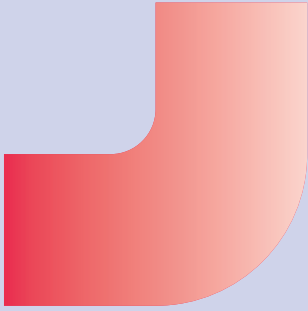


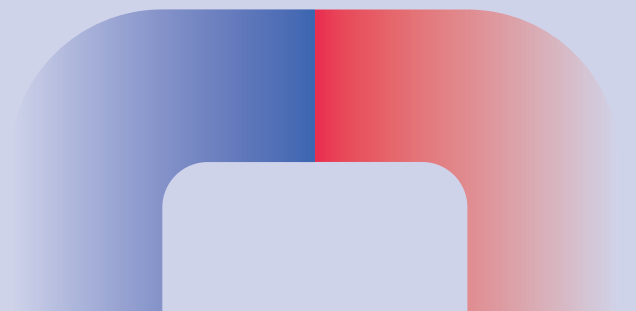
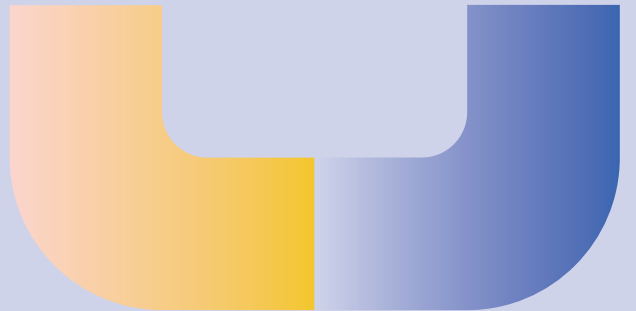


**Berlin  
Process  
Summit**  
2024  
10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary



# Ten Years of the Berlin Process

## Stocktaking Study



**About this publication:**

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The Southeast Europe Association e.V. (SOG) as an intermediary organization supports the political, scientific and socio-cultural exchange with as well as the analysis of South-east Europe. Institutionally supported by the German Federal Foreign Office, we have been one of the most important supporters of German foreign cultural policy since our foundation in 1952. We see it as the SOG's task to build bridges through our activities. More information about the Southeast Europe Association: [www.sogde.org](http://www.sogde.org)

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Civil Society &  
Think Tank Forum 2024  
**Ten Years of the  
Berlin Process**

**Stocktaking Study: Mapping  
the Road for the Western Balkans**

**Authors:** Dr. Marika Djolai, Dr. Silvana Mojsovska

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## FOREWORD

The Berlin Process is celebrating its tenth anniversary this year. Since its inception in 2014, the format has developed to be a preeminent platform for fostering regional cooperation among the Western Balkan countries and an important link between the EU and the region. In the past ten years, the Berlin Process has produced many different outputs. It has witnessed an ever-increasing scope of policy areas covered. After the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion into Ukraine, the Berlin Process has become even more relevant as an accelerant of the European integration process in the region.

Anniversaries are always good opportunities for stocktaking. The Southeast Europe Association and the Aspen Institute Germany, with the support of the German Federal Foreign Office, have thus conceived and commissioned this study to closely examine the Berlin Process' key milestones during the past decade. What we encountered on this journey went far beyond our own expectations, despite our close involvement in the Berlin Process as hosts of the 2021, 2022 and 2024 Civil Society and Think Tank Forum.

To regular observers, it was always clear that the Berlin Process is more than annual meetings of regional and EU leaders preparing declarations and action plans. However, this study underlines that there is a plethora of initiatives, institutions, working groups, and projects that have emerged over the past decade, supporting the development of an ever-growing web of regional cooperation. The study highlights Berlin Process success stories like the establishment of RYCO and the Western Balkan Fund. However, the study also underlines challenges that have hampered the process related to topics and

structure. We are confident that this research will give newcomers to the Berlin Process a clearcut overview of its structure and its outputs. At the same time, the study might also hold some surprises for those who have been with the Berlin Process from the start.

This study would not have been possible without the dedicated work of many people. First, we would like to thank our authors, Marika Djolai and Silvana Mojsavska, who have invested several months in desk research and expert interviews with former organizers of the Berlin Process. We are grateful to Silvana for her efforts into the research on economic cooperation, science, and the green transition, and to Marika for her shepherding of the research on societal, political, and security cooperation as well as foreign policy. It is thanks to their strong commitment that we received such interesting and comprehensive results. Furthermore, we thank our peer reviewers, Adnan Ćerimagić, Donika Emini, Andi Hoxhaj, Ana Marjanović Rudan, and Daliborka Uljarević, who have given expert feedback on early drafts of the study. We also very much appreciate the openness and enthusiasm of the many former hosts and organizers of the Berlin Process summits and side events who shared invaluable insights into what was achieved during specific summits. Last but surely not least, we would like to thank our teams at the Aspen Institute Germany and the Southeast Europe Association who have supported the implementation of this study, especially Avi Shapiro and Tina Bories for Aspen Germany, and Viktoria Voglsinger-Palm for the Southeast Europe Association. This compilation of the study has only been possible due to the generous support of the German Federal Foreign Office.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The “Stocktaking Study: 10 Years of the Berlin Process” offers a comprehensive analysis of the Berlin Process (BP) from its inception in 2014 to its ten-year milestone in 2024. Initiated by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, the Berlin Process was designed to support the Western Balkans Six (WB6) – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia – in pursuit of regional cooperation and building closer ties with the European Union.

**Objective:** The study aims to map the Berlin Process across various policy areas and to document the numerous initiatives, declarations, institutions, working groups, and projects that have emerged over the decade. It provides a timeline of activities and analyzes which initiatives remain active, which have been completed, and which have transitioned to other platforms. While not an impact assessment, the findings offer strategic observations on enhancing the effectiveness of the Berlin Process moving forward.

**Methodology:** The study employs a mixed methods approach, including desk research and a review of the BP summit declarations, policy papers, and related reports. Furthermore, 17 interviews were conducted with chair country representatives of the Berlin Process, European Commission officials, and the representatives of many Berlin Process initiatives. The study also collected feedback from stakeholders during the Preparatory Forum of the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum 2024 in Skopje in July 2024. The study was reviewed by experts from the WB6 and Berlin Process participating countries to ensure the accuracy and relevance of the findings. Stakeholders and chair country representatives were consulted for feedback and factchecking. The content and the findings are organized into six policy areas: (1) regional economic cooperation, transport, and connectivity, (2) societal cooperation, (3) political and security cooperation, (4) foreign policy, (5) energy security and the green transition, and (6) science and research.

**Structure and Scope of the Berlin Process:** In 2024, the Berlin Process encompasses ten partner countries – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom – alongside the WB6 countries. The Berlin Process also involves EU institutions, international financial institutions, and the region’s civil society, youth, and businesses. The Berlin Process operates without a secretariat, relying instead on a rotating chairmanship and ad-hoc funding. This has allowed the BP to be flexible in responding to challenges and needs of the WB6 and to indirectly contribute to EU enlargement, while avoiding stringent conditions. The scope of the Berlin Process has been wide-ranging. Over the past decade, it has addressed a plethora of topics and produced 43 key outputs, including institutions, agreements, action plans, and declarations signed by the Berlin Process partner countries and the WB6.

**Key Findings:** The main value of the Berlin Process is in bringing governments and stakeholders from the WB6 together around the same table and creating a safe space for dialogue and collaboration, despite persistent challenges that dominate relations between some countries. Such a platform did not exist prior to 2014. The Berlin Process has significantly contributed to regional cooperation and has brought the WB6 closer to the EU. The partner governments have invested commendable effort to support the WB6, visiting the countries and engaging with a wide range of stakeholders. As the Berlin Process enters its second decade and all partner countries remain committed, there is a potential to sustain its momentum and to ensure that it continues to serve as a vital platform for regional cooperation, stability, and European integration.

**Success Stories:** The study reveals several success stories, such as the establishment of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and Youth Forum, the Common Regional Market (CRM), the Green Agenda, and the Western Balkans Fund, all of which have significantly advanced regional integration and cooperation. Other notable outcomes are the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum, the Business Forum, the Digital Agenda, collaboration in the field of security, and support to Roma integration.

**Challenges:** The BP has been hindered by a lack of a centralized monitoring and evaluation mechanism, inadequate core funding, and unclear procedures on handing over priority topics to the next chair. Initiatives often falter without a sustained follow-up, and there is a need for more robust monitoring and impact assessment practices. Some topics were dropped after a short time on the BP agenda including health, migration, and terrorism and radicalization as well as good governance, rule of law, and support for judicial reforms.

**Recommendations:** The study recommends establishing a small secretariat to ensure continuity, formalize monitoring and reporting mechanisms, conduct regular impact assessments, and help transfer the ownership of and accountability for Berlin Process initiatives to the WB6 governments. The BP should support democratic processes, specifically rule of law and media freedom in the WB6, and tap into the expertise of the scientific community to counter the brain drain and empower youth in the region. Alongside regional cooperation, achieving reconciliation between and within societies in the region is at the core of the Berlin Process, but this intention needs more concrete and institutionalized support.

## LIST OF ACRONYMS

<b>AP</b>	Additional Protocol	<b>MI</b>	Ministry of Infrastructure
<b>B2B</b>	Business-to-Business	<b>MS</b>	EU Member States
<b>BiH</b>	Bosnia and Herzegovina	<b>OSF</b>	Open Society Foundations
<b>BF</b>	Business Forum	<b>ORF</b>	Open Regional Fund
<b>BiEPAG</b>	Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group	<b>RAA</b>	Regulatory Reform Agenda
<b>BP</b>	Berlin Process	<b>RAI</b>	Regional Anti-corruption Initiative
<b>CA</b>	Connectivity Agenda	<b>RCC</b>	Regional Cooperation Council
<b>CEFTA</b>	Central European Free Trade Agreement	<b>REA</b>	Regional Economic Area
<b>CRM</b>	Common Regional Market	<b>REEP Plus</b>	Regional Energy Efficiency Program Plus
<b>CSF</b>	Civil Society Forum	<b>RYCO</b>	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
<b>CSOs</b>	Civil Society Organizations	<b>SAA</b>	Stabilization Association Agreement
<b>DIHK</b>	Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce	<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>EBRD</b>	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development EC European Commission	<b>SECO</b>	Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs
<b>EFB</b>	European Fund for the Balkans	<b>SEETO</b>	Southeast Europe Transport Observatory
<b>EIB</b>	European Investment Bank	<b>SEPA</b>	Single European Payment Area
<b>EIP</b>	Economic and Investment Plan	<b>SME</b>	Small and Medium Enterprise
<b>ESAP</b>	Environmental and Social Action Plan	<b>TCT</b>	Transport Community Treaty
<b>EU</b>	European Union	<b>TEN-T</b>	Trans-European Transport Network
<b>EUROCHAMBRES</b>	Association of European Chambers of Commerce and Industry	<b>TTF</b>	Think Tank Forum
<b>GAWB</b>	Green Agenda Western Balkans	<b>UNMIK</b>	United Nations Mission in Kosovo
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>WB6</b>	Western Balkans Six
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit	<b>WB6 CIF</b>	Western Balkans 6 Chamber Investment Forum
<b>GP</b>	Growth Plan	<b>WBF</b>	Western Balkan Fund
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology	<b>WBIF</b>	Western Balkan Investment Framework
<b>IFI</b>	International Financial Institutions	<b>WB TTFP2</b>	Trade and Transport Facilitation Program
<b>INFRAKOS</b>	Kosovo Railway Infrastructure	<b>WKO</b>	Austrian Federal Economic Chamber
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance		
<b>IPARD</b>	Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development		
<b>FM</b>	Minister of Foreign Affairs		
<b>KfW</b>	German Development Bank		
<b>LAP</b>	Land Acquisition Plan		
<b>MAP</b>	Multiannual Action Plan		
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs		



# INTRODUCTION

The Berlin Process (BP) was initiated in 2014 by German Chancellor Angela Merkel as a “Conference of Western Balkan States” on the occasion of the 100<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the First World War outbreak. The aim was to support reform processes in the six Western Balkan countries (WB6) after their EU enlargement was put on hold, largely attributed to then President of the European Commission (EC) Jean-Claude Juncker.<sup>1</sup>

Published on the ten-year anniversary of the Berlin process, the “Stocktaking Study: 10 Years of the Berlin Process” aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the initiatives and actions established under the BP umbrella and to offer ideas for future developments. The study serves as a critical resource for stakeholders committed to ensuring the sustainability of the Berlin Process and to supporting reforms in the WB6.

The study aims to map the Berlin Process along six policy areas using BP summit declarations (called “Chair’s Conclusions” or “Final Declarations”) as guideposts. More specifically, the study:

- Compiles an overview of the declarations, initiatives, institutions, working groups, and projects that have emerged from the Berlin Process;
- Examines which of these initiatives, institutions, working groups, and projects are active, completed, or have been transferred to other initiatives and/or institutions, and creates a timeline of outputs, activities, and initiatives;
- Notes clear success stories and scalable solutions that can be applied more broadly. It does not provide an evaluation or impact assessment of the Berlin Process;
- Concludes with a discussion about lessons learned and offers observations about enhancing the effectiveness of BP initiatives in the coming years.

The study employs a mixed methods approach for data collection:

- Desk research with a comprehensive review of the summit declarations, policy articles, and reports related to specific initiatives and outputs;
- Background interviews with Berlin Process chair country representatives as well as the focal points of some BP initiatives and the European Commission;<sup>2</sup>
- Feedback from stakeholders during the Preparatory Forum of the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum in Skopje in July 2024;
- Analysis of verified outputs to guide the issue areas and prioritize policies to focus on. Six policy areas were used to arrange and analyze the data and information collected during the study.

The study was peer reviewed by regional and topical experts from the Western Balkans with extensive knowledge of the BP. Factchecking and feedback was received from stakeholders (the RCC, EFB, and RYCO), WB6 sherpas, and Berlin Process chair country representatives.

The report is structured into six sections, each analyzing initiatives and outputs linked to a specific BP policy/intervention area. The designated policy areas are primarily used for analytical purposes and structuring of the study and are arranged in order of their inclusion in the BP framework so the study’s structure provides an insight into the chronology of the BP’s topical, policy, and intervention dynamics. They cover regional economic cooperation, societal cooperation, political and security cooperation, foreign policy, energy and the green transition, and science and research. In practice, these issue areas are all interconnected, crosscutting, and oriented towards achieving regional cooperation in the Western Balkans in the broadest sense. The study concludes with a summary of key findings and strategic recommendations for the future.

1 EUbusiness, Juncker to Halt Enlargement as EU Commission Head, <https://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/politics-juncker.x29> (accessed July 31, 2024).

2 Interviewed BP partner countries: Austria, Albania, Bulgaria, Germany, France, Italy, North Macedonia, Poland, and the United Kingdom. Interviewed non-state actors: the Joint Science Conference, EC, and GIZ. A total of 17 interviews were conducted.

## OVERVIEW OF THE BERLIN PROCESS

The Berlin Process has been a highly consistent and inclusive format for cooperation between the Western Balkans, initiated by the German government in 2014.<sup>3</sup> The participants of the BP initially set a timeline of four years, as stated in the Chair's Declaration in 2014. The four original pillars of the BP are: supporting the reform process, resolving outstanding bilateral and internal issues, achieving reconciliation within and between societies in the region, and enhancing regional economic cooperation and laying the foundations for sustainable growth.<sup>4</sup> The Berlin Process aims to improve regional cooperation in a number of policy areas to support countries in the region in achieving EU standards and to bring concrete benefits to the citizens in the region. The BP has the advantage of broad international support and involvement, including EU member states and institutions.<sup>5</sup>

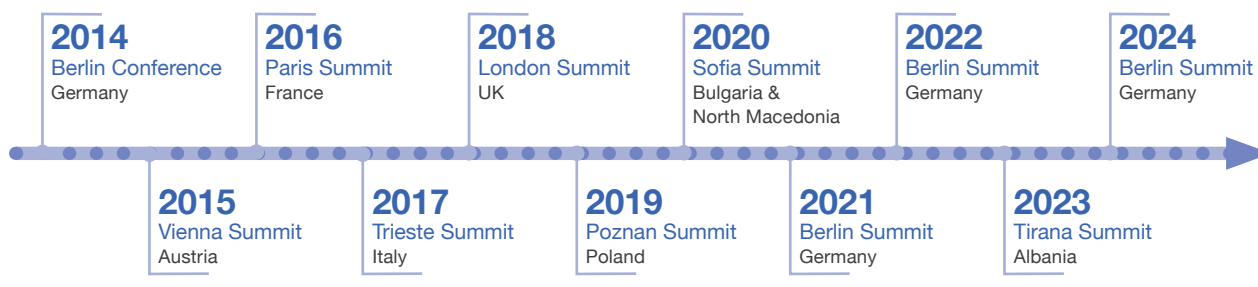
Currently, ten partner governments – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, and the United Kingdom – are supporting the WB6 within the BP framework. The European Commission (EC), the European External Action Service (EEAS), and the Presidency of the European Council represent the EU at the annual BP leaders' summits, while the BP also benefits from the regular contributions of civil society as well as youth and business representatives from the Western Balkans who convene through official side forums.

Since its inception, the BP has significantly broadened the number of topics covered (see Annex 1) and produced 43 outputs in the form of declarations,

agreements, action plans, and other documents endorsing the WB6's intentions for cooperation in certain areas (see Annex 2). Preparation and implementation of the outputs has been supported by several regional organizations, primarily the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Transport Community (TC), the Energy Community (EnC), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI), and the Western Balkans Six Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF).<sup>6</sup>

The RCC, alongside the EU, has a prominent and very active role in shaping the BP topics and priorities and delivering on some BP outputs. The RCC has participated in coordination meetings of the WB6 Ministries of Foreign Affairs and other ministerial meetings related to its portfolio, has prepared and implemented initiatives and agreements (specifically in the area of regional economic cooperation and common regional market), and has promoted the digital and connectivity agenda, including by implementing the roaming agreement. The RCC also has provided support to the security, green transition, and Roma integration aspects of the BP. In addition, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) provides support to the Berlin Process in the form of financial assistance to certain initiatives such as RYCO, a joint training program for junior diplomats, and projects supporting regional economic cooperation, the Green Agenda, agriculture, and digital agenda. The GIZ is also responsible for the organization of the Gender Equality Forum 2024.

**Figure 1: Berlin Process Hosts and Summits<sup>7</sup>**



3 Berlin Process, Berlin Process – 2014, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/the-berlin-process-2014> (accessed August 28, 2024).

4 Berlin Process, Chair's Declaration 2014, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2014\\_1714043796.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2014_1714043796.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

5 Berlin Process, The Goals of the Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/the-goals> (accessed August 28, 2024).

6 Berlin Process, Results of the Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/#results> (accessed August 28, 2024).

7 Berlin Process, Documents, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/#summits> (accessed August 28, 2024).

Involvement of regional organizations is necessary for the facilitation and implementation of the outputs, as the Berlin Process has a flexible structure with no designated secretariat with a coordination role. It functions with a rotating chair (host country) selected each year in coordination with the German government, which also hosts the annual Berlin Process Summit.<sup>8</sup>

The BP Summit, also referred to as the leaders' summit, has been a major annual event at the highest political level, with participation by representatives of the WB6, EU institutions, BP partner countries, international financial institutions, and regional organizations. Each summit typically delivers "Chair's Conclusions" or "Chair's Final Declarations" (also referred to as the summit declaration) outlining the main achievements, outputs, and commitments of the Berlin Process over the year.

The Berlin Process encompasses many preparatory activities between the annual leaders' summits. Each year, the leaders' summit is preceded by ministerial meetings between the WB6 and BP partner countries, which regularly include ministerial formats of foreign affairs, interior, economy and/or energy, and other formats as needed, such as for the digital agenda, a Roma Ministerial since 2019, and meetings of ministers of health during the pandemic. In 2024, a ministerial meeting on the Green Agenda as well as on agriculture has been launched. The ministerial meetings serve as fora for defining the priorities under each BP chairmanship.

Apart of the ministerial meetings, there are several side events that form an integral part of the Berlin Process, including the Business Forum, the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum, the Youth Forum, the Digital Summit, and the Joint Science Conference.<sup>9</sup> In 2023, the Local Government Forum was organized on the margins of the BP. The latest addition in 2024 has been the Gender Equality Forum. All of these events provide contributions and additional perspectives for discussion at the BP summits.

The chair country funds the summits, forums, and interim meetings. Some activities and projects have received external funding from GIZ, ERSTE Foundation, and Open Society Foundation (OSF). Outputs and projects negotiated and agreed in the BP framework are largely funded by the EU Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Additional funding is provided by international financial institutions such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) and the European Investment Bank (EIB). In addition, some existing financing platforms such as the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) have been used as mechanisms for funding BP initiatives and outputs. RYCO and the Western Balkans Fund are funded by the WB6 governments with some support from the EU and national development cooperation agencies, including from Switzerland, which is not a BP participant.

The BP is closely connected to the EU accession process of the WB6. The BP facilitates engagement between the WB6 leaders and the European Commission to discuss priorities and policies that are in line with the EU acquis. In the second five-year cycle of the BP (2019-2023), EU integration came into more focus, particularly during the Polish and German chairmanships. In addition, support for EU accession was addressed concretely in the Chair's Declaration in 2023 under the Albanian chairmanship of the BP.<sup>10</sup> WB6 integration into the EU was consistently addressed by the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum through policy outputs and annual forums within the framework of the Berlin Process.

However, the BP is distinct from EU enlargement policy and methodology. It aims to provide a forum for regular dialogue between the WB6 and partner countries. The format of the Berlin Process, with only a limited number of EU member states, allows the WB6 to more easily and concisely communicate their regional issues and needs. This takes place in parallel to EU-WB6 mechanisms. The format has been considered as an added value, which should continue to evolve in terms of ensuring more tangible results for the WB6.

<sup>8</sup> Berlin Process, About Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/#about-berlin-process> (accessed August 28, 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Berlin Process, Chair's Conclusions 2023, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2023\\_1714043445.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2023_1714043445.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

**Figure 2: The Berlin Process: Structures and Process**



# 1. REGIONAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION, TRANSPORT, AND CONNECTIVITY

This section analyzes three issues covered in the framework of the Berlin Process: regional economic cooperation, transport, and connectivity. All three have been quite complex and were on the agenda from the start of the BP.

**Table 1: List of Outputs within the Policy Areas of Regional Economic Cooperation, Transport, and Connectivity**

ENTRY	OUTPUT/ DOMAIN	START- YEAR	END- YEAR	RELEVANT ORGANIZATION	AREA OF FOCUS/ OBJECTIVES
1.	WB6 Chamber Investment Forum (CIF)	2015	On-going	EC, EBRD, RCC, CEFTA, EURO-CHAMBRES, WKO, DIHK	Regional economic cooperation among businesses and investment projects
2.	Regional Economic Area (REA)	2017	2020	EC, RCC, CEFTA	Transforming the region into area without economic boundaries (dimensions: trade, investment, labor mobility, and digital market)
3.	Common Regional Market (CRM)	2020	On-going	EC, RCC, CEFTA	Regional trade area (dimensions: movement of goods, services, capital, and people, investment, digitalization, industry, and innovation).
4.	Transport Community	2014	On-going	SEETO/Transport Community	Road and railway connection of the region
5.	Connectivity Agenda	2015	On-going	SEETO/Transport Community Energy Community, EC, WBIF	Advancement of the transport and energy intra- and interconnectivity of the region

*Note: The outputs are listed according to the policy areas, not chronologically*

## Entry 1: WB6 Chamber Investment Forum

The agreement on creating the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF) was signed in August 2015 (Vienna Summit), building on the joint initiative of the Serbian and Kosovo Chambers of Commerce with the aim to identify and stimulate regional economic cooperation and investment projects.<sup>11</sup> In the period October 2015-July 2017, the WB6 CIF conducted a series of meetings of its members, while the Secretariat of the WB6 CIF was inaugurated in July 2017 (Trieste Summit).

The WB6 CIF is a professional association of the Chambers of Commerce of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia, with headquarters in Trieste, Italy.

The operation of the WB6 CIF is supported by the European Commission (the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) and DG Trade) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The WB6 CIF closely cooperates with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), and other organizations such as Eurochambres, the Austrian Federal Economic Chamber (WKO), and the German Chamber of Industry and Commerce (DIHK).<sup>12</sup>

At the time of its establishment, the goal of the WB6 CIF was to serve as a response by the business community to political processes in the region.<sup>13</sup> The WB6 CIF was actively involved in the implementation of the Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Eco-

11 Berlin Process, Chair's Declaration 2015, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2015\\_1714043784.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2015_1714043784.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

12 WB 6 Chamber Investment Forum, What We Do, <https://www.wb6cif.eu> (accessed August 28, 2024).

13 Ibid.

conomic Area (MAP REA) from 2017-2020.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, many activities of the Action Plan on the Common Regional Market planned for 2021-2024 envisaged a supportive role for the WB6 CIF.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the WB6 CIF has an active role in the Business Forums of the Berlin Process and frequently contributes to its organization and provides inputs to the discussion on behalf of its members.

The WB6 CIF is still active, though the latest publicly available WB6 CIF Annual Report refers to 2021.<sup>16</sup> So far, no comprehensive analysis of the results of the WB6 CIF or assessment of its contribution to the BP and to regional economic cooperation has been conducted.

## Entry 2: Regional Economic Area (REA)

The goal to transform the WB6 into a Regional Economic Area (REA) was endorsed with the adoption of the Multi-Annual Plan (MAP) for REA in 2017 (Trieste Summit).

The Berlin Process Summit Chair's Declaration of 2017 states that the REA is "neither an alternative nor a parallel process to the European integration: it will reinforce the capacity of Western Balkans economies to meet the EU accession economic criteria, and to implement EU acquis on a regional scale before joining the EU."<sup>17</sup>

The MAP for the REA 2017-2020 is comprised of four dimensions: trade, investment, mobility, and digital market. Regarding trade, the REA built on CEFTA's trajectory to further promote trade in the region. Its major achievements include the adoption of CEFTA Additional Protocol 5 (Amendment of CEFTA Agreement) and Additional Protocol 6 (Trade in Services)<sup>18</sup> On the second dimension, the REA focused on setting a regional investment agenda for the WB6. On

mobility, the WB6 parties agreed to work on the removal of the obstacles to mobility of certain professions and academia.

The digital dimension covered roaming and broadband deployment, cybersecurity, and data protection, while also aiming to improve digital skills across the region. This was translated into the Digital Agenda, adopted by the WB6 in 2018.<sup>19</sup> The Digital Summit has been one of the landmarks of the Digital Agenda and is intended to enhance collaboration and innovation in the digital sphere among the Western Balkan economies. The Western Balkan Roaming Agreement signed in 2019 and implemented as of July 2021, has been perceived as the most tangible benefit of REA/CMR (see entry 3) for WB6 citizens by introducing a "Roam Like at Home" regime for the region.<sup>20</sup>

Priorities under the REA have been defined as a joint effort of the EC and the WB6 governments, which included consultation processes with stakeholders from the region. In addition, the REA implementation was regularly discussed at the Berlin Process summits until 2019 as well as in the Business Forum and the Civil Society Forum and Think Tank Forum. As of 2020, the REA was upgraded into the Common Regional Market initiative.

The RCC and CEFTA were part of the REA structures. The EU provided extensive financial support for the implementation of the MAP for the REA, which enabled the completion of a number of planned activities. The RCC website provides a complete list of achievements of the REA.<sup>21</sup>

14 Regional Cooperation Council, Multi-Annual Action Plan For a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/383/consolidated-multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six> (accessed August 28, 2024).

15 Regional Cooperation Council, Common Regional Market Action Plan, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/543/common-regional-market-action-plan> (accessed August 28, 2024)

16 WB 6 Chamber Investment Forum, Report on the Activities of the WB 6 Chamber Investment Forum, <https://www.wb6cif.eu/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/WB6-CIF-Report-2021-final.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2024).

17 Berlin Process, Declaration by the Italian Chair, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-by-the-italian-chair-2017\\_1714043754.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-by-the-italian-chair-2017_1714043754.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

18 Regional Cooperation Council, Common Regional Market Action Plan, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/543/common-regional-market-action-plan> (accessed August 28, 2024)

19 Western Balkan Investment Framework, Digital Future, <https://www.wbif.eu/sectors/digital-infrastructure> (accessed August 28, 2024).

20 Regional Cooperation Council, Stay Charged, Roam Free <https://www.rcc.int/campaigns/10/stay-charged-roam-free> (accessed August 28, 2024).

21 Regional Cooperation Council, Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans – Map, [https://www.rcc.int/priority\\_areas/39/map-rea](https://www.rcc.int/priority_areas/39/map-rea) (accessed August 28, 2024).

### Entry 3: Common Regional Market

The Declaration on the Common Regional Market (CRM) was adopted at the Berlin Process Summit in 2020 (Sofia, Chairmanship of Bulgaria and North Macedonia) and promoted as “a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and a steppingstone towards the EU Single Market”.<sup>22</sup> The Action Plan of the CRM 2021-2024 was an integral part of the Declaration.

The CRM was built on the foundations of the REA and developed through intense consultations at national, regional, and international levels. REA structures were used for the CRM, including Component Contact Points (CCPs) and REA Coordinators in the WB6 as well as prime ministers’ sherpas as the highest level of government to provide strategic guidance to the process. The RCC and CEFTA remained in charge of facilitating the implementation of the CRM Action Plan 2021-2024.

The CRM envisioned addressing four regional areas: trade (free movement of goods, services, capital, and people), investment, the digital market, and industrial and innovation policy. The newly added area of industry and innovation, which was not addressed in the REA, relates to the potential inclusion of the WB6 in international supply and value chains by creating a more coherent economic region. This issue was first discussed at the Berlin Process Summit in 2014 but was revived on the BP agenda through the CRM Action Plan.

The CRM has been included among the six priorities of the EU’s Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027, raising the possibility of support for the CRM’s implementation.<sup>23</sup> The major achievements of the CRM Action Plan 2021-2024, as reported by the RCC, include traveling with national ID cards of WB6 in the region, the extension of green lines to all border crossing points, and labeling products with “made in the Western Balkans.”<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the latest developments of the CRM refer to

advancing the digital outlook of the region with the Joint Declaration on the WiFi for the Western Balkans Initiative, followed by the Joint Agreement on Recognition of Professional Qualifications of Nurses, Veterinary Surgeons, Midwives and Pharmacists, the Joint Declaration on Facilitation of Trade and Transport, and the Declaration of Single Euro Payment Area of the WB6. All these declarations were signed in 2023 (Tirana Summit) and their implementation has yet to follow.<sup>25</sup> Adoption, ratification, and implementation of these CRM mobility agreements is monitored by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) in Albania.<sup>26</sup>

The CRM declarations provide a framework for cooperation in the WB6 that should be later translated into their domestic legal and policy frameworks. However, WB6 governments rarely perceive this as an easy task. In addition, CRM related declarations lack dispute mechanisms that would provide more solid ground for implementation of the activities.

The CRM was regularly discussed at the Berlin Process summits from 2019-2023, as well as at the Business Forum and the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum organized on the margins. In the Chair’s Conclusions of the Berlin Process Summit 2023, the signatories noted that “further significant progress should be made with regard to the implementation of the Common Regional Market Action Plan by the time of the next Berlin Process Summit Meeting” and called upon “the RCC, CEFTA and other regional organizations to start devising the next phase.”<sup>27</sup> The envisioned activities for the Berlin Process Summit 2024 include an endorsement of the CRM Action Plan for 2025-2028.

### Entry 4: Transport Community

The Transport Community (TC) was discussed at the first summit of the BP in 2014, as stated in the Chair’s Declaration: “the participating States share the view that a transport community for the Western Balkans could provide a positive impetus for economic devel-

22 Regional Cooperation Council, Declaration on Common Regional Market, November 9, 2020, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/544/declaration-on-common-regional-market>, (accessed August 28, 2024).

23 Western Balkan Investment Framework, Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans 2021-2027, <https://www.wbif.eu/eip> (accessed September 30, 2024).

24 Regional Cooperation Council, Common Regional Market, <https://www.rcc.int/pages/143/common-regional-market> (accessed August 28, 2024).

25 Berlin Process, About Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/#summits> (accessed August 28, 2024).

26 Cooperation & Development Institute, CRM Update: Kosovo Ratifies the 4<sup>th</sup> Agreement, <https://cdinstitute.eu/2024/06/25/crm-update-from-kosovo/> (accessed August 28, 2024).

27 Berlin Process, Chair’s Conclusions 2023, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2023\\_1714043445.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2023_1714043445.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

opment by improving the region's logistical connections to the European markets where demand is high."<sup>28</sup>

Following this pledge, six transport and three railway projects were agreed upon in Berlin Process summits in 2015 and 2016, respectively (see Entry 5). Furthermore, the Transport Community Treaty was signed in 2017.<sup>29</sup> It entered into force in May 2019, aiming to create a TC between the EU and the WB6. The TC is now an international organization composed of the EU and the WB6 with headquarters in Belgrade, Serbia. Its key objective is to extend EU transport market rules, principles, and policies to the Western Balkans through a legally binding framework.<sup>30</sup> The TC was officially founded in 2019 as a successor to the South East European Transport Observatory (SEETO).

Further regional cooperation on transportation took off in the wake of COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, including the implementation of "Green Lanes," priority truck lanes for essential goods at border crossings in the region.<sup>31</sup> In addition, the Connectivity Package (as part of the Connectivity Agenda) was put forward with six projects in sustainable transport and clean energy in 2020 (Sofia Summit). Transport projects have been co-financed through the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) Connectivity Agenda (see Entry 5).

The development of the transport portfolio continued with the signing of the Declaration on the Facilitation of Trade and Transport of the WB6 in 2023 (Tirana Summit).<sup>32</sup> Its implementation is envisaged through the Trade and Transport Facilitation Program (WB TTFP2) aiming at enhancing economic integration of the WB6 with the EU single market by reducing transaction costs and transit times for goods and services.<sup>33</sup>

## Entry 5: Connectivity Agenda

The EU Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkans was initiated at the Berlin Process Summit in 2014 (Berlin), while a more specific outline was defined in 2015 (Vienna Summit). The agenda comprised of extending three core corridors of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to the Western Balkans, supporting ten transport and energy infrastructure investment projects, and "soft" measures on transport and energy. The transport soft measures included the opening of the transport market, establishing a competitive, reliable, and safe transport system, and increasing the effectiveness of border crossing procedures. The energy measures were related to the establishment of a regional electricity market, cross-border balancing of trade of electricity, and regional capacity allocation. The Berlin Process Summit in 2015 (Vienna) also delivered a pledge of 1 billion EUR in EU IPA grants under the Connectivity Agenda by 2020.<sup>34</sup> This sum was allocated to 45 projects and leveraged a total of 3 billion EUR in new investments. The implementation of the Connectivity Agenda has been pursued through the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF), while authorities of the WB6 have played a key role in identifying and preparing grant applications for strategic projects prioritized by National Investment Committees.

Furthermore, the Connectivity Agenda has been placed at the heart of the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, presented by the EC in October 2020. The total pledge for the period 2021-2027 is 9 billion EUR in EU IPA funds, with prospects of leveraging up to 20 billion EUR in total investments. As noted above, the Connectivity Package (as part of the Connectivity Agenda) was put forward with six projects on sustainable transport and clean energy in 2020 (Sofia Summit). The Connectivity Agenda continues to be regularly discussed at the BP summits. It

28 Berlin Process, Chair's Declaration 2014, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2014\\_1714043796.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2014_1714043796.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

29 Publications Office of the European Union, The Transport Community, EUR-Lex, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/the-transport-community.html> (accessed August 28, 2024).

30 The Council of the European Union, On the Conclusion, on Behalf of the European Union, of the Treaty Establishing the Transport Community, 2019/392, March 4, 2019, [https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/international-relations/enlargement/western-balkans/transport-community\\_en](https://transport.ec.europa.eu/transport-themes/international-relations/enlargement/western-balkans/transport-community_en) (accessed August 28, 2024).

31 Transport Community, Green Lanes, <https://www.transport-community.org/transport-facilitation/green-lanes/> (accessed August 28, 2024).

32 Berlin Process, Joint Declaration 2023, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-facilitation-of-trade-and-transport-bp-summit-2023\\_1697614073.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-facilitation-of-trade-and-transport-bp-summit-2023_1697614073.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

33 European Union, Single Market, [https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/single-market\\_en](https://european-union.europa.eu/priorities-and-actions/actions-topic/single-market_en) (accessed August 28, 2024).

34 Western Balkans Investment Framework, <https://www.wbif.eu> (accessed August 28, 2024).



has been complementary to the CRM given that road, railway, and energy connections serve as a precondition for creation of well-functioning economic links under common market rules.

## Interim Stocktaking

Regional economic cooperation has been one of the main pillars of the BP over the past decade. The Chair's Declaration of the initial Berlin Process Summit in 2014 stated that the parties are "united in the aim of enhancing regional economic cooperation and laying the foundations for sustainable growth."<sup>35</sup> Regional economic cooperation under the BP evolved from support to the existing regional platforms and organizations, such as CEFTA, toward formulating new tangible actions. These particularly refer to efforts to transform the WB6 region into the REA and, since 2020, the CRM.

The main outputs of the regional economic cooperation area of the BP agenda are the WB6 CIF, the REA, and the CRM, while the BP has also attempted to support preconditions for sustainable growth such as sound transport infrastructure and regional connectivity. There are also other outputs related to regional economic cooperation, as noted in the complete list of outputs of the Berlin Process attached in Annex 2.

The path of regional economic cooperation has been marked by three layers of cooperation and coordination of the WB6 countries: business cooperation, policy alignment, and coordination of financial programs and instruments to achieve specific economic goals. The selected outputs in this section clearly illustrate such a setting.

The first layer – business cooperation – has been institutionalized through the WB6 CIF. The WB6 CIF has been provided with a valuable position to provide input and shape the implementation of regional initiatives, while also being financially supported by EU and other donors in pursuing of its regular activities and projects. The business perspective has been continuously retained on the agenda of the Berlin Process, enabling the WB6 CIF and other stakeholders to actively convey their interests and to help tailor the regional economic cooperation agenda.

The second layer – policy alignment – has been foundational to the two major undertakings around WB6 regional economic cooperation: the REA and CRM. The BP actors have demonstrated continued political determination to shape the region into a borderless economic area, evident in the action plans of the REA and CRM. However, genuine results of the regional economic agenda are conditioned by policy adjustments at the national level. The necessity of improvements in this direction has been pointed out in the Chair's Declaration of the Tirana Summit (2023), as noted above.

The third layer – coordination of financial programs and instruments to achieve specific economic goals – has played a vital role in the sustainability of BP initiatives. The selected initiatives (the WB6 CIF, REA and CRM, Transport Community, and Connectivity Agenda) have been bolstered with strong financial support primarily from the EU's IPA funds. Without financial allocations, the prospects for success of any initiative were rather limited. This particularly refers to large undertakings in the area of regional economic integration, transport, and connectivity. In addition to financial allocations, the implementation structure has been a crucial factor for success. All analyzed outputs in this section have been institutionally supported, which maintained their active status and undeniably positive results. However, the real success of these policy areas within the BP should be the subject of a detailed impact assessment, which is not within the mandate of this study. No such assessment has been done so far, although it could certainly provide a more comprehensive understanding of the BP's results.

The initiatives in the policy area of regional economic cooperation were developed under EU auspices and proclaimed as preparatory steps towards the future membership of the WB6 in the EU single market. Although this linkage has been viewed with a certain skepticism in the region, tangible results such as the "Roam Like at Home" regime have increased ownership of BP initiatives in the region. This should serve as a lesson for future developments in this policy area, and even more broadly in the BP.

35 Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (BPA), Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, 28 August 2014, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/service/archive/archive/final-declaration-by-the-chair-of-the-conference-on-the-western-balkans-754634> (accessed August 29, 2024).

## 2. SOCIETAL COOPERATION

The importance of civil society and their role in supporting democratization and EU enlargement in the WB6 and regionally was recognized early in the BP establishment. This section analyses activities and initiatives supported in the BP framework that encourage participation, advocacy, and critical engagement of citizens, including youth, Roma integration, and reconciliation efforts in the region.

**Table 2: List of Outputs and Initiatives Within the Societal Cooperation Area**

ENTRY	OUTPUT/ DOMAIN	START- YEAR	END- YEAR	RELEVANT ORGANIZATION	AREA OF FOCUS/ OBJECTIVES
1.	Civil Society Forum	2015	Ongoing	ERSTE Foundation, EFB, OSF, BP partner countries	Policy recommendations, regional collaboration
2.	Think Tank Forum	2019	2020	Merged with the Civil Society Forum	As above and support to EU integration
3.	Western Balkans Fund	2017	Ongoing	WB6 governments EU	Support to civil society and reconciliation
4.	Reconciliation	2015	Ongoing	RYCO, WBF, other BP initiatives	Peace and stability between WB6 societies
5.	Roma Integration	2019	Ongoing	OSF	Integration, support to Roma
6.	RYCO	2016	Ongoing	WB6 governments, EU, other donors	Regional youth cooperation
7.	Youth Forum	2016	Ongoing	RYCO, WB youth and CSOs	Youth engagement and development
8.	Culture Fund	2022	Open	Funded by German gov., implemented by RYCO	Bring together artists and others from the cultural scene from at least two WB6 countries

### Entry 1 and 2: Civil Society Forum and Think Tank Forum

The Civil Society Forum (CSF) of the Berlin Process was launched in 2015. It was initiated by the Austrian MFA in co-operation with the ERSTE Foundation, which provided operational and financial support. The ERSTE Foundation continued financially supporting the CSF and it transferred the coordination and management responsibilities to the European Fund for the Balkans. At the Trieste Summit in 2017, it was officially stated that the CSF is an integral part of the Berlin Process. The CSF is a series of events aimed at fostering dialogue, sharing best practices, and developing policy recommendations among civil society representatives, think-tanks, and experts from the Western Balkans (WB).<sup>36</sup> It was among the first concrete initiatives of the BP, initially managed by

the European Fund for the Balkans,<sup>37</sup> with a later involvement of the Southeast Europe Association, Aspen Institute Germany, and the Open Society Foundations.

The CSF has been held in the margins of the BP summit every year. It was envisaged that relevant representatives of the CSF should be regularly consulted between summits in order to prepare 'shadow reports' on the topics covered within the BP and help in realizing some of the agreements on the ground. These consultations have included meetings and smaller forums under the CSF umbrella which were organized in 2016 (two meetings, Novi Sad/Belgrade and Skopje) and 2017 (Tirana). The scope of the CSF's activities grew under the UK (2018) and Polish (2019) chairmanships to include preparatory meetings for the London Summit, the Civil Society Forum of the

<sup>36</sup> CSF, About CSF, <https://wb-csf.eu/about-csf> (accessed July 31, 2024).

<sup>37</sup> European Fund for the Balkans, Initiatives, <https://balkanfund.org/initiatives>, (accessed July 31, 2024).

Western Balkans conference, roundtables with civil society in Tirana, Podgorica, Sarajevo, and Pristina, a regional meeting of the WB6 Ministries of Foreign Affairs and the CSF of the Western Balkans, and the Think Tank Forum in Skopje (2019). The Reflection Forum Initiative participated in the main CSF events between 2016 and 2019 and collaborated further as outlined below.<sup>38</sup> In parallel, the summit hosts (UK and Polish government officials) invested extensive efforts to travel throughout the region to meet local CSOs for brainstorming, mapping, and needs assessments.

In 2021 and 2022, under the German chair, the CSF was held twice per year including a Preparatory Forum with thematic working groups and a Main Forum on the margins of the BP Summit in Berlin. In 2023, the CSF was supported and funded by the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which allowed for activities to be expanded significantly with several hybrid and in-person meetings of thematic working groups throughout the year. Some meetings saw engagement with national ministries (e.g. the Minister of Environment and Spatial Planning of North Macedonia) and representatives of EU delegations (e.g. EU Office in Kosovo on the security agenda).

The think tank community was involved in the CSF since 2015 and took part in the forum established later that year. The Polish government decided to introduce a separate Think Tank Forum (TTF) at the Summit in Poznan in 2019, which was merged with the CSF in 2020 at the Sofia Summit. In 2019, one meeting of the TFF was held in Skopje before the main summit.

Under the CSF umbrella, civil society representatives were sometimes invited to participate in official governmental meetings between the BP summits. This includes the EU-WB Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs (2016), the Reflection Forum (2018, 2019) under the auspices of the GIZ Open Regional Fund (ORF) for South-East Europe, which also in-

cluded RYCO and some WB government representatives in collaboration with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) of Poland (2019), regional meetings with WB MFAs (2019, 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023), participation in an international energy and infrastructure conference (2019), and the ministerial meeting on Roma Integration (2021). Their involvement remains on an ad-hoc basis.

Contributions from the CSF became more focused from 2017 when it started preparing policy briefs with recommendations. So far, the CSF has covered EU enlargement and regional cooperation, bilateral disputes, rule of law, democratization, security, migration, connectivity and digitalization, disinformation, reconciliation and good neighborly relations, climate and the green agenda, energy, mobility, and the European Single Market. Local and regional civil society organizations and experts collaborate on these publications<sup>39</sup> every year, which also shaped the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum's joint statements.<sup>40</sup>

A crucial part of the CSF activities was a presentation of the policy recommendations to Western Balkan and EU leaders during the leaders' summit, starting from 2016. In Trieste, the recommendations were acknowledged and included in the Trieste Western Balkans Summit Declaration by the Italian chair.<sup>41</sup> The practice was continued in London 2018 and at the CSF in Poznan, where representatives had a high-level session with political leaders to share their inputs. At the 2022 CSF in Berlin and 2023 CSF in Tirana representatives of WB national ministries participated in several panels and discussions.<sup>42</sup>

### Entry 3: Western Balkans Fund (WBF)

The WBF was set-up in the framework of the BP as an international organization based in Tirana, Albania, founded by the governments of all WB6 countries.<sup>43</sup> Its establishment as an all-inclusive and regionally owned initiative was confirmed in 2015, following the Vienna Summit, and it became operational in 2017.

38 The Western Balkans Reflection Forum Initiative was launched in 2015 to advance a strategic, inclusive and policy-oriented reflection on the relations between the EU, its Member States and the countries of the Western Balkans. <https://www.cep.si/regional-projects/reflection-forum-initiative-2/> (accessed 28 August 2024)

39 The Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans, Publications, <https://wb-csf.eu/publications-csf> (accessed August 28, 2024).

40 Ibid.

41 CSF, Civil Society Forum Recommendations as Part of the Western Balkans Summit Declaration, <https://wb-csf.eu/news-and-events-csf/civil-society-forum-recommendations-as-part-of-the-western-balkans-summit-declaration> (accessed August 28, 2024).

42 Aspen Institute Germany and Southeast Europe Association, Civil Society & Think Tank Forum 2022, Conference Report and Policy Recommendations, [https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/Think-Tank-Forum-2022\\_2212199.pdf](https://www.aspeninstitute.de/wp-content/uploads/Think-Tank-Forum-2022_2212199.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

43 Western Balkans Fund, Western Balkans Fund – Supporting Common Projects, <https://westernbalkansfund.org/about-us/> (accessed August 28, 2024).

The WBF aims to promote cooperation and common values between citizens, civil society, and people-to-people contacts by providing funding for small and medium projects.

The WBF is funded by the WB6 governments and offers grants on a competitive basis (through calls for proposals) to a wide range of actors in the region covering cultural cooperation, scientific exchanges, research, educational cooperation, sustainable development, youth development, cross-border cooperation, media, the environment, European integration, and gender as a cross-cutting issue. Through public calls in five cycles since 2016, the organization has distributed 1.65 million EUR (maximum individual grant amount is 15,000 EUR) and 210,000 EUR in the newly launched Move Grants in 2023.

The WBF also developed and strengthened cooperation with the European Commission resulting in the WB/EU Joint Action contract in 2021, which enabled co-funding of the WBF grants scheme by the European Union. The Joint Action receives 67.9 percent of its funding from the EU while 32.1 percent is covered from the WBF's own budget.

#### Entry 4: Reconciliation

Achieving reconciliation within and between societies in the region is one of the Berlin Process's four pillars. Commitment to the topic of reconciliation was reaffirmed in specifically dedicated sections of the Vienna Summit Declaration 2015, the Paris Summit Declaration 2016, the Trieste Declaration 2017, the London Declaration 2018, the Poznan Declaration 2019, and the Berlin Declaration 2021.<sup>44</sup> Stakeholders from the BP participating states often acknowledged the importance of dealing with the past as a necessary step for achieving regional stability.

Some concrete actions and initiatives within the BP address and support reconciliation. RYCO (see

Entry 6) was structured on the experience of the Franco-German Youth Office<sup>45</sup> combined with experience of the Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation<sup>46</sup>, both with long experience of working on reconciliation. Furthermore, the 2017 Trieste final declaration specifically mentioned recommendations by the CSF for setting up a 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 January 1st, 1991, to December 31st, 2001 (RECOM).<sup>47</sup> Notably, the London Summit of 2018 made the most concrete contribution to reconciliation. 14 participating prime ministers signed the declaration which included a "Joint Declaration on Missing Persons" and a "Joint Declaration on War Crimes" in the framework of the BP.

#### Entry 5: Roma Integration

Exclusion and marginalization of Roma people is well documented, showing that their societal and institutional integration is problematic in the WB6 and Europe. These challenges have been addressed in the BP framework. The Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process was adopted by the WB6 Prime Ministers in July 2019 (Poznan Summit).<sup>48</sup> The Declaration was followed by the first Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration in Tirana in October 2020.<sup>49</sup> It welcomed "related aspects of the EC Economic and Investment Plan for the WB, which recognizes the need to improve the access to education and labor market for Roma."<sup>50</sup>

The second Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration in the Western Balkans was held in Sarajevo in June 2021. It was included in the agenda and the declaration of the Berlin Process Summit 2021 and the Berlin Process Summit 2022, with a third Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration held in Podgorica in October 2022. The Sofia Chair's Conclusions underlined the

44 Berlin Process, Documents, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/documents> (accessed August 28, 2024).

45 Franco-German Youth Office, <https://www.fgyo.org/homepage> (accessed August 28, 2024).

46 The Foundation for Polish-German Cooperation, <https://fwpn.org.pl/en/foundation/about-us> (accessed August 28, 2024).

47 Confusion remains about links between the proposed BP RECOM and original RECOM, which existed since 2001.

48 Regional Cooperation Council 2016-2022, Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process, <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/105/strategy-for-the-advancement-of-the-rights-of-the-roma-and-ashkali-communities-in-kosovo-2022-2026-and-the-action-plan-2022-2024> (accessed August 28, 2024).

49 Regional Cooperation Council 2016-2022, Conclusions of the Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration, <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/news/343/conclusions-of-the-ministerial-meeting-on-roma-integration> (accessed August 28, 2024).

50 Berlin Process, Chair's Conclusions 2020, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2020\\_1714043700.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2020_1714043700.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

importance of including the Roma integration dimension in mainstream policies, including the Digital Agenda and the Green Agenda for the WB6. The fourth Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration was held in Skopje in September 2023 and was followed by a reaffirmed commitment to Roma integration in the Tirana Summit 2023 Chair's Conclusions, specifically in the areas of education, employment, civil registration, the regularization of informal settlements, and in the digital field.

The BP Roma integration topic received endorsements by the Roma Integration program<sup>51</sup> supported by the EU in cooperation with the Council of Europe, but this program is not institutionally or financially connected to the BP initiative.<sup>52</sup> The first two phases of this program were implemented by RCC and financed by the EC and the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which also organized the CSF in Tirana (2023) where the Roma topic featured prominently.

### Entry 6 and 7: Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and the Youth Forum

RYCO is a concrete, institutionalized output of the BP established by the WB6 governments. It aims to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation between the youth in the region through exchange programs.<sup>53</sup> It supports youth organizations in the region through grants distribution and youth exchange. Among the main outputs is an annual Western Balkans Youth Forum, which typically takes place on the margins of the annual BP summit. Similarly to the CSF, the forums have been supported by BP host governments and received external funding including the RCC's Western Balkan Youth Lab project and the EU-funded Technical Assistance to Civil Society Organizations in the Western Balkans and Turkey (TACSO).

The Youth Forum, also called a Youth Conference in 2016, 2017, and 2018, has covered a wide range of relevant topics including education and mobility, employment and entrepreneurship, youth engagement and participation, and youth and the media. In Trieste (2017), the focus was on the Young Civil Servants Scheme and Erasmus+. At the London Summit, Youth Conference and CSF were merged (2019), while in Poznan (2019) and Sofia (2020) the event was omitted altogether. Youth Forum in Berlin (2021) was oriented towards reconciliation and peacebuilding, volunteering, new skills for the future, sustainable development, shifting “brain drain” to “brain gain,” and how to increase youth participation as part of the proposed Regional Youth Agenda (RYA).<sup>54</sup> The Youth Forum in Berlin (2022) launched a Berlin Declaration composed of four segments — the preamble, where young people identify their concerns and aims and three sections dedicated to establishing resilient democracies, building inclusive peace in times of war, and ensuring a sustainable and green future.<sup>55</sup> The Youth Forum in Tirana (2023) highlighted questions of education and youth mobility of young people and issued a declaration referring to topics initiated in the Berlin Declaration.<sup>56</sup> RYCO regularly participated in the BP meetings on other topics, such as foreign ministers' meetings and leaders' summits, and collaborated with the CSF.

RYCO is financed by the WB6 governments and supported by the EU and other donors. RYCO's reported results for the period 2018-2021 stated the inclusion of over 27,000 young people of the WB6 in some of the RYCO's activities (more recent reports are not publicly available).<sup>57</sup> This included three regional youth mobility and exchange programs, regional training programs for teachers and young journalists, the RYCO Superschools Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme supported by the GIZ (scheduled to run until 2026), 110 regional projects

51 Council of Europe, European Union Launches the Third Phase of its Roma Integration Programme in Partnership with the Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/-/european-union-launches-the-third-phase-of-its-roma-integration-programme-in-partnership-with-the-council-of-europe> (accessed 28 August, 2024)

52 Interviewing WB6 sectoral Ministries was outside the scope of this study.

53 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, <https://www.rycowb.org/about/> (accessed August 28, 2024).

54 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Regional Youth Agenda, [https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Regional-Youth-Agenda\\_fin\\_05072021.pdf](https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Regional-Youth-Agenda_fin_05072021.pdf) (accessed September 21, 2024).

55 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Berlin Declaration of the WB Youth Forum 2022: The Youth Calls for Democracy, Peace, and Sustainability, <https://www.rycowb.org/berlin-declaration-of-the-wb-youth-forum-2022-the-youth-calls-for-democracy-peace-and-sustainability/> (accessed September 21, 2024).

56 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Western Balkans Youth Forum 2023, Summary and Action Points, <https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Conclusions-of-the-WB-Youth-Forum-2023.docx-1.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2024).

57 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, RYCO Strategic Plan 2022-2024, <https://www.rycowb.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/RYCO-Strategic-Plan-2022-2024-Final-compressed.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2024).

responding to identified needs of youth, CSOs and secondary schools in the WB6, and other activities aiming at building an advanced youth culture in the region.<sup>58</sup> In 2024, RYCO has four active projects with 6.5 million EUR including the Western Balkan Youth Cultural Fund project worth 1.1 million EUR until 2026.

### Entry 8: Culture Fund

In 2023, importance of culture received recognition at the Tirana Summit in 2023, when it was added to the BP agenda. Germany committed 300,000 EUR specifically for the Culture Fund, alongside 1.2 million EUR for RYCO programming.<sup>59</sup>

## Interim Stocktaking

This policy area addresses initiatives grouped under the domain of societal cooperation, including commitments and actions aimed at supporting social groups, citizens, and civil society. Concrete, sustainable initiatives established in the societal cooperation policy area include the CSF and TTF, the WBF, and RYCO and the Youth Forum. Each initiative can be seen as contributing to reconciliation in the region, as is clearly stated in their programmatic objectives, which has emerged as a cross-cutting area of the BP.

The civil society and think tank community's engagement in the BP, starting in 2015, has become more prominent and formally recognized in the summit declarations. However, their involvement with the WB6 governments, particularly at the leaders' level, remains marginal and on an ad-hoc basis. The civil society and think tank community's participation in the foreign ministers' meetings and the recent practice of including WB6 government ministers on the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum's panels are promising steps. Both the CSF and TTF generated opportunities for activists to meet, exchange ideas, and collaborate regionally through annual CSF events, which have ensured constant influence on policy processes. Furthermore, the policy briefs have generated influential recommendations and entered a public discourse, even if they were not always followed-up by specific activities. Initially, the policy

briefs were available in WB6 local languages, but this was later abandoned, which limits citizens' access to the BP policy agendas and priorities.

The CSF portfolio has generally matched the BP portfolio of projects and initiatives, but only brought limited benefit to civil society. Positive outcomes include increased connection between CSOs from the WB6 and the BP participating EU member states, the expansion of civil society's work on promoting European integration, and making civil society's expertise more visible to the WB6 governments and EU institutions as well as helping to strengthen societal cohesion and regional cooperation. Nevertheless, civil society remains deeply concerned about a lack of concrete support for EU enlargement and democratization in the BP framework.

The CSF does not have dedicated or institutionalized financing in the BP framework. The cost of activities is typically covered by the BP summit host country combined with significant financial support from OSF and other donors like ERSTE. Funding for civil society involvement between the summits remains patchy and inadequate, which affects the effectiveness and sustainability of this engagement and further complicates the planning of activities.

The Western Balkans Fund's contribution to the societal and regional cooperation has been positive. As a concrete, institutionalized output of the BP, it has been fully operational since 2017, promising lasting sustainability. It continues to support civil society, youth initiatives, research, and education in the WB and can be considered a successful cooperation initiative of the WB governments.

RYCO is another established initiative with regular secured financing and a secretariat. The platform is essential for supporting youth projects in the region and reversing the impact of democratic decline in the WB countries through youth cooperation. It has been a successful tool for supporting regional cooperation and fostering reconciliation on the societal level, especially among the youth. Commitment to youth engagement was reinvigorated during Albania's chairmanship in 2023.<sup>60</sup> However, the internal dynamics

58 Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Superschools Western Balkans School Exchange Scheme, <https://www.rycowb.org/building-capacity-and-momentum-for-ryco-2-3-2/> (accessed August 28, 2024).

59 Bundesregierung, Clear Commitment to the EU Prospects for the Western Balkan States, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/western-balkans-tirana-2023-2230546> (accessed September 3, 2024).

60 Ibid.

between representatives of different WB6 countries in the organization reportedly remain sensitive.<sup>61</sup>

Funding made available via the Western Balkans Fund and RYCO is beneficial for civil society and youth organizations in the region. Noteworthy is a lack of direct financial support from the WB governments to the CSF and TTF. When it comes to possible reasons, feedback from some WB governments emphasized lack of financial and human resources when it comes to engaging in the BP, which limits the possibility of their support for the CSF activities.

Reconciliation was embedded in the BP framework when the process was initiated and remains if focus through regional projects. Despite recommendations and concrete steps taken in 2017 and 2018, reconciliation activities have never been institutionalized as a self-standing financing effort. Civil society has been the main driver for this process. One exception is the UK government, which continued to support work on war crimes and missing persons for five years after the London Summit. Slow progress on implementation was noted by leaders in Poznan 2019, where the Chair's Conclusions added a reference to the need to support RECOM.<sup>62</sup> The WB governments have shown little interest in supporting reconciliation initiatives directly, although they do so implicitly by funding RYCO and the WBF.

Dedication to Roma integration has been maintained on the BP agenda since 2019. It has been recognized and endorsed by the EU as an initiative, which allows for connecting activities and policy influence in this domain. Representatives of Roma NGOs have been regularly attending meetings and activities of the CSF, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Roma ministerial<sup>63</sup> meeting held in 2023 outlining concrete steps of action.<sup>64</sup>

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61 Interview with the BP stakeholders.

62 Berlin Process, Chair's Conclusions 2019, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2019\\_1714043719.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2019_1714043719.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

63 European Commission, Fourth Ministerial Meeting on Roma Integration, [https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech\\_23\\_4587](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_4587) (accessed August 28, 2024).

64 Ibid.

### 3. POLITICAL AND SECURITY COOPERATION

This policy area focuses on internal issues in the WB countries, primarily assessing outputs and initiatives that supported democracy and rule of law (RoL), good governance agenda, and security.

**Table 3: List of Outputs and Initiatives within the Political and Security Policy Area**

ENTRY	OUTPUT/ DOMAIN	START- YEAR	END- YEAR	RELEVANT ORGANIZATION	AREA OF FOCUS/ OBJECTIVES
1.	Democracy, Good Governance, and Rule of Law	2014	Ongoing (intermittent)	BP	Nominal support to democracy, mainly in summit declarations
2.	Judiciary and Anti-corruption Measures	2014	Ongoing (intermittent)	BP, UK and Italian governments	Supporting anti-corruption measures in the WB6
3.	Security and Justice	2018	Ongoing	UK government, German government	Homeland, SALW, European, OC, terrorism
4.	Migration	2015	Ongoing (intermittent)	BP	Illegal migration routes, human
5.	Parliamentary Dimension of the BP	2023	Ongoing	BP, German government, RCC	Inclusion of WB parliaments in the BP
6.	Media	2015	2015	BP	Media freedom

#### Entry 1: Democracy, Good Governance, and Rule of Law (RoL)

The inclusion of democracy and good governance topics in the BP agenda has been patchy, sometimes as one-off meetings and events or in the wording of the Summit Declarations (2014, 2015, 2017, 2018). In 2019 in the Poznan Chair's Conclusions, the leaders of the Western Balkans reconfirmed their commitment to strengthening the rule of law. Recommitment to strengthening rule of law rule of law, criminal justice, and information exchange between law enforcement agencies was stated again in the Chair's Declaration in 2021 and 2023, alongside the fight against organized crime.<sup>65</sup> According to the BP website, RoL is listed as a specific topic of the leader's summits in 2016 and 2017. The topics seem to have been driven by the EU host countries rather than their WB6 counterparts. Starting in 2016, RoL was regularly incorporated in CSF meeting agendas, policy outputs, and

recommendations. The declaration by the Italian Chair (2017) notes that "Improving governance and the rule of law is an essential requirement for EU accession and for building a sound economic fabric."

#### Entry 2: Judiciary and Anti-corruption Measures

The fight against corruption was prioritized from the start of the BP and was on the leader's summit agenda in 2014, 2016, 2017 (topic listed as RoL and anti-corruption), 2018, and 2019.<sup>66</sup> To mainstream the anticorruption dimension, the Italian National Anticorruption Authority (ANAC) chaired a workshop in Trieste (2017) with partner institutions from the WB6 and the Regional Anticorruption Initiative (RAI) focused on five issues: prevention of corruption, transparency, public procurement, whistleblowing, and conflicts of interest.<sup>67</sup> The Joint Declaration Against Corruption was signed at the Trieste Summit 2017<sup>68</sup> alongside an agreement to organize thematic fol-

65 Berlin Process, Documents, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/#summits> (accessed August 28, 2024).

66 Ibid.

67 Berlin Process, Declaration by the Italian Chair, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-by-the-italian-chair-2017\\_1714043754.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-by-the-italian-chair-2017_1714043754.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

68 Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Trieste Western Balkans Summit. Joint Declaration Against Corruption, [https://www.esteri.it/en/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2017/07/trieste-western-balkan-summit-joint/](https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2017/07/trieste-western-balkan-summit-joint/) (accessed July 31, 2024).



low-up seminars and cooperate with the EC in order to strengthen WB6 capacities to respond to corruption.

At the London Summit in 2018, the WB6 expressed their commitment to fight and prevent corruption and tackle organized crime. Anti-corruption pledges and activities remained in focus at the Poznan Summit (2019), noting that they are also reflected in the EU's "fundamentals first" approach.<sup>69</sup> WB6 governments made further commitments to fulfill the declaration's pledges and implement anti-corruption measures (e.g. Kosovo).<sup>70</sup> In 2021, support for the anti-corruption portfolio was transferred from the UK government to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which established a Regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans Jurisdictions.<sup>71</sup>

Independence of the judiciary is listed as a topic of the first BP summit in 2014 alongside anti-corruption measures. The need to support reform of judiciary, in line with the EU enlargement process, has been mentioned in the Chair's Declarations in 2016 and 2019. The Berlin Chair's Conclusions (2021) reaffirmed commitment to the anti-corruption pledges agreed in London in 2018 and addressing aspects of corruption linked to organized crime groups are of relevance to the ministries of justice, anti-corruption agencies, the ministries of finance, and the ministries of the interior.

### Entry 3: Security and Justice

This issue area covers several aspects: preventing illicit flow of small arms and light weapons (SALW), countering violent extremism, tackling organized crime, and strengthening security in the WB region and the EU. This area was brought into focus under the Italian (2017) and UK (2018) chairs and engaged the ministries of foreign affairs, interior, and finance.

Then Prime Minister Theresa May was very keen on both international and homeland security, prioritizing these topics at the London Summit. The fight against organized crime was prominent at the Trieste Summit agenda, although coupled with fight against terrorism, extremism, and radicalization.

At the London Summit, the governments of the WB6 committed to strengthening coordination and co-operation within the region in the fields of serious and organized crime, terrorism, and other security threats.<sup>72</sup> To facilitate this, they called for an action to end forced labor, modern slavery, and human trafficking, signed the Small Arms and Light Weapons Initiative Road Map, and issued a Joint Declaration on Principles of Cooperation in the Field of Information-Exchange for Law.

Delivery of these initiatives and commitment was monitored by a newly formed Security Commitments Steering Group chaired by the UK. A regional meeting on security was held in January 2018 followed by the first Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group meeting in November 2018. The second meeting of the group was held in June 2019, while European security was discussed in a separate summit preparation meeting. The last meeting of the Security Commitments Steering Group was held in January 2020 in Sofia.<sup>73</sup>

After this, the topic of security returned in 2021 through a meeting of ministers of interior and the Joint Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation in the Field of Information Exchange for Law Enforcement.<sup>74</sup> A "roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans by 2024" was approved at the Berlin Process Summit in 2021. In 2023, a tripartite inter-governmental agreement establishing the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre was signed with the

69 Berlin Process, Chair's Conclusions 2019, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2019\\_1714043719.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2019_1714043719.pdf) (accessed July 31, 2024).

70 Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Commitments from the 'Berlin Process' on Rule of Law and Good Governance, <https://bit.ly/3AFZVMZ> (accessed July 31, 2024).

71 United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, Regional Anti-Corruption and Illicit Finance Roadmap for the Western Balkans Jurisdictions, [https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeasterneurope/AC\\_and\\_Illicit\\_Finance\\_Roadmap\\_Full\\_25.06\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.unodc.org/documents/southeasterneurope/AC_and_Illicit_Finance_Roadmap_Full_25.06_PDF.pdf) (accessed July 31, 2024).

72 The UK Government, Berlin Process – Security Commitments Steering Group. Terms of Reference, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b4390bb40f0b678c91a2ae9/Berlin\\_Process\\_Security\\_Commitments\\_Steering\\_Group\\_Terms\\_of\\_Reference.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b4390bb40f0b678c91a2ae9/Berlin_Process_Security_Commitments_Steering_Group_Terms_of_Reference.pdf) (accessed July 31, 2024).

73 Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, 28–29 January 2020, Sofia, Bulgaria: Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group, <https://archive.rai-see.org/28-29-january-2020-sofia-bulgaria-berlin-process-security-commitments-steering-group/> (accessed July 31, 2024).

74 Berlin Process, Chair's Conclusions 2021, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2021\\_1714043673.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2021_1714043673.pdf) (accessed July 31, 2024).

aim to promote regional cooperation in the domain of cyber resilience during Albania's chairmanship.

The first engagement on terrorism in the BP framework was the conference "Tackling Jihadism Together – Shaping, Preventing, Reacting" in March 2015.<sup>75</sup> It resulted in the EU-Western Balkans Counter Terrorism initiative, which was adopted in December 2015 and coordinated by the RCC as part of the Integrative Internal Security Governance process. Further commitment to tackling terrorism and radicalization was expressed in the Chair's Declaration of the Paris Summit (2016) and received comprehensive attention in the Trieste Summit Declaration (2017) focused on information sharing, regional cooperation between WB6 and EU countries and institutions, and work with local communities.<sup>76</sup> The topic was withdrawn from the BP agenda in later years as it was less geopolitically relevant.

#### Entry 4: Migration

The topic of migration has been on the summit agenda since 2014, particularly related to the migrant crisis. At a meeting in 2015, the Western Balkans Migration Route, a 17-point action plan, was agreed upon. In Paris (2016), the parties identified the areas in which regional cooperation between the EU and the WB should be further strengthened: return and readmission, information exchange, coordination, joint operations to fight smugglers' networks and organized crime, and enhanced cooperation between border police forces. Participants also agreed on the importance of constantly monitoring the development of new migration routes through the region to the EU.<sup>77</sup> Migration was mentioned as a topic in the Chair's Declarations or Conclusions in 2015, 2016, and 2017 (irregular migration) as well as in 2021, where a specific reference was made to the Migration, Asylum Refugees Regional Initiative as follows:

- Participants recognized the constantly changing challenges of migration within the WB region,

whilst acknowledging the opportunities for economic development and societal exchange presented by migration;

- Participants commended the activities of the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative as a platform for discussing and developing migration policies and strategies.

Concrete activities addressing migration varied from year to year and included a conference titled "Eastern Mediterranean – Western Balkans Route" (2015), a meeting on the WB migration route (2015), a discussion at the Think Tank Forum in Skopje (2020), and a mention in the Tirana Summit Chair's Conclusions (2023) in the context of security and prevention of migrant smuggling.

#### Entry 5: Parliamentary Dimension of the BP

The importance of the WB6 parliaments was first acknowledged in the 2019 Poznan Summit Chair's Conclusions. The Conference of the Parliamentary Committees on European Integration/Affairs of the States Participating in the Stabilization and Association Process in Southeast Europe (COSAP) recommended establishing the parliamentary dimension of the Berlin Process at a meeting in Tirana in January 2021. A parliamentary conference on "The role of the Parliaments in the Berlin Process" was held in Tirana on October 13, 2023, and called on governments to support a stronger role for parliaments in the BP.<sup>78</sup>

#### Entry 6: Media

Despite the crucial importance of media freedom and its worrisome downward trend in the WB6, only one media event, the BIRN regional conference in 2015, was organized in the BP framework. However, journalists and representatives of independent media organizations have been regularly invited to participate in the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum.

75 Council of the European Union, Vienna Declaration. Tackling Violent Extremism and Terrorism, 7500/15, March 25, 2015, <https://www.statewatch.org/media/documents/news/2015/apr/eu-council-vienna-declaration-terrorism-7500-15.pdf> (accessed September 3, 2024).

76 Berlin Process, Chair's Conclusions 2016; [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2016\\_1714043769.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2016_1714043769.pdf); Berlin Process: Declaration by the Italian Chair 2017, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-by-the-italian-chair-2017\\_1714043754.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-by-the-italian-chair-2017_1714043754.pdf) (accessed July 31, 2024).

77 Berlin Process, Final Declaration 2016, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2016\\_1714043769.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2016_1714043769.pdf) (accessed August, 1 2024).

78 Berlin Process, Parliamentary Conference on 'The Role of the Parliaments in the Berlin Process'. Tirana, 13 October 2023. Declaration, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-conference-on-the-role-of-the-parliaments-in-the-berlin-process\\_1697467634.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/declaration-conference-on-the-role-of-the-parliaments-in-the-berlin-process_1697467634.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

## Interim Stocktaking

The issue areas of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law (RoL) are among the less successful areas of the BP in terms of concrete outputs and attention received, but were still addressed in the Chair's Declarations or Conclusions in most years between 2014 and 2023. At the same time, civil society, think tanks, and youth representatives called for more attention to this area, most recently in the policy paper prepared for the CSF 2023 in Tirana.<sup>79</sup> Commitment to the RoL by the WB6 governments is a key requirement for EU membership and a necessary factor for EU accession.<sup>80</sup> The anti-corruption and security portfolios received significant attention and continue to feature on the BP agenda, but the measures cannot be maintained without upholding the RoL.

Including parliaments as legislative bodies in the BP is an important step as they represent the electorate: the citizens of the WB6. However, due to diminished credibility of parliaments due to questionable electoral procedures and election fraud, the development of this area needs to be continued carefully to ensure it supports democracy and the RoL.

The security agenda can be considered a successful output of the BP, if not consistently featured at all annual summits and declarations. After boosting the security portfolio at the London Summit, the UK government continued to support the Security Commitments Steering Group for five years, after which it was transferred to the UNODC. At the same time, the interior ministers track was permanently embedded in the BP portfolio, and they have continued meeting on a regular basis. Despite these efforts, security challenges, corruption, and organized crime continue to plague the WB region.<sup>81</sup>

Media freedom is a topic that did not deliver any concrete outputs and disappeared from the BP agenda a year after its introduction. Initiatives on cybersecurity, an area formally introduced to the BP portfolio in 2023, will be limited without support to independent media and media freedom which helps combat misinformation and propaganda in the WB6.

Migration appeared only sporadically on the BP agenda, particularly during the 2015 migrant crises and recently related to the topic of trafficking of illegal migrants. Any concrete action in this area and linking with other EU supported initiatives would be beneficial to the region. Some issue areas, like migration and terrorism, were dropped from the BP portfolio when they became less of a European or global priority.

79 CSF, Key Recommendations of the Thematic Working Group on Security and Geopolitics, [https://wb-csf.eu/docs/07\\_Key-Recommendations-of-the-Thematic-Working-Group-on-Security-and-Geopolitics.pdf.pdf](https://wb-csf.eu/docs/07_Key-Recommendations-of-the-Thematic-Working-Group-on-Security-and-Geopolitics.pdf.pdf) (accessed August 1, 2024).

80 European Commission, Rule of Law Report 2024: With the 5th Edition, the EU is Better Equipped to Face Rule of Law Challenges, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/rule-law-report-2024-5th-edition-eu-better-equipped-face-rule-law-challenges-2024-07-24\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/rule-law-report-2024-5th-edition-eu-better-equipped-face-rule-law-challenges-2024-07-24_en) (accessed August 1, 2024).

81 Stakeholder interview.

## 4. FOREIGN POLICY

Resolving outstanding bilateral issues is one of the four original BP intervention areas, defined in 2014. They are part of the foreign policy area that also covers interactions between the states enacted through the foreign ministers' engagement, strategies for engagement with international actors, specifically the EU, and addressing challenges that are of cross-border nature and require actions by more than one country and coordination such as migration.

**Table 4: List of Outputs and Initiatives within Foreign Policy Area**

ENTRY	OUTPUT/ DOMAIN	START- YEAR	END- YEAR	RELEVANT ORGANIZATION	AREA OF FOCUS/ OBJECTIVES
1.	Bilateral Disputes Resolution	2015	2021 (Intermittent)	BP summit host governments, GIZ	Resolution of bilateral disputes between the states involved in the BP
2.	Foreign Ministers Meetings	2014	Ongoing	BP summit host governments, WB6 governments	Enhance regional cooperation, setting BP priorities

### Entry 1: Bilateral Disputes Resolution

Bilateral issues between some Western Balkan countries (e.g. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, Serbia and Kosovo) are among the main obstacles to regional cooperation. Unresolved issues between some WB6 and EU member states can halt progress of the EU accession process (e.g. North Macedonia's hurdle in the process is a direct result of actions by neighboring countries). The EU enlargement policy is specific about resolving bilateral issues before joining the EU.

The bilateral disputes portfolio was introduced to the BP summit agenda at the Berlin Process Summit in Vienna (2015). The Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG) prepared a declaration titled "Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes" that was adopted at the summit.<sup>82</sup> This was the first concrete commitment to supporting the EU accession process of the WB6 by resolving bilateral disputes. The Chair's Final Declaration in 2015 (Vienna) also incorporated a commitment to monitor the bilateral disputes resolution on an annual basis, but this was phased out after 2018 despite some territorial and political issues being resolved between 2015 and 2017 in the BP framework.<sup>83</sup>

The first concrete step in this issue area was the signing of a border agreement between BiH and Montenegro in the margins of the Vienna Summit. A border demarcation agreement between Kosovo and Montenegro was signed on August 26, 2015, and was subsequently ratified by the respective parliaments in 2018.

Commitment to bilateral disputes resolution varied depending on the BP chair. Austria and the UK advanced this topic the most, with less interest during the French or Italian chairmanship. In the lead-up to the London Summit (2018), the bilateral issues portfolio was discussed at an informal meeting of foreign ministers (FM) in March 2018 and at a regional meeting of WB6 Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Prime Ministers in October 2018. The European Fund for the Balkans (EFB) on behalf of the CSF and BiEPAG participated as advisors during the preparations of this portfolio for the BP London Summit.

The first and second Stocktaking Seminar on Bilateral Issues in the framework of the BP took place in November 2018 and March 2019. This was a collaborative effort between the EFB, BiEPAG, the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs, the GIZ Open Regional Fund - EU Integration, and the WB6

82 Bundesministerium, Western Balkans Summit Vienna 2015. Addendum, [https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Addendum\\_Western\\_Balkans\\_Summit.pdf](https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Aussenpolitik/Addendum_Western_Balkans_Summit.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

83 Berlin Process, Chair's Declaration 2015, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2015\\_1714043784.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-final-declaration-2015_1714043784.pdf) (accessed August 1, 2024).

MFAs. The topic returned on the agenda of the Western Balkans Think Tank Forum in March 2020 and was acknowledged in the Chair's Conclusion at the Berlin Summit in 2021. Following the signing of the Prespa Agreement in 2018, Greece and Bulgaria were invited to the BP Summit in London with the intention to strengthen good neighborly relations in the region.

The dispute between Kosovo and Serbia remains the most pertinent bilateral and political issue in the WB region. It has sporadically appeared on the leaders' summit agenda and in the wording of the Chair's Conclusions in 2019 and 2021. A related dispute is the visa regime between BiH and Kosovo that most notably obstructs implementation of the mobility agreements of the CRM. Specifically, free travel with IDs is opposed by the President of Republika Srpska who has blocked its adoption and ratification. Because of this, CRM mobility agreements are not fully realized. Ratification and implementation of the mobility agreements remains closely monitored by the civil society sector and the WB6 governments.<sup>84</sup>

## Entry 2: Foreign Ministers Meetings

A key component of the BP has been the sustained involvement of the WB6 MFAs which have convened regularly, often in collaboration with external stakeholders like the EC (DG NEAR), the Visegrad Group, and other WB6 and partner country ministers (e.g. economy, energy, justice). The basic format is coordination meetings of WB6 MFAs, which have taken place in November 2015, March and November 2016, October 2018, April 2019, March and October 2020, June 2021, October 2022, and September 2023.

In 2015, WB6 FMs participated in the meeting of FMs of South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) members and in the following conferences: "Tackling Jihadism Together – Shaping, Preventing, Reacting" (Vienna), "Improved Connectivity and a Strong Core Network" (Prishtina), "Regional Cooperation Day" (Brussels), and the annual meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of the Visegrad Group (V4) and the WB6.<sup>85</sup> The foreign ministers regularly participated in the Brdo – Brijuni Process a yearly meeting

of the WB6 heads of state and governments, which is complementary to the BP.

In 2016, there was a high-level meeting of the WB6 ministers of foreign affairs in Durres, along with the Czech FM and DG NEAR, resulting in important agreements: EU funding for the connectivity agenda, a cooperation agenda regarding refugee crisis, a demand to conclude the visa liberalization process for all WB citizens, the EC's organization of a youth forum, the launch of a pilot scheme for young civil servants, and the preparation of a regional hydropower master plan.

The annual meeting of ministers of foreign affairs of the V4 and WB6 (Warsaw) concluded that the V4 will support EU integration of the WB6, fight against corruption, and manage migration. The subsequent meeting of the FMs of V4 and WB6 delivered the Transport Community Treaty (TCT) in December 2016.

In 2017, the foreign ministers' agenda had a major focus on energy. The first "WB Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Energy" (Skopje) discussed investment in energy efficiency and agreed on signing of the TCT, funding for energy efficiency, and the Electricity and Sustainability Charter. An informal meeting of the WB FMs was hosted by Italian FM Angelino Alfano in the lead up to the Trieste Summit facilitated discussion on upcoming topics, bilateral matters, and internal matters such as an agreement on Albanian elections.<sup>86</sup> An informal meeting of WB6 prime ministers (Durres) delivered an agreement on the 115-point plan, while the meeting of WB6 FMs in New York facilitated discussion of the Multiannual Action Plan for the Regional Economic Area.

In 2018, WB6 FMs participated in a regional meeting on security (Kolašin), a digital summit preparatory meeting, and an exchange on REA structures (Skopje). An informal meeting of the WB6 ministers of foreign affairs (March, Sarajevo) focused on RoL, bilateral issues, and reconciliation as critical to the region's EU integration and the upcoming London Summit. At the "Conference of the WB6 Ministers of Foreign Affairs" (Sarajevo), the list of projects selected

84 Cooperation and Development Institute, Update on CRM 4 Mobility Agreements (Implementation), <https://cdinstitute.eu/2024/01/16/update-on-crm-4-mobility-agreements-implementation/> (accessed August 1, 2024).

85 Signing of the Agreement on Establishment of the Western Balkans Fund.

86 Italian Government, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Informal Meeting of the Foreign Ministers of the Western Balkans, [https://www.esteri.it/en/sala\\_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2017/05/riunione-informale-dei-ministri-2/](https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2017/05/riunione-informale-dei-ministri-2/) (accessed August 1, 2024).

for funding by the Western Balkans Fund was approved and FMs participated in preparatory meetings for the London Summit in Sarajevo and Tirana. A WB6 FMs meeting (New York) supported the continuation of the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. A regional meeting of WB6 FMs and prime ministers' offices (Pristina) focused on expectations for the 2018 BP Summit and preparations for the first stocktaking seminar on bilateral issues within the Berlin Process.

In 2019, a meeting between WB6 Ministers of European Affairs and the EC focused on enlargement perspectives, European security, and construction of trans-European connections (Warsaw), followed by a WB6 ministries of foreign affairs exchange with RYCO (Skopje). WB6 FMs participated in the second stocktaking seminar on bilateral issues in the framework of the Berlin Process (Skopje) and the Civil Society Forum (Tirana). A regional meeting of WB6 FMs and prime ministers' offices focused on taking stock of implementation of the Berlin Process commitments and planning for the Poznan Summit. A meeting of the FMs of the Visegrad Group (V4) and the WB6 (Belgrade) focused on the Western Balkans' EU integration prospects and a common European future. Meetings of the MFAs (civil servants) were introduced during the Polish chair and continued under the Bulgaria/North Macedonia chair. The aim was to prepare the agenda for the FMs meeting and engagement with the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum.

In 2020, the first coordination meeting of the ministers of foreign affairs of the BP countries, was held in Skopje, followed by the preparatory meeting for the Western Balkans Summit in Sofia in (online).

In 2021, a meeting of FMs (online) focused on supporting the development of closer ties between the countries of the WB and the EU, the countries' EU accession, and enhanced regional cooperation. In 2022, a meeting of FMs was held in Berlin. In 2023, a foreign affairs ministerial of the BP was held in Tirana, Albania, focusing on regional cooperation.<sup>87</sup>

## Interim Stocktaking

The foreign policy agenda of the BP has two pillars. The first pillar is a platform for the foreign ministers of the WB6 and BP partner countries to engage regularly and work together. The second pillar consists of initiatives addressing specific problems that affect WB region, most notably:

- Bilateral disputes and their resolution with the aim to enable EU accession;
- Refugee crises and illegal migration through the years (WB is part of Frontex, WB is part of Frontex and participates in activities and receives funding).

The bilateral disputes portfolio started as a flagship initiative of the foreign policy portfolio. In the first two years, efforts were made to facilitate resolutions of at least one territorial dispute between the WB6 as a prerequisite to creating good neighborly relations and the enabling of their EU accession path.<sup>88</sup> The stocktaking seminars in 2018 and 2019 facilitated collaboration between the foreign ministries of the WB6 and some partner countries. Bilateral disputes were discussed at the FM meetings in 2017, 2018, and 2019.

Despite the WB6 governments and EU partner countries signing of the declarations in 2015 and 2018 (except for Bulgaria and Greece) stating that EU countries will not block the EU accession path of the WB6, several active bilateral disputes to date have resulted in a stalled progress. Given the initial successful mediation of territorial disputes between the WB6 countries, the BP is exactly the platform that can facilitate progress on these issues outside of the EU's institutional constraints. Bulgaria, Greece, and Croatia all used or threatened to use their asymmetric power to impose EU accession vetoes over unresolved issues with the WB6.

87 European Commission, Foreign Affairs Ministerial of the Berlin Process in Tirana to Foster Regional Cooperation with the Western Balkans, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/foreign-affairs-ministerial-berlin-process-tirana-foster-regional-cooperation-western-balkans-2023-10-05\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/foreign-affairs-ministerial-berlin-process-tirana-foster-regional-cooperation-western-balkans-2023-10-05_en) (accessed August 1, 2024).

88 Regional Cooperation Council, Charter on Good-Neighborly Relations, Stability, Security and Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe, February 12, 2000, [https://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/2013.10.03\\_CHARTER\\_SEECD.pdf](https://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/2013.10.03_CHARTER_SEECD.pdf) (accessed August 1, 2024).

The BP's contribution to the resolution of the Kosovo-Serbia dispute has been very limited. Nevertheless, the BP has given opportunities to Kosovo to participate in a variety of regional initiatives and to sit at the same table with Serbia, which had never happened before.

The first pillar, foreign ministers' engagement, has been very successful. Foreign ministers participated in the BP summits and a series of meetings every year in a variety of locations: WB6 countries, participating EU member states, and in the United States. It must be noted that this schedule is very demanding, often leaving little time to follow up with concrete actions and implementation activities. The MFAs of the WB6 lack capacity and human resources to adequately deal with expectations and tasks generated through the BP initiatives.<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless, they delivered a number of tangible results and projects.

When the BP started in 2014, communication and engagement between the WB6 governments was more precarious and often non-existent, and to have all the MFAs around the same table was a major achievement. Activities under the BP helped establish and improve regional cooperation in foreign policy as well as building bridges in other sectors such as youth, homeland security, energy, economy, and connectivity. Some of their meetings in the BP framework were informal, which allowed the FMs to build rapport.

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89 Observation from the interviews.

## 5. ENERGY SECURITY AND GREEN TRANSITION

This section elaborates on two policy areas covered in the framework of the Berlin Process: energy security and the green transition. They are closely interlinked, implying that the major outputs outlined below refer to both. The selected outputs include the Regional Electricity Market, WB6 Sustainability Charter, Declaration on the Green Agenda, and Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition as milestones of the BP.

**Table 5: List of Outputs in the Energy Security and Green Transition Policy Areas**

ENTRY	OUTPUT/ DOMAIN	START- YEAR	END- YEAR	RELEVANT ORGANIZATION	AREA OF FOCUS/ OBJECTIVES
1.	Regional Electricity Market	2015	Ongoing	Energy Community	Setting preconditions for establishing regional electricity market
2.	WB6 Sustainability Charter	2016	Ongoing	Energy Community	Energy efficiency, renewable energies, sustainable energy markets
3.	Declaration on the Green Agenda	2020	Ongoing	European Commission	Five pillars – decarbonization, climate change, circular economy, ecological protection, and biodiversity
4.	Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition	2022	Ongoing	European Commission	Energy supply and prices, green transition

### Entry 1: Regional Electricity Market

The establishment of the Regional Electricity Market is one of the commitments which derived from the BP Summit in 2014 (Berlin). At the BP Summit in 2015 (Vienna), the parties agreed on the Roadmap for Regional Electricity Market of the WB6 consisting of “energy soft measures” (as part of the Connectivity Agenda – see Section 1, Entry 5) that should remove existing legislative and regulatory barriers and enhance the institutional structures necessary for the functioning of this market in line with the Energy Community Treaty and relevant EU acquis.<sup>90</sup>

The operational framework for this initiative was provided through the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) by the WB6 and 15 EU member states in April 2016 during the preparatory activities of the BP Summit in Paris (2016).<sup>91</sup> The MoU set out the general principles of cooperation as well as concrete actions to develop the regional electricity market.

The Energy Community Secretariat was tasked with leading the development of the Regional Electricity Market and assisting with the implementation of the measures. For that purpose, technical assistance has been provided by the EU since 2016. However, the process of establishment of the Regional Electricity Market has been quite complex and has not been completed.

Some commitments for establishing the Regional Electricity Market were reiterated in the Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition in the Western Balkans, adopted in 2022 (see Entry 4 below). This particularly refers to the coupling of electricity markets of the WB6, regionally and within the EU, as well as continuing with reforms in the energy sectors.

### Entry 2: WB6 Sustainability Charter

The Sustainability Charter on the Western Balkans was signed during the Berlin Process Summit in 2016 (Paris) to pursue a transition towards a low carbon

90 Berlin Process, Results of the Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/#results> (accessed August 28, 2024).

91 Energy Community, Western Balkans Berlin Process, <https://www.energy-community.org/regionalinitiatives/WB6.html> (accessed August 28, 2024).



and sustainable energy sector.<sup>92</sup> The Sustainability Charter's main priorities were defined in terms of improving energy efficiency governance, developing and implementing smart support measures for renewable energy, and fostering climate action and transparency in sustainable energy markets.

The WB6 Sustainability Roadmap has been adopted for the period December 2016 - November 2018.<sup>93</sup> The Energy Community Secretariat elaborated two monitoring reports on the implementation of the WB6 Sustainability Charter in 2017 and 2018.<sup>94</sup>

Along with the WB6 Sustainability Charter, the Regional Energy Efficiency Program Plus (REEP Plus) was adopted with the timeline of implementation 2017-2020 as a successor to the original REEP, which was established in 2012.<sup>95</sup> The program aims to create an enabling policy environment, support investment preparation, and provide medium-term financing to encourage households, businesses, and the public sector to prioritize investment in energy efficiency. In this manner, some of the priorities in the WB6 Sustainability Charter were addressed with REEP Plus.

Furthermore, the main priorities of the WB6 Sustainability Charter were absorbed by the Declaration on the Green Agenda and Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition adopted in 2020 and 2022, respectively (see Entries 3 and 4 below). The intense dynamics of the energy and green agenda on the global level, followed by the EU developments, could be perceived as an argument for adaptability of the sustainability framework in the WB6.

### Entry 3: Declaration on the Green Agenda

The Declaration on the Green Agenda for the WB6 was adopted at the BP Summit in 2020 (Sofia).<sup>96</sup> The declaration aligns with the EU Green Deal and aims to accelerate reforms with the overarching goal of addressing climate change in the region to reach carbon neutrality by 2050.<sup>97</sup> Through its five pillars, the declaration strives to support transformation of the energy, transport and agriculture sectors, enhance resiliency to the impacts of climate change, facilitate transition from linear to circular economy, and strengthen efforts on de-pollution and intensify activities on nature and ecosystems protection including halting biodiversity loss.

The RCC has coordinated the process of preparing the declaration, applying extensive consultation processes with relevant governmental and non-governmental stakeholders in the region. In addition, the RCC has elaborated the Green Agenda Action Plan for the Western Balkans (GAWB) covering the period 2021-2030.<sup>98</sup>

Following its endorsement, the Green Agenda has been regularly on the Berlin Process agenda, highlighting its importance for the region. Since 2021, the European Commission has committed 1.25 billion EUR from IPA funds to support the implementation of the Green Agenda, including technical assistance and investments in energy efficiency, renewable energy, the transition from coal, and environmental management.<sup>99</sup> Further investments and grants under the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) are expected to support the green transition, along with the Energy Support Package for the Western Balkans.

92 European Commission, Western Balkan Sustainable Charter, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/western-balkan-sustainable-charter\\_en](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/western-balkan-sustainable-charter_en) (accessed August 28, 2024).

93 Energy Community, Western Balkan Berlin Process, <https://www.energy-community.org/regionalinitiatives/WB6.html> (accessed August 28, 2024).

94 Ibid.

95 Western Balkan Investment Framework, Regional Energy Efficiency Programme for the Western Balkans – REEP Plus, <https://www.wbif.eu/project-detail/PRJ-MULTI-ENE-011> (accessed August 28, 2024).

96 Regional Cooperation Council, Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, <https://www.rcc.int/files/user/docs/196c92cf0534f629d43c460079809b20.pdf> (accessed August 28, 2024).

97 European Commission, The European Green Deal. Striving to be the First Climate-Neutral Continent, [https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal\\_en](https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en) (accessed August 28, 2024).

98 Regional Cooperation Council, Action Plan for the Implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans 2021-2030, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/596/action-plan-for-the-implementation-of-the-sofia-declaration-on-the-green-agenda-for-the-western-balkans-2021-2030> (accessed August 28, 2024).

99 European Commission, Implementing a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-10/factsheet%20green%20agenda%20oct2023%20final\\_0.pdf](https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-10/factsheet%20green%20agenda%20oct2023%20final_0.pdf) (accessed September 3, 2024).

#### Entry 4: Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition in the WB

The Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition was adopted at the BP Summit in 2022 (Berlin).<sup>100</sup> The declaration's goals include accelerating the implementation of the Green Agenda of the WB at both national and regional levels, supporting the European Union's REPowerEU initiative and the European Green Deal, improving security in energy supply, fulfilling obligations stemming from the Regional Electricity Market initiative, and speeding up decarbonization and further increasing energy efficiency.

The declaration has been accompanied by an annex outlining EC commitments such as the Energy Support Package of 1 billion EUR. In this package, 50 percent was allocated to provide immediate help in alleviating the impact of the energy price increases on the economies and 50 percent was allocated for medium-term measures related to a green energy transition based on energy efficiency, decarbonization, and renewable energy sources. Furthermore, the EC reiterated its commitment to the ongoing energy transition initiatives to the WB6.

The issues covered in the declaration reflected global circumstances and the rising importance of the security of energy supplies and stability of prices, while regional issues deriving from the work of the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum as well as the Business Forum were also included.

The declaration also contains a note to the EC and regional organizations involved in the implementation of the Green Agenda Action Plan to regularly report about the implementation of these actions at the BP events. This is necessary to overcome the shortcomings of the reporting on the energy-related issues under the BP.

At the BP Summit in 2023 (Tirana), WB leaders endorsed the Joint Declaration of Intent on the Regional Climate Partnership, further underscoring the necessity for a green transition and private sector investments in energy efficiency, renewables, and sustainable development.<sup>101</sup> These declarations are yet to be implemented.

#### Interim Stocktaking

Energy, climate, sustainability, and the green transition comprise an overarching and dynamic subject. The pressures imposed by climate change along with the instability of the energy supply channels and prices in recent years have urged the WB6 leaders and BP partner governments to reflect on these issues within the BP. Several declarations followed the discussions before and during the summits, with the latest two focusing on the green agenda as well as energy security and the green transition, respectively. These two declarations have been accompanied by financial packages for their implementation, which has proved to be a crucial factor for the success of any BP initiative. However, financing must be complemented with realistic, comprehensive, and coherent actions and a well-set implementation infrastructure.

Furthermore, frequent changes of the priorities that should be addressed in these areas could lead to unsuccessful initiatives. The energy and green agendas of the WB6 tend to be very ambitious, with a lot of requirements for national policy shifts, extensive investments, and awareness changes in the upcoming years. However, the reforming potential of the Western Balkan countries has not yet been strengthened. The delay in establishing the Regional Electricity Market (initiated in 2015) indicates that changes in this area need to be designed properly and realistically. In addition, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting mechanisms should be compulsory elements of implementation if leaders of the WB6 are striving toward genuine results.

<sup>100</sup> Energy Community, Berlin Process Summit: Western Balkans Agree to Strengthen Regional Cooperation on Energy Security and the Green Transition, <https://www.energy-community.org/news/Energy-Community-News/2022/11/04.html> (accessed August 28, 2024).

<sup>101</sup> Berlin Process, Joint Declaration 2023, [https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-of-intent-regional-climate-partnership-bp-summit-2023\\_1697614107.pdf](https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-of-intent-regional-climate-partnership-bp-summit-2023_1697614107.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

## 6. SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

This section analyzes two policy areas covered in the framework of the BP: science and research. The selected outputs include the Joint Science Conference of the BP/WB and the Western Balkans Research Foundation.

**Table 6: List of Outputs for Policy Areas of Science and Research**

ENTRY	OUTPUT/ DOMAIN	START- YEAR	END- YEAR	RELEVANT ORGANIZATION	AREA OF FOCUS/ OBJECTIVES
1.	Joint Science Conference of the BP/WB	2015	Ongoing	German National Academy (Leopoldina)	Science, research, education and societal topics relevant for WB
2.	WB Research Foundation	2017	2017	None	Supporting excellent young scientists

### Entry 1: Joint Science Conference of the BP/WB

The Joint Science Conference was established in 2015 as a platform for academic contribution to the BP. Following the request of the German Federal Government, the German National Academy of Sciences – Leopoldina took the lead in organizing the Joint Science Conference in the BP framework. So far, there have been seven conferences held over the period 2015-2023.<sup>102</sup>

The conferences have examined challenges and necessary improvements for science, innovation, and education systems and have provided evidence-based insights on broader societal and economic issues in the WB. The topics have been chosen in consultation with stakeholders from WB6 and BP partner countries. The results of the conferences are summarized in joint statements or communiqués and fed into the annual BP summits.<sup>103</sup>

The conferences take place in the country of the chair of the BP, while the financing is ensured by the German Federal Government via Leopoldina's regular budget allocation, with the support of additional scientific institutions in each of the host countries. The circle of the stakeholders is composed of national academies of sciences and arts, rectors' conferences, leading universities and research organiza-

tions, distinguished scientists, junior scientists, and experts invited ad personam. Further representatives of international organizations, the EC, national governments, and embassies can take part per invitation as participants or observers.<sup>104</sup>

Along with the Berlin Process Joint Science Conference, Leopoldina has closely worked with the EC to enable the WB6's full access to research programs of the EU and a progressive integration into the European Research Area (ERA) and the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia were already fully associated within Horizon 2020 (the EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation) and WB partners received 170 million EUR in direct EU contributions, with approximately 1000 WB6 organizations having participated.<sup>105</sup>

As of 2021, five WB countries were granted full access to Horizon Europe, the EU's successor to Horizon 2020, while Albania joined in 2022. Researchers, innovators, and research entities established in the region can now fully participate in the EU's 95.5 billion EUR program on equal terms with entities from EU members states. As stated by the EC, this will allow the WB6 to develop and conduct projects, technologies, research, and activities that will contribute to tackling global challenges. Their participation will also

102 German Academy of Sciences, Berlin Process Western Balkans – Joint Science Conference, <https://www.leopoldina.org/en/international/science-diplomacy/jsc/> (accessed August 30, 2024).

103 German Academy of Sciences, Leopoldina, <https://www.leopoldina.org> (accessed August 30, 2024).

104 Ibid.

105 European Commission, Research and Innovation, [https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/five-western-balkan-partners-join-horizon-europe-research-and-innovation-programme-2021-12-06\\_en](https://research-and-innovation.ec.europa.eu/news/all-research-and-innovation-news/five-western-balkan-partners-join-horizon-europe-research-and-innovation-programme-2021-12-06_en) (accessed August 30, 2024).

further reinforce their capacities and support WB integration into the European Research Area.<sup>106</sup>

Expanding the possibilities for science and research of the WB6 could be considered as an outstanding outcome to which Leopoldina has contributed and should be further promoted as a tangible result for BP beneficiaries. Currently, there is rather scarce information about the BP related activities on Leopoldina's website, depriving stakeholders of more broad understanding of the BP's impact on science and research.

### Entry 2: Western Balkans Research Foundation

The blueprint of Western Balkans Research Foundation was adopted on the third Joint Science Conference held in 2017 (Paris).<sup>107</sup> The blueprint was later elaborated following a request of the heads of states and governments of the Berlin Process to the Joint Science Conference to propose "funding mechanism for excellent young researchers from the Balkans, allowing them to gain experience abroad and to create their own laboratories of excellence."<sup>108</sup>

This proposal was adopted during the BP Summit in 2017 (Italy) when EU member states and leaders of the region started the process of establishing the Western Balkans Research Foundation as a self-governing international institution, with expected financial contributions from the EU and partners of the BP.

The Italian government expressed willingness to host the WB Research Foundation in Trieste. A group of scientists was mandated to study the project's financial and technical feasibility and negotiate all necessary arrangements by the next BP summit. However, the initiative did not manage to progress further, as efforts to provide EU financial support for the foundation have failed. Instead, a special call within Horizon Europe's widening component for the Western Balkans was released in 2021 with a budget of 21 million EUR.<sup>109</sup>

## Interim Stocktaking

Science and research is a policy area that needs to be further promoted within the Berlin Process. The major outcome in this policy area – the BP Joint Science Conference – are held regularly, providing contributions to the BP summits on the topics selected by the German National Academy of Sciences – Leopoldina in consultation with the other stakeholders. Apart from the conference and results being shared at the BP annual summits, no evidence was available about closer partnership of the BP scientific cohort with the decision-makers of the BP. In addition, the dialogue between political and non-political stakeholders of the education and science system should be further advanced on a national level in the WB countries and with the EC in specific EU frameworks. In this context, further efforts are needed to tap the potential of the scientific community gathered by Leopoldina and to channel their knowledge and expertise within the larger scope of BP outputs and events.

Leopoldina's cooperation with the EC towards ensuring full access of the WB6 to the EU research and innovation programs could be considered as strategically significant for the EU accession of the region. It follows the paradigm of ensuring as much access as possible to EU funding and EU (policy) frameworks even before full membership. In this respect, BP political efforts for setting additional regional initiatives should be adjusted to the ongoing EU or regional programs in terms of increasing the prospects of BP initiatives. Increasing the level of available information about the science and research developments within BP is necessary, given the outstanding importance of this area as a crosscutting issue for economic and social development of the region.

106 Ibid.

107 German Academy of Sciences, Western Balkans Research Foundation, [https://www.leopoldina.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Internationales/overview\\_wbrf.pdf](https://www.leopoldina.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Internationales/overview_wbrf.pdf) (accessed August 28, 2024).

108 Ibid.

109 European Commission, Twinning Western Balkans Special, <https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/opportunities/portal/screen/opportunities/topic-details/horizon-widera-2021-access-02-01> (accessed August 28, 2024)

## AUTHORS' CONCLUSION

The BP, initiated by the German government in 2014, has been set as a political platform to support cooperation of the WB governments, to provide fora for regular discussion of the priority issues, and to set the ground for sustainable results. Many regional organizations are involved in the design and implementation of the outputs, such as the RCC, CEFTA, and RAI. The study found that organizations deriving from the BP – the WB6 CIF, RYCO, the Transport Community and Energy Community for the WB6, and the Western Balkans Fund – have been active since their initiation, supporting the delivery of the projects generated within the BP framework.

The BP is distinct for its flexible structure, with no secretariat or designated fund. A rotating chair is selected annually among the partner countries in coordination with the German government. Over the past decade, each chair typically brought new issues to the table and expanded the BP's thematic portfolio. The Austrian government launched the Civil Society Forum (2015), which has become an essential component of the BP, and introduced the bilateral disputes resolution portfolio. The French chair (2016) introduced the youth component and promoted the establishment of RYCO. The UK chair (2018) added a security portfolio (2018), while the Polish chair (2019) and subsequent Bulgarian/North Macedonian chair (2020) introduced and formalized the Common Regional Market. Furthermore, the German government introduced energy security and the green transition as topics in 2022. The chairs who introduced a new topic or issue area were responsible for a follow-up with the WB6 governments and relevant ministries as well as coordination with implementing organizations.

This study highlights the great diversity of topics and actors involved in the BP. Over the past decade, the BP covered close to 40 topics (see Annex 1) and produced 43 outputs in the form of initiatives, declarations, agreements, action plans, and other documents (see Annex 2). From the analysis of the key policy areas, it was clear that each initiative's development path was different. In addition, there were indirect outputs following the implementation of BP initiatives, such as the CRM Action Plan 2021-2024 that provided broader effects through the EU-WB Roaming Agreement and Green Lanes between WB and EU member states, broadening the scope and perspectives of the regional cooperation within BP and genuinely contributing to the EU integration of the WB6.

The BP has delivered genuine progress through several initiatives, particularly in the areas of economic development, the green agenda, and societal and regional cooperation. Other areas, such as research, reconciliation, or bilateral issues resolution were less successful. One-off topics that were not taken to the next summit include health and media, mainly due to lack of follow-up or commitment by the chair country that introduced the topic.

The key policy areas mapped in this study show that secure financial support and a functional implementation structure, alongside political will of the WB6 governments and commitment of the chair country to follow up on certain initiatives, are crucial factors for the success of any initiative under the BP. The commitment and involvement of other stakeholders, such as the business community or civil society, is also highly relevant. The governments of the WB6 were more favorable towards certain initiatives, such as the common regional market, and more ready to commit to them.

The main challenges of the BP are the implementation structure of the initiatives, financing, and monitoring and evaluation. Financing of the activities and initiatives planned in the BP framework has been largely ad-hoc and often inadequate. The summit chair is responsible for carrying forward the initiatives they brought to the table. The lack of a secretariat and designated funding for the BP often negatively affected the channeling of the WB6 countries' pledges into implementation of certain initiatives. In response, the BP partner countries have resorted to diplomatic channels and bilateral engagement with the WB6 who underperform on implementation.

Monitoring of the completion of initiatives and outputs has been largely missing. Some achievements are reported on and acknowledged in BP declarations on an annual basis. However, there is a lack of dedicated external monitoring mechanisms for each issue area to assess the cumulative effect. Currently, several different actors are engaged in monitoring activities. Initiatives funded through IPA fulfill EU monitoring and evaluating requirements, while the RCC has been responsible for monitoring some other initiatives. Adoption, ratification, and implementation of the CRM mobility agreements is monitored by the Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) in Albania.

The absence of a BP secretariat and a lack of political will of the BP partners in some cases has made coordinated or centralized monitoring arrangements difficult. As a result, perception of the BP's success has been mixed and its outcomes difficult to evaluate, which has led to criticism about the absence of transparency and questions about the extent of the BP's contribution to the EU accession process. So far, no external evaluation has been conducted, which could have provided evidence-based contribution to the debate about the impact and future of the BP.

The BP supports the EU accession of the WB6 implicitly while operating separately from the EU enlargement process, which makes it more flexible and responsive. A unique value added by the BP has been its design to serve as a venue for regular communication between the WB6 and participating EU member states. This should be further upheld and emphasized going forward to best serve the interests of the WB6.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establish a small secretariat of the Berlin Process and introduce a formal monitoring and reporting mechanism, perhaps with civil society's assistance.
- Conduct implementation and/or impact assessments of BP initiatives to serve as a basis for defining a more comprehensive and manageable portfolio.
- Increase the ownership of BP initiatives in the WB6 region by ensuring/promoting tangible results of undertaken initiatives for WB citizens.
- Promote media pluralism and media freedom, which are an integral part of the EU RoL portfolio and an important segment of regional security. This effort should receive more attention in the framework of the BP.<sup>110</sup>
- Tap into the potential of the scientific community gathered within the Joint Scientific Conference and channel their knowledge and expertise toward the advancement of BP initiatives.
- Make sure the BP remains inclusive and open to citizens, minorities, and marginalized groups, remains gender sensitive, and promotes equality in all actions.
- Gender, which has been introduced to the BP portfolio for the first time in 2024, should become a permanent topic.
- The BP should support reconciliation through specific actions and initiatives that focus on the victims and survivors of armed conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, their rights and the strengthening of communities.

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<sup>110</sup> European Council, Council of the European Union, Rule of Law, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/rule-of-law/> (accessed August 1, 2024).

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# ANNEX 1

## List of Topics Discussed at the Berlin Process (2014-2023)

TOPICS AT SUMMIT	2014 Berlin	2015 Vienna	2016 Paris	2017 Trieste	2018 London	2019 Poznan	2020 Sofia/ Skopje	2021 Berlin	2022 Berlin	2023 Tirana
EU Integration										
Regional cooperation										
Transport community										
Independence of judiciary, fight against corruption										
Reconciliation										
Bilateral disputes										
Good Governance/ Rule of Law										
Belgrade-Pristina (Kosovo-Serbia)										
Media										
Civil society										
Fight against terrorism and radicalization										
Migration										
Connectivity agenda										
Youth										
Education/ Vocational and Science/ Research										
Recognition of higher education qualifications										
Regional economic integration/ Common Regional Market/Economic convergence										
Regional Agreement for free movement with ID cards										
SMEs development/ Entrepreneurship										
Security issues										
Missing persons and war crimes										

TOPICS AT SUMMIT	2014 Berlin	2015 Vienna	2016 Paris	2017 Trieste	2018 London	2019 Poznan	2020 Sofia/ Skopje	2021 Berlin	2022 Berlin	2023 Tirana
Digitalization/ Digital transformation					■		■			■
Economy/Economic prosperity	■	■			■	■				
Environment and Climate/ Green Agenda			■			■	■	■	■	■
Green Corridors/ Lanes							■	■		
Challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic in the Western Balkans							■	■		
Regional Invest- ment Reform Agenda						■				
Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans 2020							■	■		
Further support to Roma integration						■	■	■	■	■
The future of the Berlin Process					■	■	■	■	■	■
Think Tank Forum					■	■				
Energy Security/ Connectivity	■			■					■	
Culture									■	
Including Western Balkans in the EU Value Chain Partnership										■
Trade, Transport and Digital Connectivity		■	■		■	■				■
Good Neighborly Relations					■	■				■

Note: The topics are listed in order of appearance at the Summits, as described in the officially communicated Chair's Conclusions (as per [www.berlinprocess.de](http://www.berlinprocess.de)). The table lists all the topics that were discussed at the Summits by years, applying content-wise principle, not following precise titles, as some of the topics were broadened or merged, but remained on the Berlin Process Agenda.

## ANNEX 2

### List of Outputs: Initiatives, Declarations, and other Official Documents of the Berlin Process Summits (2014-2023)

	INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
1	Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO)	2015 – Joint Declaration  2016 – Agreement on establishment	Active  Inter-governmental organization Six regional offices in WB.	First call for proposals launched in 2017 Five open calls 2017-2023 Superschools exchange Cultural Programs Support of social businesses	<a href="http://www.rycowb.org">www.rycowb.org</a>  EU financially supports many of the projects of RYCO, contributing heavily to its sustainability.	Societal Cooperation/ Youth
2	WB6 Chamber Investment Forum (WB6 CIF)	2015 – Initiative  2017 – established	Active  Professional association of Chambers of Commerce of the WB region. Platform for business cooperation. Headquarters in Trieste, Italy.	WB6 CIF was actively involved in implementation of the MAP REA 2017-2020. WB6 CIF is included in the implementation of the CRM Action Plan 2021-2024. Regularly contributes to the BP Business Forums.	WB6 CIF is supported by the European Commission, EBRD, Regional Cooperation Council, CEFTA, and other Chambers of Commerce from EU Member States.  Latest Annual WB6 CIF Report as of 2021.  <a href="https://www.wb6cif.eu/">https://www.wb6cif.eu/</a>	Regional Economic Cooperation
3	Roadmap for regional electricity market for the WB6	2015 – Agreement	Ongoing  Although no deadline was set, the implementation goes slower than expected due to the complexity of the subject and necessary reforms.	The roadmap identifies national and regional projects and reforms that should lead to the market coupling between the WB6 and with EU Member States.	WB6 MoU on regional electricity market development (WB6 and 15 EU MSs signatories).	Green Agenda/Energy
4	Western Balkans Fund (WBF)	2015 – Agreement  2017 – WBF becomes operational	International organization  Active  Office – Tirana	The Western Balkans Fund's mission is to promote reconciliation, develop closer cooperation, and strengthen ties between the Western Balkans Contracting Parties.  First call for proposals launched in 2017  Six calls up to 2023	<a href="https://westernbalkansfund.org/wbf-documents/">https://westernbalkansfund.org/wbf-documents/</a>  EU co-fund the projects, contributing to sustainability of the Fund (financed by equal quotas from the WB6 Parties).	Regional Cooperation and Reconciliation

	INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
5	Western Balkans Purchasing Initiative	2015	Active	Annual events  10 purchasing initiatives held over the period 2015-2024.	The initiative stemmed up from the Berlin Process, but, transformed into the German-WB6 Initiative  <a href="https://www.bme-matchmaking.com/events/11th-purchasing-initiative-western-balkans/">https://www.bme-matchmaking.com/events/11th-purchasing-initiative-western-balkans/</a>	Regional Economic Cooperation
6	WB6 Sustainability Charter	2016 – Agreement	Replaced with Green Agenda Declaration.  Two implementation reports available for 2017 and 2018.  Topics of the WB6 SC integrated within the Declaration on the Green Agenda (2020) and Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition (2022).	Priorities of the Charter were defined in terms of improving energy efficiency governance, developing and implementing smart support measures for renewable energy and fostering climate action and transparency of sustainable energy markets.	Certain priorities of the WB6 Sustainability Charter were addressed with Regional Energy Efficiency Program Plus (REEP Plus) and financially supported.	Energy/Green Agenda
7	Young Civil Servants Pilot Scheme (YCSPS)	2016 – Initiative	Not Active	First project August 2017-July 2018	Followed by EU programs funded through IPA.	Good Governance/ Youth
8	Green for Growth Fund: Hydropower and other renewable energy schemes for the WB6	2016 – Agreement for inclusion of the GGF into Berlin Process' actions	Active  The Green for Growth Fund was established in 2009, Initiated by the European Investment Bank and KfW Development Bank. It was included as supportive instrument of the Berlin Process actions as of 2016.	GGF hydropower and other renewable energy schemes for WB 6.	This initiative has been part of the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF).	Energy/Green Agenda
9	Regional Energy Efficiency Program (REEP) for the WB/REEP Plus	2016 – Agreement	The REEP program was launched in 2013.  WB/REEP Plus was agreed in 2016.  Active	The program aims to create an enabling policy environment, support investment preparation and provide medium-term financing to encourage households, businesses and the public sector to prioritize investment in energy efficiency	<a href="https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b945b4e9-8ef2-4247-ae65-5ac9e8d73f96_en?filename=ipa_ii_2019-040-826.01_-reep_plus_replenishment.pdf">https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/document/download/b945b4e9-8ef2-4247-ae65-5ac9e8d73f96_en?filename=ipa_ii_2019-040-826.01_-reep_plus_replenishment.pdf</a>	Energy/Green Agenda

INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
10 Joint Declaration Against Corruption	2017	Active  Cooperation with UNCAC and RAI.	Making the fight against corruption a top priority.	<a href="https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2017/07/trieste-western-balkan-summit-joint/">https://www.esteri.it/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/2017/07/trieste-western-balkan-summit-joint/</a>  Recommitment by WB6 in 2021.	Political and Security Cooperation
11 Western Balkan Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (WB EDIF)	2017 – Agreement for inclusion of EDIF into Berlin Process’ actions *EDIF was launched in 2012 by EC and supported by EBRD and other financial institutions	Active  WB EDIF has been launched in 2012.  It was included as supportive instrument of the Berlin Process actions as of 2017.	WB EDIF provides funding to local financial intermediaries via debt and equity products as well as support services, such as venture capital funds, guarantee schemes and micro-finance institutions	<a href="http://www.eif.org/what_we_do/resources/wbedif/index.htm">www.eif.org/what_we_do/resources/wbedif/index.htm</a>	REA/CRM
12 Treaty Establishing the Transport Community	2017 – Treaty signed  Entered into force May 2019	Active	The treaty lists the EU transport legislation (rail, road, maritime, inland waterways and infrastructure) and the environment, public procurement, competition and procedural rules which all parties must implement.	The Treaty is linked to the Connectivity Agenda.	Transport and Connectivity
13 Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (REA)	2017 – Adopted Plan	Implemented over the period 2017-2020  Concluded	Four dimensions: trade, investment, mobility and digital market.  Most tangible benefit for WB citizens: Western Balkan Roaming Agreement.	MAP REA was transformed into CRM  <a href="http://www.rcc.int/docs/383/consolidated-multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six">www.rcc.int/docs/383/consolidated-multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six</a>	Regional Economic Cooperation
14 Western Balkans Research Foundation (WBRF)	2017 – Adopted proposal	Not active	n.a	Blueprint for WBRF was elaborated by Joint Science Conference of the Berlin Process and adopted in 2017, but WBRF did not progress further	Science and Research

INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
15 Digital Agenda	2018	Active Digital Agenda I (2018-2023) Digital Agenda II (launched 2023)  Deriving from MAP REA 2017-2020	Digital Summits (on ministerial level) of the WB6 are major annual events for implementation of the Digital Agenda.  Western Balkan Roaming Agreement was signed in 2019 and entered into force as of July 2021. It is considered as one of the landmarks of the Digital Agenda. *The WB Roaming Agreement served as a foundation for EU-WB Roaming agreement implemented as of 1 October 2023. This could be considered as indirect output of the BP.	The Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans is a joint effort of the six Western Balkans partners and the European Commission. It was presented on 6 February 2018 as one of the six flagship initiatives of engagement objectives in the Communication on a credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans.  <a href="https://www.wbif.eu/sectors/digital-infrastructure">https://www.wbif.eu/sectors/digital-infrastructure</a>	Digitalization
16 Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the WB	2018	Active	The Roadmap has been adopted by the EU and integrated in the EU Action Plan 2020-2024	<a href="https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b460236e5274a37779450ca/ROADMAP_-_Franco-German__solution_for_illegal_weapons.pdf">https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5b460236e5274a37779450ca/ROADMAP_-_Franco-German__solution_for_illegal_weapons.pdf</a>  The Roadmap places specific importance on the advancement of gender equality.	Security
17 Joint Declaration on the Principles in the Field of Information-Exchange in the field of Law Enforcement	2018	Active	Strengthened in 2023 by adding cyber security and establishment of the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3zB3jbF">https://bit.ly/3zB3jbF</a>  Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group to drive progress.	Good Governance and Rule of Law
18 Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighborly Relations in the Framework of the Berlin Process	2018	Active		Importance reiterated frequently	Regional Cooperation, all areas

INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
19 Declaration by the Chair of the Interior and Security Ministers meeting of the London Western Balkans Summit	2018	Active	Information exchange on serious organised crime, terrorism and other security threats.  Addressing corruption.  Endorsed the Terms of Reference for a Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group	Support to existing mechanisms for cooperation, including agreements with EU Justice and Home Affairs Agencies, the MARRI, the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the RAI, the Integrative Internal Security Governance (ISG) approach, the Police Cooperation Convention for South-east Europe (PCC-SEE), and the South-east European Police Chiefs Association (SEPCA).	Political and Security Cooperation
20 Declaration on Missing Persons in the Framework of the Berlin Process	2018	Active	Collaboration with the Western Balkans Missing Persons Group; signed Joint Framework Plan		Societal Cooperation/Reconciliation
21 Joint Declaration on War Crimes	2018	Active		Reaffirmed in Poznan Summit Chair's conclusions (2019). All signatures upheld. Support for regional cooperation between State Prosecutors/Ministries of Justice transferred to EU, UNDP most recently.	Societal Cooperation/Reconciliation
22 Declaration of Western Balkans Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process	2019	Active	Four Ministerial meetings on Roma Integration.	<a href="https://bit.ly/3Y09Ea8">https://bit.ly/3Y09Ea8</a>  Commitment to achieving equality and full integration of the Roma, as part of regional cooperation and the accession process to the European Union.	Societal Cooperation/Reconciliation
23 Western Balkan Roaming Agreement	2019 – Signed	Active; implementation as of July 2021	WB Roaming Agreement is considered as one of the most important achievements of the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans as well as MAP REA and CRM.	Regional Cooperation Council served as intermediate in the negotiations for WB Roaming Agreement	REA/CRM

	INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
24	A joint “Statement on Clean Energy Transition in the Western Balkans”	2019 – Initiative	Active	The Joint “Statement on Clean Energy Transition in the Western Balkans” is one of the building blocks of the WB6 Green Agenda and related documents	<a href="https://wbif.eu/library/page/state-ment-clean-ener-gy-transition-west-ern-balkans2">https://wbif.eu/library/page/state-ment-clean-ener-gy-transition-west-ern-balkans2</a>  <a href="https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/west-ern-balkans-summit-poznan-chairs-conclu-sions">https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/west-ern-balkans-summit-poznan-chairs-conclu-sions</a>	Energy/Green Agenda
25	Memorandum on Cooperation on the SEE International Institute for Sustainable Technologies	2019	No further info available	n.a	South East European International Institute for Sustainable Technologies (SEEIIST) based on Switzerland was established in 2017 and got political support of the WB6 on BP Summit in 2019. No progress has been reported to its activities.	Science
26	Regional Rail Strategy	2019 – Initiative	Active	Priorities: rail market opening, development of rail freight corridors, improvement of the maintenance and alignment with the EU rail legislation.	<a href="https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rail-fiche_final2806.pdf">https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rail-fiche_final2806.pdf</a>	Transport and Connectivity
27	Action Plan for the implementation of the Regional Rail Strategy	2020 – Adopted Plan	Active  Project activities envisaged by 2027	Aim: Integration of rail transport markets of the six Western Balkans regional partners into the EU.	<a href="http://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rail-Action-Plan.pdf">www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Rail-Action-Plan.pdf</a>  <a href="https://transport.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/sites/2/2021/12/S2.4-DLasi-ca-TCT-PS_17-12-2021_online.pdf">https://transport.danube-region.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/sites/2/2021/12/S2.4-DLasi-ca-TCT-PS_17-12-2021_online.pdf</a>	Transport and Connectivity
28	Declaration on the Common Regional Market (CRM)	2020 – Adopted	Active	Promoted as a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and a stepping stone towards EU Single Market.	<a href="https://www.rcc.int/docs/544/declaration-on-common-regional-market">https://www.rcc.int/docs/544/declaration-on-common-regional-market</a>	CRM
29	CRM Action Plan 2021-2024	2020 – Adopted	Active (2021-2024)	Four regional areas on trade (free movement of goods, services, capital and people); investment; digital area and industrial and innovation area	List of achievements available at RCC website: <a href="http://www.rcc.int/pages/143/common-regional-market">www.rcc.int/pages/143/common-regional-market</a>	CRM
30	„Green Lanes” Initiative	2020 – Initiative	Active	<a href="http://www.transport-community.org/transport-facilitation/green-lanes/">www.transport-community.org/transport-facilitation/green-lanes/</a>	Related to CRM Action Plan	Transport, Trade



INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
31 Declaration on the Green Agenda	2020 – adopted	Active	Aims to accelerate reforms with the overarching goal of addressing climate change in the region with ultimate goal of carbon neutrality by 2050.  Five pillars: energy; climate change; circular economy; environmental protection and biodiversity.	Since 2021, the European Commission has committed 1.25 billion EUR to support the implementation of the Green Agenda.	Green Agenda
32 Regional program to bring young diplomats together	2021	Active	Implementation started in 2024.	Supported by GIZ	Political and Security Cooperation
33 Joint Partnership with all partners of the Berlin Process to strengthen Cyber Resilience in the Western Balkans	2022	Active	In 2023 signature of the tripartite intergovernmental agreement establishing the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre	<a href="https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2023_1714043445.pdf">https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/chairs-conclusions-2023_1714043445.pdf</a>	Political and Security Cooperation
34 Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition in the Western Balkans	2022 – adopted	Active	Acceleration of the implementation of the Green Agenda of the WB; support to European Union's RE-PowerEU initiative and the European Green Deal; security in energy supply.	<a href="http://www.energy-community.org/dam/jcr:2229718d-018e-4643-858f-3765129f8c04/ECS_Report_on_Declaration_WB6.pdf">www.energy-community.org/dam/jcr:2229718d-018e-4643-858f-3765129f8c04/ECS_Report_on_Declaration_WB6.pdf</a>	Green Agenda/ Energy
35 Annex to the Declaration on Energy Security and Green Transition in the Western Balkans	2022 – adopted	Active		Annex outlines the European Commission commitments for implementation of the Declaration such as Energy Support Package of 1 billion EUR and 500 million EUR to cushion energy price increase.	Green Agenda/ Energy
36 Regional Joint Statement on Preventing Plastic Pollution including Marine Litter	2023 – agreed	Active		<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/regional-joint-statement-on-preventing-plastic-pollution-including-marine-litter-bp-summit-2023_1697614083.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/regional-joint-statement-on-preventing-plastic-pollution-including-marine-litter-bp-summit-2023_1697614083.pdf</a>	Green Agenda

	INITIATIVES, DECLARATIONS, DOCUMENTS	YEAR	STATUS	MILESTONES	NOTE	BERLIN PROCESS TOPIC/AREA
37	Joint Declaration of Intent Regional Climate Partnership	2023 – signed	Active	Lots of projects within the Climate Partnership are already in the process, implemented by GIZ and KfW	<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-of-intent-regional-climate-partnership-bp-summit-2023_1697614107.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-of-intent-regional-climate-partnership-bp-summit-2023_1697614107.pdf</a> Facilitation of the dialogue at the regional level	Green Agenda
38	Joint Agreement Recognition of Professional Qualifications Nurses Veterinary Surgeons Midwives and Pharmacists	2023 – signed and entered into force	Active	Yet to be implemented	<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-agreement-recognition-of-professional-qualifications-nurses-veterinary-surgeons-midwives-and-pharmacists-bp-summit-2023_1697628897.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-agreement-recognition-of-professional-qualifications-nurses-veterinary-surgeons-midwives-and-pharmacists-bp-summit-2023_1697628897.pdf</a>	Common Regional Market
39	Joint Declaration on Single Euro Payments Area of WB	2023 – signed	Active	Yet to be implemented	<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-single-euro-payments-area-of-wb-bp-summit-2023_1697614062.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-single-euro-payments-area-of-wb-bp-summit-2023_1697614062.pdf</a>	Common Regional Market
40	Joint Declaration on Facilitation of Trade and Transport	2023 – signed	Active	Yet to be implemented	<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-facilitation-of-trade-and-transport-bp-summit-2023_1697614073.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-facilitation-of-trade-and-transport-bp-summit-2023_1697614073.pdf</a>	Common Regional Market
41	Joint Declaration WiFi4EU for WB	2023 – signed	Active	Yet to be implemented	<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-wifi4eu-for-wb-bp-summit-2023_1697614045.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-wifi4eu-for-wb-bp-summit-2023_1697614045.pdf</a>	Common Regional Market
42	Joint Declaration on the Establishment of a Convergence Observatory in the WB	2023	Active		<a href="http://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-the-establishment-of-a-convergence-observatory-in-the-wb-bp-summit-2023_1697614031.pdf">www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/joint-declaration-on-the-establishment-of-a-convergence-observatory-in-the-wb-bp-summit-2023_1697614031.pdf</a>	Common Regional Market/ Growth Plan
43	Declaration for Green Mobility of South East European Parties And Observing Participants	2024 – agreed	Active	Yet to be implemented	<a href="https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/gms-declaration-final-web_1725624105.pdf">https://www.berlinprocess.de/uploads/documents/gms-declaration-final-web_1725624105.pdf</a>	Green Agenda

Figure 3: Berlin Process – Infographic



**Fun Fact:** in 2015, the Austrian host convened a football match with foreign ministers and prime ministers between “EU members” and “future EU members”. The score was 3:2 for “future EU members.”

*Information accurate as of September 1, 2024.*

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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