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KRYEMINISTRIA



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REPORT

Berlin Process Coordination Meeting

Tirana, 18-19 May 2023



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BACKGROUND & OBJECTIVE

Berlin Process Sherpa's, representatives of the Western Balkans Ministries of Foreign Affairs, representatives from EU Member States part of the Berlin Process, and international and regional organizations met in person on 19 May in Tirana for the Berlin Process Coordination Meeting to prepare for the upcoming Berlin Process Summit scheduled on October 16, 2023, in Tirana.

The regional meeting provided a good opportunity for the participants to assess the work done since the Berlin Process Summit 2022 and the status of ratification of the three mobility agreements signed last year. The objective of this meeting was for participants to deliver and discuss activities to be undertaken and to identify steps in the framework of the preparations for the Summit 2023, as well as exchange information on the expectations.



SUMMARY OF THE MEETING

The meeting was opened and chaired by **Ms. Odeta Barbullushi**, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Albania (Sherpa for Albania) who welcomed the participants and expressed Albania's full support for the relaunch of the Berlin Process and acknowledged the strong commitment of Germany and the EU towards the EU accession process in the Western Balkans. Following the welcoming remarks of Ms. Barbullushi, the Albanian Deputy Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs, **Ms. Megi Fino** shared her perspective reiterating the significance of the Berlin Process as a unique and indispensable tool for enhancing the European perspective of the Western Balkans. **Ms. Fino** emphasized that this process would play a crucial role in facilitating the region's gradual or staged accession to the European Union.

The meeting was also attended by the Director General of the Directorate General for Neighborhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR), **Mr. Gert Jan Koopman**, who acknowledged the challenges faced and expressed strong interest in advancing the agenda. Director General Koopman emphasized the need to change the pace of advancement in the region due to evolving geopolitical dynamics. **Mr. Koopman** emphasized the importance of economic growth and integration within the region and the EU, citing the economic and investment plan as a significant contribution to enhancing economic infrastructure and integration. Highlighting the transformative potential of strong economic growth, he stressed the importance of focusing on building a regional market and accelerating integration and accession.

At the end of the introduction session, the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, **Ms. Majlinda Bregu**, expressed gratitude for the meeting and highlighted the importance of regional cooperation in the Western Balkans (WB). She acknowledged the challenges of the current geopolitical context and emphasized that the Common Regional Market (CRM) has proven to be a qualitative framework for multilateral regional cooperation. Secretary General Bregu stressed the need for continued cooperation, stating that the CRM, together with the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, serves as a platform for achieving economic resilience and success stories in the region. She also mentioned specific areas of focus, while giving information on the state of play of the mobility agreements, highlighting the progress made and the need for further implementation. Ms. Bregu concluded by emphasizing the importance of delivering on commitments, setting a joint vision, and accelerating regional integration.



PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE ALBANIAN CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE BERLIN PROCESS

The Albanian Chairmanship of the Berlin Process for 2023 outlined its priorities to advance regional cooperation and development in the Western Balkans. These priorities focus on key areas such as connectivity, digital integration, energy security, and youth engagement. By addressing these areas, the Albanian Chairmanship aims to strengthen regional ties, improve infrastructure, and promote economic growth in the region.

Furthermore, the Albanian Sherpa Ms. Odeta Barbullushi highlighted the importance of improving research infrastructure, trade facilitation, sustainable green financing, private sector engagement, and identifying European agencies where WB6 could accede. It also provided insights into the upcoming calendar of ministerial events, emphasizing collaboration, and proposing solutions for regional challenges.

Following the presentation of priorities by the Albanian Sherpa, participants had a discussion and agreed on the following:

- Participants expressed gratitude for the organization of the meeting and emphasized the importance of frequent meetings to enhance communication and effectiveness for the benefit of their citizens.
- Participants agreed on the need for economic integration of the region, emphasizing that the way forward is equality of all parties.
- Participants welcomed the launching of the technical negotiations on the Agreement on Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Nurses, Veterinary Surgeons, Pharmacists, and Midwives and committed to taking all actions to comply with the tasks and obligations deriving from the CRM and the Berlin Process framework.
- Participants welcomed the priority thematic pillars as proposed by the Albanian Chairmanship and gave their full availability to work closely in the following months to address key challenges which hinder socio-economic convergence in the region and the phasing in of the regional market in the European Single Market.
- Participants made a brief overview of recent developments in their respective countries related to the three mobility agreements signed last year, as well as presented their expectations from a national point of view for the upcoming Berlin Process Summit.
- Participants highlighted the progress made in adopting and ratifying the three agreements, with the fourth mobility agreement expected to be signed at the next meeting in Skopje.



- Participants supported the initiative to launch negotiations on a regional Agreement on Access to Study in Higher Education, which will aim to boost mobility between students from the region towards universities in the European Union.
- The roaming agreement was highlighted as a tangible result of the Berlin Process, improving connectivity among citizens.
- Participants expressed openness to explore proposals from their counterparts and reaffirmed their strong commitment to the Berlin Process.



MEETING CONCLUSIONS

1. Connectivity:

- Priority on transport connectivity within the region and with EU Member States.
- Emphasis on implementing the Green Lanes initiative for efficient border crossings.
- Focus on facilitating the exchange of customs information to reduce waiting times at border crossing points.

2. Digital Connectivity and Cybersecurity:

- Promotion of digital integration within the region and with the EU internal market.
- Support for reducing data roaming charges between the EU and Western Balkans.
- Strengthening cybersecurity measures to address the growing threat of cyber-attacks.

3. Energy Sector:

- Enhancing energy security and diversification in the region.
- Developing electricity infrastructure to support market competition and renewable energy sources.
- Strengthening energy infrastructure, including natural gas and hydrogen systems.
- Promoting a regional approach to carbon pricing for effective energy market integration and transition.

4. Youth, Mobility, and Higher Education:

- Prioritizing youth engagement and addressing challenges faced by young people in the region.
- Support for mobility agreements and negotiations on regional agreements for access to study in higher education.
- Signing agreements on recognition of professional qualifications for healthcare professionals.
- Organizing the Youth Forum to provide a platform for youth participation and contribution.



5. Research Infrastructure:

- The Albanian Chairmanship prioritizes improving research infrastructure in the Western Balkans.
- Acknowledgment that some economies in the region, do not participate in the European Strategy Forums of Research Infrastructure.
- Aim to bring all six economies to the same level of participation in research mechanisms and raise their engagement in European financial schemes and mechanisms for higher education and research.

6. Trade and Strengthening Links to the Internal Market:

- Implementation of the four freedoms of the Single Market and the Common Regional Market is a crucial focus.
- Emphasis on sustainable tourism and deepening cooperation in the agriculture sector.
- The objective is to achieve joint touristic packages that work across the region, offering facilitated services, lower prices, and improved connectivity.
- Prioritization of integrated border crossing, implementation of Green Lanes with EU Member States, and facilitation of integrated payment systems.
- Unifying procedures for licensing Authorized Economic Operators between the Western Balkans and the EU.
- Importance of data sharing between customs authorities of the Western Balkans and neighboring EU countries.

7. Sustainable Green Financing:

- Highlighting the need to plan regionally on sustainable green financing.
- Efforts to align policies and approaches regarding green financing among the central banks in the region.

8. Private Sector Engagement and European Agencies:

- Recognizing the importance of involving the private sector and businesses in the Berlin Process.
- Integration of the business community into priority setting, particularly regarding mechanisms and instruments for regional integration into the internal market.



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- Objective is to identify European agencies in which the Western Balkans can participate in the short and mid-term.