

## **Western Balkans Summit on the Berlin Process, 22 October 2025**

### **Chair's Conclusions:**

1. On 22 October 2025, the Prime Minister of the United Kingdom welcomed the Heads of Government of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia and Germany, representatives of France, Greece, Italy, Poland and Slovenia, the European Union, World Bank, European Investment Bank, European Bank of Reconstruction and Development, Central European Free Trade Agreement, Regional Cooperation Council, Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and rapporteur from the Berlin Process Civil Society Forum.
2. 2025 is a year of significant anniversaries for building peace in Europe: eighty years since the end of the Second World War, fifty years since the signing of the Helsinki Final Act, and thirty years since the Dayton Peace Accord which ended the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In times of major geopolitical shifts and economic change, and Russia's continued war of aggression against Ukraine, European cooperation is more important than ever.
3. Common challenges such as migration, security and growth call for joint responses. The Berlin Process has served as a key platform for the Western Balkans Six (WB6) to strengthen cooperation across the region and with European partners for eleven years, covering a wide range of issues from regional economic cooperation, connectivity, transport, digitalization and cyber security, youth, reconciliation, the fight against organized crime, advancing gender equality, corruption and illegal migration, education and science, Roma integration, energy and energy security, climate and environment protection as well as agriculture and food.
4. Good governance is the foundation of economic progress in the Western Balkans. Independent institutions, credible elections, greater civic space, media freedom and effective oversight – including functioning parliaments and an independent judiciary – underpin sustainable economic development, political dialogue and security. The inclusive participation of civil society and business in the Berlin Process, alongside government representatives, remains fundamental to its success. To that end, the Chair is extremely grateful to its German partners and all those government and non-government partners in the region who hosted, organised and participated in this year's programme of Berlin Process events.
5. Leaders reaffirmed the importance of European values and cooperation. The continued Russian war against Ukraine and Russia's hybrid war against NATO and the EU require ever-closer cooperation and unity in Europe in defence of democracy, freedom and prosperity. Leaders welcomed the Hillsborough Castle Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations agreed by all Berlin Process representatives at the Foreign Ministers Meeting, broadening and deepening the agreements on the same issues under Germany's chairmanship in 2024 and the last UK chairmanship of the Berlin Process in 2018.
6. Building on the relevant Ministerial meetings (Foreign Ministers, Interior Ministers, Economy Ministers, and Ministers in charge of Roma inclusion, Agriculture, the Green Agenda and Creative Economy) and side events (Youth Forum, Civil Society Forum (CSF), Gender Equality Forum (GEF), Digital Summit, Science Conference, Business Forum, Illicit Finance Event, WB6 Business Chambers Forum, Anti-Corruption Initiative Meeting, Border Police Chiefs Forum, Purchasing Initiative of German Business, and Parliamentarians event), participants reflected on discussions, challenges and prospects for regional cooperation in the WB6 as they move further along the path towards economic, democratic and social convergence with the EU and step towards further integration into the European Union.

7. Leaders reaffirmed the key role of the Berlin Process as a driver of regional cooperation and an integral mechanism to support the Western Balkan economies on their individual paths towards EU integration. The inclusive format of the Berlin Process that treats the WB6 as equals remains an important and unique catalyst of regional and EU integration.
8. Leaders also agreed the importance of sustained, merit based, and visible progress towards Euro-Atlantic integration for all the WB6, in line with the relevant accession criteria and the democratic will of WB6 citizens.

## **Migration**

9. Leaders agreed that illegal migration and organised immigration crime are challenges for all governments across Europe. The Western Balkans has seen the negative effects of being a transit route for migrants seeking to come to the EU and the UK. Leaders recognised the importance of border resilience in the Western Balkans and the need for cooperation at a regional level. They welcomed the ongoing steps being taken by Western Balkans partners to harmonise their visa regimes with the EU, and agreed on the need to ensure that, where visa-free access is provided for overseas citizens, effective safeguards are in place to prevent the exploitation of this access by individuals seeking to migrate onward illegally.
10. The UK welcomed the agreement of the WB6 to participate in the Joint Migration Task Force (JMTF), including those participating on an informal or technical basis without prejudice to existing positions on status and using the Berlin Process format. Through regional cooperation, the JMTF will tackle irregular migration from and through the Western Balkans, improving information-sharing and law enforcement cooperation.
11. Participants agreed to build on existing Working Arrangements (and Status Agreements where applicable) between FRONTEX, the WB6 and the UK, to improve processing and sharing of travellers' biometric information at external borders between Berlin Process participants in order to strengthen border management and tackle irregular migration.
12. Leaders welcomed that the Western Balkans Border Directors' Forum took place to discuss enhanced operational cooperation. Participants agreed to make this forum a permanent part of the Berlin Process, providing a point for regular review of operational coordination to support the Interior Ministers' Track. Berlin Process participants committed to work to develop upstream interventions in countries of transit that provide viable and desirable alternatives to irregular migrants to prevent onward travel. In support of this, the UK pledged £1 million (€1.2 million) to the International Organisation for Migration's Assisted Voluntary Returns and Reintegration (AVRR) Programmes in the region.
13. Participants took note of the recommendations from the Civil Society Forum and from the Youth Forum. Both non-governmental side events focused on the growing challenge of emigration and brain drain from the Western Balkans. Participants in the Youth Forum stressed that circular mobility must be transformed from a challenge into an opportunity. Youth called for policies that reduce brain drain by creating conditions for return, reintegration, and regional engagement, while ensuring that student exchanges, recognition of qualifications, and professional mobility are safeguarded and expanded. In this context, Leaders acknowledged the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) as a key regional mechanism advancing youth cooperation, mobility, and reconciliation across the Western Balkans.

## **Economic Growth and Prosperity**

14. Participants of the Economic Ministers' Meeting agreed the importance of improving regional connectivity to all European partners. Participants welcomed investment in infrastructure in the region from both the UK and the European Union (EU). The EU Budget is providing more than €37 billion (£32 billion) to the region under the current multiannual framework. Complementing this, the UK government has made available

up to £24 billion (€28 billion) through UK Export Finance for the whole of the Western Balkans, to support strategic projects that promote regional prosperity and strengthen economic security.

15. The Economic Ministers' Meeting highlighted partnership agreements as a key mechanism for facilitating investment and accelerating the delivery of critical infrastructure projects. The UK-North Macedonia Government to Government (G2G) Partnership signed in 2025 was highlighted as a leading example of what is possible in the region through collaboration.
16. Leaders welcomed the continued prioritisation of economic growth and prosperity for citizens across the Western Balkans. They agreed that the implementation of the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan under the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is more than a technical exercise. It will bring concrete benefits to citizens, foster economic development, and enhance the region's competitiveness, deeper convergence with the EU and its gradual integration into the EU Single Market in selected areas.
17. Participants welcomed the progress achieved under CEFTA in implementing the CRM Action Plan, emphasising that these outcomes reduce costs, facilitate trade in services and the mobility of professionals, enhance competitiveness, and constitute an important contribution for the region's convergence and gradual integration with the EU Single Market. They commended the progress in simplifying trade formalities, particularly through the recognition of results of conformity assessment for industrial products and the recognition of Authorised Economic Operator programmes.
18. Participants welcomed the strengthening of customs cooperation, supporting more efficient and predictable trade flows and underlined the importance of labour market mobility and the recognition of professional qualifications, committing to swiftly finalise the outstanding decisions. Leaders further welcomed the adoption of the decision on cooperation in statistics and took note of the decisions on the recognition of advanced and qualified trust services, committing to finalise their adoption to enable paperless trade, accelerate digital transactions, and improve evidence-based policymaking. The participants recalled the adoption of Additional Protocol 7 on Dispute Settlement and committed to expedite ratification procedures without delay to ensure its prompt entry into force.
19. Leaders endorsed fifteen RCC-led deliverables including eleven declarations that operationalised regional integration. A key achievement was the Declaration on Coordination and Portability of Social Security which lays the foundation for enhanced mobility, welfare and greater security across the WB6 while working across the region. To support responsible investment and green transition, leaders adopted complementary tools such as the Whitelist of Sustainable Finance Taxonomy, Green Bonds Standards. The Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Policy Toolkit was adopted to promote responsible investment and accelerate the green transition across the region. These initiatives on FDI and investment facilitation were approved by leaders as signals of improving the ease of doing business and attracting high-quality investments. Commitments on green public procurement embed sustainability into public spending, creating a regional benchmark for industrial transformation. Looking into the future, leaders recognised the value of regional tourism branding in boosting global visibility.
20. Participants stressed that economic growth must be underpinned by the green transformation if it is to be lasting and resilient. In this spirit, they endorsed the outcomes of the Second Ministerial on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB), including the Dubrovnik Declaration, the revised Green Agenda Action Plan 2025–2030, the Climate Adaptation Roadmap, and the Regional Action Plan on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter. Leaders recognised these steps as essential to aligning the region with the European Green Deal and strengthening regional efforts towards a climate-nature-resilient, resource-efficient, circular, and

pollution-free societies, while ensuring that the transition is a just and inclusive transition for all.

21. Participants called for intensifying the pace of implementation of the Green Agenda actions across all five pillars, strengthening coordination through the Regional Working Group on the GAWB, with RCC support, and advancing regional resilience to climate change by paving the way for the development of a WB6 Adaptation Strategy by 2026.
22. Participants concluded that the green transition is an essential part of EU integration and reiterated their commitment to the full implementation of the Green Agenda. They agreed that regional economic integration and the green transition form a single, coherent agenda. Participants also acknowledged the importance of regional cooperation and international support in ensuring a just and equitable energy transition, and encouraged further investment in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green infrastructure. By pursuing both together, the Western Balkans are building a future of sustainable growth, resilience, and convergence with the EU. The leaders committed to continue implementing these initiatives with urgency and coordination, ensuring that agreements reached at the Summit deliver real benefits for citizens and businesses across the region.
23. Participants underlined that accelerating economic growth in the Western Balkans to narrow the gap with the EU remains paramount. This requires the coordinated implementation of reforms across multiple policy areas. Leaders acknowledged the usefulness of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Economic Convergence Scoreboard for the Western Balkans, developed within the framework of the Berlin Process, as an annual, evidence-based tool to monitor reform progress and the pace economic convergence.
24. Participants welcomed the outcomes of the WB6 Business and Chambers Forum held in Belgrade, recognising the strategic role of the WB6 Chambers of Commerce in advancing regional economic integration between governments and the private sector. A UK academic report informing policy decisions, supporting the Common Regional Market agenda and EU accession efforts was shared with Economy Ministers. In London, a business forum was held to convene companies active in or considering expansion into the Western Balkans. Panel discussions chaired by the RCC and European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) showcased investment opportunities, WB6 business environments and clean energy transition prospects. Together participants reinforced the need for continued reforms to attract sustainable investment and economic prosperity.
25. Participants further took note of the results of the Digital Summit, in particular the formation of a Platform on Regional Digital Identity Wallets and Interoperability of Trust Services that seeks to provide a structured and inclusive mechanism for political coordination and technical harmonisation under the auspices of the RCC. Moreover, the continued commitment of the WB6 to regional digital integration, including further work on improving the business environment by improving granting procedures in line with the Gigabit Infrastructure Act and other relevant EU acquis on broadband development, by enhancing institutional and administrative capacity, improving regional cooperation in deployment and development of broadband infrastructure and services, as well as continued work on reducing roaming fees with the EU was welcomed.
26. Leaders welcomed the continuation of the Berlin Process Joint Science Conferences, held in Ljubljana, and organised by the German National Academy Leopoldina and the UK's Royal Society. They commended efforts to strengthen universities and research organisations as pillars of democracy and engines of competitiveness in the region's knowledge economies. Leaders underlined the need for sustained investment, capacity development, and closer integration within European frameworks, while recognising the role of science in addressing evolving security challenges and building societal resilience. They also welcomed reforms advancing

academic freedom, institutional autonomy, and opportunities for young talent, including from the diasporas.

27. Participants also welcomed the adoption of the conclusions of the Sixth Roma Ministerial Meeting and in particular the commitment to increase Roma employment and labour market participation, to provide targeted support to Roma youth and women, support Roma entrepreneurship, to enhance targeted skilling and employment pathways for Roma in areas such as renewable energy, care work, environmental services, green and digital sectors as well as improve access to education for Roma and to close the digital divide.
28. Participants noted the conclusions of the Standing Working Group (SWG) for Agriculture and Rural Development in Southeastern Europe. Specifically, participants welcomed the continued commitment to advancing EU integration through agricultural reform, pledging alignment with key EU legislation. Participants welcomed the recognition of the urgency of climate action and measures to transform food systems, integrate adaptation into investment policies, and adopt individual climate plans by 2026.
29. Participants noted discussions at the Gender Equality Forum on accelerating women's economic empowerment as an enabler of economic security and growth across the region. Participants welcomed WB6 approval of a Women's Economic Empowerment Call to Action, with commitments to support women-led small and medium enterprises and expand their access to finance. The Call to Action also notes the disproportionate burden of unpaid care carried by women, with WB6 committing to invest in the care economy and support families to thrive. In support of this, the UK announced £1 million (€1.2 million) globally for TransformCare, which addresses care inequalities and enables women to engage more fully in economic life, including in the Western Balkans.
30. Participants supported the adoption by WB6 Culture Ministers of a Joint Declaration on the Creative Economy recognising the importance of the creative economy as a key driver of economic growth, innovation and social cohesion. In this context, the launch of 10 new partnerships between UK and WB6 institutions as part of a £500,000 (€576,000) fund to share expertise and promote creative sector development, as well as the announcement of British Council led research in closing the gap between employers and education providers in creative sector. In addition, leaders welcomed ongoing efforts under RYCO's Cultural Fund, which promotes regional collaboration and creative exchange among young artists and cultural professionals, fostering social cohesion through culture.
31. Participants welcomed that Germany and the WB6 have started building on last year's BP initiative to develop a work plan on active labour market policies, the implementation of labour rights, including occupational safety and health and labour inspection, as well as on social dialogue. The work plan will enhance regional cooperation on employment and social policies in the Western Balkans through regional dialogues and exchanges of expertise.
32. Participants took note of recommendations developed in non-governmental side events such as the Youth Forum and the Civil Society Forum (CSF). While the Youth Forum highlights that economic growth must translate into tangible opportunities for the next generation through entrepreneurship, digital transformation and green initiatives, supported by access to finance, training and cross-border cooperation, experts from the CSF specifically called upon Leaders to speed up the implementation of the commitments made as part of the CRM. This includes the implementation of already signed agreements, the allocation of skilled personnel and oversight mechanisms, the harmonisation of policies, transparent procurement procedures, the removal of trade and mobility barriers, as well as enhanced transparency and the rule of law.
33. Participants further acknowledged the recommendation from the CSF to integrate environmental and climate safeguards into all states of economic growth and

infrastructure development, to expand and properly manage protected areas, prosecute polluters, ensure an accountable management of resources, invest in monitoring systems and enforce emission limits, and to ensure that environmental protection is firmly embedded in the EU accession process.

## **Security**

34. The UK has been a key contributor to security and stability in the Western Balkans, including to the UN-mandated NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR) since it first entered Kosovo in 1999 as a peacekeeping force. As a demonstration of the UK's unwavering commitment to NATO and the security and stability of the Western Balkans, the UK announced an extension of its contributing support to KFOR until at least December 2028.
35. Russia's war against Ukraine, hybrid threats from malign actors, transnational organised crime, organised immigration crime and irregular migration, are shared threats to our societies. Leaders therefore welcomed concrete steps taken in the field of security.
36. Participants agreed that cyber security resilience is critical to ensuring security and regional stability. They underlined their support for the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre in Podgorica, with several participants offering concrete offers of support and participation. They also welcomed the establishment of a Western Balkans Cyber Diplomacy network by the WB6.
37. Participants recognised the threat posed by Foreign Information Manipulation and Interference (FIMI) as a critical national security issue requiring a collective response. Participants welcomed the WB6 Foreign Ministers' readiness to prepare technical talks on the extent of the challenge and possible solutions.
38. Participants emphasised continued support for regional cooperation on the prevention of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), through the Western Balkans SALW control Roadmap which was endorsed at the Interior Ministers Meeting.
39. Participants underlined the need to promote an end-to-end strategic approach in fighting transnational organised crime and emphasised the importance of disrupting illicit financial flows and the global supply of cocaine. This includes developing joint intelligence and data driven operational activity, enabling a prioritised response that actively disrupts the operations of trafficking networks and shared high-value targets, applying pressure to the entire supply chain and thus preventing the harmful smuggling of cocaine from Latin America to the streets of Europe.
40. Participants welcomed commitment to strengthening the political and legal environment to prevent and combat corruption and organised crime as essential foundations for regional integration, security, and stronger integrity systems. This includes advancing the full adoption and effective implementation of the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declarations initiated by the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI).
41. Participants also agreed that illicit finance is a recognised critical enabler of organised crime and corruption, including in the Western Balkans. The participants concurred that achieving progress requires the reinforcement in legal frameworks and strong political commitment; the promotion of beneficial ownership transparency; and the mitigation of financial informality by transitioning away from being cash-based economies to fostering digital payments and supporting financial inclusion initiatives. Participants acknowledged the UK, EU and World Bank's efforts to lead on coordinated efforts to ensure lasting impact.
42. Participants took note of the recommendations developed in the field of security at the Civil Society Forum. These recommendations included the need for the WB6 to adopt and implement EU-aligned legislation (including the Digital Services Act, Artificial Intelligence Act and European Media Freedom Act), to develop and operationalise national strategies to counter FIMI, to strengthen national institutional capacities in cyber security as well as gender-responsive approaches in cyber security and information integrity policies.

43. In the 25th year of the landmark UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, the UK's Ministry of Defence offered to arrange bespoke Human Security Defence Training for all WB6 participants. At the Interior Ministers' Meeting, participants expressed concern at the exponential rise in online harassment and abuse globally. They agreed on the need for a coordinated response to this growing public safety threat and human rights issue.
44. Participants noted the UK-supported launch of STOP Non-Consensual Intimate Images (NCII), to allow women across the WB to remove images that may be used to silence and shame them, and the offer of UK legal expertise to strengthen legislation to address online harm. In line with recommendations from the Gender Equality Forum, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Montenegro formally joined the Global Partnership for Action on Gender-Based Online Harassment and Abuse, thereby linking regional efforts with global initiatives to safeguard women's rights in digital spaces, opening opportunities for joint projects, capacity building, and greater international visibility.

### **Bilateral issues and good neighbourly relations**

45. Participants welcomed the renewed commitment to increase efforts to address the past by all Berlin Process participants in the Hillsborough Castle Joint Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations. The UK announced dedicated funding for partnerships between UK cultural institutions and museums and other grassroots initiatives across the region to foster innovative and inclusive memorialisation. The UK also proposed to establish a Northern Ireland-WB6 working group at official level to share good practice and experience on inter-community relations.
46. Participants commended the significant integration of gender equality throughout this year's Berlin Process agenda, with concrete actions launched at the Gender Equality Forum and across all Ministerial events. Participants recognised gender equality as an enabler and accelerator of regional priorities, and that societies where women's and girls' rights are respected are more secure, stable and prosperous. As a mark of ongoing commitment, participants welcomed the establishment at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting of the Women in Diplomacy Network agreed by WB6 Foreign Ministries, and the decision by the WB6 that 15% of funds through the Western Balkans Fund will now be earmarked for initiatives on gender equality.
47. Parliamentarians highlighted the need to increase women's participation in politics, identified opportunities for greater economic cooperation and mechanisms for increased scrutiny over foreign interference, disinformation and migration. They also acknowledged the crucial role of parliamentary oversight in monitoring WB6 governments' progress against Berlin Process commitments and advancing Euro-Atlantic integration of the region.
48. Participants took note of a wide range of recommendations from the Civil Society Forum and the Youth Forum. Civil society experts called upon governments in the Western Balkans to promote public acknowledgement of the past and to develop national programmes to address trans-generational and collective trauma rooted in this past. Moreover, experts asked their governments to inter alia combat hate speech and inflammatory rhetoric in public and political discourse, strengthen cooperation on war crimes prosecution, revise national history curricula and ensure media regulation and accountability.
49. Youth particularly highlighted their role in advancing the UN Youth, Peace and Security Agenda by leading efforts to counter disinformation, radicalisation, and social fragmentation, and by building resilient communities. Participants were encouraged to support sustainable regional youth cooperation through the RYCO Trust Fund, a joint mechanism initiated by RYCO with support from the Government of Germany, and to expand contributions to RYCO's Cultural Fund as instruments for long-term youth and cultural collaboration.

**Next Chair of the Berlin Process**

50. Participants welcomed the offer of Montenegro to host the next Leaders' Summit in 2026 and looked forward to meeting in Podgorica next year.