



Summit of the Berlin Process

Budva, Montenegro, 22 October 2026

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

On 22 October 2026, the Prime Minister of Montenegro, H.E. Mr Miloško Spajić, hosted the Heads of Government of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, together with high-level representatives of Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Poland, Slovenia, the United Kingdom and Ireland in its current capacity of Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Budva, under the Montenegrin Chairmanship of the Berlin Process. The European Commissioner for Enlargement and the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) participated in the Summit, alongside representatives of international and regional organisations and international financial institutions. A rapporteur of the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum also contributed to the discussions.

The Summit marked the culmination of Montenegro's 2026 Chairmanship of the Berlin Process. Under the motto "Region in Motion. Owning the Change.", the Chairmanship pursued four priorities: strong and inclusive economic growth; competitiveness; security and resilience; and green and sustainable transition. Over the course of the year, 25 events were held, including 13 ministerial meetings: the Meetings of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Interior, Economy, Agriculture, Labour and Trade, and the Ministerial Meetings on the Green Agenda, Roma Integration, Youth, Public Administration, Creative Economy as well as the Ministerial Energy Forum. The programme also included the Launch of the CEFTA Academic Network, the 12th Purchasing Initiative, the Youth Forum, the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum, the Gender Equality Forum, the Investment Energy Dialogue, the Public Voices Forum, the Border Police Chiefs Forum, the Economic Conference, the Digital Summit, the Illicit Finance Event, the Anti-Corruption Initiative meeting and the 10th Berlin Process Joint Science Conference. The Summit provided an opportunity to take stock of the results achieved and set priorities for the further work of the Berlin Process.

1. In times of major geopolitical shifts, economic change, heightened security threats, and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, European cooperation is more important than ever. Participants expressed their unwavering support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Ukraine, within its internationally recognized borders. Almost all participants strongly condemned Russia's ongoing and unprovoked war of aggression, the recent serious escalation by Russia, and in particular attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure. Almost all participants also deplored Russia's malicious activities directed against the European Union, its Member States, international organisations and third countries.
2. Participants reaffirmed their commitment to a stable, secure and prosperous Western Balkans region, firmly anchored in the European Union. They underlined that a credible and merit-based accession process remains a strategic investment in Europe as a whole. Participants recognized the renewed momentum in the EU's enlargement agenda and its commitment to welcome new Member States once all the conditions for accession have been met. The participants welcomed the publication of the long-expected European Commission's Communication "Preparing for a wider Union" with the accompanying Pre-enlargement Policy Reviews, and the ongoing work on Montenegro's accession treaty. Participants emphasized the importance of keeping the enlargement process high on the EU agenda, while ensuring that it remains predictable and responsive to the evolving geopolitical environment.
3. Aware that regional cooperation remains central to the Berlin Process, participants called for renewed efforts to implement existing commitments and deliver tangible benefits for citizens. They underlined that good neighbourly relations, reconciliation and an honest

approach to the past are essential for regional stability and European integration. They stressed the importance of respecting the decisions of international and national courts and rejecting the glorification of war criminals, genocide denial and historical revisionism, reaffirming the need to advance reconciliation and mutual trust in line with the principles agreed under the Berlin Process. Participants recalled that the Berlin Process Joint Declaration on War Crimes, which was agreed upon by all Western Balkans participants in London in 2018, calls for a culture of respect and solidarity towards all victims. Participants underlined the importance of resolving the fate of all persons still missing as a result of the conflicts in the region, regardless of their ethnicity, and of ensuring justice and recognition for all victims, in line with the Joint Declaration on Missing Persons adopted under the Berlin Process in 2018.

4. Building on the results of the abovementioned ministerial meetings, forums and other events held during the Chairmanship, participants acknowledged progress and discussed developments, challenges and prospects for regional cooperation in the Western Balkans as a step toward the region's gradual integration into the European Union.

Competitiveness and Strong and Inclusive Economic Growth

5. The leaders from the Western Balkans Six (WB6) reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the Common Regional Market 2025–2028 (CRM 2) for the Western Balkans and stressed the need to move from agreed commitments to effective implementation, delivering tangible benefits for citizens and businesses. The participants highlighted the importance of women's economic empowerment, digital transformation and a more competitive business environment. Recognising the key roles of the CEFTA Secretariat and of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in coordinating and taking forward the outcomes presented at this year's Berlin Process, participants invited both organisations to support the implementation, monitoring, and follow-up of the agreed commitments. They highlighted the mutually reinforcing roles of the Common Regional Market and the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans in advancing economic convergence, regional connectivity and gradual integration into the EU Single Market. In this context, they recognised the contribution, continued support and direct involvement of the Transport Community Secretariat in the Berlin Process, including in shaping its strategic documents.
6. Participants called for the full implementation of all Berlin Process agreements without further delays, including the agreement on freedom of movement with identity cards and on higher education, enabling citizens to benefit from opportunities for study, work and travel across the region.
7. Participants welcomed the progress made in advancing the RCC facilitated Regional Innovation for Start-up Excellence (RISE) Facility and the Western Balkans Six Investment Facilitation Roadmap. These initiatives are designed to support innovation ecosystems, enhance the transparency and predictability of investment procedures, improve the investment climate, and strengthen competitiveness in the region. Participants particularly commended the formal launch of the WB6-EU Industrial Parks Partnership, supported by the RCC, following the signing of Memoranda of Understanding between seven industrial parks and business zones from the WB6 and six EU counterparts. The Partnership will strengthen business links, support integration into European value chains and promote the exchange of green industrial practices.
8. Participants welcomed continued work coordinated by RCC on compiling a regional pipeline of over 30 strategic investment projects, intended to complement regional investment policy frameworks with concrete opportunities for sustainable investment.
9. Participants welcomed progress in advancing the RCC-supported Regional Financial Literacy Framework for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), with the aim of

enabling entrepreneurs to make better-informed decisions, and the Regional Minimum Core Indicator Set for Gender-Disaggregated Entrepreneurship Statistics, creating a common basis for collecting and comparing gender-disaggregated entrepreneurship data across the region to track progress, identify gaps, and improve targeted support.

10. With a view to supporting the development of regional touristic products, participants endorsed the Western Balkans Six Regional Tourism Facility¹, establishing a structured mechanism for joint regional tourism initiatives, including promotion, sustainable tourism, digital solutions, and capacity building, to be facilitated by the RCC. They further welcomed progress in advancing the Declaration on Regional Cooperation for the Mobility of Organised Tourist Groups and Adventure Tourism in the Western Balkans Six (Tourism Green Lanes), aiming to establish an overarching framework for smoother and more predictable mobility of organised tourist groups and adventure tourism across the region.
11. Participants acknowledged the OECD's contribution to evidence-based reforms through the SME Policy Index 2026 and the Economic Convergence Scoreboard for the Western Balkans, supporting stronger business competitiveness and monitoring convergence with the European Union.
12. The participants also recognised the significant progress achieved through CEFTA Green Lanes and SEED+, delivering tangible benefits for trade and strengthening economic integration with the EU. With expanded electronic data exchange with EU Member States, SEED+ now processes information on approximately 3.6 million trucks annually, while Green Lanes are expected to generate cumulative waiting time savings equivalent to 30 years at intra-CEFTA crossings over 2025–2026. They welcomed the implementation of the CEFTA Customs Risk Management Strategy 2025–2028 and the pilots on the recognition of customs controls. The WB6 participants committed to finding practical solutions for aligning working hours at agreed crossings and completing the recognition of authorised economic operator programmes across CEFTA, so that more economic operators benefit from priority lanes and reduced controls.
13. The participants acknowledged progress towards fully electronic phytosanitary and veterinary certification through CEFTA TRACES NT, processing approximately 75,000 certificates annually and reducing processing times by 52% for businesses and 77% for inspectors. They encouraged the development of the CEFTA Agri-Food Notification System and the framework for the rapid exchange of information on unsafe and non-compliant non-food products. The WB6 leaders reaffirmed their commitment to extending the recognition of results of conformity assessment of industrial products and to completing a general system for trade in agricultural products that eases trade and advances alignment with EU rules in each CEFTA Party. The participants welcomed progress on electronic trust services and on the Roadmap for CEFTA-wide motor third-party liability insurance, and the commitment of the WB6 participants to finalising both by the end of 2026. The WB6 leaders further committed to finding a practical solution for advancing the recognition of professional qualifications within CEFTA.
14. Participants welcomed progress achieved on the Regional Administrative Framework on Cooperation for the Portability of Social Rights facilitated by RCC, designed to strengthen cooperation and information exchange among social security institutions in the WB6 so that people working in another WB6 partner can preserve their social security entitlements.
15. The participants also commended the approval of the Berlin Process Work Plan on Employment and Social Policy as a key framework for enhancing regional cooperation and aligning with EU employment and social standards at the Conference of Ministers of Labour on Employment and Social Policy. Their commitment to continued implementation of the Berlin Process Employment and Social Policy Work Plan and to strengthening

¹ Belgrade has not yet confirmed its endorsement of the Framework Document, pending the completion of internal consultations, and is invited to confirm its endorsement at a later stage.

cooperation in support of economic convergence and EU integration was appreciated. In this context, participants reaffirmed the importance of aligning priorities in the field of Roma employment with this Work Plan and agreed that this framework can contribute to a more effective implementation of previously undertaken commitments in the areas of employment and education. They welcomed the concrete suggestions made at the Seventh Ministerial Meeting on Roma Inclusion, such as, inter alia, strengthening local support mechanisms for Roma experiencing long-term unemployment and identifying employment opportunities for Roma in sectors experiencing labour shortages, including the care sector, the green economy and the digital economy.

16. Emphasising common regional challenges, including the importance of strengthening labour rights, occupational safety and health, labour inspection systems and the effective enforcement of labour legislation in line with EU and international standards, participants stressed the importance of stronger regional cooperation, exchange of good practices and continued coordination among Western Balkans partners in the field of employment and social policy. They welcomed efforts aimed at modernising employment services, strengthening institutional capacities and advancing the digitalisation and interoperability of labour market systems, and highlighted the importance of labour mobility in line with EU standards, including preparations for participation in the EURES network and further alignment under Chapter 2 and Chapter 19 of the EU acquis.
17. The participants endorsed of the RCC-facilitated Declaration on Streamlining Permit Granting Procedures in the Telecommunications Sector in the Western Balkans Six, aiming to accelerate and enhance the predictability of telecommunications infrastructure deployment by simplifying procedures, clarifying requirements, and strengthening coordination among the relevant institutions.
18. Recognising the importance of maintaining the annual high-level political dialogue on digital transformation, participants welcomed the discussions held at the Digital Summit and the agreements reached there on advancing implementation of the Digital Identity Wallet (DIW) and mutual recognition of digital identities, developing minimum technical standards aligned with the EU acquis and with the long-term objective of having full interoperability at EU level.
19. The participants endorsed an Artificial Intelligence Roadmap, led and facilitated by the RCC, recognising the importance of an enabling environment for the responsible development, deployment and uptake of Artificial Intelligence. The AI Roadmap aims to accelerate AI adoption through stronger regional cooperation, improved skills and governance, shared data and computing resources, and the safe, responsible and trustworthy use of AI.
20. Reaffirming the importance of agricultural reforms for EU accession, the participants took note of the conclusions of the Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Rural Development and called for accelerated alignment with the Common Agricultural Policy and the broader EU acquis. They underlined the importance of strengthening institutional capacities, policy coherence and regional cooperation in order to facilitate the integration of the agricultural and food sectors into the EU market and supported the development of practical proposals for gradual participation of Western Balkan partners in relevant EU agricultural policies, programmes and structures, in accordance with applicable EU requirements.
21. The participants reaffirmed the urgency of strengthening food security and climate resilience, building on previous commitments on climate adaptation in agriculture. They also recognised landscape fire prevention, preparedness and sustainable forest management as shared regional priorities. They acknowledged generational renewal, knowledge and innovation as essential to competitive agriculture and viable rural communities. Participants reaffirmed SWG RRD's role as the regionally owned platform for agricultural and rural policy cooperation, implementation and monitoring.

22. The participants welcomed the launch of the CEFTA Academic Network as an open platform linking academia with CEFTA's work to strengthen evidence-based policymaking and support implementation of the CRM Action Plan 2025-2028. They commended the CEFTA Research Award, the Network's first practical instrument, for recognising policy-oriented research by early-career researchers and bringing their ideas into CEFTA policy discussions.
23. The participants recognised the agreement by Ministers responsible for culture to explore a shared regional vision positioning the WB6 as a leading European destination for authentic cultural and creative experiences, and to strengthen links between cultural heritage, creative entrepreneurship, tourism and innovation.

Security and Resilience

24. The participants welcomed that the Ministers of Interior agreed on best practices and proposals for joint action in the fight against common threats posed by organised crime, and recognised the need to build institutional resilience, strengthen partnerships and further enhance operational cooperation and interoperability among the WB6, EU partners and the UK, as applicable. In line with European standards, participants agreed on the concept of prevention, adequate protection, effective and efficient response, and the ability to recover as the best approach in the development of resilient institutions.
25. Participants welcomed the Ministers' commitment to intensifying regional cooperation on migration management, border security and the fight against cross-border crime, including through stronger operational cooperation, joint task forces, information-sharing, return and readmission, visa control and capacity building. They acknowledged the contribution of the Second Western Balkans Police Border Chiefs' Forum, held in Skopje, to advancing these efforts. Participants underlined the Ministers' agreement that measures to prevent irregular migration must uphold migrants' human rights and comply with international standards, supported by transparent cooperation with EU law enforcement agencies, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and civil society.
26. The participants commended the commitment of the WB6 at the Digital Summit to inter alia full harmonisation with EU standards by aligning domestic legislation with the NIS 2 Directive and the EU Cybersecurity Act, and to closer institutional cooperation with the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), with a view to making the Western Balkans an integral part of the European cybersecurity framework, as well as the region's commitment to strengthen joint efforts towards a resilient digital environment as a critical pillar of domestic security and the economic sovereignty of the entire region. Participants also welcomed the contribution of the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C) in Podgorica to strengthening regional cyber resilience.
27. Participants welcomed the regional conference "Beyond Compliance: Building Resilient Economies Through Financial Integrity", held in Pristina under the Berlin Process. They underlined the importance of translating financial integrity standards into effective implementation through stronger regional cooperation, information-sharing, financial investigations and asset recovery, thereby strengthening the rule of law, institutional trust and economic resilience.
28. Participants welcomed the outcomes of the Berlin Process anti-corruption event organised by the Regional Anticorruption Initiative held in Tirana and underlined the need to translate regional commitments into effective implementation and measurable results. They emphasised that independent institutions, adequate capacities, transparent decision-making and effective oversight are essential to strengthening integrity and public trust and encouraged closer cross-border cooperation and engagement with civil society, citizens and the private sector.

Green and Sustainable Transition

29. The participants welcomed the endorsement of the 2026 Ministerial Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, reaffirming their political commitment to accelerating the implementation of the Green Agenda at the Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The Declaration places particular emphasis on climate and water resilience, biodiversity and nature protection, the circular economy, pollution reduction, and sustainable financing for the green transition, while recognising the need for stronger regional coordination and more effective implementation.
30. They further acknowledged the endorsement of a package of key regional deliverables, developed with the coordination and support of the RCC, including the WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy, the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030, the WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration Plan, the Regional Pledge on phasing out the five most littered single-use plastics, and the Regional Extended Producer Responsibility Framework for Plastic Packaging. The endorsed documents provide a common regional framework for addressing shared environmental and climate challenges and serve as the basis for the next phase of regional cooperation on climate change and environmental protection, with a particular focus on translating political commitments into concrete actions, securing adequate financing, establishing clear responsibilities, strengthening monitoring and reporting, and ensuring measurable results. Leaders of the WB6 also stressed the importance of continued cooperation with the European Union, regional organisations and international partners in supporting the implementation of these commitments.
31. Participants welcomed the progress achieved on the RCC-facilitated Regional Green Investment Incentives Standards, setting a common benchmark for effective, coherent, and fiscally responsible incentive regimes that promote investments in the green transition.
32. In light of the importance of further alignment with the EU energy and climate acquis, implementation of reforms, and improvement of the regulatory framework across the WB6, participants took note of the commitments of the WB6 at the Ministerial Energy Forum and Investment Energy Dialogue to accelerating the energy transition, strengthening regional cooperation, and advancing integration with the European Union energy market. Participants reaffirmed the need for stronger regional cooperation, including electricity market integration and a coordinated approach to addressing challenges related to energy security, and decarbonisation, and welcomed the continued support of the European Union, the Energy Community, international financial institutions, and Berlin Process partners in advancing the region's energy and climate transition.

Democratic Governance and Inclusive Societies

33. The participants acknowledged the recommendations of the Western Balkans Youth Forum 2026 and reaffirmed the importance of young people as partners in shaping the European future of the Western Balkans. They encouraged the integration of youth perspectives across the Berlin Process priorities. Participants underlined the importance of sustained investment in youth participation, skills and opportunities, reconciliation and peacebuilding. They encouraged continued efforts to ensure that regional cooperation delivers tangible and measurable benefits for young people and contributes to creating conditions for them to build their future in the Western Balkans. In this regard RYCOs 10th anniversary marks one of the great success stories of the region and the Berlin Process to strengthen the support for young people in the region.

34. The participants welcomed that Ministers in charge of youth from across the region agreed on the importance of strengthening regional youth cooperation and of ensuring the meaningful involvement of young people in decision-making and reform processes, including by translating the recommendations of the Youth Forum into concrete action. They welcomed efforts to strengthen the sustainability of regional youth cooperation, reaffirming the role of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) as the key mechanism for youth cooperation in the region, including through the RYCO Trust Fund – RYCOncile, as a mechanism to support these initiatives across the region. Participants expressed their support for the RYCO Trust Fund and encouraged Berlin Process partners and other stakeholders to contribute to its financing. Germany's pledge of EUR 500,000 to the RYCO Trust Fund, as well as Montenegro's pledge at the Youth Ministerial to contribute EUR 25,000 to the RYCOncile Fund, were greatly appreciated. Leaders also welcomed the announcement of Commissioner Marta Kos at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting that the European Commission will provide EUR 12 million to RYCO, GIZ and RCC for youth-related projects over the next three years.
35. Participants commended Montenegro's Chairmanship for being the first Berlin Process Chair to ensure the participation of representatives of the Civil Society and Think Tank Forum (CSF), held in Pristina, in all relevant thematic ministerial meetings. This inclusive practice brought civil society expertise directly into policy discussions and set a valuable precedent for future Berlin Process Chairmanships. Under the motto "Proof, not promises," the CSF called on the Berlin Process leaders to establish, in partnership with civil society, a structured monitoring mechanism producing a public delivery tracker that records commitments made, progress achieved and outstanding obligations across the Process, building on existing regional monitoring, including the Common Regional Market Monitor. The CSF further stressed that existing commitments should be implemented before new ones are undertaken and called for the full participation of all six Western Balkan partners in the European Democracy Shield and the European Centre for Democratic Resilience.
36. The participants also welcomed the Third Berlin Process Gender Equality Forum held in Sarajevo, reaffirmed that gender equality is a key indicator of stable, secure and prosperous societies, and underlined the importance of systematically integrating a gender dimension across the Berlin Process and its activities. In this regard, they welcomed the Joint Statement on Cooperation of the Institutional Mechanisms for Gender Equality and Protection against Discrimination of the Western Balkans Six and Croatia, and encouraged continued exchange of experience and good practices among gender equality institutions. Participants reaffirmed that advancing gender equality across the region requires the joint efforts of governments and civil society, recognising the importance of working hand in hand towards this shared objective.
37. Participants welcomed the implementation of the WB6 decision to earmark 15% of Western Balkans Fund (WBF) resources for gender equality initiatives through the WBF Gender Equality Fund (GEFund), noted its successful launch, and encouraged sustained financial support for this mechanism.
38. The participants acknowledged the commitments by Ministers responsible for Roma inclusion in the framework of the Seventh Ministerial Meeting on the implementation of the Declaration of the Western Balkan Partners on Roma Integration within the EU Enlargement Process to accelerate the implementation of the agreed commitments, strengthen mutual cooperation and enhance coordination with the institutions of the European Union and relevant international partners, with the aim of delivering measurable and sustainable results in the field of Roma inclusion. Participants took note of the uneven progress achieved across economies and sectors in implementing the Poznań Declaration and reaffirmed the importance of implementing commitments made. They underlined the need to address antigypsyism and the importance of Roma participation in the design, implementation and monitoring of public policies. Participants further acknowledged the

Ministers' call for the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights to extend its activities across the WB6.

39. The participants commended the first Ministerial Meeting on Public Administration Reform in the Western Balkans and reaffirmed that a professional, capable and future-oriented public administration is essential for democratic governance and accelerated EU accession. They agreed that strengthening administrative capacity remains a strategic priority, requiring sustained political commitment, adequate resources and a merit-based civil service aligned with EU standards. Digital transformation and agility were highlighted as key enablers of more efficient, transparent and citizen-oriented administrations. Participants also welcomed the launch of the Regional Mobility Scheme, supported by the Regional School of Public Administration, as an important instrument for knowledge exchange and convergence with EU practices, and encouraged further participation of EU Member States.
40. Participants also welcomed the outcomes of the tenth Berlin Process Joint Science Conference and acknowledged the essential role of the knowledge sector for the European integration of the Western Balkans. They recognised that transformation and modernisation must be people-centred and supported by knowledge systems that are adequately funded from public and private sources, and that also benefit from EU pre-accession support. The participants supported the modernisation of universities through future-oriented study programmes, responsible use of artificial intelligence, efficient management, better synergies with the labour market, and greater mobility. They underlined the need for strong innovation ecosystems, place-based and regionally connected, and for support at critical stages of the knowledge transfer and market entry process. This is key to the transition towards knowledge economies that generate sustainable growth and opportunities for young people in the region. Participants underlined the importance of independent scientific advice in addressing strategic challenges, such as energy, climate adaptation, public health, artificial intelligence, and the setting of priorities for EU pre-accession funds, while encouraging the institutionalisation of such advisory models in the region.
41. Participants also welcomed the first Western Balkans Public Voices Forum, bringing together media professionals, public communicators, regional organizations and political leaders to explore how European integration, regional cooperation and reforms can be communicated more effectively to citizens. They acknowledged that progress on reforms must be accompanied by a clearer public understanding of their purpose, implications and tangible benefits, and highlighted the roles political leaders and professional media can jointly play. They also emphasised the importance of strengthening cooperation between the media and public sector communicators to ensure that policies affecting citizens' lives are communicated more clearly, accurately and transparently. They called for sustained financial and technical support for independent media, focused on measurable impact and complemented by meaningful partnerships with private sector actors committed to democratic values and the public interest.

Future of the Berlin Process

42. Participants welcomed the offer of Austria to assume the role of chair of the Berlin Process and host the 2027 Berlin Process Summit.