be matched by avoiding ethnocentricity (for example, it would not make sense to match the schools from Belgrade and Banja Luka or Pristina and Tirana). Teachers should be the youth leaders, instead of project managers. They are supposed to create the content, while RYCO, together with GIZ, should act as administrative support. Empowering teenagers and their teachers through such approach is expected to yield greater regional understanding. This project is currently in the pilot phase.

## II. Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SWG)

### Mission and scope of activities

The Regional Rural Development Standing Working Group in South Eastern Europe (SWG) was founded on the basis of a common wish to establish an organisation for sustainable rural development in SEE. As an organisation, SWG is a non-political body, acting in a spirit of friendship and good neighbourliness and enhances mutual respect and confidence, dialogue and cooperation among the Member Institutions.

In general, SWG is working to empower and promote sustainable principles of rural development through networking and permanent cooperation between all rural development stakeholders in SEE region. It is an intergovernmental organisation responsible for initiation and preparation of regional development projects in SEE. It acts as independent agency for coordination and implementation of joint projects, as well as for carrying out project activities. Through them, SWG serves as the facilitator in the process of strengthening regional institutions necessary to support long-term agricultural and rural development. Moreover, the teamwork by our members reinforces their individual efforts to mainstream or incorporate regional rural development concerns into all of their policies and programmes.

Its mission is to increase horizontal collaboration among respective economies and territories of SEE, coordinating regional initiatives related to agriculture and rural development and support the process of economic development in rural areas of SEE.

Specific objectives include:

- To improve the common understanding of EU agriculture and rural development policies
- To assist the improvement of implementation structures and systems for agriculture and rural development in rural areas, with specific emphasis on cross-border cooperation
- To improve the understanding and use of implementation tools for agriculture and rural development
- To identify and share information and application of good practice in agriculture and rural development to broaden the rural agenda

Since 2012 SWG’s mandate is to act as a regional organisation which should take care of regional initiatives focused on the WB related to matters under the authority of Ministry of Agriculture, both in terms of steering policy approximation, including exchange, studies, policy recommendations, and acting as implementing agency for regional initiatives. SWG does not have a mandate to work in one economy, so it cannot apply for tenders.

Its members include line ministries of the six WB economies and line ministries of the two Bosnia and Herzegovina entities (Republika Srpska and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The SWG executes its activities in the following areas:

- Rural Development
- Trade and Economic Development
- Agriculture and Agro-industry
- Environmental Protection and Sustainability
- Protection and promotion of cultural heritage
- Tourism and Rural Tourism
- Contributing to Human Health and Education
- Exchange of Statistical Data
- Promoting Gender Equality and Empowerment of Women in Rural Areas.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

SWG is currently in the process of development of the strategic document, which is now in second draft stage. Following the comments from DG AGRI, DG NEAR, DG REGIO and DG MARE, the strategic document is in its final phase. The new strategy is in line with SWG’s “philosophy” – EU approximation of WB economies in agriculture and rural development, which includes forestry, water management, sea, etc. All matters under the ministry in charge of agriculture are also included in SWG’s mandate. This means many correlated topics are integrated.

General objective of SWG remains more or less the same, compared to the existing one, and that is to streamline effective EU accession process in the sector of agriculture and rural development (the existing strategy states: To facilitate close cooperation among the Ministries of Agriculture and other stakeholders in the field of agriculture and rural development and to support the EU integration).

The 4 specific objectives will include:

I. The first objective concerns the facilitation of regional cooperation in boosting EU integration process. This includes being active contributor in terms of expertise to regional networks and objectives relating to sustainable development; SWG also facilitates regional cooperation by mediating between DG AGRI and its beneficiaries; as well as facilitating the process in terms of data supply.

The activities under this priority include exchanges on the political level, which happen once a year; at the beginning of April 2020, there will be a video meeting on ministerial level addressing the topic of COVID-19 pandemic. On technical questions, SWG has no major hurdles in communication and reaching

agreements at the regional level; however, it is the political circumstances which often impede the success of SWP's initiatives.

Moreover, SWG will increase its efforts in helping the national authorities in management of IPARD funds by applying various forms of technical assistance.

It will also help both the WB economies and EC in the negotiation process. SWG will develop new monitoring tool in line with new EC methodology for the accession process of the candidate economies.

2. The second objective concerns improving evidence-based approach through regional analysis and inclusive knowledge transfer. With its capacities, SWG practically acts as a think tank by producing hard evidence and publications with recommendations, done on various topics, relating to approximation with CAP, etc. The next policy issue will be related to COVID-19: although there is legal background for the systems of mandatory resources for food in the economies of the region, none of the economies except Serbia partially have it. If the crisis lingers for more than 6 months, all economies in the region will face food deficit problem. SWP will also assess how the economies reacted to the pandemic, and point out the deficiency of the spirit of regional cooperation. This issue should be on the menu for the November 2020 ministerial meeting.

Through dissemination of policy analysis, SWG tries to educate the beneficiary economies and thus contribute to capacity building of its technical staff dealing with agriculture.

3. The third objective concerns development of competitiveness in agriculture and rural areas, in particular cross-border areas. This is where SWP sees the greatest need for intervention, as these areas are the least developed. SWG has a network of regional offices (offices in Brcko, Uzice, Niksic, Prizren) to support the achievement of the planned initiatives. The rationale is to animate local communities to take action in terms of rural and economic development, in line with CLLD approach (community lead local development).

Efforts will be increased in terms of digitalisation in rural areas, including the improvement of digital skills of local population relating to agriculture and rural development; in attracting foreign investments; as well as in gender mainstreaming and animating youth population in rural areas.

4. The fourth objective concerns environmental innovation towards sustainable development in agriculture and rural development. It concerns sustainable use of energy resources – water, air, soil: conservation of biodiversity and provision of ecosystem services.

One important aspect concerns circular economy related to agriculture and rural development: food waste management and solid waste management. As most river waste are originating from rural areas, SWG plans to have a study on cross-border implications of this phenomenon and the ways to tackle it (example: river Bojana water pollution, as the waste flows into the Adriatic Sea and pollutes beaches in Montenegro and Croatia).

All EU related strategic documents relating to agriculture and rural development - From Farm to Fork Strategy to many relevant elements of the Green Deal – will be a “bible” for SWG, in a sense that SWG's areas of research on technical topics and strategic thinking will be in line with the EU's developments. In all its studies, SWG will naturally tackle the EU developments. Much will depend on how the Green Deal initiatives will be elaborated, as well as on the new MFF and CAP budget therein.

In a nutshell, there are two new elements in the SWG's new strategy, compared to the existing one:

- Strong emphasis on implementation of IPARD, not because it is so financially important for the candidate economies, but because its implementing structures will be used once the WB economies become EU member states and eligible for CAP and structural funds
- Issues related to environment and climate, and its contribution to agriculture (objective 4 of the new strategy)

Implementation of this Strategy will need a backup of the Commission. SWG will also ask Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) for opinion, and finally it will be up to the economies to decide. The Strategy will in any case be in line with EU strategies and EU thinking.

### Potential synergies with the RCC in the post-2020 framework

In the words of the SWG interlocutor: “I want to emphasise that the issue of agriculture and rural development was not treated sufficiently in the current SEE 2020 strategy. Crisis like corona, besides health, highlights another important topic - self-sufficiency in production of food. If the current crisis lasts [for] more than 6 months, you will see how the agriculture is important. It's a resource. Serbia is the only self-sufficient economy in terms of basic products. Rural areas cover 70-80% of territory of the WB economies [and this] should be at least seen as SEE strategic issue. In this stage of development and approximation of the WB economies to the EU, we should focus on this. That's why it must be a subject described in greater details in new RCC strategy.”<sup>81</sup>

## 12. South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC)

### Mission and scope of activities

The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) works to strengthen the capacities of national and regional stakeholders to control and reduce the proliferation and misuse of small arms and light weapons, and thus contribute to enhanced stability, security and development in South Eastern and Eastern Europe. SEESAC functions under the mandate given to it by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the RCC.

SEESAC functions as an executive arm of the Regional Implementation Plan on Combating Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) formulated and adopted by the Stability Pact in November 2001 and revised in 2006 and in 2014. The **aim** of the Plan is to stop the flow and availability of SALW in the region, consolidate current achievements and support the socio-economic conditions for peace and development in South Eastern and Eastern Europe.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with the SWP's Secretary General, March 2020.

SEESAC's activities are constantly changing to adapt to the current needs and capacities of the local governments and other stakeholders. Currently its work is focused on the following issues:

1. Increasing regional cooperation, knowledge exchange and information-sharing
2. Improving capacities for Physical Security and Stockpile Management (PSSM) through infrastructure security upgrades, surplus reduction and training
3. Enhancing capacities for marking, tracing and record-keeping
4. Reducing illicit possession and misuse of firearms through support for awareness-raising and collection campaigns

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

The Roadmap for a sustainable solution to arms control in the Western Balkans by 2024<sup>82</sup> envisages the Western Balkans as a safer region and an exporter of security where comprehensive and sustainable mechanisms, fully harmonised with the EU and other international standards, are in place to identify, prevent, prosecute, and control the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of firearms, ammunition and explosives. It is based on regional cooperation principals and it draws upon SEESAC's signature solution to arms control resulted from over a decade of work on all arms control-related aspects with governments in the region and in partnership with the EU.

In the future, SEESAC will focus on transforming the image of WB as the region entangled in conflict and requiring appropriate assistance in response, to the image of the region as a valuable contributor to global security. For example, the process for the development of a roadmap on this issue in West Africa and Caribbean has the Western Balkans as a role model.

SEESAC is monitoring the Roadmap implementation based on inputs from statistical data from national authorities.

In the area of gender equality, the SEESAC interlocutor believes the WB region is unique in the world, as there is a large portfolio with the Ministry of Defence on gender equality. Furthermore, four ministries in the region are working on this issue, including a joint manual on discrimination in the armed forces.

### Potential synergy with RCC in the post-2020 framework

According to SEESAC interlocutor, the security sector did not feature properly in the RCC SEE2020 Strategy, especially considering the high level of the issue and commitment, and bearing in mind the priority the EU is giving to the issue. The regional security sector reform platform provides a list of experts. This can be replicated with other development issues in the WB, and examined, in cooperation with the RCC, how these can be deployed in other parts of the world. Low-cost measures can be introduced with great impact, with the current resources at disposal.

82 SEESAC, "Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024", available at: <http://www.seesac.org/f/docs/publications-salw-control-roadmap/Regional-Roadmap-for-a-sustainable-solution-to-the.pdf>

## 13. South-Eastern Europe Health Network - SEEHN

### Mission and scope of activities

South-Eastern Europe Health Network (SEEHN) is a regional intergovernmental organisation and represents a fusion of political and technical capacities for health in the following 9 members: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, State of Israel, Montenegro, the Republic of Moldova, the Republic of North Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia (Western Balkans and beyond). The political part of the network is supported on daily basis by national health coordinators (NHC) at the level of state secretaries or deputy ministers. The technical part of the network consists of regional health development centres (RHDCs), which foster regional cooperation and boost technical expertise in the areas<sup>83</sup>, such as: communicable diseases surveillance and control, mental health, antimicrobial resistance, human resources for health, public health services, non-communicable diseases surveillance and prevention, blood safety, accreditation and continuous quality improvement of healthcare, sexual and reproductive health. Although SEEHN has a challenging role in balancing between political leadership and technical cooperation, and the many external partners, especially the WHO Regional Office for Europe, SEEHN is a unique health organisation at the south eastern regional level to promote health and drive economic growth.

SEEHN governance structure has evolved over the time and currently each economy has a presidency mandate on a rotating principle in alphabetical order, every six months<sup>84</sup>. The presidency mandate is concluded by a Plenary Meeting of the NHCs. SEEHN has proved its potential as a sustainable initiative of regional ownership through the SEEHN Secretariat operationalisation in 2017, hosted by the Republic of North Macedonia in Skopje.

Moreover, the SEEHN main political forum is the ministerial meetings which gather ministers in charge of health and are held every four to five years. Every Forum has resulted in four pledges so far, with the last one being the Chisinau Pledge, signed in 2017.<sup>85</sup> These documents are in fact strategic guidelines for the Network.

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

The four principal objectives outlined in the mentioned Chisinau Pledge are:

1. Sustain and strengthen the regional cooperation in public health in South-eastern Europe
2. Work towards achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
3. Strive for universal health coverage (UHC) for populations covered by the Network
4. Further upgrade public health services and capacities

At present, the functioning of the Network relies on contributions from 9 members. This allows SEEHN to implement the activities that are within the Chisinau Pledge and the underpinning Action Plan. The SEEHN

83 <http://seehn.org/regional-health-development-centers/>

84 Lately, exceptions have been applied and the last two presidency mandates lasted for one year with the aim to foster better political commitment and consistently developed and implemented action plan.

85 Chisinau Pledge, p. 5, available at: [http://seehn.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CHISINAU-PLEDGE\\_SIGNED-VERSION-FOR-WEB.pdf](http://seehn.org/web/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/CHISINAU-PLEDGE_SIGNED-VERSION-FOR-WEB.pdf)

Secretariat and the WHO Regional Office for Europe have jointly developed a strategic document that aims to support achievement of United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 3 and other health-related SDG targets, especially the key target of universal health coverage in the members SEEHN<sup>86</sup>.

### Potential synergy with RCC within the post-2020 framework

SEEHN has emerged its initial path from peace and stability in the South Eastern Europe to address public health concerns through regional cooperation and has done this through cooperation at political level by providing leadership, designing key policy documents, areas of policy-making and governance structure, and at technical level by bringing together regional health professionals to design policies and best practices through projects in public health issues of common concern.

SEEHN would like to see health represented to a greater extent in the next RCC strategy. In the previous strategy, only a small section was dedicated to health. SEEHN is open to work with the RCC as they have mutual interests, in particular addressing the drivers of effective policy-making to strengthen key public health areas of common concern and to stimulate the process towards European Union integration, especially because five of its Members are part of the Western Balkans (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia).

Until 2016, RCC contributed to SEEHN with some small financial support.

Air pollution is an area where SEEHN could cooperate with the RCC. The first kick-off activities with the RCC can be based on the conclusions and recommendations of the first SEEHN Meeting on reducing the impact of air pollution<sup>87</sup> held on 7-8.11.2019, in the Republic of North Macedonia. Other priorities beyond the ones discussed or outlined within the scope of the Chisinau Pledge shall be discussed with the SEEHN Members based on their national priorities and common interests.

Some initial ground for partnership between SEEHN and the RCC might be to explore and discuss new possibilities of cooperation on cross-cutting issues, such as air pollution and energy safety.

Partnerships and potential areas of focus for the future include:

- Health Workforce qualification
- Digital agenda in health perspective
- Joint procurement of vaccines in the region
- Health equity
- Universal health coverage
- Emergency preparedness and response from the multi-sectorial cooperation and coordinated response prospective

<sup>86</sup> <http://seehn.org/the-first-sub-regional-cooperation-strategy-between-the-who-regional-office-for-europe-euro-and-south-eastern-europe-health-network-seehn-2018-2023/>

<sup>87</sup> <http://seehn.org/regional-round-table-reducing-health-impacts-of-polluted-air-strengthening-health-systems-and-multisectoral-response-in-see-countries-taking-place-now-in-skopje-north-macedonia/>

## 14. Transport Community

### Mission and scope of activities

Transport Community (TCT) was established in 2017 with the objective of integrating transport markets of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia into the transport market of the EU, a market comprising of road, rail, inland waterway and maritime transport.

The main aim of the Transport Community is to extend the EU transport market rules, principles and policies to the six Western Balkan economies through a legally binding framework.

The role of TCT is to ensure comprehensive transport policy that will better integrate WB in the EU. The role of the Secretariat is to prepare the WB partners to fill the gap in regards to transport policy legislation, even before the accession. When the legislation is fully transposed, the WB will have access to EU transport market, with exception of food transport. This is the game changer for WB economies' transport policy.

TCT can be seen as a tool for supporting enlargement process in terms of monitoring the implementation of legislation; providing assistance in transposing and implementing legislation; and as the key interlocutor for enlargement process related to transport.

DG MOVE was consulted by DG NEAR during the preparation of the proposal for revised EU accession methodology (February 2020); TCT provided its inputs and looks forward to all initiatives related to bringing closer EU and WB transport policies and markets.

The findings and recommendation of OECD "Outlook – Competitiveness in South-East Europe" study was taken as a sort of guideline for TCT's action.<sup>88</sup>

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

1. Rail sector, which is seen as a big challenge, not only in WB but entire EU<sup>89</sup>
2. Road safety, which also remains a priority on the EU level. In this area, the mid-term Action Plan was agreed.<sup>90</sup> The Action Plan is aligned with Road Safety Targets 2030<sup>91</sup>
3. Transport facilitation and removal of bottlenecks between the WB and with EU MS, to avoid long queues at the borders. This thematic priority tackles lack of connectivity, which impacts transport and planning<sup>92</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Document available at: <https://www.oecd.org/publications/competitiveness-in-south-east-europe-9789264298576-en.htm>

<sup>89</sup> The work of the technical committee for this area can be found on this link: <https://www.transport-community.org/library/meetings/technical-committees/>

<sup>90</sup> The AP is available at: [https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/RS-Measures-and-Action-Plan\\_V6.pdf](https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/RS-Measures-and-Action-Plan_V6.pdf)

<sup>91</sup> Road Safety Considerations in Support of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, available at: [https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/dtl1b2017d4\\_en.pdf](https://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/dtl1b2017d4_en.pdf)

<sup>92</sup> The work of the technical committee for this area can be found on this link: <https://www.transport-community.org/library/meetings/technical-committees/>

4. Technical committee on road - The mid-term Action Plan in this area is agreed<sup>93</sup>
5. Alignment with the EU acquis on transport-related aspects within the Green Deal
6. Crisis management during COVID-19 pandemic, as TCT shifted priorities so as to cope with current urgency on borders, reducing bottlenecks in transporting certain goods which has an impact on overall trade

### Potential synergy with RCC in the post-2020 framework

RCC should pay attention to avoiding duplication of activities in transport-related matters by different organisations, such as the World Bank, TCT, etc., i.e. to influence avoiding the scenario where these organisations are carrying out the same studies in parallel; etc.

According to TCT interlocutors, transport should be seen as core of entire economy. All transport-related priorities fit into overarching economic goals. In addition to monitoring the transport corridors, TCT works on policy alignment, which means that transport liberalisation and transport facilitation contribute to economic convergence between the EU and WB. Following this logic, the SEE2030 Strategy should explore possibilities of cooperation and synergies of TCT with regional organisations such as CEFTA, trade associations, environmental agencies, and similar.

## 15. Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF)

### Mission and scope of activities

Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) is a joint initiative of chambers of commerce and industry from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia that established a platform of cooperation in 2017 with the **aim** to provide a joint voice to the business community in the region and to facilitate inter-business contacts and promote the region as one investment destination.

WB6 CIF represents around 350,000 companies, mostly small and medium-sized enterprises in its mission to open new opportunities for stronger networking of business communities within the region by removing the remaining obstacles to the development of the regional economic cooperation and improving business and investment climate in the markets of the WB region. WB6 CIF is the business community's response to political processes in the region, which take place within the Berlin Process as an additional incentive of the Western Balkans to join the EU.

### Principal objectives and activities:

- Supporting economic development of the Western Balkans
- Supporting competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises

<sup>93</sup> This AP is available at: <https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/6-Draft-Action-Plan.pdf>

- Enhancing local and regional investment climate and facilitating investments generating economic development and jobs
- Pooling human resources and structures in the fields of business support, research, education and communication
- Managing and organising activities to create visibility of chambers' role in creating better business and investment climate and business support
- Providing an instrument for more efficient use of available funds from the European Union and other international donors to reach above stated objectives

### Principal objectives, activities and priorities in the post-2020 period

According to the WB6 CIF interlocutors, the following topics will be prioritised in the upcoming period:

- Supporting economic development of the Western Balkans
- Pooling human resources and structures in the fields of business support, research, education and communication
- Supporting competitiveness of small and medium sized enterprises
- Managing and organising activities to create visibility of chambers' role in creating better business and investment climate and business support
- Enhancing local and regional investment climate and facilitating investments generating economic development and jobs
- Providing an instrument for more efficient use of available funds from the European Union and other international donors to reach above stated objectives

More specifically, in the next few years WB6 CIF will focus on implementation of its tasks connected with the EU project under construction. The project has the following elements:

- Participation of the WB6 CIF representatives in the governance structure of the MAP REA
- Establishment and launch of the official platform to enable dialogue between WB6 private sector and EU institutions on policies and regulations relevant for businesses
- Conducting one annual survey among companies in the region to identify regulatory barriers and other obstacles and opportunities for regional business cooperation
- Organising six training sessions to support business community in yielding the benefits of the regional economic integration
- Creating promotional and information material (printed, electronic, etc.) to disseminate information on potential benefits of regional economic integration, namely Regional Economic Area
- Organising six info days to disseminate information on potential benefits of regional economic integration
- Organising regional business competition to promote success stories of the regional economic integration and actions aimed at developing competitiveness acknowledged on the European and global level
- Creating an on-line toolbox providing information on market access in the region
- Organising one business-to-business or business-to-finance event
- Organising one joint participation in international fair and/or business event



- Providing technical assistance to SMEs and the chambers in the region to ease the access to EU funds
- Setting up services supporting integration of SMEs in European and global value chains
- Creating market intelligence database for key product/market portfolios to provide support to CIF members in delivering services supporting internationalisation of SMEs in the region
- Organising two meetings in the framework of the dialogue between CCI Serbia and CCI Kosovo\*
- Restoration and promotion of trade relations in the region

Also, WB6 CIF has few assignments connected with EBRD project Establishment of the Western Balkan Regional Internship Programme, as well as two elaborated advocacy proposals related to establishing WB6 Export-Import Laboratories and addressing entry barriers for investors, developed and presented to WB6 governments.

## 16. Civil Aviation Agency (CAA)<sup>94</sup>

The Government of Montenegro, at the meeting on 02 July 2009, adopted the Decision on establishing the **Civil Aviation Agency** (Official Gazette of Montenegro no. 45/09) for the **purpose** of performing affairs of public interest in the area of civil aviation. Competence of the Agency is laid down in Article 6 of the Law on Air Transport.<sup>95</sup>

### Areas of Activity:

1. Flight Operations
2. Airworthiness
3. Licencing and Training
4. Airports
5. ATM/ANS – Air Navigation Services
6. Aviation Security
7. Aviation Safety

### Initiative for establishment of a joint services provision area

Ten aeronautical organisations of South East Europe signed a Letter of Intent for joint provision of services of the economies in the region on 29 April 2013 in Sarajevo. This initiative is aimed at strengthening the cooperation in the field of air transport by means of offering safe and efficient air navigation services. The document was signed by the Directors of the aeronautical authorities of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Republic of North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Hungary.

<sup>94</sup> The interview with the CAA interlocutor was not convened.

<sup>95</sup> <https://caa.me/en/about-us-0>

## Key findings

The production of this report coincides with the major shifts the regional organisations and the entire societies are experiencing due to COVID-19 pandemic. It is highly probable that the work plans of the majority of organisations will be strongly influenced by the new circumstances; the same goes for the priorities and strategic planning. The present findings barely incorporate this important element, given the timing of the research and impossibility to anticipate final consequences of COVID-19 pandemic. They are based on the feedback received from the interlocutors of 15 interviewed organisations, as well as on the author's assessment bearing in mind the wider context and the analysis provided in section 2.1 (EU's priorities vis-à-vis WB).

The findings reveal several important takeaways irrespective of post COVID-19 context, which should be considered in the future planning of post-2020 SEE Strategy. It should be noted that since the creation of the incumbent SEE 2020 Strategy, two novel organisations were created - Transport Community Secretariat and RYCO. Moreover, for some organisations like Energy Community, SEESAC or ETF, potential for cooperation with the RCC or relevant regional organisations might be limited, due to their specific mandate and governance structure.

First, academic/professional qualifications and removal of obstacles to their recognition at a regional level, together with vocational education and training (VET), is a topic of interest and future action to large number of regional organisations in the upcoming period: CEFTA, ERI SEE, CEF, WB6 CIF, ETF. Each does and can get engaged from its respective angle/mandate and field of expertise. ReSPA is also engaged in this issue to an extent, through a joint project with CEF on empowerment of educational workers who are understood in the wider context of public civil service. Addressing this issue brings benefits to the economic growth and competitiveness and supports strengthening the region's human capital. At the same time, its successful realisation is a litmus test for the regional cooperation and reconciliation. As such, this multi-layered topic with large spill-over effect to other policy areas could be in the limelight of RCC's future action.

Second, when it comes to support to WB's economies and their competitiveness, as well as the improvement of the environment for investment, CEFTA, WB6CIF and Transport Community show great potential for synergies. In fact, it has already been exploited: for example, the secretariats of CEFTA and Transport Community presented a joint proposal to facilitate the transport and trade of essential goods within the Western Balkans in the COVID-19 context.<sup>96</sup> In light of the creation and functioning of the Transport Community, transport dimension can be observed as core of the entire economy, since all transport-related goals fit into the overarching economic goals. Nevertheless, in light of environmental concerns and necessity to ensure sustainable and equitable growth, economic prosperity cannot be detached from the "green" dimension. Stronger focus on environmental dimension when projecting economic growth go hand in hand with the EU's Green Deal package and the growing demands related to EU's accession process of the WB economies.

Third, evidence in the previous period has shown correlation between environmental concerns, such as air quality and air pollution in the region, and long-term consequences on public health. Moreover, COVID-19

<sup>96</sup> Proposal available at: [https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/joint-TCT-CEFTA-proposal-green-corridors\\_07042020.pdf](https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/joint-TCT-CEFTA-proposal-green-corridors_07042020.pdf)

outbreak has revealed the region's vulnerability when it comes to food safety and security. Integrating public health-related matters with the mentioned issues can be a way forward in the upcoming period. This is where SEEHN, Energy Community and SWG can play a major role. Concrete policy areas in which RCC and SEEHN can work on in the upcoming period are health workforce qualification, digital agenda in health perspective, joint procurement of vaccines in the region, health equity, universal health coverage and emergency preparedness and response from the multi-sectorial cooperation and coordinated response prospective. In addition, rural development and agriculture might have been a neglected issue in the current SEE 2020 Strategy. In the absence of an initiative/organisation that would have environmental issues at core of its mandate, RCC can take a lead, coordinative role, and further stimulate the economies of the region and the EU counterparts to invest themselves greater on this matter in the future.

Forth, the COVID-19 outbreak and the overall negative democratic performance of the economies in the region are highlighting the importance of local, grassroots dimension for the achievement of RCC's mission and goals and functioning of the WB's societies. For that reason, local dimension should feature more prominently in RCC's upcoming strategic framework, instead of being observed as a cross-cutting issue.

Fifth, the expertise and advocacy potentials of the regional organisations can be exploited when it comes to monitoring of achievement and "localisation" of the SDGs. This refers to raising awareness of and provision of support to the local actors and advocating for their active role in contributing to the achievement of the SDGs. As the table in Annex II demonstrates, almost all SDGs are of interest to the analysed regional organisations. The same goes for IPA III planning, where many organisations observe RCC as an ally in making the best out of the upcoming pre-accession instrument.

Sixth, several organisations have established and consolidated themselves as "knowledge hubs" and capacity building institutions in their respective areas of expertise: ReSPA, CEF, ERI SEE, SEESAC, NALAS, RAI, ETF. Their potential and "institutional memory" should be noted and taken advantage of in the upcoming period.

Seventh, the achievement of the mission of some regional organisations is highly dependent on overall political relations between the economies of the region, political will to perform potentially costly reforms and the general context related to the EU accession perspective. This is especially relevant in the case of CEFTA, RYCO and RAI. The volatile external circumstances which are highly influencing the agenda of these organisations should be also borne in mind in the upcoming period.

Eight, RCC should follow up carefully the elaboration of the revised EU accession methodology and the proposed "clustering" of negotiating chapters. The main features of the revised approach will be materialised in the Negotiating Framework for North Macedonia, the soonest. If clustering becomes new "way of thinking" of grouping the policy areas, and the current negotiating economies (Montenegro, Serbia) adopt the same model, the new RCC strategy might incorporate similar logic.

Ninth, all analysed organisations are aware of potential overlaps with RCC and other organisations and are willing to openly discuss *modus operandi*, "gentlemen agreements" and other forms where each organisation would engage in certain project or activity using the "comparative advantage" logic.

Lastly, some interlocutors have made suggestions for improvement of governance and monitoring of SEE 2020 Strategy, for example regarding the role of regional dimension coordinators, which should be taken into account when designing the next strategic document.

## 2.3. INTERLINKAGES BETWEEN WESTERN BALKAN ECONOMIES IN THE CONTEXT OF POST-2020 STRATEGY

### General overview of WB6 policy planning systems

All WB economies lack consistent long-term and medium-term strategic planning in their national policymaking systems. In fact, none of the WB6 economies has an overarching strategic document based on which all other strategies are made. As a result, none of the economies has a clear typology or hierarchy between its central planning documents.<sup>97</sup> In the absence of more robust findings from the reports of national experts, this fact might explain the weak implementation of existing strategies, the SDGs, and the general lack of consistence and comprehensiveness in national strategies in the WB6.

It must be acknowledged that Montenegro has adopted a 2030 National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSOR), which serves as horizontal strategy in line with the SDGs, but it cannot be considered as comprehensive, overarching strategy. In Albania, Kosovo\* and Serbia, previous years have seen the development and entry into force of mid-term strategic documents in parallel with existing and already functioning ones, which additionally added to the confusion and incoherence of central planning process.

In addition, in all economies of the region, the centre-of-government institutions are weak as compared to line ministries in terms of the initiation and execution of policy planning. Such a bottom-up approach to policy planning and the low coordination capacities exhibited by centre-of-government institutions (general secretariats of government, mostly) additionally exacerbate efforts to bring coherence into planning systems. In general, SIGMA's findings suggest that for the entire region, alignment between annual and medium-term documents suffers from serious shortcomings.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings have been addressed in recent 2018 amendments to policy planning frameworks in most of the WB6 economies, aimed to strengthen the competences of centre-of-government institutions in policy planning and to introduce coherence in the existing systems. In Serbia, the Law on the Planning System from 2018 and corresponding secondary legislation from 2019 set clear rules for development, monitoring, and reporting on sectoral strategies. In Montenegro, the Decree on drafting, alignment and monitoring of strategic documents from 2018 gave the General Secretariat of the Government a greater role in monitoring its implementation. In Kosovo\*, the government adopted a new administrative instruction on strategy planning, development and monitoring, which aims to improve the quality of sectoral strategies and address overlaps therein, over-ambitious planning, poor financial planning, and ensure regular monitoring and reporting. In North Macedonia, the government updated guidelines on the preparation, monitoring and reporting of strategic planning documents. In Albania, the government made some progress in preparing an IT tool that should help to link strategic policy planning and budgeting.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>97</sup> SIGMA 2015, P.Vagy, p.26-27 <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/docserver/2bad1e9c-en.pdf?expires=1587995681&id=id&accname=guest&checksum=31F6DDC2C72A73EBF011B31EBFFE6DA9>

<sup>98</sup> EC, Albania Country Report 2019, p.11, <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-albania-report.pdf>

However, the effects of legislative improvements in these four economies are yet to be seen, as it is still premature to assess whether they have produced positive changes in practice. The European Commission stressed that in Serbia, the Public Policy Secretariat, the institution in charge of coordinating sectoral policies, should start ensuring strong quality control, including on the costs of strategies and their linkages to medium-term fiscal planning.<sup>99</sup> In Montenegro's case, the EC emphasised the need to align budgetary (fiscal) planning with policy planning.<sup>100</sup> For North Macedonia, the EC emphasised the need to improve the coordination functions of the General Secretariat to implement the mentioned guidelines, as well as to raise capacities for monitoring sectoral strategies.<sup>101</sup> In Kosovo\*, medium-term planning is entirely dependent on the durability of the government's mandate, in which a fragile and unstable political situation has so far prevented any structured policy planning.

Furthermore, improving administrative capacities to put in practice the necessary changes into the policy planning systems is yet another predominant challenge. More specifically, this problem concerns the limited skills and competences of civil servants – namely in terms of analytical capacities required for strategic planning and the issue of staff outflow and turnover, a persistent issue in Serbia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example. Moreover, the dominant administrative culture in the economies of the region is characterised by strong line ministries with weak centre-of-government institutions, which negatively affects efforts to introduce changes in policy planning systems.

### Linkages with EU priorities

The WB6 economies currently find themselves at different stages in the EU integration/accession process (see Table 1 below). These economies can roughly be divided into three groups: 1 - candidates negotiating EU accession (Montenegro and Serbia); 2 - candidates which are supposed to open accession negotiations in the foreseeable future (North Macedonia and Albania), and; 3 - potential candidates (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*), whose advancement in the EU integration process is severely impacted by specific statehood issues.

<sup>99</sup> European Commission, Serbia country report 2019, p.10, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-serbia-report.pdf>

<sup>100</sup> European Commission, Montenegro country report 2019, p.11, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-montenegro-report.pdf>

<sup>101</sup> European Commission, North Macedonia country report 2019, p.13, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-north-macedonia-report.pdf>

Table 1: Comparative timetable of the EU integration and accession processes of Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo\*

	Montenegro	Serbia	Bosnia and Herzegovina	North Macedonia	Albania	Kosovo*
Negotiations launched for SAA	10/10/2005	10/10/2005	25/11/2005	05/04/2000	31/01/2003	28/10/2013
SAA signed	15/10/2007	29/04/2008	16/08/2008	09/04/2001	12/06/2006	27/10/2015
SAA enters into force	01/05/2010	01/09/2013	01/06/2015	01/04/2004	01/04/2009	01/04/2016
Visa liberalisation enters into force	19/12/2009	19/12/2009	15/02/2010	19/12/2009	15/12/2010	
Applied for EU Membership	15/12/2008	22/12/2009	15/02/2016	22/03/2004	24/04/2009	
Council invited the Commission to submit an opinion	23/4/2009	25/10/2010	20/09/2016	17/05/2004	16/11/2009	
Reply to Commission questionnaire	9/12/2009	31/1/2011		14/02/2005	13/04/2010	
Commission delivers its opinion	9/11/2010	12/10/2011		09/11/2005	09/11/2010	
Candidate status (EC)	17/12/2010	01/3/2012		17/12/2005	27/06/2014	
Agreement to start accession negotiations (Council)	26/6/2012	28/06/2013		25/3/2020	25/3/2020	
Accession negotiations started (EC)	29/6/2012	21/01/2014				
Start of the screening process (EC)	26/3/2012	25/07/2013				
End of the screening process (EC)	27/06/2013	24/03/2015				
Opened the 1st Chapter (EC)	18/12/2012	14/12/2015				
Opening of Chapters 23 24	18/12/2013	18/07/2016				
Closure of Chapters 23 and 24						
EU membership						

All economies of the region have defined EU membership as a strategic priority. This objective is reflected in strategic frameworks of the six economies. Moreover, in general, most of the economies of the region refer to EU priorities in their policy planning documents. In Kosovo\*, for example, every strategic document prepared by the government is required to be in line with EU priorities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the EU represents the most significant source of foreign input into the domestic policymaking agenda, wielding a high level of domestic influence across a number of crucial sectors.

Based on data provided in the reports on the preparation of a post-2020 strategy for the WB6 economies, Montenegro is to an extent aligned with the circular economy aspects of the European Green Deal, as it took into account previous EU strategic documents in designing its strategies. Concretely, Montenegro's Waste Management Strategy until 2030 contains objectives to reduce the use of plastic and further develop a circular economy. The National Biodiversity Strategy with the Action Plan (NBSAP) for the period from 2016 to 2020 establishes a strategic framework for the implementation of Convention on Biological Diversity. When it comes to the priorities outlined in "A Europe fit for the digital age", Montenegro has been implementing its Information Society Development Strategy 2020, which defines strategic directions for development in this area with the aim of meeting the EU standards set in the Digital Agenda 2020 and the Digital Single Market Strategy.

Serbia is planning to align its strategic framework with the EU action plan for the Circular Economy from 2015 (and expectedly refer to relevant elements of the Green Deal) through the following strategies: the National Environmental Protection Strategy, the Waste Management Strategy with the National Waste Management Plan 2019-2024, the National Strategy for Environmental Protection for the Period After 2020, the Low-carbon Development Strategy with Action Plan for 2030, the Air Protection Strategy, the Sludge Management Strategy, and the Circular Economy Programme, which are expected to be adopted by the end of 2020. Furthermore, ERP Structural Reform 10, for the establishment of a sustainable system for environmental protection financing by improving the functioning of the Green Fund, is directly tied to the EU Greening the European Semester. When it comes to the EC's "Safer and Healthier Work for All" communication from 2017, Serbia supports this strategic EU goal through its Strategy for Occupational Safety 2018-2022. Regarding the EU's ambition to become climate neutral by 2050, Serbia's National Security Strategy addresses environmental and climate concerns, along with the National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP), the Strategy for Development of Energy Sector of the Republic of Serbia until 2025, with predictions until 2030, and the Implementation Programme of the Strategy for Development of Energy Sector until 2025 with Predictions until 2030 for the period from 2017 to 2030, and the Urban Development Strategy. Concerning the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, the implementation of the Action Plan for the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 includes a strong focus on linking EU internal and external disaster risk reduction priorities with biodiversity strategies and ecosystem-based approaches.

For North Macedonia, 2020 is an election year, and the new government is expected to align its strategic priorities with the priorities of the incumbent EC mandate. The current political priorities of the government are based on recommendations provided in the Priebe reports, the Urgent Reform Priorities defined by the EC, as well as on fostering inter-ethnic cohesion with the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, and on the principles of mutual respect and tolerance.

In terms of national policy planning and planning related to EU integration/accession processes, all economies in the region, irrespective of the current stages in their EU integration/accession processes, have

committed themselves to designing and implementing internal, multiannual plans for the harmonisation of national legislation with the EU acquis. Additionally, some economies, such as Albania and Kosovo\*, have designed specific EU-integration related strategies (the National Strategy for Development and Integration in Albania and the EU integration plan 2013-20 in Kosovo\*), which outline measures to better prepare these economies for the next steps in their EU integration process.

Coherence between EU integration-related planning and government work programmes in the WB6 is another area in which significant shortcomings are found. For most of the economies in the region, the implementation rate of EU integration-related plans is below 50%. In Albania in 2019, for instance, the implementation rate of the national plan for EU integration was below 30%,<sup>102</sup> while in Serbia in 2019 the level of alignment was a low 26%.<sup>103</sup> Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet adopted policy planning guidelines for the National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquis (NPAA) nor aligned its government's annual work plans with the NPAA. Kosovo\* regularly publishes Report on the Implementation of the National Programme for Implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (NPISAA), whose implementation rate in 2019 reached 50.8%.<sup>104</sup>

This phenomenon reflects poor policy planning mechanisms, characterised by inconsistencies between the valid policy planning documents (strategies, annual work plans, and others), deficient alignment between fiscal and policy planning, and faulty policymaking practices. For all the economies of the region, the EC has stressed the need to better synchronise national plans for the adoption of the acquis with annual work plans. Moreover, poor implementation of EU integration-related documents indicates the absence of genuine political will in the economies of the region to undertake the necessary reforms in the EU accession process, as a result of the high domestic costs of conducting substantive reforms, vague membership perspectives, and lacking political incentives from the side of the EU.

### Comparative overview of thematic priorities in national strategic frameworks in the WB6

This section provides comparative analysis on thematic priorities that can be extrapolated from the six national reports on the preparation of post-2020 strategies and their complementary sources. It outlines the policy areas common to all national economies, the ones which are dominant in almost all economies, and the particularities of some of the economies. Since the level of detail and precision of information provided in national reports varies to a great extent, the present findings may be limited in terms of their depth and content.

When it comes to the number and duration of existing strategies, comparative overview shows that in most of the economies, the number of valid strategies has decreased compared to the previous decade. This is due either to the overall tendency towards rationalising the number of strategic documents and efforts to render national strategic frameworks more harmonised (see Section 2.3.1) or to the expiry of certain strategies which have not yet been followed up. Table 2 below shows the total number of extant strategies, based on information from national reports, as well as information on the number of strategies which are extant by 2025 and which go beyond 2025. Finally, it demonstrates the long-term planning ratio

<sup>102</sup> EC Albania annual report, op.cit.

<sup>103</sup> [https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna\\_dokumenta/npaa/npaa\\_trece\\_tromesecje\\_19.pdf](https://www.mei.gov.rs/upload/documents/nacionalna_dokumenta/npaa/npaa_trece_tromesecje_19.pdf)

<sup>104</sup> [http://mei-ks.net/repository/docs/raport\\_mbi\\_zbatimin\\_e\\_pkzmsa\\_gjate\\_vitit\\_2019\\_eng.PDF.p.5](http://mei-ks.net/repository/docs/raport_mbi_zbatimin_e_pkzmsa_gjate_vitit_2019_eng.PDF.p.5)

of different governments, which is calculated by dividing the number of beyond-2025 strategies by the total number of valid strategic documents. Annex III attached to this report provides detailed information on the strategies in each economy in terms of their duration and validity.

Table 2: Overview of strategic frameworks of the WB6

Strategy	Albania	Bosnia	Kosovo*	Montenegro	North Macedonia	Serbia
Expiring by 2025	11	6	48	22	23	22
Valid beyond 2025	5	1	2	10	8	9
Total number of strategies	16	7	50	32	31	31
Long-term planning ratio	0.45	0.16	0.04	0.45	0.34	0.41

Generally speaking, strategies which cover the following topics tend to be long-term and extend up to 2030 in their duration:

- Waste management
- Mineral Policy
- Energy Policy
- Environmental protection, sustainable development, and the fight against climate change
- Cultural protection and development
- Policies towards refugees
- Transportation and infrastructure development

When it comes to thematic priorities, comparative overview reveals some topics which are either common to all economies or to the majority. In general, if analysing policy areas, the greatest number of strategies in all national frameworks deal with home affairs issues – including the fights against organised crime, terrorism, and human trafficking, proliferation of small arms and light weapons, and police reforms. Economic topics are the second most frequent comparatively, followed by energy/climate and environment.

The policy areas dealt with by strategic documents in all or most of the economies include:

- Public administration reform
- Small arms and light weapons
- Suppression of human trafficking
- Counterterrorism
- Suppression of violent extremism/organised crime

- Waste management
- Water management
- Cultural heritage and cultural development
- Fiscal strategies
- Energy
- Environmental protection
- Mining/mineral extraction
- Promotion of entrepreneurship and of SMEs
- Youth employment/education
- Transportation strategies
  - Railway development
  - Infrastructure development
- National diaspora strategies
- Tourism strategies
- Inclusiveness
  - Roma people and minorities
- Sustainable development
- Transparency and cooperation with civil society



The word cloud above demonstrates the most frequently used words in the titles of strategies from the WB6 economies, based on information from national reports.

Furthermore, comparative overview reveals certain topics addressed by strategies that are particular to two economies: informal economy, in the cases of Albania and Kosovo\*, and plans for emission reduction, in the cases of Kosovo\* and Serbia. Other similar commonalities can be found in the table attached in Annex III.

Finally, comparative overview reveals certain singularities in terms of topical areas covered by strategic documents. More precisely,

- Serbia has strategies dedicated to topics such as the development of new generation networks (5G), artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, waterborne traffic, mental and public health, drug abuse, and AIDS.
- Kosovo\* has strategies dedicated to topics such as local self-government, domestic violence, and the inclusion of people with disabilities and Ashkali communities.
- Montenegro has strategies dedicated to topics such as developing the social and healthcare system, coastal zone management, and LGBT protection.
- North Macedonia has strategies dedicated to topics such as government transparency, female entrepreneurship, and social responsibility.

## Detailed comparative overview of overlaps and particularities of strategic frameworks from the WB6 economies

This section is based on information provided in Annex I of six national reports on the preparation of post-2020 strategies which list existing and planned medium and long-term strategies with key priorities. The listed strategies in some cases contradict or do not match with the information provided in other parts of national reports, and therefore the findings presented below should be taken with a grain of salt.

In the area of **governance**, as well as regarding **cross-cutting strategies**, there is only some overlap between the provided national strategies. Disaster risk mitigation/reduction and emergency management are covered by Montenegro, and more so by Serbia. In both cases, the aim is to develop systems not only for anticipating and preparing for disasters, but also methods to deal with their consequences. The development of statistics/statistical research and public information, all with the goal of providing institutions, organisations and citizens with more accessible and efficient data, is present in the strategies of Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. In the cases of North Macedonia and Serbia, there are also measures that, broadly speaking, deal with the functioning of state institutions, albeit with different aspects therein. North Macedonian measures focus on ameliorating government transparency and accountability, while Serbian measures focus on training civil servants and local self-administration employees, as well as developing public procurement.

The Midterm Programme of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers covers a broad array of areas and sectors, from economy, environment and energy to employment and social policy, and, as such, is listed as a cross-cutting strategy, yet stands out as having no major overlaps with the other strategies listed in this section.

In the field of **home affairs**, there are significant overlaps between different national programmes. The issue of small and light arms and ammunitions control is covered by Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – all of which focus on creating and developing legal frameworks and tools for regulating their illegal and illicit production, trade and use, while in the case of North Macedonia the relevant strategy also focuses on controlling their legal trade. Another area of policy overlap is on the issue of human trafficking, addressed by Montenegro and Serbia. In both cases, strategies exist that seek to end human trafficking, to end the abuse of victims and provide them adequate aid, and to develop institutional coordination and international cooperation in the fight against trafficking. The issue of terrorism/violent extremism is also addressed by Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia alike. In all cases, there is a focus on improving resilience to terrorism and extremism, institutional capabilities, and cooperation, while in the case of North Macedonia attention is also given to addressing the causes of radicalisation, aiming to prevent incidents of terror before they occur, all while maintaining inclusivity and responsibility. Another area of overlap is in the field of policing, where both Montenegro and Serbia have strategies pertaining to reforming and improving HR management within police forces.

Serbia stands out in the field of home affairs for having several strategies covering policies not explicitly covered by other national strategies – namely a strategy to combat organised crime, a development strategy of the Ministry of Interior, as well as a National Security Strategy focusing on the preservation of sovereignty, integrity and neutrality. Regarding the field of **justice and rights**, while most economies have a number of strategies covering a variety of topics, their overlap is minor, and only in broad terms. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia have judicial reform strategies aiming to bolster the efficiencies of their respective judiciaries, as well as their impartiality, independence and transparency. Montenegro and Serbia both have strategies aimed at ameliorating the positions and integration processes of minorities, monitoring their rights, spreading awareness, and fostering general respect for multiculturalism and multiethnicity in a variety of ways. That said, in the case of Serbia, there is only focus on the Roma population of Serbia, while the Montenegrin strategy focuses on “minorities” broadly understood. North Macedonia and Serbia both have strategies in place relating to their respective diasporas, aimed at fostering cooperation, upholding their rights and supporting their heritages abroad, while Serbia also has a returnee strategy. Bosnia and Herzegovina’s foreign policy strategy also lists protection of the interests of nationals abroad as one of its key pillars, but the information provided in this regard is very limited. Finally, Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia possess strategies pertaining to migration management/refugee integration.

Montenegro stands out as the only economy with a specific strategy for improving the quality of life of LGBT people, aiming to do so on a system-wide level through education reform, strengthening their rights, and designing an efficient regulatory framework to uphold them.

Serbia also stands out with its unique strategy pertaining to bolstering gender equality, primarily aiming to change gender patterns and improve gender equality culture through the implementation of various policies and measures. Furthermore, Serbia has strategies regarding personal data protection and the fight against cybercrime, as well as a strategy for the development of free legal assistance and for processing war crimes.

Concerning **economic and social policy**, there are significant overlaps between various economies. Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia all have strategies focusing on education, especially in regards to developing a more inclusive system of education and ensuring a higher quality. Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia all have specific strategies targeting adult education, aiming to provide accessible

education and training for adults. Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia also have their own tourism strategies, all aimed at boosting the attractiveness of their respective economies for tourists and developing tourist infrastructure, among other similar goals. There are a number of strategies relating to health in Albania, Montenegro and Serbia. While they cover different aspects in this area ranging from the general improvement of public health to developing an integrated information system and eHealth services (and notably mental health services), the economies' strategies aim at improving healthcare for their citizens in a number of similar ways. Albania has a dedicated strategy for the reduction of alcohol-related injuries. North Macedonia and Serbia have national youth strategies, aimed at providing young people with a better living standard and more opportunities for their development and involvement in society. In addition, both North Macedonia and Serbia also have individual strategies for cultural development. Finally, both these economies have strategies for fighting against demographic trends, though Serbia puts far more emphasis on this, with multiple strategies that cover this area.

While no specific strategies are listed, the national report for Kosovo\* mentions that it is also prioritising social inclusion, poverty reduction, and building equal opportunities, as well as developing public employment services and increasing the employability of youth, women and vulnerable groups.

Montenegro stands out for having a unique strategy aimed at improving teachers' education and fostering their development and social inclusion. Furthermore, it also lists strategies for what it calls "Smart Specialisation", broadly aimed at moving the economy in a healthier, more efficient, more sustainable, and digitised direction. Montenegro also has two strategies dealing with welfare systems, specifically the development of a welfare system for the elderly and a social and child welfare development strategy.

North Macedonia, while lacking more general health-related strategies, has a strategy aiming to foster the improvement of citizens' oral health by increasing awareness and improving availability of healthcare system. Most notably, it also has a unique interculturalism strategy that promotes the concept of "One Society for All", aiming to develop and strengthen intercultural communication between its citizens. It also has a strategy for the promotion of social responsibility, most notably regarding enterprises and organisations in the public, private and civil sectors.

Serbia too has a multitude of unique strategies in the field. It has a strategy for social housing with the aim of providing affordable and sanitary housing to those who cannot obtain housing under market conditions. Serbia also has a number of unique health-related strategies, specifically ones focusing on the prevention and control of HIV and AIDS, the prevention of drug abuse, as well as the prevention of alcohol abuse and the treatment of alcohol-induced disorders, along with a programme for control of bacterial resistance to antibiotics. Finally, Serbia also has a strategy focused on improving occupational health and safety to ensure occupational well-being.

There is very little specific overlap in policy in the fields of **science and environment**, though it should be noted that both aspects are covered by individual national strategies. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia have strategies focusing on improving their respective economies' capacities for sustainable development as a key goal. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia also have strategies broadly focused on the amelioration and development of scientific research, technological upgrading, innovation, and scientific cooperation and integration on the regional and international levels.

Kosovo\* has a very limited section pertaining to this field, mentioning only that the improvement of an environment conducive to innovation, as well as the extension of ICT networks and services infrastructure, are national priorities.

Montenegro has its own national strategy addressing climate change, stating only that its aim is to coordinate climate change goals with those of the EU. Furthermore, Montenegro has a waste management strategy, a strategy pertaining to forest and forestry development, as well as a water management strategy. These strategies all have the common goal of improving environmental conditions and focusing on sustainability.

North Macedonia has its own environmental protection strategy, aiming to identify, study, protect and monitor the geodiversity, geological heritage, biological and landscape diversity of North Macedonia. Furthermore, it has a unique biodiversity strategy which aims to address the causes of loss of biodiversity, to reduce various pressures on ecosystems, as well as to improve knowledge and the availability of relevant information in the field.

Serbia also has a number of unique strategies in a general sense. Concerning the environment, it boasts a strategy for the sustainable use of natural resources and assets, which also aims to reduce the negative impact of the use of said resources on the economy and environment. It also has a national emission reduction plan (NERP). In the field of science, it stands out for having a strategy specifically focused on the development of artificial intelligence, with the goal of fostering the development and harnessing the potential of AI for improving economic growth, employment and living standards.

In the area of **economics and infrastructure development**, there is much overlap between various policies as well as a number of unique strategies. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia all have strategies that focus on transportation – whether concerning railway transportation, aquatic transportation or simply transportation in a general sense. They all have the common goals of making transportation more efficient, sustainable, better developed, and more integrated on national, regional, and international levels. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\* and Serbia have strategies pertaining to agricultural/rural development, all of which focus on production growth, increasing competitiveness and sustainability, and improving the quality of life in rural areas as well as introducing frameworks for developing agriculture and rural areas more broadly. Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia and Serbia all have one or more strategies pertaining to the field of energy, focused, broadly speaking, on creating more effective, competitive, sustainable and clean energy systems, and in some cases also focused on more efficient utilisation of available resources, as well as reducing energy consumption, diversifying energy sources, and regional and international integration.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia broadly overlap in their informatics strategies, with the Bosnian policy aiming for maximising ICT potential and quality as much as availability, the North Macedonian strategy focusing on developing and improving cybersecurity, and the Serbian strategy focusing on the development of efficient and accessible New Generation Networks. Montenegro and North Macedonia both have strategies for SMEs and MSMEs, aiming to improve business environments and enterprises' access to finance, increase their competitiveness, and foster their development and innovation, as well as their effectiveness and productivity. Kosovo\* and North Macedonia both have strategies to deal with the informal economy, primarily through reducing and monitoring the related activities, but also through working towards its formalisation in order to build a healthy formal business environment. These two economies also have similar trade facilitation strategies, which aim to reduce

transaction costs, eliminate inefficiencies, improve competitiveness and develop quality infrastructure. Albania, Montenegro and Serbia both have fiscal strategies which focus on improving the sustainability of public finances and fostering growth and investment. Kosovo\*, Montenegro and North Macedonia also have industrial strategies, which aim to foster further industrialisation and modernisation, and increase productivity, revenues and competitiveness.

Montenegro also has several unique strategies, one of which is the National Strategy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management, aiming to protect the environment, landscape and cultural goods, sustainably and effectively manage protected assets, and implement eco-friendly, efficient, and sustainable ways of managing, monitoring, administrating and developing coastal zones. It also has a Collaborative Innovation Programme, which focuses on strengthening the competitiveness of Montenegrin enterprises through fostering innovation, idea exchange, cooperation, and strengthening human resource management and job creation.

North Macedonia's principle unique strategy is the Strategy for Women Entrepreneurship Development, whose goal is to empower female entrepreneurship by consolidating and coordinating activities, creating an enabling business climate and providing support to women entrepreneurs.

Serbia stands out with a number of unique strategies, including the National Strategy for the Improvement of Facilities Storing Food of Animal Origin, the Water Management Strategy, the Strategy for Sustainable Urban Planning, the Strategy for Development of Free Investment Zones, as well as the Strategy for the Development of Intellectual Property.

Albania stands out with strategies dedicated to the topics of mining, land consolidation, integrated water resources management and water waste management.

## Donor support to the WB6 economies

The following section outlines the major donor mechanisms in the WB6 economies, their scope of support and their thematic priorities.

In a nutshell, the WB region attracts a large number of donor organisations which recognise the need to further invest in the process of its stabilisation and development. Considering that all of the WB economies aspire to join the EU, almost all donor activities aim to, in one way or another, support this process as well. The analysis of key themes shows that there is a commonality between different donors, especially in regard to their support for the transition towards consolidated democracy and developed and sustainable economies. Typically, the key areas of donor focus include: democracy, rule of law, good governance, human rights, sustainable development, environment, employment, health, youth, education, fight against corruption, support to vulnerable populations and support to civil society, including building regional cooperation and connectivity.

All of the analysed donors are considered to be “Western”, representing either international or state-based organisations. For now, there are no Russian or Chinese organisations providing significant donations to the region. All things considered, the EU remains by far the single largest donor to the WB. It supports reforms in the region by providing financial and technical assistance primarily through

the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA). The current IPA II has allocated nearly €4 billion to individual partners in the Western Balkans and an additional €3 billion to multi-country funds for the period from 2014 to 2020.<sup>105</sup>

Other examples of organisations which substantially invest in all of the economies of the region are USAID, UNDP, the World Bank Group, the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), the UK Department for International Development (DFID), and GIZ. In addition, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) also does the same while only excluding Montenegro.

There are, however, organisations which focus only on certain economies rather than the region as a whole. The Austrian Development Agency (ADA), for example, focuses primarily on Albania and Kosovo\*, the Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS) on Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*, and the Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation (LuxDev) only on Kosovo\*. This can be explained by the fact that these three economies are the least developed in the region, which is why they require additional attention from the international donor community.

Looking at the level of interaction between donor organisations and individual economies in the region, Kosovo\* is notable, as all of the analysed donor organisations have invested in this economy. This focus can be explained by the fact that Kosovo\* remains the least developed part of the region. In terms of the total value of donor investments to individual economies, however, Bosnia and Herzegovina often stands out from the rest of the region as receiving the largest share of total investments.

Many donor organisations have also provided valuable assistance to the region's economies during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some have provided financial assistance, while others focused on providing medical equipment, coordinating their activities with state and local health authorities. Many donors chose to finance COVID-19-related projects while partnering with other organisations, such as the UNDP, UNICEF and the World Health Organisation, during the implementation phase. Although China and other third actors have provided assistance to the region during the pandemic, the EU's donations came on top. In fact, the EU envisioned EUR 3.3 billion worth Financial Support Package to the Western Balkans to fight the pandemic. It consists of a reallocation of the unspent funds from IPA for immediate support and to address the social and economic recovery needs incurred by the pandemic. It includes an Economic Reactivation Package to ensure survival in the short term, and recovery in the medium term, of businesses in the private sector, a €750-million package of macro-financial assistance to foster macroeconomic stability, a €1.7-billion package of assistance from the European Investment Bank to aid the private and public sector, and an Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace to provide immediate humanitarian assistance and healthcare to vulnerable refugees and migrants.<sup>106</sup>

**The Austrian Development Agency (ADA)**, an operational unit of the Austrian Development Cooperation (ADC)<sup>107</sup>, provides assistance to Albania and Kosovo\*.<sup>108</sup>

<sup>105</sup> EEAS, EU Engagement in the Western Balkans', 2019, available at: [https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/new\\_eu\\_wb\\_factsheet\\_28\\_05\\_2019.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/new_eu_wb_factsheet_28_05_2019.pdf)

<sup>106</sup> European Commission, "Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery", 2020, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-support-western-balkan-regions-covid19-recovery\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/communication-support-western-balkan-regions-covid19-recovery_en.pdf)

<sup>107</sup> The Donor Committee for Enterprise Development, "Austrian Development Cooperation", available at: <https://www.enterprise-development.org/agency-strategies-and-coordination/austrian-development-cooperation/>

<sup>108</sup> Austrian Development Agency, "Southeast Europe", available at: <https://www.entwicklung.at/en/countries/southeast-europe>



The ADA's thematic priority areas and projects are the following: 1 - the economy and development, with focus on employment; 2 - education, with a focus on labour-market oriented, socially inclusive vocational education and higher education; and 3 - governance, human rights and rule of law, with a focus on institution-building in the context of EU integration. Cross-cutting issues include gender equality, social inclusion and environment/climate change.

The ADA assists Albania in converging national standards with EU guidelines, especially within the areas of public administration, human rights and water sector, while also helping to advance regional development in the economy. Amount of funding per topic in Albania: government and civil society - 39%; water and sanitation - 36%; education - 9%; humanitarian aid - 7%; forestry - 2%; social infrastructure and services - 1%; and multisector - 1%. The total value of contract amounts to approximately €8.5 million, with a total of 13 projects.<sup>109</sup>

The ADA focuses on rural and economic development on the one hand and promotes local institutional capacities on the other. Amount of funding per topic in Kosovo\*: education - 40%; business and other services - 21%; government and civil society - 11%; agriculture - 10%; social infrastructure and services - 7%; environmental protection - 4%; industry - 2%; and multisector - 1%. The total value of contract amounts to approximately €6.7 million, with a total of 15 projects.<sup>110</sup>

While seven ADA focus economies existed in the region until 2010, only Albania, Kosovo\* and Moldova have remained as ADA priority economies since 2015.<sup>111</sup> Nevertheless, the ADA has a regional strategy that is meant to be complementary to existent, bilateral economy strategies for Albania and Kosovo\*. The ADA's last available strategy is the 2016-2020 "Danube Area/ Western Balkans Region – Regional Strategy". The geographical scope of this regional strategy includes Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia (including Moldova).

**The Italian Agency for Development Cooperation (AICS)** operates in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo\*.

In Albania, this organisation has 43 ongoing initiatives, with a total investment of €306 million.<sup>112</sup> In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there are 7 ongoing initiatives, with a total investment of €4 million.<sup>113</sup> In Kosovo\*, there is only one ongoing initiative, with a total investment of €3 million.<sup>114</sup>

The AICS Headquarters in Tirana coordinates projects for Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo\*. It is committed to three main areas of intervention, in which Italy recognises added value, including: 1 - Rule of Law and Good Government; 2 – The Environment and Nature, and; 3 - Competitiveness and Innovation.<sup>115</sup>

<sup>109</sup> Austrian Development Agency, "Albania", available at: <https://www.entwicklung.at/en/countries/southeast-europe/albania>

<sup>110</sup> Austrian Development Agency, "Kosovo\*", available at: [https://www.entwicklung.at/en/countries/southeast-europe/Kosovo\\*](https://www.entwicklung.at/en/countries/southeast-europe/Kosovo*)

<sup>111</sup> Austrian Development Agency, "Danube Area/Western Balkans Region", 2016, available at: [https://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Dokumente/Publikationen/Strategien/Englisch/EN\\_Strategy\\_Danube\\_area\\_Western\\_Balkans.pdf](https://www.entwicklung.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Dokumente/Publikationen/Strategien/Englisch/EN_Strategy_Danube_area_Western_Balkans.pdf)

<sup>112</sup> AICS, "Albania", available at: <https://tirana.aics.gov.it/en/home/countries/albania/>

<sup>113</sup> AICS, "Bosnia and Herzegovina", available at: <https://tirana.aics.gov.it/en/home/countries/bosnia/>

<sup>114</sup> AICS, "Kosovo\*", available at: [https://tirana.aics.gov.it/en/home/countries/Kosovo\\*/](https://tirana.aics.gov.it/en/home/countries/Kosovo*/)

<sup>115</sup> AICS, "Italy and the Western Balkans", available at: <https://tirana.aics.gov.it/en/home/field-office/head/>

**The United States Agency for International Development (USAID)** operates in all of the Western Balkan economies.

In 2018, USAID invested the following amounts in the Western Balkan economies: in Albania, \$12 million; in Bosnia and Herzegovina, \$53 million;<sup>116</sup> in North Macedonia, \$17 million;<sup>117</sup> in Kosovo\*, \$34 million;<sup>118</sup> and in Serbia, \$15 million.<sup>119</sup> In Montenegro, the latest available data from 2017 shows \$1 million of investment.<sup>120</sup>

USAID supports these economies through programmes that focus on democracy and governance, economic development, energy, health, youth, education, and vulnerable populations.<sup>121</sup> It perceives the Western Balkans as part of the "Europe and Eurasia" region.

Its actions toward the region conform to the goals of the State Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs (EUR) and the USAID Bureau for Europe and Eurasia (E&E) Joint Regional Strategy, in particular Goal 6 "Balkans Fully Integrated into Euro-Atlantic Institutions".<sup>122</sup> USAID also has separate strategies for each Western Balkan economy. Typically, focuses in these economies include good governance, social cohesion and economic growth.

USAID has been active in contributing to the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic in all of the Western Balkan economies.

In Albania, the U.S. Government, through USAID, is coordinating with the World Health Organization to help Albanian health authorities in their response to the outbreak of COVID-19. USAID is helping Albania prepare their laboratory systems, by providing test kits and event-based surveillance, and more.<sup>123</sup>

The total value of USAID-funded assistance to Bosnia and Herzegovina is \$500,000, transferred to UNICEF to coordinate responses, focusing mainly on risk communication, mental and psychosocial support, supply of hygiene kits, and the promotion of critical behavioural changes at the community level. This funding is part of a larger commitment of \$1.2 million that the U.S. has provided to aid in Bosnia and Herzegovina's emergency response efforts in the face of this crisis.<sup>124</sup> In addition, the Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations of Bosnia and Herzegovina explicitly asked USAID for concrete assistance in mitigating

<sup>116</sup> USAID, "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country – North Macedonia", 2018 available at:

[https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/BIH?fiscal\\_year=2018&implementing\\_agency\\_id=1&measure=Obligations](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/BIH?fiscal_year=2018&implementing_agency_id=1&measure=Obligations)

<sup>117</sup> USAID, "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country – Bosnia and Herzegovina", 2018 available at:

[https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/MKD?fiscal\\_year=2018&implementing\\_agency\\_id=1&measure=Obligations](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/MKD?fiscal_year=2018&implementing_agency_id=1&measure=Obligations)

<sup>118</sup> USAID, "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country – Kosovo\*", 2018, available at:

[https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/CS-KM?fiscal\\_year=2018&implementing\\_agency\\_id=1&measure=Obligations](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/CS-KM?fiscal_year=2018&implementing_agency_id=1&measure=Obligations)

<sup>119</sup> USAID, "U.S. Foreign Aid by Agency - Serbia", 2018, available at:

[https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/SRB?fiscal\\_year=2018&implementing\\_agency\\_id=1&measure=Obligations](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/SRB?fiscal_year=2018&implementing_agency_id=1&measure=Obligations)

<sup>120</sup> USAID, "U.S. Foreign Aid by Country - Montenegro", 2017, available at:

[https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/MNE?fiscal\\_year=2018&implementing\\_agency\\_id=1&measure=Obligations](https://explorer.usaid.gov/cd/MNE?fiscal_year=2018&implementing_agency_id=1&measure=Obligations)

<sup>121</sup> USAID, "Europe and Eurasia", available at:

<https://www.usaid.gov/where-we-work/europe-and-eurasia>

<sup>122</sup> USAID, "Serbia Country Development Cooperation Strategy", 2020, available at:

<https://www.usaid.gov/serbia/cdcs>

<sup>123</sup> Euronews, "USAID and WHO offer COVID-19 testing kits to Albania", 2020, available at:

<https://euronews.al/en/daily-news/2020/04/01/usaid-and-who-offer-covid-19-testing-kits-to-albania>

<sup>124</sup> UNICEF, "U SAID and UNICEF procure communication equipment for centres for mental health within COVID-19 response in Bosnia and Herzegovina", 2020, available at:

<https://www.unicef.org/bih/en/press-releases/usaid-and-unicef-procure-communication-equipment-centres-mental-health-within-covid>

the negative effects of the pandemic on tourism capacities in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He was reassured that as of July this year assistance will be provided.<sup>125</sup>

In Kosovo\*, the U.S. Government, through USAID, has awarded \$1.1 million to provide operational support and improve Kosovo\*'s response capacities to stop further disease transmission and mitigate COVID-19's impact. UNICEF is one of USAID's implementing partners.<sup>126</sup>

In Montenegro, the U.S. Government, through USAID, is providing critically-needed support by coordinating with the Government of Montenegro, international humanitarian partners and other stakeholders to identify priority areas for investment. It has committed \$300,000 in health assistance to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak in Montenegro.<sup>127</sup>

In North Macedonia, the U.S. Government has committed \$1.1 million to mitigate the spread of the COVID-19 outbreak. Through USAID, the U.S. is providing these funds to the World Health Organization and UNICEF to implement activities to support the economy's efforts to respond to COVID-19.<sup>128</sup>

In Serbia, USAID partnered with UNICEF to assist Serbia in combating COVID-19. With USAID assistance, UNICEF is distributing kits including supplies such as soap, detergent and hygiene products, to the most at-risk communities and facilities. USAID is also working with UNICEF to provide targeted messages and information to Roma communities and migrant and refugee centres on how to prevent COVID-19 and where to seek assistance for a range of issues including hygiene and nutrition issues, and guidance for parents on positively coping with confinement with their children.<sup>129</sup> In addition, USAID Serbia is partnering with the Red Cross of Serbia (RCS) to serve communities affected by the COVID-19 outbreak in Serbia. To get immediate assistance to people in critical situations in Serbia, USAID provided a \$150,000 emergency grant to the RCS to procure essential items for Serbia's most vulnerable families and groups, including the elderly, primarily in several of Serbia's least developed municipalities.<sup>130</sup> This support to UNICEF and RCS is part of a total of \$1.38 million in COVID-19 assistance provided by USAID to Serbia so far.

**The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)** is active in all of the Western Balkan economies. Although Kosovo\* is not an UN member, the UN operates there as well per UN Security Council Resolution 1244.

The UNDP supports economies in tackling complex development challenges and achieving the SDGs through their integration into national systems. It has three development missions to eradicate poverty in all its forms and dimensions, to accelerate structural transformations, and to build resilience to shocks and crises.

<sup>125</sup> Radio Free Europe, "Košarac traži pomoć oko ublažavanja posljedica korona virusa na turizam u BiH", 2020, available at (in Serbian): <https://www.slobodnaevropa.org/a/30559639.html>

<sup>126</sup> US Embassy in Kosovo\*, "USAID and UNICEF Ensure Additional Support For Families in Need During COVID 19", 2020, available at: <https://xk.usembassy.gov/usa-id-and-unicef-ensure-additional-support-for-families-in-need-during-covid-19/>

<sup>127</sup> US Embassy in Montenegro, "The United States Provides Assistance to Montenegro to Respond to COVID-19", 2020, available at: <https://me.usembassy.gov/the-united-states-provides-assistance-to-montenegro-to-respond-to-covid-19/>

<sup>128</sup> USAID, "U.S. Provides Assistance to North Macedonia To Respond To COVID-19", 2020, available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/north-macedonia/news-information/press-releases/us-provides-assistance-north-macedonia-respond-covid>

<sup>129</sup> USAID, "USAID Partners with UNICEF to Assist Serbia in Combating COVID-19", 2020, available at: <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/videos/node/357651>

<sup>130</sup> US Embassy in Serbia, "USAID Partners with Serbian Red Cross on COVID-19 Response", 2020, available at: <https://rs.usembassy.gov/usa-id-partners-with-serbian-red-cross-on-covid-19-response/>

The UNDP has focused on urgently tackling the COVID-19 pandemic in all of the WB economies. In the longer term, the UNDP will work with economies to assess the social and economic impacts of COVID-19, take urgent recovery measures to minimise long-term impacts, particularly for marginalised groups, and help societies to recover better and recover "greener" and more sustainably.<sup>131</sup>

In Albania, the UNDP and Telekom Albania announced the launch of a partnership in support of the fight against COVID-19. The partnership consists of the "Spread the Word, not the Virus" joint communication campaign, intended to provide citizens with accurate information about the disease.<sup>132</sup> In addition, in consultation with the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the UNDP in partnership with the Government of Sweden is supporting a coordinated referral mechanism to develop a protocol that standardises actions to be taken in dealing with cases of domestic violence during the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>133</sup> Finally, a joint partnership agreement was signed between the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection, the UNDP, the Swiss Embassy and the Royal Norwegian Embassy, outlining their support to help Albanian health authorities combat COVID-19 by purchasing 30 ventilators. To this end, the Swiss Government is donating \$330,000, the Norwegian Government 3,000,000 Norwegian Krone (approximately €270,000) and UNDP \$100,000.<sup>134</sup>

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the UNDP supports the purchase of essential medical goods and supplies with funding allocated by various international and domestic donors, authorities and partners, confirming their confidence in the UNDP's role as a partner of choice for executing complex tasks in this period of crisis.<sup>135</sup> The UNDP aims to strengthen the health system at all levels by supporting the procurement and delivery of essential medical equipment and supplies for testing and treating persons infected with COVID-19. A task force on the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19 was also established. This task force, which is co-chaired by the UNDP and UNICEF, will engage in all relevant streams of work, including focusing on social, economic, health-related, and human rights.<sup>136</sup> Also, the UNDP, alongside the EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina and the EU Special Representative, provided over 2,000 medical visors to the Institute for the Public Health of Sarajevo Canton.<sup>137</sup> In terms of Republika Srpska, five ECG machines and personal protective equipment for frontline medical workers, financed by the Kingdom of Norway, were procured by UNDP.<sup>138</sup>

<sup>131</sup> UNDP Europe and Central Asia, "COVID-19 Pandemic response", 2020, available at: <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/coronavirus.html>

<sup>132</sup> UNDP Albania, "COVID-19: UNDP joins forces with Telekom to provide health information to the Albanian public", 2020, available at: <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/covid-19--undp-joins-forces-with-telekom-to-provide-health-infor.html>

<sup>133</sup> UNDP Albania, "UNDP and Swedish Government join forces to combat domestic violence amid COVID-19", Medium, 2020, available at: <https://medium.com/@albania.undp/undp-and-swedish-government-join-forces-to-combat-domestic-violence-amid-covid-19-3670c09c75b1>

<sup>134</sup> UNDP Albania, "Switzerland, Norway, and UNDP finance the purchase of 30 ventilators to help Albania counter COVID-19", 2020, available at: <https://www.al.undp.org/content/albania/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2019/switzerland--norway--and-undp-finance-the-purchase-of-30-ventila.html>

<sup>135</sup> UNDP BiH, "UNDP's support to the COVID-19 response in BiH", 2020, available at: [https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina/en/home/coronavirus.html](https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/coronavirus.html)

<sup>136</sup> Ibid

<sup>137</sup> UNDP BiH, "7500 EU-funded COVID-19 testing kits delivered, delivery of medical masks begins", 2020, available at: [https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/covid-19-Delivery2.html](https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/covid-19-Delivery2.html)

<sup>138</sup> UNDP BiH, "Kingdom of Norway supports Covid-19 response by RS medical authorities", 2020, available at: [https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia\\_and\\_herzegovina/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/norwaysupportscovid19response-byRSinstitutions.html](https://www.ba.undp.org/content/bosnia_and_herzegovina/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/norwaysupportscovid19response-byRSinstitutions.html)

In Kosovo\*, the UNFPA and UNDP offices in Kosovo\* delivered over 8,500 food items to gender-based violence shelters throughout Kosovo\* as immediate assistance in these days of crisis.<sup>139</sup> The UNDP in Kosovo\* also provided much-needed protective items to the Kosovo\* Employment Agency, including protective masks, packages of rubber gloves and alcohol-based hand sanitisers.<sup>140</sup> Finally, 4,000 protective masks and rubber gloves and 500 bottles of hand sanitisers were donated to the Kosovo\* police.<sup>141</sup>

In Montenegro, the UNDP has worked to procure personal protective equipment for health workers, diagnostic and therapeutic medical devices (portable x-rays, medical ventilators, and others) and other necessary supplies for the proper functioning of healthcare facilities, with the financial support of the EU. Also, together with UNICEF, the UNDP has already equipped three quarantine facilities in Podgorica, Danilovgrad and Ulcinj. The equipment provided to these facilities consists of furniture, air-conditioning devices, household appliances, linen and bedding, and other supplies. This will improve and enhance the accommodation capacities of quarantine facilities.<sup>142</sup> The Delegation of the EU and the UNDP in Montenegro signed a contract worth €3 million to deliver necessary medical and protective equipment for health workers. The contract is funded by the EU and the project will be implemented by UNDP.<sup>143</sup>

In North Macedonia, it was difficult to find any online sources that indicate UNDP activities. Looking at the official profile of the UNDP North Macedonia on the UNDP's website, it appears that there were no projects in this economy after early 2018. Their Facebook page shows that the UNDP has, however, delivered five intensive care monitors to Skopje's Infectious Diseases Hospital in response to the government's needs in controlling the COVID-19 pandemic.<sup>144</sup> It also shows that within the UNDP's support for economically endangered communities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the UNDP awarded aid (food and sanitation products) to 80 families.<sup>145</sup>

In Serbia, the UNDP, in cooperation with the EU, has so far organised the arrival of 15 cargo aircraft with 720 tons of urgently-needed medical and protective supplies. The shipments delivered by these planes included respirators, protective masks and suits, medical gloves, and COVID-19 tests, intended for health care institutions throughout the economy, as well as others fighting the pandemic.<sup>146</sup> The transportation of these medical supplies was part of a recent, €7.5-million EU-UNDP initiative to enhance Serbia's preparedness to cope with disasters and emergencies and build resilience to crises and shocks at the national and local levels.

<sup>139</sup> UNDP Kosovo\*, "UNFPA and UNDP support shelters for protection of women and children throughout Kosovo\* with necessary food items", 2020, available at: <https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/04/01/unfpa-and-undp-support-shelters-for-protection-of-women-and-children.html>

<sup>140</sup> UNDP Kosovo\*, "UNDP provides protective items to the Kosovo\* Employment Agency", 2020, available at: <https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/04/06/undp-provides-protective-items-to-the-kosovo-employment-agency.html>

<sup>141</sup> UNDP Kosovo\*, "UNDP provides personal protective equipment to Kosovo\* Police to help counter the COVID-19 pandemic", 2020, available at: <https://www.ks.undp.org/content/kosovo/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/03/27/undp-provides-personal-protective-equipment-to-kosovo-police-to.html>

<sup>142</sup> UNDP Montenegro, "UNDP support to Montenegro in tackling the COVID-19 crisis", 2020, available at: <https://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/Covid19UNDPMontenegro.html>

<sup>143</sup> UNDP Montenegro, "EU and UNDP sign contract to deliver urgent medical equipment", 2020, available at: <https://www.me.undp.org/content/montenegro/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/EmergencyResponse.html>

<sup>144</sup> UNDP North Macedonia, Facebook Official Page, 2020, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/UNDPMK/posts/2635087976817832>

<sup>145</sup> UNDP North Macedonia, Facebook Official Page, 2020, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/UNDPMK/posts/2629674217359208>

<sup>146</sup> UNDP Serbia, "How is UNDP helping Serbia fight the coronavirus epidemic", 2020, available at: [https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/kako-undp-poma\\_e-srbiji-u-borbi-sa-epidemijom-korona-virusa.html](https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/kako-undp-poma_e-srbiji-u-borbi-sa-epidemijom-korona-virusa.html)

Funds and activities are still being realigned to immediately tackle the COVID-19 crisis.<sup>147</sup> There are also other examples of UNDP's active engagement in Serbia.<sup>148</sup> For example, UNDP has supported the organisation Tačka povratka (Returning Point) and the Government of the Republic of Serbia in their intention to issue an open call to health care workers from Serbia who are currently abroad but are not professionally engaged at the moment to temporarily return, if need be, and help with their expertise, experience and skills in the fight against the coronavirus. So far, 347 health care workers have responded to this call.<sup>149</sup>

**The Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)** operates in all of the Western Balkan economies except Montenegro.<sup>150</sup>

The SDC has separate 2017 to 2020 or 2018 to 2021 strategies for each of the WB economies it cooperates with. For now, it remains unknown why the SDC does not directly cooperate with Montenegro. According to the SDC's official website, the only explanation that is given is the following: "The SDC's activities in Montenegro concentrated on humanitarian aid from 1991. Since the economy's declaration of independence in 2006 the SDC's cooperation programme has focused on Serbia."<sup>151</sup>

Switzerland's cooperation with the economies of the Western Balkans has the following main objectives: to support the transition to democracy and market economy systems and to foster conflict prevention, social cohesion and inclusion.<sup>152</sup>

The goal of the SDC's Western Balkans Division (WBD)<sup>153</sup> is to support partner economies in their transitions to democratic market systems and contribute to their integrations at the regional and European levels. The joint cooperation strategies of the SDC and the State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO) form the basis of the programmes carried out in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, North Macedonia and Serbia. The following are the key focus areas of activity: decentralisation and good governance, economic development and (youth) employment, health, water and infrastructure, and migration.

The WBD also implements regional programmes in the areas of police cooperation and research, and helps fund regional initiatives.

The planned expenditures for Swiss cooperation in the Western Balkans from 2017 to 2020 amount to approximately CHF 538 million (approximately €511 million). Of this, the SDC contributes two thirds and SECO one third. In addition, other federal agencies are active in the Western Balkans, including the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM) within the framework of migration partnerships with Serbia, Bosnia and

<sup>147</sup> UNDP Europe and Central Asia, "In Serbia, EU and UNDP team up to fight COVID-19", 2020, available at: <https://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2020/serbia-eu-undp-team-to-fight-covid19.html>

<sup>148</sup> For a full list of activities, see: UNDP Serbia, "How is UNDP helping Serbia fight the coronavirus epidemic", 2020, available at: [https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/kako-undp-poma\\_e-srbiji-u-borbi-sa-epidemijom-korona-virusa.html](https://www.rs.undp.org/content/serbia/en/home/presscenter/articles/2020/kako-undp-poma_e-srbiji-u-borbi-sa-epidemijom-korona-virusa.html)

<sup>149</sup> Ibid.

<sup>150</sup> SDC, "SDC Western Balkans Division", available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/sdc/organisation/departments/cooperation-eastern-europe/western-balkans.html/content/contacts/en/contacts-zentrale/deza/OstZusArbeit/WestBalk>

<sup>151</sup> SDC, "Bilateral relations Switzerland–Montenegro", available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/dfa/representations-and-travel-advice/montenegro/switzerland-montenegro.html>

<sup>152</sup> SDC, "Swiss Cooperation in the Western Balkans", 2017, available at: [https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/die-deza/country-factsheet-wba\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eda.admin.ch/dam/deza/en/documents/die-deza/country-factsheet-wba_EN.pdf)

<sup>153</sup> SDC, "Western Balkans", available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/sdc/organisation/departments/cooperation-eastern-europe/western-balkans.html>

Herzegovina and Kosovo\*, the Human Security Division (HSD) of the FDFA, and the Federal Department of Defence, Civil Protection and Sport (DDPS), which are active in Kosovo\*.<sup>154</sup>

In Albania, as mentioned in the UNDP section, a joint partnership agreement was signed between the Albanian Ministry of Health and Social Protection and UNDP, along with the Swiss Embassy and the Royal Norwegian Embassy, outlining their support to help Albanian health authorities combat COVID-19 with the purchase of 30 ventilators. To this end, the Swiss Government is donating \$330,000.<sup>155</sup>

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland is making CHF 1.4 million (approximately €1.3 million) available to respond quickly to pressing needs caused by COVID-19. At the request of Bosnia and Herzegovina's health authorities, the Swiss Embassy (through UNDP) has also financed the urgent procurement of respirators, COVID-19 diagnostic tests and protective gear for hospitals throughout the economy.<sup>156</sup>

In Kosovo\*, the official websites of the Swiss Embassy and the SDC do not indicate how they have assisted Kosovo\* in the fight against the pandemic. Their Facebook page, however, shows that the SDC has allocated CHF 500,000 (approximately €470,000) to help Kosovo\* in the fight against the COVID-19 virus.<sup>157</sup> In coordination with other donors and the UNDP Kosovo\*, this support will be providing life-saving ventilators.

In North Macedonia, it remains unknown how much the Swiss have donated to the fight against the pandemic. There were, however, notable examples of practical assistance. The Municipality of Pehčevo, for instance, has formed local teams that will provide support to the elderly and infirm, people with disabilities, and people at social risk. These activities are implemented in cooperation with the UNDP and with financial assistance from the SDC, which have already provided funds and protective materials for the needs of these groups of citizens.<sup>158</sup> The Facebook page of the embassy shows that Switzerland has assisted North Macedonia in its efforts to fight COVID-19 by providing equipment to the emergency hospital in Skopje.<sup>159</sup> This page also shows that a new social service to support the most vulnerable citizens in the time of COVID-19 crisis was launched by the Ministry for Social Care in partnership with Switzerland and UNDP. Approximately 200 unemployed individuals were equipped with protective gear and trained to provide daily services for more than 1,500 people in need in 27 municipalities across the economy.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>154</sup> SDC, "Swiss Cooperation in the Western Balkans", 2017

<sup>155</sup> SDC, "Switzerland, Norway, and UNDP finance the purchase of 30 ventilators to help Albania counter COVID-19", 2020, available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/albania/en/home/news/news.html/content/countries/albania/en/meta/news/embassy/2020/ventilator-purchase-albania>

<sup>156</sup> SDC, "Swiss support in mitigating COVID-19 consequences in Bosnia and Herzegovina", 2020, available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina/en/home/news/news.html/content/countries/bosnia-and-herzegovina/en/meta/news/2020/april/swiss-support-in-mitigating-covid-19-consequences-in-bosnia-and-herzegovina>

<sup>157</sup> Embassy of Switzerland in Kosovo\*, Facebook Official Page, 2020, available at: [https://www.facebook.com/SwissEmbassyPristina/posts/switzerland-stands-together-with-Kosovo\\*-in-the-fight-against-covid-19-the-swiss-/3144972965521132/](https://www.facebook.com/SwissEmbassyPristina/posts/switzerland-stands-together-with-Kosovo*-in-the-fight-against-covid-19-the-swiss-/3144972965521132/)

<sup>158</sup> Utrinski Vesnik, "Формирање локални тимови за поддршка на најранливата категорија граѓани во Пехчево", 2020, available at (in Macedonian): <https://utrinskivesnik.mk/%d1%84%d0%be%d1%80%d0%bc%d0%b8%d1%80%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8-%d0%bb%d0%be%d0%ba%d0%b0%d0%bb%d0%bd%d0%b8-%d1%82%d0%b8%d0%bc%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%b8-%d0%b7-%d0%b0-%d0%bf%d0%be%d0%b4%d0%b4%d1%80%d1%88%d0%ba%d0%b0/>

<sup>159</sup> Embassy of Switzerland in North Macedonia, Facebook Official Profile, 2020, available at: <https://www.facebook.com/SwissEmbassySkopje/photos/a.1151962251597680/2664744403652783/?type=3&theater>

<sup>160</sup> Embassy of Switzerland in North Macedonia, Facebook Official Profile, 2020, available at: [https://www.facebook.com/SwissEmbassySkopje/photos/pcb.2640341076093116/2640339912759899/?type=3&\\_tn=HH-R&id=ARDdxI9uxZ6qzNatmjf3CDDA7G57ACyrlI5DgdBAOQjaTVIJZHw4pPLG5\\_0O6T5l-Z5lurjSHOeP9T5-&xts\\_%5B0%5D=68.ARCsOui3\\_VIntno4sIVkNguuegncl8-GTughnaAdig59utYmQXXIBCST44-vKiIZT7edAllKhnPV2-v4Ay-cjw4CbdtTTOB\\_cCFKc3jLbp5kvj2S51Opx\\_Ggtdsdy3fRk8xbgSZEMMz-oeWxUXebVMtSgnzkw-p\\_VGkw5clay26Ts7BC3lt-N7RflAg-dPjrXGpOWRNrXsEKRPuH5O5Z1fKJ6Y6pslaOS-CyYqql7sTJq7uVin6Sgtp9WiloASOTWsbBe\\_gJsaDOJMD5oPc\\_u9Vfj3plEw94wUJY5mK\\_IAt2jUHC9k8ch7dLkbc0c9zn3W4NDsgSftfuXfhmmCB\\_Hp\\_8WR](https://www.facebook.com/SwissEmbassySkopje/photos/pcb.2640341076093116/2640339912759899/?type=3&_tn=HH-R&id=ARDdxI9uxZ6qzNatmjf3CDDA7G57ACyrlI5DgdBAOQjaTVIJZHw4pPLG5_0O6T5l-Z5lurjSHOeP9T5-&xts_%5B0%5D=68.ARCsOui3_VIntno4sIVkNguuegncl8-GTughnaAdig59utYmQXXIBCST44-vKiIZT7edAllKhnPV2-v4Ay-cjw4CbdtTTOB_cCFKc3jLbp5kvj2S51Opx_Ggtdsdy3fRk8xbgSZEMMz-oeWxUXebVMtSgnzkw-p_VGkw5clay26Ts7BC3lt-N7RflAg-dPjrXGpOWRNrXsEKRPuH5O5Z1fKJ6Y6pslaOS-CyYqql7sTJq7uVin6Sgtp9WiloASOTWsbBe_gJsaDOJMD5oPc_u9Vfj3plEw94wUJY5mK_IAt2jUHC9k8ch7dLkbc0c9zn3W4NDsgSftfuXfhmmCB_Hp_8WR)

In Serbia, Switzerland has provided up to €600,000 to take immediate actions. The focus of these funds will be on the most vulnerable within Serbian society.<sup>161</sup> Furthermore, a truck carrying tents, blankets and tarpaulins donated by the Swiss Humanitarian Aid arrived this week in Serbia. Switzerland also supports Serbia's Commissariat for Refugees and Migration in providing migrants with shelter and alleviating the situation in asylum centres. Finally, a repatriation flight chartered by the Swiss government was organised on 4<sup>th</sup> April, carrying nearly 200 Serbian citizens wishing to come back home. Residents in Switzerland or passengers in transit were able to use this flight.<sup>162</sup>

**The Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA)** operates in all of the Western Balkan economies.

SIDA pursues its efforts within the framework of the Stabilisation and Association Process.<sup>163</sup> For the period from 2014 to 2020, coinciding with the EU's Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA), it has had the "Results strategy for Sweden's reform cooperation with Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey".<sup>164</sup> It is stated that cooperation with the Western Balkans totals about SEK 3.6 billion (approximately €338 million), of which SIDA is expected to manage about SEK 3.5 billion (approximately €319.5 million) and the Swedish Institute is expected to manage about SEK 60 million (approximately €5.6 million).<sup>165</sup>

In 2019, SIDA aided the individual Western Balkan economies with the following amounts: Albania - \$13.1 million; Bosnia and Herzegovina - \$20.9 million; Kosovo\* - \$12.6 million; North Macedonia - \$5.1 million; and Serbia - \$14.2 million.<sup>166</sup> Montenegro is an outlier, receiving only \$141,000 in 2019, this following a trend of providing almost no significant donations to this economy since 2010.

The activities of SIDA in the Western Balkans are expected to result in the following: enhanced economic integration with the EU and the development of market economies; strengthened democracy, greater respect for human rights; more fully developed state under the rule of law; and better environment, reduced climate impacts, and enhanced resilience to environmental impacts and climate change. These initiatives should contribute to creating conditions for the economies of the Western Balkans to become members of the EU.

**GIZ** (*Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit*) operates in all of the Western Balkan economies.

According to official GIZ data, it has invested the following amount in each of the Western Balkan economies: in Albania, €76 million for 17 projects (91% without co-financing); in Bosnia and Herzegovina, €133 million for 20 projects (64% without co-financing); in Kosovo\*, €82.5 million for 20 projects (90%

<sup>161</sup> SDC, "Embassy of Switzerland in Serbia", available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/belgrade>

<sup>162</sup> SDC, "Switzerland's support to Serbia in the fight against the Covid-19", 2020, available at: <https://www.eda.admin.ch/countries/serbia/en/home/search/search-result.html/content/countries/serbia/en/meta/news/2020/april/press-release-covid-19>

<sup>163</sup> Sida, "Regional cooperation in Europe", 2015, available at: <https://www.sida.se/English/where-we-work/Europe/Region-Europe/>

<sup>164</sup> Sweden's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans and Turkey", 2014, available at: <https://www.regeringen.se/49b72b/contentassets/12a89180baf43e3823b6c6f18b6d86a/results-strategy-for-swedens-reform-co-operation-with-eastern-europe-the-western-balkans-and-turkey-2014-2020>

<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

<sup>166</sup> Open Aid, "Sida Total Aid Over Time", 2019, available at: <https://openaid.se/aid/swedish-international-development-cooperation-agency/world/2019/>

without co-financing); in Montenegro, approximately €10 million for 8 projects (77% without co-financing); in North Macedonia, €26 million for 13 projects (89% without co-financing), and in Serbia, €108 million for 26 projects (82% without co-financing).<sup>167</sup>

From a regional perspective, the value of GIZ's projects totals €437 million for 82 projects (with an average rate of 80% without co-financing).<sup>168</sup> This support is provided in part via the open regional funds for South-East Europe.

Although GIZ manages separate portfolios for individual Western Balkan economies, it is clear that the themes it tackles are common for all of them, including rural development, sustainable infrastructure, social development, governance and democracy, environment and climate change, and economic development and employment.

**The World Bank Group** (WBG) has provided development support to all the Western Balkan economies. Today, the WBG supports the EU accession paths of the Western Balkan economies and helps them to address their main development constraints.

The WBG has a Western Balkan Programme. This programme currently supports reform in the following main areas:

- macro, fiscal, and financial sustainability
- governance, institutions, and public sector reform
- business environment, private sector development, and competitiveness
- jobs, and disincentives and barriers to work
- regional cooperation and connectivity, and
- climate change and resilience<sup>169</sup>

The WBG will enhance the regional focus of this programme through both lending and knowledge products (advisory services and analytics). While over the past years the WBG has contributed to informed policymaking in Western Balkans by delivering several important regional knowledge products, attention has recently shifted to regional lending operations that address intra-regional priorities in the areas of connectivity and equity.

As of October 2019, the World Bank active lending portfolio amounts to \$3.02 billion and includes 54 operations. The undisbursed balance is \$1.64 billion (about 58% of the active portfolio). The average project age is 4 years.<sup>170</sup>

Trust funds are an important part of the WBG's Programme in the Western Balkans. Currently, the WBG's Western Balkan trust fund portfolio comprises about 100 individual tasks for which \$143 million

<sup>167</sup> GIZ, "Project Data", available at: [https://www.giz.de/projektdaten/index.action;sessionId=DF41A5F005699DC-C563822CAB365E062?request\\_locale=en\\_GB#?region=4&countries=AD,AL,AM,AT,AZ,BA,BE,BG,BY,CH,CS,CY,CZ,DDR,DE,D-K,EE,ES,EUM,EUR,FI,FO,FR,GB,GE,GG,GI,GL,GR,HR,HU,IE,IM,IS,IT,JE,KAU,KOS,LI,LT,LU,LV,MC,MD,ME,MK,MOE,MS,MT,NL,NO,PL,PT,RO,RS,RU,SE,SI,SK,SM,SOE,STA,TC,TR,UA,VA,XK](https://www.giz.de/projektdaten/index.action;sessionId=DF41A5F005699DC-C563822CAB365E062?request_locale=en_GB#?region=4&countries=AD,AL,AM,AT,AZ,BA,BE,BG,BY,CH,CS,CY,CZ,DDR,DE,D-K,EE,ES,EUM,EUR,FI,FO,FR,GB,GE,GG,GI,GL,GR,HR,HU,IE,IM,IS,IT,JE,KAU,KOS,LI,LT,LU,LV,MC,MD,ME,MK,MOE,MS,MT,NL,NO,PL,PT,RO,RS,RU,SE,SI,SK,SM,SOE,STA,TC,TR,UA,VA,XK)

<sup>168</sup> GIZ, "Project Data – Western Balkans", available at: [https://www.giz.de/projektdaten/index.action;sessionId=DF41A5F-005699DCC563822CAB365E062?request\\_locale=en\\_GB#?region=4&countries=RS,BA,ME,XK,MK,AL](https://www.giz.de/projektdaten/index.action;sessionId=DF41A5F-005699DCC563822CAB365E062?request_locale=en_GB#?region=4&countries=RS,BA,ME,XK,MK,AL)

<sup>169</sup> World Bank, "Western Balkans Program Overview", 2019, available at: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/region/eca/brief/vienna-see-program-overview>

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

of donor funding had been mobilised to date. The EU is by far the most prominent donor to the WB Programme, and has provided over 60% of total trust fund financing.<sup>171</sup>

**The UK Department for International Development (DFID)** cooperates with all the Western Balkan economies.

The United Kingdom in general has active projects through the DFID in the Western Balkan economies: six in Albania, four in Bosnia and Herzegovina, four in Kosovo\*, four in Montenegro, three in North Macedonia, and nine in Serbia.<sup>172</sup>

Most notable project is implemented via the Good Governance Fund (GGF), investing in Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia and Serbia. It is not exclusive to the Western Balkans, as it also encompasses Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. The total budget for 2015-20 was £44.9 million,<sup>173</sup> but there is no source available online to indicate how much of this funding was divided among the Western Balkan economies. The next programme is set to last until 2023.

The GGF's primary objective is to build resilience in targeted economies by providing support for domestic reform agendas which reduce corruption, promote transparent and accountable institutions, and build open and inclusive economies and societies.<sup>174</sup> This project was approved before the referendum on the UK's membership in the EU. Through the GGF it has supported a series of governance and economic reform initiatives aimed at building stability, reducing poverty and increasing prosperity. In the following period, the fund will continue to focus on areas such as anti-corruption measures, improving the business environment, judicial reform, key sector reforms (such as in banking and energy), strengthening rule of law, and supporting independent media.

**Luxembourg Agency for Development Cooperation (LuxDev)** at the moment only has projects in Kosovo\*, although in past years it also had projects in Montenegro and Serbia.<sup>175</sup>

An office of the Luxembourgish Development Cooperation was established in Pristina in 1999. Bilateral support through LuxDev focuses on health, vocational training and water sector in Kosovo\*. It currently has four active projects in Kosovo\*.<sup>176</sup>

**The EU's Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)** represents the largest financial assistance tool for the Western Balkan economies. The IPA aims to prepare candidates and potential candidates for EU membership and the rights and obligations associated with it.

From January 2007 onwards, the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) replaces a series of EU programmes and financial instruments for candidate countries or potential candidate countries.<sup>177</sup> The IPA is aligned with and derived from Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) reporting periods, which last

<sup>171</sup> Ibid.

<sup>172</sup> Available at: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/location/country/>

<sup>173</sup> UKAID, "Development Tracker", available at: <https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/projects/GB-COH-03580586-5000533034>

<sup>174</sup> Bidstats, "Good Governance Fund (GGF) Contract Notice", available at: <http://bidstats.uk/tenders/2019/W33/709034368>

<sup>175</sup> LuxDev, "Balkans Luxembourg Development Cooperation", 2011, available at: [http://luxdev.lu/files/documents/BAL\\_web.pdf](http://luxdev.lu/files/documents/BAL_web.pdf)

<sup>176</sup> LuxDev, "Our Regional Office", available at: [https://kosovo.luxdev.lu/en/office#our\\_projects](https://kosovo.luxdev.lu/en/office#our_projects)

<sup>177</sup> Available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/regional\\_policy/en/funding/ipa/](https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/funding/ipa/)

seven years. IPA I lasted from 2007 to 2013, with a budget of €11.5 billion, and IPA II from 2014 to 2020, with a financial envelope of €11.7 billion, respectively. IPA II enabled assistance through 4 multi-country channels that provide a viable complement to national assistance, including: 1 - horizontal support: technical assistance, information and training; 2 - regional structures and networks: promotes regional cooperation, networking and sharing of best practices to help beneficiaries prepare for EU membership; 3 - regional investment support targeting projects with clear regional dimensions that help socio-economic development; and 4 - territorial cooperation in promoting good neighbourly relations.<sup>178</sup> IPA III is set to last from 2021 to 2027, with a final budget that is yet to be agreed upon by the EU member states. Whatever is decided during MFF negotiations, it should be noted that the Commission did set a promising start by proposing an IPA III budget of €14.5 billion in current prices.<sup>179</sup> While continuity is to be ensured, IPA III is expected to become more strategic through novelties such as changing the way the budget is allocated (with programming based on themes and priorities rather than by country), increasing flexibility to respond to evolving needs, and ensuring greater impacts through increased coherence.<sup>180</sup>

## Key findings

All WB6 economies have deficient strategic planning systems, characterised by the absence of cohesion between their valid strategic documents, absence of “roof strategies” and long-term visions, and poor reporting, monitoring and evaluation of the implementation of existing strategies. Most of the economies have recently adopted legislative amendments in their policy planning systems aimed to address these shortcomings; however their effects are yet to be seen. Moreover, short policy cycles in the WB6 economies, due to features such as snap elections and short-lived governments, are a very present phenomenon and further exacerbate problems in effective policy planning process. This state of play negatively affects efforts to draw parallels and extrapolate commonalities between the strategic priorities in the period after 2020. At the same time, the necessity for the harmonisation of policy planning systems represents an opportunity for the RCC’s post-2020 strategy to serve as a reference point, or framework, for future actions taken by the WB6 economies in rationalising their policy planning systems.

From a comparative perspective, the findings based on national reports are scarce when it comes to the linkages of the WB6 economies with the EU priorities. Nevertheless, given that post-2020 national strategic frameworks tend to extend beyond 2025 on topics related to energy security, environment, climate, transportation and digital transformation, there is great potential for incorporating policy measures stemming from the Green Deal and the EU Digital Single Market into national policy in the WB6 in the upcoming period. The potential acceleration of the EU accession process of the WB6 would stimulate these economies to align with the EU acquis and enforce newly adopted legislation. Alternatively, greater connections and interdependence between the EU and the WB6 due to the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic will also lend favour to the better interlinkage of the WB6 national strategic frameworks with the EU.

<sup>178</sup> European Commission, “Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA)”, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/multi-beneficiary-programme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/multi-beneficiary-programme_en)

<sup>179</sup> European Parliament, “Legislative Train Schedule – IPA III”, 2020, available at: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-new-boost-for-jobs-growth-and-investment/file-mff-ipa-iii>

<sup>180</sup> European Parliament, “Briefing – IPA III”, 2018, available at: [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/630298/EPRS\\_BRI\(2018\)630298\\_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2018/630298/EPRS_BRI(2018)630298_EN.pdf)

When it comes to the number and duration of existing strategies, comparative overview shows that in most of the economies the number of valid strategies has decreased compared to the previous decade. This is due either to an overall tendency towards rationalising the number of strategic documents and efforts to render national strategic frameworks more harmonised (see Section 2.3.1), or due to the expiry of certain strategies which have not yet been followed up. The findings show that, safe for Montenegro and Serbia, in other economies most strategic documents are valid up to 2025.

In terms of topical distribution, the greatest number of strategies in all national frameworks deal with home affairs issues. Economic topics are the second most frequently covered comparatively, followed by energy/climate and environment. Some 80% of the topics are covered by all or the majority of the economies, whereas some 20% of policy areas are dealt with either by a single economy or not more than two.

In terms of donor assistance to the region, the analysis of key themes shows that various donors share similar interests, especially in regard to support to the transition towards consolidated democracy and developed and sustainable economies. Typically, key areas of focus are: democracy, rule of law, good governance, human rights, sustainable development, environment, employment, health, youth, education, fight against corruption, support to vulnerable populations, and support to civil society, including regional cooperation and connectivity. The variety of topics shows that international donor assistance to the region goes beyond mere support to economic development, also encompassing areas essential for democratic functioning. Furthermore, it appears that the region has maintained a relatively stable level of priority for international donors in the past years. Comparative time analysis indicates that funds have not witnessed major cuts in most cases. Considering, for example, that the U.S., the UK and the EU have faced various crises of their own in the past years, the region has strong reasons to be satisfied with the fact that these major partners still provide and are likely to continue to provide significant assistance. In fact, there are no indications that the U.S., the UK and the EU will cease to provide substantial assistance to the region any time so. Meanwhile, the latest round of international donor assistance, provided to the region during the COVID-19 pandemic, shows that the region is still on the maps of most relevant donor organisations and international players. Nevertheless, in order for the assistance to be more effective, there is always room for better promotion in the local media in order to catch the “hearts and minds” of the local population. This especially applies to Serbia, as the latest polls show that the majority of its population considers China as the largest donor, while the EU is lagging far behind it in the minds of the Serbian citizens.<sup>181</sup>

## 2.4. LINKAGES OF REGIONAL PRIORITIES WITH UNITED NATIONS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The analysis in this section is primarily based on the six reports on the preparation of post-2020 strategy provided to the RCC. Other documents that contributed to the analysis were the following: Voluntary National Reviews from all Western Balkan economies, North Macedonia Environmental Performance Reviews by UNECE, UN Kosovo\* Team website, North Macedonia’s Partnership for Sustainable

<sup>181</sup> Institut za evropske poslove, “Istraživanje javnog mnjenja – Stavovi građana prema Rusiji”, 2020, slide 5, available at (in Serbian): <http://iea.rs/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Stav-gra%C4%91ana-Srbije-prema-Rusiji-mart-2020.pdf>

Development - UN Strategy for 2016-2020, and Serbia-UN SDG Knowledge platform. These documents were used to complement and cross-check the information provided in the national expert reports.

The findings present a comparative analysis of linkages of strategic priorities of the WB economies - Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia - with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). When it comes to the SDGs and the Western Balkans, most of the substantial and relevant work regarding this issue has taken place as of 2015. Since then, all of these economies made commitments to the implementation of the *Transforming Our World—The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. In practice, however, much remains to be done in order to properly interlink the national systems with the SDGs.

All of the economies have a long way to fully align with the SDGs, while the indicator framework and target system remain insufficiently developed. Furthermore, the monitoring system remains underdeveloped in all of the regional economies, which is why higher participation of the national parliaments, as well as the civil society organisations (CSO), is needed. In addition, only four out of six Western Balkan economies have submitted their Voluntary National Reviews – national documents aimed to be transparent and participatory as well as based on robust evidence on the implementation of the 2030 Agenda - to the UN. Kosovo\* has not done it, as it is not a UN member, while North Macedonia announced its intention to publish the Review in summer 2020 as a first-time presenter. The economies that had already submitted their first review are nevertheless expected, and encouraged, to submit a second one when possible in order to properly track progress over time.

As most of the national documents related to the incorporation and implementation of the SDGs expire after 2020, the current period is of great significance for the Western Balkans. In fact, 2020 will be a “strategic planning year” for the WB economies, which is why they will need to put significant efforts to determine their short- and long-term commitments to the implementation of the SDGs. Considering that all WB economies aspire to join the EU, the process of EU integration has also served as an important encouragement and an effective pathway for the implementation of the SDGs in the respective economies. For this reason, the EU’s support to the WB economies will remain indispensable even in the following period.

All things considered, the comparative analysis presented in this report shows that the Western Balkan economies share many commonalities, especially as none of them has fully completed the process regarding the implementation of the SDGs. All Western Balkan economies therefore need to undertake the following activities: continue efforts on improving monitoring, evaluation and reporting of the implementation of the SDGs; improve capacity and mechanisms for advanced administrative data collection; prepare for the next National Voluntary Review Report; extend and deepen the consultation process with the civil society organisations and other relevant stakeholders; and raise awareness among the wider population on the importance of the SDGs.

## Key Findings of the Comparative Analysis

### National Strategies

All Western Balkan economies have adopted development strategies – horizontal or sectoral - related to the implementation of the SDGs. These typically cover the period from 2015 or 2016 to 2020. As

2020 represents an end of a cycle, most governments are in the preparation phase for the new strategic framework planning cycle post-2020. Considering the overarching importance of proper planning of the implementation of SDG-related activities, especially as the region lags far behind the EU in terms of socio-economic convergence, it will be of great importance to have the strategic setting properly set in the following period. Also, considering that there is weak genuine commitment by the political elites to the issue of SDGs, there is the need to ensure that even properly set frameworks are adequately implemented.

- In **Albania**, the National Strategy for Development and Integration (NSDI-II) 2015-2020 is the key policy document outlining the development vision for the economy. The SDGs are integrated into NSDI II, including a specific annex showing the links between the pillars and sub-themes, and the different SDGs. In 2017, the Prime Minister’s Office initiated the development of a National Action Plan for Albania’s pursuit of SDG. In the same year, the Albania’s Parliament unanimously approved a resolution confirming the economy’s commitment to 2030 Agenda. The Baseline Report on SDGs was prepared and adopted by the Inter-Ministerial Committee on SDGs in January 2018. In the same year, Albania adopted the Voluntary National Review, which highlighted the progress Albania made in implementing the SDGs in the period from 2015 to 2017. The issue remains that the actual NSDI II, as well as a number of economy’s sectoral and cross-cutting strategies are at their final stage and will soon expire.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina** has been working on internalising the UN’s SDG agenda since 2016. The development strategies reviewed through the UN Rapid Integrated Assessment show that sustainable development in Bosnia and Herzegovina is generally well covered. The strategic documents, programmes and action plans reflect all 17 SDGs from 2030 Agenda. However, Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to establish an effective strategic planning system regarding the SDGs. Following the administration of the Voluntary National Review in 2019, Bosnia and Herzegovina is now committed to developing an SDG Framework for the economy, currently being crafted. This document is expected to inform strategic documents at institutions of all levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina. At present, with the SDG framework under construction, there is little detail available about individual programmes and performance indicators that can be used at a later stage to drive the post-2020 agenda and help gauge its progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Kosovo\*** remains a unique example in the region, as it is not a signatory to 2030 Agenda and the SDGs at the UN General Assembly due to its unresolved status of statehood. Nevertheless, since 2015 it has joined the rest of the region to achieve the SDGs. In 2016, the National Development Strategy 2016-21 (NDS) was adopted and has undergone the SDG compliance check, while the verification process for sectorial strategies is still ongoing. Furthermore, in 2018, Kosovo\*s Assembly adopted a parliamentary resolution endorsing the 2030 Agenda and the SDGs. Finally, as it is not a member of the UN, it has not sent the Voluntary National Review to the UN, which makes it more difficult to follow the progress over time.
- In **Montenegro**, the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (NSOR) until 2030 serves as a horizontal strategy which is in line with the SDGs. It represents a strategic framework for the transposition of the SDGs and its indicators into the national context. The NSOR is accompanied by its Action Plan which includes thematic areas, goals, measures, sub-measures, baseline indicators, targeted values and a proposed list of numerous indicators to measure progress in implementing the Strategy. Furthermore, Montenegro was the first in the region to submit its

Voluntary National Review, having done so in 2016. However, it has not submitted the second report in 2019, which means that the earlier one is at this point outdated.

- **North Macedonia** appears to lack a central document integrating all SDGs, as it rather has several different strategic documents targeting various SDGs. Notable documents include the National Strategy for Sustainable Development until 2030. Furthermore, the Government is currently initiating the process of elaboration of the Voluntary National Review in line with the SDGs. The report is expected to be promoted during the first half of 2020 and it will consist of national plans to contribute to the achievement of these goals.
- In **Serbia**, mapping results show that, under its existing strategic framework, it is committed to the achievement of the SDGs. Serbia, however, lacks an umbrella document comparable in its format to a National Development Plan, which would be based on a long-term vision with clearly defined priorities, measures and activities/projects to be implemented – as its National Sustainable Development Strategy expired in 2017 (originally adopted in 2009). In addition, many strategies contain phrases such as ‘National’ or ‘Development Strategy’ in their titles, but their contents and areas they address show they cannot be considered overarching strategies because they deal only with strategic planning in individual sectors or parts of sectors. Also, there are areas where key sector-specific strategies are missing or where the implementation of specific strategic documents is not monitored, which hinders the assessment of Serbia’s progress in the achievement of relevant SDGs. Currently, 34 strategies, action plans and programmes that are relevant for post-2020 period are under preparation. Some of them are already drafted, some are in the public debate phase and some are adopted by the Government or under way to be adopted in the Parliament. Finally, Serbia submitted the Voluntary National Review in 2019.

## Responsible Institutions

- Most Western Balkan economies have established Inter-Ministerial bodies and/or units with their respective governments with the task to organise the implementation of the SDGs. Such bodies are typically comprised of high-level officials, which gives further political importance to the achievement of the SDGs. The National Assemblies, in most cases, remain insufficiently involved in the institutional process that deals with the SDGs. The fact that the process is driven primarily by the governmental bodies shows that the strategic planning and implementation primarily depends on the executive branch. It represents a larger trend of centralised approach towards policymaking in the region, while minimising the role of the legislature. Only by having joint cooperation of the executive and legislative branch can the topic of the SDGs be more inclusive and effective, as well as better communicated to the public. Increased role of the Assembly would also allow it to better monitor the implementation rate. In **Albania**, the Inter-Ministerial Committee on SDGs was established in 2017 and is actively leading the 2030 Agenda processes in the economy. It is chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Albania and is comprised of representatives of key government institutions, representatives of local government, civil society, academia, development partners/ international agencies and business organisations. Also, the technical support is provided by the Department of Development and Good Governance in the PM’s Office, and the SDG Inter-Ministerial Technical Working Group.

- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the Rollout Working Group on the SDGs created three subgroups in 2018, each tasked to lead the process of crafting the Voluntary Review of Bosnia and Herzegovina, drafting the SDG Framework document, and working on data/statistics for the SDGs. The members of the working group comprise representatives from the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Directorate for Economic Planning and the governments of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republika Srpska and Brčko District.
- In **Kosovo\***, SDG focal points within the Government were appointed (Strategic Planning Office, Ministry of Economy and Ministry of Finance). Also, in 2018, the Assembly established the Council for Sustainable Development to work on monitoring the practical implementation of the SDGs. As such, it is comprised of the members of the Assembly while calling on other partners to support the Assembly.
- In **Montenegro**, in 2014 the Government assigned the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism the task to coordinate continuation of activities regarding the NSOR. The National Council for Sustainable Development, Climate Changes and Integrated Coastal Zone Management of Montenegro deliberates the reports on the NSOR implementation and gives final recommendations before the reports are sent to the Government for adoption. The Division for Sustainable Development and Integrated Coastal Zone Management in the Ministry of Sustainable Development and Tourism (formerly the Office for Sustainable Development) oversees the process of monitoring the implementation of NSOR.
- In **North Macedonia**, the SDG implementation plan, as well as a five-year action plan, is being developed under the overall responsibility of the Office of the Vice Prime Minister to mainstream the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the national level. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is responsible for coordinating Government activities and ensuring that Government commitments related to the Partnership for Sustainable Development are fulfilled. The Ministry focuses on the strategic level and oversees the contribution that line ministries are making to the overall achievement of the five Partnership outcomes.
- In **Serbia**, Inter-Ministerial Working Group (IMWG) for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was established in 2015. It represents an institutional mechanism responsible for coordinating, following and reporting on the implementation of 2030 Agenda. It is composed of high-ranking representatives of 27 line ministries and Government offices, chaired by the Minister in charge of Demography and Population Policy. In their written submissions, all ministries have provided a list of projects they are currently implementing that contribute to the implementation of strategies and directly or indirectly to attaining the SDGs.

## Indicators, Measures & Targets

- Setting proper indicators for measuring progress regarding 17 SDGs remains an issue, as some SDGs have low number of indicators, while some have none. Without properly setting the indicators, the progress will be difficult to measure. In that context, there is also a considerable percentage of partially aligned and unaligned SDG targets with the national systems. The working bodies therefore need to put more effort into developing a more detailed system of indicators,



measures and targets. Otherwise, the economies of the region would show that they are not fully dedicated to the proper and full implementation of the SDGs. The expert level is often understaffed and underfinanced in the regional administrations. For this reason, they will need sincere political support and genuine backing in order to properly handle the SDG planning and implementation. In **Albania**, the level of integration of SDGs into NSDI II and the various sectoral strategies was evaluated in 2016 through a UN Rapid Integrated Assessment tool. The assessment shows that of 169 SDG targets, 58 are aligned with the national policy, 72 are partially aligned, 19 are unaligned, and 20 are irrelevant to Albania. Thus, alignment of the SDG targets in the national policy is at some 60 percent. When it comes to the NSDI II, 140 SDG targets (83%) are directly tied to specific components of its pillars. 134 SDG targets (79%) are also linked to the specific objectives of the national strategic policy framework.

- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, according to the results of the UN SDGs 2030 Rapid Integrated Assessment, out of all planning documents reviewed in the course of their study, fewer than half had assigned indicators. So far, some 48 out of total of 169 priorities available under the SDG umbrella have been identified.
- In **Kosovo\***, the analysis of the alignment of key European Integration Agenda documents with the SDGs show that its “2019 Country Report” has the convergence of 63.91%. The second highest alignment can be found with the Economic Reform Programme at 47.54% while the SAA presents a much lower degree of convergence, with only 21.05% of its provisions matching SDG targets. When it comes to the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (2014 – 2020 financial perspective), only 14.73% of the funds match the SDG targets’ implementation.
- In **Montenegro**, out of 169 specific targets of sustainable development, structured in 17 SDGs, 167 were transposed into measures defined in the NSOR Action Plan. Only two targets (9.a and 9.c) were not relevant for Montenegro. The adoption of a new Voluntary National Review Report is needed in order to have the latest data in all aspects regarding the SDGs.
- In **North Macedonia**, national 2020+ priorities and objectives contribute to 10 out of 17 SDGs. Many other strategic papers and documents (such as water strategy, waste management strategy, national action plan for reducing inequalities, national strategy for reducing poverty and social inclusion) include priorities set to contribute to the SDGs. Therefore, there is not a single SDG that has not been covered by some national policy document in North Macedonia.
- In **Serbia**, its officials stated the intention to work on fulfilling all 17 SDGs according to 244 indicators. The biggest number of indicators and activities was selected within the areas covered by SDG 3 (27) and SDG 16 (25). Other SDGs contain between 10 and 15 indicators. In Serbia, all 17 goals were declared, with 244 indicators including all three dimensions of sustainable development: economic growth, social inclusion and environmental protection. One of the crucial documents is Declaration on the role of national statistical offices in measuring and monitoring the SDGs, which states that the national statistical offices are committed to contribute their expertise to measure SDGs in a professional, independent and impartial way. Institutional capacity of the Statistical Office has been significantly improved. Quantification of the fulfilment of national targets is enabled and all data are regularly updated and made publicly available.

## Consultations and Involvement of Civil Society

The process of drafting national strategies and documents was, in most cases, accompanied by a consultative process. The process was conducted not only between the government and the line ministries, but also with the parliaments, civil society experts, academia and other stakeholders. Nevertheless, it remains unclear to what extent the input provided by these stakeholders was put to practice. As SDG implementation remains incomplete, deeper cooperation with CSOs is needed to boost the process and to make it more transparent. Without any feedback and greater involvement of the CSOs, there can hardly be a bottom-up support to the process of planning the implementation of SDGs in the region. The inclusion of CSOs should be perceived from a wider perspective, as governments of the region in general have had reserved stance towards the civil society, whom they sometimes perceive as rivals instead of partners.

- In **Albania**, consultative meetings were organised with the participation of the civil society organisations (CSO), academia, local governments and development partners. As part of the engagement of all stakeholders in the process, 25 public and private universities and faculties signed an agreement committing to play an active role in advancing the 2030 Agenda in October 2017. The National Council on Civil Society engaged in approving a public statement on supporting 2030 Agenda for the economy in June 2018. When it comes to the process of Voluntary National Review, external consultations were held with more than 60 invited representatives of civil society, academia, businesses and interest groups.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the SDG Framework is currently being crafted through an extensive consultative process with parliaments, private sector, CSOs and the academia, among others. A Private Sector Group established with respect to the SDGs and several other stakeholders from civil society and the academia were active in the process of creation of the Voluntary National Review.
- In **Kosovo\***, most of the initiatives have been supported substantially by the UN Kosovo\* Team. In parallel to the support provided to Kosovo\* institutions, the UN Development Coordinator has engaged with the private sector and civil society aiming at wider awareness and cross-sector cooperation on UN 2030 Agenda in Kosovo\*. It remains unclear how and to what extent CSOs were involved in processes initiated by the Government SDG focal points.
- In **Montenegro**, the public consultations process was organised on the NSOR 2030. Most consultations were held in 2016, with stakeholders from local self-governments, CSOs, academia and the business sector. Also, consultations were held with representatives of 26 institutions - official and administrative data producers relevant to monitoring the implementation of NSOR. At the moment, there is no data that would showcase whether civil society was invited to take part in the process since 2016 and if so, to what extent they participated. Looking at other UN-related examples, it is known that the Integrated UN Programme for Montenegro 2017-2021 strategic document was jointly developed by the UN Country Team in Montenegro and the Government of Montenegro, in collaboration with the CSOs, academia and international stakeholders.
- In **North Macedonia**, the Government invited all interested stakeholders to participate in the preparation of the upcoming Voluntary National Review. In the last few years, the situation in the economy has significantly improved in this respect where the process of drafting policy documents now includes wider consultations with different stakeholders.

- In **Serbia**, the Focus Group of the National Assembly for the Development of Control Mechanisms for the Process of Implementation of the SDGs, established in 2017, initiated the first public hearing on SDGs implementation. It gathered CSOs and other relevant stakeholders. The Office for Cooperation with Civil Society of the Government of Serbia, whose representatives are members of the Inter-ministerial Working Group for the Implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, published a public call for CSOs to contribute to the development of the first Voluntary National Review. 21 civil society organisations applied.

## EU Integration Process

As all Western Balkan economies have aspirations to join the EU, they have put efforts to linking the fulfilment of the SDGs with their EU agendas. The practice has shown that the fulfilment of the SDGs is deeply interlinked with the ongoing EU integration reform process taking place in these economies. Without the credible perspective of joining and unequivocal support of the EU, it is unlikely that the regional economies would have been prepared to take it upon themselves to implement SDGs, especially as the EU remains the key supporter of the region in terms of financial and technical support. The donations and loans by the EU, especially in cooperation with International Financial Institutions, are the way forward and more cooperation is expected. The EU thus stands out, especially when compared with other foreign actors which are increasingly getting involved in the region, such as Russia and China, whose projects have no conditioning or special focus on the SDG implementation.

- In **Albania**, links have been established between the SDGs and the EU integration goals, including reference to the Albanian National Plan for European Integration (NPEI) 2014–2020 and the acquis chapters of EU accession negotiations. European integration is the overarching priority of NSDI II.
- In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the EU accession, 2030 Agenda and the SDGs are perceived as mutually reinforcing and complementary processes, with domestic authorities increasingly internalising the requirements of both processes through legislation as well as the supporting strategic documents.
- In **Kosovo\***, every strategic document prepared by the Government is required to be in line with EU priorities. A thorough analysis of requirements deriving from the EU approximation agenda and 2030 Agenda has been initiated by the UNDC office in Kosovo\*. The aim of the analysis is to identify the potential for synergies as well as potential gaps to enable both Kosovo\* institutions and its international partners to engage in coordinated, mutually reinforcing implementation of SDGs and EU approximation requirements. Work towards the fulfilment of the SDGs also honours Kosovo\*'s commitment to objectives such as the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and its aspirations of EU integration.
- In **Montenegro**, according to joint assessment conducted by UN and Government of Montenegro, there is a complementarity between the EU accession process and the achievement of 2030 Agenda and SDGs, as these are intertwined processes. Almost two-thirds of SDG targets have a strong link to the negotiation chapters of the EU accession process.

- In **North Macedonia**, many of the policy documents adopted in the past several years, apart from its national priorities (which are in many aspects aligned with the UN, EU and international initiatives in which the economy participates), set path for contribution towards the global, international and European goals.
- In **Serbia**, meeting the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda is inseparable from Serbia's EU integration process. These two processes are fully compatible and interdependent. The bulk of financial resources for SDG implementation in Serbia is provided through the use of the EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA).

## Impact of COVID-19 context on the implementation of SDGs

The implementation of SDGs matters, as well as adequate monitoring of it, especially in the current COVID-19 context. The latest reports on SDG implementation at the EU level have shown that, although the EU itself made progress towards achieving the SDGs, there is some trend of moderate movement away from, for example, SDG5 Gender Equality, and SDG13 Climate Action.<sup>182</sup> As for the Western Balkans, the results are likely to be more severe, given the existing data which reveals significant increase of domestic violence and upsurge of socio-economic disparities during the pandemic. In that sense, in case of no drastic changes in the dynamics between the EU and this region, the economic and social convergence gap of the region with the EU is likely to increase even further, along with reaching the SDG targets.

In fact, there is a concern that the Western Balkans' already sluggish implementation of SDGs will be further negatively affected by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. The longer the pandemic lasts, and the more severe it becomes, the more difficult will it be for the region to fully sustain their economies, and thus properly tackle the challenges related to the accomplishment of SDGs. It is the same challenge the whole Europe faces. Besides the issues concerning slower economic growth, sectors that are most likely to be hit the most include tourism, agriculture and creative industries.<sup>183</sup> Although the bulk of funding required to achieve the SDGs will continue to come from the regional economies themselves,<sup>184</sup> the focus on connectivity and stronger cooperation with the EU has the potential to mitigate these expenses.

Meanwhile, it is promising that the EU continues to prioritise the implementation of the SDGs even in a time of pandemic - as seen in Commission's focus on them during the multi-annual financial framework negotiations which links investments and debt relief to SDG.<sup>185</sup> Considering that the EU has already announced a EUR 3.3 billion financial package, aimed to help provide immediate support and ensure long-term recovery of the region, there is room to optimise the implementation of the SDGs even during the times of crisis. Therefore, the partners of the region will need to work between themselves and together with the EU, more than ever, to minimise the economic consequences of the pandemic and ensure that the SDGs remain on the agenda.

<sup>182</sup> Eurostat, "Sustainable development in the European Union - Monitoring report on progress towards the SDGs in an EU context", 2020, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/11011074/KS-02-20-202-EN-N.pdf/334a8cfe-636a-bb8a-294a-73a052882f7f>

<sup>183</sup> CSIS, "Covid-19 Demands Innovative Ideas for Financing the SDGs", 2020, available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/covid-19-demands-innovative-ideas-financing-sdgs>

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> European Commission, "Questions and answers: the EU budget for external action in the next Multiannual Financial Framework", 2020, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda\\_20\\_988](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/qanda_20_988)

# 3. Conclusions and recommendations

The writing of this report coincides with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which will have a profound impact on the EU's priorities in the coming period. The official priorities of the incumbent Commission announced in "My Agenda for Europe" and concrete policy stemming from "My Agenda" will either be significantly altered or further strengthened as a result of the pandemic. The pandemic is also expected to have a strong influence on the Green Deal package, the EU's digital agenda, common foreign and security policy, migration policies, as well as the rule of law and democracy/governance mechanisms. Official calls for greater solidarity, unity, upgrading the single market, and pan-EU investment plans in the EU's outline for recovery from the pandemic come in the context of rather hasty handling of the COVID-19 pandemic, at least in its early stages. Therefore, it seems too early to anticipate the direction in which the EU will evolve in the post-pandemic world in terms of its strategic priorities and level of ambition for joint action.

Likewise, many possible scenarios for the future of EU-Western Balkans relations can be projected. If the EU decides to pursue "strategic autonomy" both politically and economically, i.e. lower its economic dependence on third parties (most notably China, the USA and Russia), and instead rely on stronger partnerships in its geographic vicinity, one might expect greater political commitment on the EU side to increase its engagement with the WB region.

At the same time, the priorities and work plans of relevant regional organisations are being changed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The overall negative democratic performance displayed by the economies in the region highlight the importance of local, grassroots dimension in the achievement of RCC's mission and goals and better functioning of the society in the WB. Moreover, the pandemic brought public health and food security policy into the limelight, as it revealed serious vulnerabilities in the WB6 in these two domains. The economies of the region are thus expected to reconsider their existing strategies and to focus more on these issues in the coming period.

This analysis has revealed that the removal of obstacles to the recognitions of academic/professional qualifications at the regional level, together with improved vocational education and training (VET), is a topic of interest and future action for a large number of regional organisations. The competitiveness of the WB6 and the improvement of environment for investment is the second-most-addressed issue among different relevant regional organisations. As the COVID-19 pandemic makes the economic recovery and growth of the WB6 economies even more urgent, it opens space for a more coherent regional approach and greater prominence of this issue in the post-2020 strategy.

Several regional organisations have established and consolidated themselves as "knowledge hubs" and capacity building institutions in their respective areas of expertise. As such, they possess institutional memory and knowledge capital that could be further exploited in the future.

When it comes to constraints related to political circumstances in the region, implementation of the missions of some regional organisations is highly dependent on overall political relations between the economies of the region, political will to perform potentially costly reforms, and the general context of the EU accession perspective. Volatile external circumstances, which strongly influence the agendas of these organisations, should also be borne in mind in the upcoming period.

All Western Balkan economies have adopted development strategies – horizontal or sectoral - related to the implementation of the SDGs. These typically cover the period from 2015 or 2016 to 2020. As 2020 represents the end of the planning cycle, most governments are in the preparatory phase for the new strategic framework planning cycles for after 2020. Setting proper indicators for measuring progress in 17 SDGs remains an issue, as some SDGs have a low number of indicators, while some have no indicators. There is also a considerable percentage of targets within national systems that are partially aligned or unaligned with SDG targets. As SDG implementation remains incomplete and some targets will be even more difficult to attain in the context of COVID-19, deeper cooperation with CSOs seems necessary to push the process and to make it more transparent. Moreover, examined regional organisations have shown interest in monitoring the "localisation" of the SDGs: their expertise and advocacy potential could therefore be harnessed in the coming period.

All WB6 economies have deficient strategic planning systems, which negatively affect efforts to draw parallels and extrapolate commonalities between strategic priorities in the period after 2020, as well as to track implementation records of the existing frameworks. The necessity for harmonisation of policy planning systems represents an opportunity for the RCC's post-2020 strategy to serve as a reference point, or a framework, for future action by the WB6 economies in rationalising their policy planning systems.

From a comparative perspective, post-2020 national strategic frameworks for topics related to energy security, environment, climate, transportation and digital transformation tend to extend beyond 2025. There is great potential for incorporating policy measures from the Green Deal and the EU Digital Single Market into national policy in the WB6 in the coming period. The potential acceleration of the EU accession processes of the WB6 would stimulate these economies to align with the EU acquis and enforce newly-adopted legislation. Alternatively, greater connections and interdependence between the EU and the WB6 in the context of consequences of COVID-19 pandemic will also encourage better interlinkage of national strategic frameworks in the WB6 with those of the EU.

In terms of topical distribution, the greatest number of strategies in all analysed national frameworks deal with home affairs issues. Economic topics are the second most frequent comparatively, followed by energy/climate and environmental ones. Some 80% of topics are covered by all or the majority of the economies, whereas some 20% of policy areas are dealt with either by a single economy, or not more than two.

In terms of donor assistance to the region, analysis of key themes shows that there are commonalities between different donors, especially in regard to support for the process of transition to consolidated democracy and developed and sustainable economies. Typically, the key areas of focus include democratic processes, rule of law, good governance, human rights, sustainable development, environment, employment, health, youth, education, fight against corruption, support to vulnerable populations, and civil society, including regional cooperation and connectivity.

Based on the findings and analysis in this report, the following recommendations to the RCC can be identified:

- Public health and food security should feature more prominently in the RCC's SEE 2030 Strategy. While policy in these two realms has neither been in the spotlight of the WB6's national strategic frameworks nor in the incumbent SEE 2020 Strategy, the present circumstances call for integrating them to a greater extent in the forthcoming strategic period. In this respect, the RCC should bear in mind the capacities of the two competent regional organisations (SEEHN and SWG) and their interest to engage and become more relevant stakeholders in the upcoming period.
- Likewise, the "local dimension" should be in greater focus of the RCC's next strategic framework. In this respect, the expertise and advocacy potentials of relevant regional organisations can be exploited for monitoring the achievement and "localisation" of the SDGs. The same goes for IPA III planning, in which many organisations see the RCC as an ally in making the best out of the next pre-accession instrument.
- The RCC should continue its engagement in initiatives for mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications at the regional level. Relevant regional organisations have demonstrated considerable resources and demands for joint action in this policy area. Developments in this field are expected to boost economic growth and work to alleviate some negative economic indicators for the region in the post-COVID-19 context.
- The RCC should follow up closely the elaboration of the revised EU accession methodology and the proposed "clustering" of negotiating chapters. The main features of the revised approach will soon be made apparent in the Negotiating Framework for North Macedonia and Albania. If clustering of policy areas becomes the new way of thinking, and the economies currently in negotiation (Montenegro and Serbia) adopt the same model, the new RCC strategy might incorporate similar logic.
- In light of the COVID-19 pandemic, the RCC should advocate for greater interdependence and connectivity between the EU and the WB region, building on its existing results and the achievements within the framework of the Berlin Process. The RCC should support the arguments according to which the EU is likely to become a more resilient and autonomous global actor if it invests itself more in its immediate neighbourhood and thus lowers its dependence on other global actors (as suggested and elaborated by the EU's High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy Josep Borrell). The EU's increased political and economic investment in the WB region will also help in the achievement of RCC's mission and strategic objectives.
- The RCC should bear in mind OECD/SIGMA's findings and assistance to the WB6 in the field of policy planning. If possible, OECD/SIGMA and RCC could work jointly to influence efforts to render strategic frameworks in the WB6 more coherent and harmonised. Such developments would positively affect achievement of RCC's strategic objectives.
- In terms of the alignment of WB6 with the SDG targets and respective monitoring, the RCC should, in the upcoming period, investigate the untapped potentials of civil society sector in this domain and suggest options for their greater involvement at the national and regional levels.
- Given its mandate and resources, the RCC could help in fostering dialogue between the governments and civil society actors by promoting and mainstreaming transparent, timely and inclusive policymaking.

## ANNEX I. LIST OF INTERLOCUTORS

### CEFTA

Mr Emir Djikic, Director

Ms Danijela Gacevic, Senior Technical Expert – Trade Facilitation

Mr Zdravko Ilic, Senior Technical Expert – Trade in Services

### CEF

Irena Lukač, Chief Partnership Officer

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### ERI SEE

Tina Šarić, Director

### Energy Community

Predrag Grujičić, Head of Gas Unit

Violeta Kogalniceanu, Head of Infrastructure and Energy Efficiency Unit

Jasmina Trhulj, Head of Electricity Unit

### European Training Foundation

Ulrike Damyanovic, Operations Department, Country Coordinator for Montenegro

### Global Water Partnership - Med

Dimitris Faloutsos, Deputy Regional Coordinator

### NALAS

Kelmend Zajazi, Executive Director

### ReSPA

Ranka Bartula-Musikic, Programme Manager

### RYCO

Đuro Blanuša, Secretary General

### RAI

Aneta Arnaudovska, Senior Anti-corruption Advisor

Dejana Grbic-Velagic, Chief Programme and Communication Officer

### SEESAC

Bojana Balon

### Transport Community

Mr. Alain Baron, Director (Interim)

Ms. Nerejda Hoxha, Desk Officer for Road Infrastructure and Policies

Mr. Mate Gjorgjievski, Desk Officer for Transport Facilitation

**SEEHN**

Mira Dasic, Director of Secretariat  
Tatiana Paduraru, Technical Officer  
Vesna Arsova, Administrative Officer

**SWG**

Boban Ilić, Secretary General

**WB6CIF**

Dejan Azeski

## ANNEX II. LINKAGE WITH THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF THE UN

SDG 2: Zero Hunger - SWG

SDG 3: Good Health and Well Being – SEEHN

SDG 4: Quality Education – ERI SEE, RYCO, CEF

SDG 5: Gender Equality – SEESAC

SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation – GWP, SWG

SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy – Energy Community

SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth – CEFTA, WB6CIF

SDG 9: Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure – Transport Community

SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities – NALAS, SWG

SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production - SWG

SDG 14: Life Below Water – GWP

SDG 15: Life on Land - SWG

SDG 16: Peace and Justice, Strong Institutions – ReSPA, RAI, NALAS, SEESAC, CEF

SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals – SEESAC, CEF

## ANNEX III. COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF STRATEGIES IN WB6 ECONOMIES BY THEMATIC AREAS

	Themes	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
GOVERNANCE/ CROSS-CUTTING	Public administration	Public Administration Reform Strategy 2022 (under preparation), strong linkage with Digital Albania Strategy and Decentralisation Strategy	Strategic Framework for Public Administration Reform 2018-2022	Strategy for Improving Policy Planning and Coordination (IPS), 2017-2021 Strategy for Training of Civil Servants 2016-2020	Public Administration Reform Strategy (expiring in 2020)	Public Administration Reform Strategy (2018-2022)	Programme for Public Procurement Development 2019-2023
	Democracy and governance	Cross-Cutting Justice Strategy 2017-2021		Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society, 2019-2023 Local Self-Government Strategy, 2016-2026 (English version starting from page 147)	Government Strategy for Cooperation with Civil Society, 2019-2023	Strategy for Transparency of the Government (2019-2021)	Strategy for Public Information System Development 2020-2025
	European integration	National Plan for European Integration (2019-2021)		National Plan for the Implementation of the SAA, 2017-2021 WB Berlin Process framework, Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA), 2017-2020 (offline copy only)	National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquisition	National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquisition	National Plan for the Adoption of the Acquisition  IDraft: Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management

	Themes	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
GOVERNANCE/ CROSS-CUTTING	Disaster risk mitigation	Solely mentioned in local projects & AP for implementation of SEE Strategy	No mention of it in the whole report	Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy, 2016-2020	Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy 2018-2023	Not mentioned	National Disaster Risk Management Programme; Disaster Risk Programme for the Republic of Serbia; National Strategy for Protection and Rescuing in Emergency
	Anti-corruption	Inter-sectoral Strategy against Corruption	No dedicated framework, whilst present in numerous programmes (Norwegian Development Programme in BiH...)	National Anti-Corruption Strategy 2019-2023	Solely mentioned in the context of South East Europe 2020 Strategy	Strategy for Reforms of Judiciary System (2017-2022): focuses on high-profile corruption	Anti-corruption measures are integrated in the Strategy for Public Administration Reform and the Public Procurement Development Strategy
HOME AFFAIRS	Arms & weapons regulation	National Strategy on Small Arms and Light Weapons for the period from 2019 to 2024	No mention of it in the whole report	Strategy for the Control of Small Arms, Light Weapons and Explosives 2017-2021	Strategy for Combating Illicit Possession, Misuse and Trade of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Ammunition 2018-2025	National Strategy for Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (2017 – 2021)	Strategy for Control of Small and Light Arms 2019-2024
	Human trafficking	Solely mentioned in local projects	No mention of it in the whole report	Strategy against Trafficking in Human Beings 2020-2024	Strategy for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings 2019-2024	Not mentioned	Strategy for Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Human Beings, Especially Woman and Children, and Protection of Victims 2017-2022

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA	
HOME AFFAIRS	Terrorism & extremism	National Strategy for Combating Violent Extremism and Action Plan	Covered by IPA III framework (EU Integration) 2021-2027	National Strategy against Terrorism 2018-2023	Strategy for Suppression of Violent Extremism 2020-2024	"National Counter Terrorism Strategy (2018-2022) National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2018-2022)"	National Strategy for Prevention and Combating Terrorism 2017-2021
	Organised crime	Included in National Strategy for Combating Violent Extremism and Action Plan	Covered by IPA III framework (EU Integration) 2021-2027	National Strategy against Organised Crime 2018-2022	Not mentioned	"National Strategy to Fight Organised Crime"	
	Defence	National Security Strategy; Drafting of Defence Programmes for 2019-2024 / Long Term Development Plan of the AF 2016-2025				Strategy for Management of Human Resources in Defence Sector (2019 – 2027)	National Security Strategy 2019 <a href="http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/strategija/2019/94/2">http://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/strategija/2019/94/2</a>
	Police action			National Strategy for Community Safety, 2018-2023 National Strategy against Narcotics and Drugs, 2018-2022	Human Resources Management Strategy of the Police Directorate 2019-2024		

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
JUSTICE & RIGHTS	Justice and regulation	Justice Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2021; Cross-Cutting Justice Strategy 2017-2021	Better Regulation Strategy 2.0 for Kosovo*, 2017-2021 Strategy for Children's Rights, 2019-2023 National Strategy for Protection from Domestic Violence 2016-2020	Strategy for Exercising the Rights of the child 2019-2023 2023 Judicial Reform Strategy	"Strategy for Information and Communication Technologies of Justice Sector (2019 – 2024) Strategy for Reforms of Judiciary System (2017-2022)"	Strategy for Fight against Cyber-Crime 2019-2023
	Consumer rights	Consumer health protection part of ongoing IPA 2012-13 project, run by Ministry of Agriculture, Rural Development and Water Administration	Mentioned as part of Council of Ministers' Information Society Policy 2017-2021	Consumer Protection Programme 2016-2020		

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA	
JUSTICE & RIGHTS	Inclusion	Part of IPA 2012 and IPA 2014 projects, pillar Investing in People and Social Cohesion	Foreseen as priority measure in Economic Reform Programme 2019-2021	National Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in the Republic of Kosovo*, 2013-2023 Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali communities in the Kosovo* society, 2017-2021 Strategy for Affirmation and Integration of Montenegrin community in Kosovo*, 2016-2021 (not found online)	Strategy for improving the quality of life of LGBT people for the period 2019-2023 Minority Policy Strategy 2019-2023	Strategy for Development of the "One Society For All" Concept and Interculturalism (2020-2023)	"Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Population in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2025"
	Immigration	National Strategy on Migration 2019-2022				Integration Strategy for Refugees and Foreigners of the Republic of Macedonia (2017-2027)	Strategy for Integration of Refugees and Foreigners (2017-2027)
	Foreign policies	National Diaspora Strategy 2018-2024 and Action Plan	Foreign Policy Strategy 2018-2023/ Plans to include Diaspora in scientific area	National Strategy for Sustainable Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo* 2018-2022		National Strategy for Cooperation with Diaspora (2019-2023)	Strategy to Support and Strengthen Ties between Home Country and Diaspora of Serbs in the Region

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECONOMY & SOCIAL POLICIES	Tourism	Albania Tourism Development Strategy 2019-2023 and Action Plan	Foreseen as priority measure in Economic Reform Programme 2019-2021	Tourism Development Strategy 2020	National Tourism Strategy (2016-2021)	Strategy for Tourism Development of the Republic of Serbia 2016 – 2025
	Culture	/	Mentioned in the midterm strategic goals of BiH Council of Ministers	Developed under the National Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030	National Strategy for Development of Culture (2018-2022)	Strategy of Culture Development 2017-2027
	Demographics				Strategy for Demographic Development (2015-2024)	



	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECONOMY & SOCIAL POLICIES	Action Plan for Development of Mental Health Services 2013-2022/Policy Paper on Strategy for Prevention and Reduction of Alcohol-Related Injuries in Albania (2017 - 2021)	No dedicated framework, mentioned multiple times (Norwegian Development Programme, Midterm Programme...)	Health Sector Strategy, 2017-2021	“Strategy for Development of Integrated Health Information System (IHIS) and eHealth for the period 2018 - 2022	National Strategy for Prevention of Oral Diseases of Children Aged 0-14 (2018-2028)	“Program for Improvement of Mental Health Protection 2019-2026 Strategy for Public Health in the Republic of Serbia, 2018-2026 Strategy for Prevention of Drug Abuse, 2014-2021 [17] 20. Strategy for Prevention and Control of HIV infection and AIDS in the Republic of Serbia 2018-2025 National Programme for Control of Bacteria Resistance to Antibiotics 2019-2021”
				Strategy for Improvement and Protection of Mental Health in Montenegro 2019-2023		

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECONOMY & SOCIAL POLICIES	The National Employment and Skills Strategy (NESS) 2014–2020	Identified as priority in the Economic Reform Program 2019-2021	Sector Strategy for Employment and Social Welfare 2018-2022 (Offline copy only)	“Inclusive Education Strategy 2019-2025 Montenegro Teacher Education Strategy 2017-2024	“Education Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2018-2025) Adult Education Strategy (2019-2023) National Youth Strategy (2016-2025)”	“Strategy for Occupational Safety in the Republic of Serbia 2018-2022  National Strategy for Social Housing 2012-2022”
			Kosovo* Education Strategic Plan, 2017-2021 Strategy for the Development of Pre-University Education in Kosovo* 2016-2020			

Themes	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
SCIENCE & ENVIRONMENT	National Strategy for Science, Technology and Innovation 2017-2023	National Science Strategy 2017-2022			One of the priorities of the Education Strategy (2018-2025)	
	Strategic Biodiversity Policy Paper	Emission reduction covered by the National Energy Strategy 2035	1. Air Quality Strategy, 2013-2022 2. National Emission Reduction Plan, 2018-2027 National Action Plan for Renewable Energy 2011-2021 Biodiversity Action Plan 2017-2021	Revision of the Forest and Forestry Development Strategy (2014-2023) National Climate Change Strategy 2015-2030 National Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030	“National Biodiversity Strategy (2018 – 2023) National Strategy for Nature Protection (2017– 2027) Emission reduction planned under the National Strategy for Sustainable Development (2009-2030)”	National Emission Reduction Plan (NERP) 2028
Environment protection & fight against climate change						

Themes	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECONOMIC & INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT	Fiscal Strategy of the Republic of Albania (2020-2022)	Identified as priority in the Economic Reform Programme 2019-2021	Medium Term Expenditures Framework, 2019-2021 National Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo* for the Prevention and Combating Informal Economy, Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes, 2019-2023 National Strategy for Public Procurement, 2017-2021	Trade Facilitation Strategy 2018 – 2022	Fiscal Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia (2020-2022)	Fiscal Strategy of the Republic of Serbia - FISCAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE PERIOD FROM 2019 TO 2021
	Finance and fiscal policy					

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECO-NOMIC & INFRA-STRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT	Economic development	Economic Reform Programme for BIH 2019-2021 Mining Strategy 2010-2025	Kosovo* National Development Strategy, 2016-2021 Economic Reform Programme, 2020-2022 Mineral Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo* 2012-2025 Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo* 2017-2026 World Bank, Kosovo* – Country Partnership Framework, 2017-2020 European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, Strategy for Kosovo*, 2016	Industry Policy of Montenegro 2019-2023 National Mineral Extraction Plan for 2019-2028	“Economic Reform Programme 2020-2022 National Small and Medium Enterprise Strategy (2018-2023) Strategy for formalising informal economy (2018-2022) Industrial Strategy (2018-2027) Strategy for Energy Development (until 2040) (draft)”	“Strategy for Development of Free Investment Zones in the Republic of Serbia, 2018-2022 Strategy for Sustainable Urban Planning of the Republic of Serbia until 2030 Strategy for Development of Intellectual Property, 2018-2022 SMART SPECIALISATION STRATEGY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA FROM 2020 TO 2027”
	Land management	Albanian National Land Consolidation Strategy 2016-2028	Land Consolidation Strategy 2010-2020	National Strategy for Integrated Coastal Zone Management of Montenegro 2015-2030		

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECO-NOMIC & INFRA-STRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT	Agriculture and rural sector		Strategic Plan for Rural Development 2018-2021	Mentioned as priority in the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) (2020-2022)		Mentioned as priority in the Economic Reform Programme (ERP) (2020-2022)
	Innovation & entrepreneurship	Digital Albania Strategy	Innovation as a general goal of the National Science Strategy 2017-2022	Strategy for Development of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in Montenegro 2018-2022	Strategy for Women's Entrepreneurship Development (2019-2023) Strategy for Social Responsibility (2019-2023)	
	Water & waste management	National Waste Management Strategy 2010-2025; Integrated Water Resources Management Strategy 2018-2027		Waste Management Strategy, 2013-2022	Waste Management Strategy until 2030 Water Management Strategy 2018-2035	Strategy for Water Management in the Republic of Serbia 2016-2034
	Transport & related infrastructure	No mention of transport strategies	National Framework Transport Strategy 2013-2016 for each transport mode, the Framework Transport Strategy aims at defining the actions to be implemented to achieve the general and specific objectives in the short (2016-2020), medium (2021-2025) and long term (2026-2030).	Multimodal Transport Sectorial Strategy, 2015-2025 Road Safety Strategy 2016-2020	Railway development strategy until 2027; Transport Development Strategy until 2035 National Sustainable Development Strategy until 2030	“National Programme for the Public Railway Infrastructure 2017-2021 [12] 15. Strategy for Development of Waterborne Traffic of the Republic of Serbia 2015-2025”

	ALBANIA	BOSNIA	KOSOVO*	MONTENEGRO	NORTH MACEDONIA	SERBIA
ECO-NOMIC & INFRA-STRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT	National Energy Strategy 2018 – 2030	National Framework Energy Strategy 2035	Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo* 2017-2026; Energy Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo* 2021-2030; Implementation Plan of the Energy Strategy 2021-2023	Renewable energy sources and energy efficiency as priority areas of the Smart Specialisation Strategy Guidelines 2018-2024	Strategy for Energy Development (until 2030)	Strategy for Development of Energy of the Republic of Serbia, until 2025, with pre-conditions until 2030
		Information Society Development Policy 2017-2021	Policy for Electronic Communications Sector - Digital Agenda of Kosovo* 2013-2020		National Strategy for Cyber Security (2018-2022)	Strategy for Development of New Generation Networks until 2023; Strategy for Development of Artificial Intelligence in the Republic of Serbia for the period 2020-2025
Policies for the energy sector						
Policies for the digital sector						

## ANNEX IV. LIST OF CONSULTED PUBLICATIONS

A Union that strives for more – My agenda for Europe, Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-24, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/political-guidelines-next-commission_en.pdf)

The European Green Deal, available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/european-green-deal-communication_en.pdf)

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Council directive 2002/22/EC On Universal Service (2002) Official Journal L 108, available at: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32002L0022>

EDUCATION REFORM INITIATIVE OF SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE 2019-2020 Work Plan, available at: [www.erisee.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ERI-SEE\\_Work\\_plan\\_2019-2020.pdf](http://www.erisee.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/ERI-SEE_Work_plan_2019-2020.pdf)

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European Commission, A ROADMAP FOR RECOVERY: Towards a More Resilient Future, available at: [www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43384/roadmap-for-recovery-final-21-04-2020.pdf](http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43384/roadmap-for-recovery-final-21-04-2020.pdf)

European Commission, European Data Strategy (2020), available at: [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/european-data-strategy_en)

European Commission, Montenegro country report 2019, p.11, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20190529-montenegro-report.pdf>

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