

# 2023 Tirana Civil Society and Think Tank Forum

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS TWG



## ACCESS TO THE SINGLE MARKET

The European Commission should present a plan with a feasible timeline to allow the markets of the Western Balkan Six to immediately access the EU Single Market in all areas that would not impose high adjustment costs and would be highly beneficial and visible for businesses and citizens.

The Western Balkan governments should manifest their unequivocal commitment to implement and monitor the implementation of the reforms linked to the Single Market acquis.

The European Commission and the Western Balkan leaders should ensure meaningful participation of relevant stakeholders, including CSOs, by ensuring that the policy dialogue on EU integration to the Single Market is open and transparent to non-state actors and significantly increase the transparency of the planning, management, implementation, monitoring, reporting, and evaluation of pre-accession funds.



## POLITICS OF ENLARGEMENT

The European Commission should prepare individual accession action plans (AAPs) that will contain intermediary milestones as incentives for each candidate country.

Dispute resolution efforts should run in parallel to the implementation of the accession action plans (AAPs).

The European Council should enable the European Commission to make use of the existing mechanisms for immediate reporting and triggering of sanctions for violations or backsliding in the area of rule of law.



## DIGITALIZATION AND CONNECTIVITY

Establish a coordinated, regional approach to implementing the EU Digital Services Act or an equivalent regulatory instrument in the Western Balkans countries, to ensure equivalent safety and protection of online users in the region to those available in the EU.

Accelerate and facilitate the entrance of the Western Balkans countries into EU digital single market, ensuring that the entire region advances at the same pace wherever possible.

Advocate for the Very Large Online Platforms (VLOPs) and the Very Large Online Search Engines (VLOSEs) to expand the commitments of the Code of Practice against Disinformation (CoP) to the Western Balkans region.



## MOBILITY

Facilitate and finance the establishment of a comprehensive all-inclusive regional mobility framework agreement including students, researchers, university administrative staff, experts in the research and innovation ecosystem and professionals in related areas within the WB6.

Support and co-finance the establishment of a Western Balkans Research Fund, as a dedicated mechanism through specific granting and supporting schemes on mobility, knowledge transfer, access to infrastructure and engagement of diaspora in research and innovation ecosystem within the Western Balkans and with the EU, addressing the current shortcomings of the Widening Participation and Horizon Europe programmes.

Western Balkans Governments must commit to increase the percentage of investment in research and innovation up to 2% of GDP by 2030 to nurture a generation of researchers, experts, innovators, and thinkers who can redefine the region's future, provide avenues for brain circulation, and attract talents by engaging with peers in the region, EU and diaspora and strengthen integration in European Research Area.



## CLIMATE AND GREEN AGENDA

Both the EU and the Western Balkans countries share the responsibility of enhancing Green Infrastructure within the Western Balkans region. The EU should increase its financial commitment to align with Western Balkans needs and establish a funding mechanism that embodies the principles of solidarity and a multi-level governance approach mirroring the successful model of the EU Cohesion Funds.

A strong administration can maximize the EU integration opportunities. The Western Balkans Six should take swift action to enhance the capacities of national and sub-national authorities entrusted with environment and climate change responsibilities, including those responsible for programming and managing EU funds.

Climate resilience cannot be achieved without investments in biodiversity and natural-based solutions. Leaders from the Western Balkans Six must secure sustainable funding for preserving and restoring the region's invaluable natural resources, with the goal of allocating 30% of national environmental and climate funds to biodiversity protection within the next five years. The EU should ensure that at least 30% of its climate-related funding for the Western Balkans is invested in biodiversity.



## SECURITY AND GEOPOLITICS

During 2024, the national authorities in the Western Balkans should focus on establishing a screening mechanism for Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), or at least agree on regionally accepted standards for screening of investments.

The European Commission should establish a financial facility solely dedicated to supporting reconciliation projects in the Western Balkans. For the new legislative term, the European Commission/DG-NEAR should put forward a proposal for the establishment of such a programme, under IPA, Global Europe, or another adequate instrument.

During 2024, the European Commission should propose concrete measures on the integration of the Western Balkan countries in the work of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA), as well as in the EU Cybersecurity Incident Review Mechanism.



## ENERGY

To re-establish and improve the legal framework governing the regional energy market(s), the EU should facilitate an independent assessment report to the European Parliament (and the national parliaments) on the implementation of the Energy Community Treaty, accompanied by a proposal for further actions to induce an appropriate debate on EU level.

An inclusive and multistakeholder dialogue should be launched to negotiate an extension to the Energy Community Treaty with necessary amendments, instead of annexing the existing Treaty. The platform should include stakeholders from the Energy Community, EU and its member states and the Western Balkan states.

The EU and its member states and the Western Balkan states should establish a funding mechanism to finance economic restructuring of the coal regions and to combat energy poverty, from different, based on the existing platforms of the European Commission.

# UNLOCKING PROGRESS

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