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## REPORT

### Berlin Process Coordination Meeting of the WB6 Ministries of Foreign Affairs

Tirana, 29 September 2023



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## I. INTRODUCTION

The coordination meeting of the Western Balkan 6 Ministries of Foreign Affairs (WB6 MFAs) within the Berlin Process took place in Tirana on September 29, 2023. The gathering saw the participation of representatives from all Western Balkan 6 Ministries of Foreign Affairs, as well as attendees from the Prime Minister's Office of Albania, the German Federal Foreign Office, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the Secretariats of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and the Transport Community, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), and Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), both in person and through online channels.

The primary purpose of the meeting was to deliberate potential policy topics and interventions relevant to the upcoming Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Affairs (MFA Ministerial) and to provide an update on the agreements scheduled for signing at the Berlin Process Summit 2023 (Summit 2023). Additionally, the meeting served as a platform for sharing information and updates regarding preparations for the Summit 2023. Participants also engaged in discussions and exchanged information pertaining to the Agenda, Protocol format, and the content of the Ministerial Meeting of Foreign Affairs, set to take place in Tirana on October 6, 2023.



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## II. SETTING THE FRAMEWORK AND THE POLICY CONTEXT FOR THE MINISTERIAL

**Ms. Gudrun Kramer**, Head of Programme at GIZ, welcomed the participants on behalf of the Project on Regional Cooperation for EU Integration and expressed her gratitude to the Advisor to the Prime Minister of Albania, Ms. Barbullushi and Deputy Foreign Minister Ms. Fino for their cooperation in organization of the meeting. Ms. Kramer thanked the representatives of WB6 MFAs and German Federal Foreign Office for their cooperation and support for the whole process and for this final coordination meeting that precedes the MFA Ministerial.

Following Ms. Kramer's welcoming remarks, **Ms. Megi Fino**, Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, provided a comprehensive overview of actions, commitments, achievements, and ongoing exchanges in regional cooperation, emphasizing its irreversible importance for the future of both the Western Balkans and Europe. Ms. Fino also underscored the key policy topics and areas of cooperation that had been prominently featured in the two previous ministerial meetings held in Tirana, namely the Ministerial of Interior Affairs and the Ministerial of Economy. She placed particular emphasis on economic integration and the Common Regional Market (CRM), regional cooperation, border management, cyber-security, and the establishment of mutual trust as central themes of the current exchanges. Ms. Fino stressed the urgency of taking concrete steps within 2023 and the imperative of legal alignment, the rule of law, and the establishment of a robust judicial system to expedite market integration. In the process of enlargement, solidarity, convergence, and coherence were highlighted as essential prerequisites for success.

The welcoming session concluded with remarks from **Ms. Odeta Barbullushi**, who brought attention to the current geopolitical and historical context that the European Union is navigating. She specifically highlighted certain mechanisms with greater relevance for the MFA Ministerial, along with key documents slated for discussion during this event. Given these factors, the MFA Ministerial is envisioned as the ideal platform to emphasize the Western Balkans' potential contribution to a stronger and more peaceful Europe. The agenda will encompass topics and policies related to regional security, border crossings, and migration as well.

The geopolitical *momentum* triggered by Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine and a new discussion momentum about the EU integration (the EU growth plan) are two important issues that will be taken into consideration in the discussion of the MFA Ministerial. Topics and policies of regional security, border crossing, migration will also be discussed.

Regarding the mechanisms and areas of relevance to the MFA Ministerial, Ms. Barbullushi introduced the following proposals:



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- **Security:** A proposal is underway to establish a regional unit dedicated to information sharing and coordination in the realm of cyber-security.
- **Single Market:** Emphasis is placed on the importance of bolstering the progressive integration into the digital domain within the single market.
- **Roaming Fees:** While the roadmap for the gradual reduction of roaming fees with the EU is already a notable achievement, policy recommendations and proposals are needed, especially in areas like the digitalization of services, connectivity with the EU, and increasing access to digital services, particularly in underdeveloped and cross-border regions.

Additionally, Ms. Barbullushi outlined the documents scheduled for discussion at the Summit 2023:

- **Mutual Recognition of Professions (MRA 2.0):** The negotiated agreement on mutual recognition of professions, specifically MRA 2.0, encompasses four additional professions (midwives, veterinary surgeons, nurses, and pharmacists), representing full alignment across all professions.
- **Climate and Energy Partnership:** An essential step forward is a joint statement between Germany and all Western Balkan 6 on Climate and Energy Partnership (Regional Climate Partnership). This indicates both a political and financial commitment from the German government in this critical area.

Another noteworthy achievement to be unveiled at Summit 2023, as emphasized by Ms. Barbullushi, is the inauguration of the **College of Europe's** third campus. This institution will play a crucial role in training the upcoming generation of technical bureaucrats in the region, contributing significantly to research and capacity building.

In conclusion, Ms. Barbullushi underscored the significance of the European Union's unwavering commitment and support for the region. This commitment is pivotal in building trust and fostering a shared vision for the future within the European Union.

**Ms. Oriana Arapi**, the Director of the EU Policy and Reform Agenda Unit within the Department of Policies and EU Accession at the Prime Minister's Office of Albania, highlighted several policy issues under discussion, which may be proposed as initiatives within the framework of Summit 2023, aligning with the forthcoming MFA Ministerial. These discussions are set to align with the European Union's new growth plan presented by the EU Commission and will encompass the following significant areas:

- **Cooperation on Critical Raw Materials:** Anticipated collaboration among countries in the trade and transport facility program, building upon the successful conclusion of phase 1. Phase 2 will revolve around three primary axes: (i) trade facilitation to support deeper market integration and trade agreements; (ii) transport facilitation; and (iii) prioritization of large-scale infrastructure projects connecting the region with the EU.
- **Single Euro-Payment Area:** Discussion surrounding the establishment of a modern payment system that will enhance the digital economy and simplify transactions with the EU.



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- **Enablers for Economic Growth:** Addressing economic challenges by ensuring the necessary conditions for growth within the context of the region.
- **WB WI-FI Initiative:** Deliberation and agreement on the WB WI-FI initiative as part of the digital agenda, with expectations of signing a memorandum of understanding with Western Balkans (WB) to bolster the digital agenda.
- **Convergence Observatory with OECD:** A proposal to establish a convergence observatory in collaboration with the OECD to address convergence issues related to data.

Ms. Arapi also raised several additional important topics that could be of significance for discussion during the MFA Ministerial, including:

- **Financial Instruments and Support:** Deliberations on financial mechanisms and support mechanisms aimed at fostering economic development and stability in the region.
- **Business Direct Support:** Consideration of initiatives and policies aimed at providing direct support to businesses, potentially to stimulate economic growth and entrepreneurship.
- **European Connectivity:** Discussions regarding initiatives and projects that promote connectivity with Europe, whether in terms of transportation, infrastructure, or digital links.
- **Agro-Processing:** Exploring opportunities and strategies for agro-processing, which can be a vital sector for economic development and value addition to agricultural products.
- **Maritime:** Potential discussions on maritime-related matters, which could encompass topics such as trade, transport, and cooperation in maritime areas.

**Mr. Albert Hani**, the Secretary General of RYCO, shared that on October 6, RYCO will host the Youth Forum, set to occur along the train route from Elbasan to Durrës, serving as the backdrop for discussions and exchanges. Furthermore, a kick-off meeting for the Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund is scheduled for October 7th, during which the announcement of the call for grant applications, each amounting to 15,000 euros per contracting party, will take place.

**Mr. Niels von Redecker**, Head of Division 209 WB at the German Federal Foreign Office, underscored the immense strategic and political significance that the Berlin Process holds for the German government. He recognized the forward-moving strides in cooperation between the Western Balkans and the ambitions of the Berlin Process 2023 Chairmanship within this context. It was emphasized that regional cooperation, reforms, and the resolution of potential conflicts in the region remain the primary objectives of the process.

Mr. von Redecker also mentioned several upcoming events following Summit 2023:

- **Conference on EU Enlargement and Reform:** A major conference is scheduled to take place two weeks after the Summit in Berlin, hosted by the German Foreign Office. This event will focus on EU enlargement and reform efforts.



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- **EU Western Balkans Foreign Ministers Informal Meeting:** Under the Spanish Presidency with the Council of the EU, an informal meeting of EU Western Balkans Foreign Ministers is scheduled for November.
- **European Council Meeting:** Finally, there is the European Council meeting scheduled for December, which will further engage with matters relevant to the Western Balkans and the EU enlargement process.

These events illustrate the ongoing commitment to fostering cooperation and progress in the Western Balkans within the context of the Berlin Process and EU integration.



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### III. PRESENTATION OF THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE MINISTERIAL MEETING

**Ms. Megi Fino** provided an overview of the preparations, the agenda, and protocol details for the MFA Ministerial. The schedule for the event is as follows:

- **October 5:** Official reception hosted by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Albania, Mr. Igli Hasani.
- **October 6:** Ministerial meeting, also hosted by Mr. Igli Hasani. The day will include:
  - Official welcoming.
  - First session.
  - Group photo.
  - Second session.
  - Closing remarks.
  - A concluding press conference.

In terms of protocol, Ms. Fino noted that the format for the MFA Ministerial will be one plus three, plus one protocol, and one security, indicating the specific arrangements and roles for the event.





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## IV. UPDATE ON THE AGREEMENTS TO BE SIGNED AT THE BERLIN PROCESS SUMMIT 2023

**Ms. Pranvera Kastrati**, Head of the Programme Department at the RCC, provided additional insights into the deliverables planned for Summit 2023:

- **Roaming Charges Reduction:** Starting from October 1, 2023, there will be a reduction in roaming charges between the European Union (EU) and Western Balkans (WB), signifying progress in improving communication services.
- **Mobility Agreements Implementation:** The RCC is actively preparing for the implementation of three mobility agreements signed in Berlin the previous year. Efforts are being made in Bosnia and Herzegovina to secure the ratification of two agreements before Summit 2023: the recognition of academic qualifications and the recognition of professional qualifications. A joint commission has been established to oversee the implementation of these agreements. Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro have technically endorsed the proposals, and a working group meeting for the implementation of mutual recognition of academic qualifications will be held in Podgorica soon.
- **Mutual Recognition of Professions (MRA 2):** Negotiations for MRA 2 concluded on June 7, and the details have been shared with all Western Balkan economies. This is an ongoing process with the hope of finalizing it by the time of Summit 2023.
- **Green Agenda:** A joint statement addressing plastic pollution, including marine litter, has been discussed and technically agreed upon. It is expected to be included as a potential annex to the Chair's Conclusions of Summit 2023. The joint statement on marine litter has received technical confirmation from most parties, except from Bosnia and Herzegovina.
- **Access to Study Agreement:** The RCC aims to launch and initiate negotiations for an agreement on access to study. This process is contingent on when Bosnia and Herzegovina and North Macedonia will nominate their two lead negotiators.

These deliverables signify important steps in the region's development, cooperation, and alignment with EU policies and standards, further demonstrating the commitment to progress within the Western Balkans.

**Ms. Danijela Gacevic**, Director of the CEFTA Secretariat, provided an update on several decisions and agreements that have been completed on a technical level and are poised for adoption before Summit 2023:

- **Recognition of Authorized Economic Operators:** An agreement on recognizing authorized economic operators has been reached.
- **E-commerce Decisions:** Three decisions pertaining to e-commerce have been finalized.
- **Intellectual Property Rights Decision:** An agreement on intellectual property rights has been reached.
- **Recognition of Professional Qualifications:** An agreement on recognizing professional qualifications has been achieved.



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- **Establishment of Veterinary Working Group:** There is consensus on establishing a veterinary working group.

In addition to these agreements, Ms. Gacevic highlighted three other decisions that are nearing completion and may be ready for adoption by October 16, 2023:

- **Decision on Statistics:** Technical discussions were concluded on September 28th.
- **Decision on Risk Management:** This decision is in an advanced stage of technical negotiations.
- **Removal of Work Permits:** A decision regarding the removal of work permits is also in a mature phase of technical negotiations.

These developments demonstrate the commitment to enhancing cooperation and integration within the region, facilitating trade, and streamlining various aspects of economic interaction.

**Mr. Matei Zakonsjek**, Director of the Transport Community, emphasized key developments and policy matters during the coordination meeting:

- **Trade and Transport Facilitation Program:** The program, which was presented in the Ministerial of Economy, aims to improve border crossing procedures, reduce waiting times at borders, and enhance border capacity. It is pivotal for streamlining trade and transportation within the region. Both the Transport Community and CEFTA Secretariat have provided their feedback and comments on the Trade and Transport Facilitation program. They are now awaiting further actions and decisions from the Western Balkan countries and the host of Summit 2023 regarding the program's progression. Mr. Zakonsjek highlighted the joint declaration to advance the green lane initiative, extending these streamlined trade routes with EU member states.



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## V. CONCLUDING REMARKS

**Ms. Admira Jorgji**, the Director of the EU Directorate in the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, conveyed her gratitude for hosting the Berlin Process coordination meeting of the WB6 MFAs and underscored the immense significance of the Chairmanship of the Berlin Summit 2023 within the broader Berlin Process.

She stressed that the key message of the MFA Ministerial will revolve around the shared objective of EU accession and integration, with the Berlin Process playing a pivotal role in supporting the Western Balkans to attain these aspirations. The MFA Ministerial is envisioned as a critical bridge between the two more pragmatic ministerial meetings, namely the Ministerial of Economy and the Ministerial of Interior. The expression of political will to continue regional cooperation was highlighted as an utmost priority.

Ms. Jorgji also touched upon two vital discussion points that will be addressed by leaders during Summit 2023: accelerated integration and economic convergence. In the context of the MFA Ministerial, economic convergence with neighbouring EU member states will be examined from two angles. First, exploring how to expedite integration within the internal market, and second, identifying additional means, such as pre-accession funds, that can contribute to advancing economic convergence.

In conclusion, Ms. Jorgji called upon ministers to assess the region's challenges comprehensively and provide concrete and practical ideas for addressing these issues. This pertains specifically to regional economic and political cooperation, as well as strategies for opening new perspectives on the path towards EU accession.

During the Q&A session, several additional clarifications and details were provided:

- 1. Confirmation Deadline for Summit 2023:** The deadline for confirming attendance at Summit 2023 is set for October 9, 2023.
- 2. Updated List and Final Agenda:** The updated list of participants and the final agenda for the Summit 2023 will be disseminated as soon as possible.
- 3. Wi-Fi for WB Initiative:** The Wi-Fi for Western Balkans initiative is being implemented through the digital program of the EU in various EU countries, aiming to provide free Wi-Fi access in urban areas and municipalities within the Western Balkans.
- 4. German Government Officials:** The Foreign Minister of the German government, Ms. Annalena Baerbock, and their special envoy, Manuel Sarrazin, will attend the MFA Ministerial meeting.



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**5. OECD Director for Western Balkans and Turkey:** The Director for the Western Balkans and Turkey from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) will participate in the Youth Forum.

**6. Berlin Conference on EU Enlargement and Reform:** Invitations have been extended to all six Ministers of Foreign Affairs from the Western Balkans and other European ministers to participate in the Berlin Conference on EU enlargement and reform.



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## **VI. ANNEX I: AGENDA OF THE MEETING**

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 29

09:00-09:30 Welcome coffee and registration of participants

09:30-09:40 Welcome and Introduction

- Megi Fino, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania
- Odeta Barbullushi, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Albania

09:40-11:00 Presentation of the Preparations for the Meeting of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs / Policy Discussion of the Possible Conclusions of the Meeting of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs

Input:

- Megi Fino, Deputy Minister, Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and Oriana Arapi, Director of EU Policy and Reform Agenda Unit, Department of Policies and EU Accession, Prime Minister's Office of Albania
- Representatives of all Western Balkans' Six Ministries of Foreign Affairs
- Niels von Redecker, Head of Division 209 Western Balkans, German Federal Foreign Office
- Joint discussion

11:00-11:30 Coffee break

11:30-12:15 Update on the Agreements to be Signed at the Berlin Process Summit 2023

- Pranvera Kastrati, Head of Programme Department, Regional Cooperation Council
- Representatives of CEFTA Secretariat and Transport Community
- Joint discussion

12:15-13:00 Heading towards Berlin Process Summit 2023 / Conclusions and Next Steps

- Odeta Barbullushi, Advisor to the Prime Minister
- Niels von Redecker, Head of Division 209 Western Balkans, German Federal Foreign Office

13:00-14:30 Lunch break

15:00 Departure of Participants