

JOINT DECLARATION
ON THE WiFi FOR WESTERN BALKANS INITIATIVE

We, the Leaders of the Western Balkans Six are meeting in Tirana on 16 October 2023, in the framework of the Leaders Berlin Process Summit

Having regard to the Trieste Summit where in July 2017, the Western Balkans leaders endorsed digital integration as one of the four components of the Multiannual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area supported by the European Commission;

Considering the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans launched by the Commission in 2018 and the need to bring digital services to work in practice for users in Western Balkans cities;

Considering that as the world's most popular wireless connectivity technology, Wi-Fi holds huge potential to support smart cities since, as well as connecting sensors and devices as part of Internet of Things services, free public Wi-Fi access offers everyone better online experiences and closer engagement with the city;

Deeply convinced that a look alike initiative as the WiFi4EU but for the Western Balkans will empower local communities to bring connectivity closer to citizens, allowing them to fully benefit from the endless opportunities of digitisation, as a concrete step towards the realisation of the Digital Single Market;

Recognising and building on:

The success of the WiFi4EU initiative that in the EU Member States, as part of the European Commission's Digital Single Market strategy, has provided support to thousands EU Municipalities by supporting the provision of free public wireless internet around the main centres of public life such as parks, squares, libraries, museums, stadiums, public buildings, pedestrian areas), etc, hospitals, town halls, streets, bus stops, other public venues and public urban space, tourist areas etc. powering also digital services in relevant sectors;

Jointly state that there is an interest:

1. To jointly develop an initiative supported by the European Union to empower local communities in the Western Balkans region to bring connectivity closer to citizens, allowing them to fully benefit from the endless opportunities of digitisation, as a concrete step towards the realisation of the Digital Single Market. The above-mentioned initiative will be provisionally referred to as WiFi for Western Balkans;
2. That similarly to the WiFi4EU implemented in EU Member States, the WiFi for Western Balkans for the Western Balkans may work through vouchers awarded to applicant Municipalities as a streamlined funding scheme covering the equipment and installation costs of Wi-Fi access points, under the condition that installations should not duplicate existing free private or public Wi-Fi access, the internet access is guaranteed for at least 3 years and Municipalities would display the WiFi for Western Balkans visual identity in the designated public spaces. Municipalities will

be free to select the Wi-Fi installation company setting up the hotspots in accordance with the applicable procurement rules;

3. That the newly installed Wi-Fi access points will be established as a network and will be free of charge, free of data harvesting and free of advertisements. The infrastructure will use state-of-the-art equipment, be easy to access, appropriately secured, part of an authentication system and enable a high-quality internet experience. Free public Wi-Fi access for users will offer everyone, regardless of their economic status and with equal opportunity, the chance to improve their online experiences and become engaged with the city in new ways. Ubiquitous Wi-Fi can also be used to connect sensors as a fast-track way to test and deploy new smart city Internet of Things services;
4. That the number of Wi-Fi access points will consider the number of inhabitants within the region to provide both indoor and outdoor Wi-Fi connectivity;
5. To work towards the development, approval, and implementation of the WiFi for Western Balkans initiative;

We also underline the need that the Western Balkans be supported by the EU to replicate the successful WiFi4EU initiative within the region;