



Western Balkans Economic Ministerial Conference - Ten years of the Berlin Process

Chair's Conclusions

On 24 September 2024, ministers of economic affairs from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, ministers of economic affairs or designated representatives from Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Slovenia and the United Kingdom, representatives from the European Union (EU), associations of trade and industry and from international and regional bodies and organisations came together in person in Berlin to attend the Economic Ministerial Conference and the Business Forum of the tenth Berlin Process. The tenth anniversary of the Berlin Process served as an opportunity to take stock of economic affairs over the past decade and also to exchange ideas for deepening regional cooperation in the future.

The Western Balkans as a regional economic area on the path to joining the EU

1. Building on the first regional Economic Ministerial Conference of the Berlin Process, which took place in Tirana in 2023, participants emphasised the necessity of increased regional cooperation as the key to promoting economic growth and continuing to improve living conditions in the region.
2. A look back at ten years of the Berlin Process shows: the six economies of the Western Balkans (WB6) have experienced stable economic growth at an average of 3.1 percent per year over the past ten years, thereby overcoming the COVID-19 crisis and high inflation. The WB6 have long since built up close economic ties to the EU, which is the most important trade partner for the region. There is still great potential for economic integration within the region. Harnessing it requires new ideas and the ongoing removal of trade barriers.
3. The meeting of the ministers was accompanied by a Business Forum, which was designed to encourage dialogue between business and government and to bring companies active in the Western Balkans or seeking to increase their involvement in the region into contact with one another.

4. The dialogue between business and government demonstrated that priority must be given to fostering an attractive environment for investment. This includes initiating legal and regulatory reforms, fighting corruption and ensuring political stability. The participants also called for increased efforts to improve infrastructure, especially in the transport, energy and digital connectivity sectors.
5. The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action is currently and will continue to support the WB6 by means of institutional partnerships (including the EU Twinning projects and bilateral administrative partnerships) and with studies as part of high-level government consultancy in the course of the ongoing alignment process with the EU. In addition, German purchasers involved in the Western Balkans Purchasing Initiative, which has been in place since 2014, engage in annual business-to-business (B2B) meetings with suppliers from the region.

The Common Regional Market (CRM)

6. The participants welcome the successes and previous implementations achieved by the Common Regional Market. The mission of the CRM largely entails facilitating the economic integration of the WB6 as they move towards joining the EU. Continuous improvement of private institutional conditions and the involvement of the private sector are essential prerequisites for the realisation of the CRM.

Energy and climate policy

7. The green transformation presents a pivotal opportunity for the WB6 to align with EU standards and to push forward with an accelerated integration of the region with the EU market. The implementation of CBAM will require a proactive and coordinated approach, both by the region's policy makers and the business sector. This will be most effectively achieved via regional cooperation, based on regional frameworks such as the Energy Community. These efforts will need to be further supported by the EU and its Member States to ensure that the WB6 have access to the necessary resources and technologies to facilitate a just and equitable transition.
8. The Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action is supporting the WB6 at various levels, including the cross-border collaboration of local and civil society stakeholders via the European Climate Initiative (EUKI). The projects contribute to the implementation of the Green Agenda. The implementation of 31 projects has been financed in the Western Balkans since 2017, with seven further projects successfully added in 2024. The European Climate Initiative Academy activities are in place to support skills development and networking.

Further partners of the Berlin Process

9. The German Eastern Business Association and the German Chambers of Commerce Abroad want to emphasise the importance of regional economic cooperation and their support for the Western Balkans on their way to EU integration. Together with WB6CIF they were the main organizers for the Business Forum.

10. The participants welcomed the support for the Western Balkan governments provided by partners like the OECD, RCC and WB6CIF.
11. The representatives from international financial institutions encouraged the WB6 to continue efforts to decarbonise their economies by accelerating the transition to renewable energy and by supporting investments in energy efficiency and infrastructure. The international financial institutions present reiterated their long-standing commitment to support the Western Balkans with financing and advisory services.
12. The partner countries emphasize their full support for the Berlin Process as an essential forum for deepening the dialogue and cooperation between the Western Balkan countries and the EU. They underscore the importance of the Common Regional Market (CRM) as a key instrument to encourage economic integration and sustainable development in the region as it moves closer to the EU.

The Chair wishes to thank all participants for their constructive contributions and their committed involvement in sustainable economic development and stability in the Western Balkans region. The Berlin Process remains a central forum to promote peace, prosperity and integration within Europe.