

Zagreb Declaration, 6 May 2020

We, the leaders of the European Union (EU) and its Member States, in consultation with Western Balkans leaders, and in the presence of regional and international stakeholders, today reiterate our strong solidarity with our partners in the context of the coronavirus crisis. In these unprecedented times, we have concluded the following:

1. Recalling the 2000 Zagreb, the 2003 Thessaloniki and the 2018 Sofia Summits, the EU once again reaffirms its **unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans**. The Western Balkans partners reiterated their commitment to the European perspective as their firm strategic choice. The credibility of this commitment depends also on clear public communication and the implementation of the necessary reforms.
2. The scale of the coronavirus crisis calls for our **unity and solidarity**. The EU stands by its Western Balkans partners and remains committed to actively support their efforts to combat the coronavirus outbreak and its impacts on societies and economies.
3. The EU and the Western Balkans are together fighting the coronavirus and its effects. The EU has mobilised very swiftly **a package of over EUR 3.3 billion to the benefit of the Western Balkans**, as outlined in the Commission Communication of 29 April on Support to the Western Balkans in tackling COVID-19 and the post-pandemic recovery. This includes **immediate support for the health sector**, in particular through delivering essential supplies to save lives and significant **support for the social and economic recovery** needs of our partners, as well as a EUR 750 million package of Macro-Financial Assistance and a EUR 1.7 billion package of assistance from the European Investment Bank.

4. The ongoing pandemic demonstrates how **the EU and the Western Balkans together are tackling common challenges**. This co-operation includes **joint procurement** and the **unrestricted trade-flow of protective personal equipment**, ensuring the fast flow of essential goods through **Green Lanes** linking the EU and Western Balkans, the supply by the EU of testing material to check the correct functioning of coronavirus tests in the Western Balkans as well as close cooperation with relevant health bodies.
5. The fact that **this support and cooperation goes far beyond what any other partner has provided** to the region deserves public acknowledgement. The EU also recognises the valuable support the Western Balkans have given during the pandemic to their immediate neighbours and towards the EU. This reflects the solidarity and mutual support the EU is built on. This cooperation and coordination should continue in the future, including throughout the exit and recovery phase.
6. The EU and the Western Balkans partners share the objective of a peaceful, strong, stable and united Europe, underpinned by our historical, cultural and geographical ties and by our mutual political, security and economic interests. The EU is determined to further **intensify its engagement** at all levels to support the region's political, economic and social transformation and welcomes the pledge of the **Western Balkans partners to uphold European values and principles** and to carry out necessary reforms thoroughly and vigorously. Increased EU assistance will be linked to tangible progress in the rule of law and in socio-economic reforms, as well as on the Western Balkans partners' adherence to EU values, rules and standards.

7. The EU welcomes the strong commitment by the Western Balkans partners to the **primacy of democracy** and the **rule of law**, especially the **fight against corruption** and **organised crime, good governance**, as well as **respect for human rights, gender equality** and for **rights of persons belonging to minorities**. The Western Balkans leaders should ensure that fundamental values, democratic principles and the rule of law are strictly upheld and implemented, including while special and extraordinary measures to contain the coronavirus pandemic are in place. The societal transformation and the effective implementation of reforms rest on these foundations. Civil society and independent and pluralistic media as well as freedom of expression and protection of journalists play a crucial role in the process of democratisation.
8. We will reinforce our cooperation on addressing **disinformation** and other **hybrid** activities originating in particular from third-state actors seeking to undermine the European perspective of the region. Closer collaboration is needed in **resilience-building** and **cyber security**. **Strategic communication** is essential in this regard.
9. The EU fully supports the Western Balkans partners' pledge to inclusive **regional cooperation** and strengthening **good neighbourly relations**, including with EU Member States. Implementing bilateral agreements in good faith and with tangible results, including the Prespa Agreement with Greece and the Treaty on Good Neighbourly Relations with Bulgaria, remains important in this regard. Further and decisive efforts need to be devoted to **reconciliation** and regional stability, as well as to finding and implementing definitive, inclusive and binding solutions to partners' **bilateral disputes** and **issues** rooted in the legacy of the past, in line with international law and established principles, including the Agreement on Succession Issues. We welcome the recent appointment of the **EU Special Representative** for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues.

10. The close cooperation of the Western Balkans in the framework of existing regional structures has shown its value in confronting the COVID-19 crisis. The EU will continue to support such **inclusive regional cooperation** and urges the Western Balkans leaders to fully exploit the potential of regional cooperation to facilitate the economic recovery after the crisis. This requires strong commitment by the entire region to continue deepening regional economic integration, building on EU rules and standards and thereby bringing the region and its companies closer to the EU Internal Market. Developing this dimension, including through the **Regional Economic Area (REA)**, can help make the region more attractive for investment.
11. Once we exit the immediate measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, a new phase of **close cooperation to tackle the significant socio-economic impact of the crisis** will follow. Building on the Communication of 29 April, the European Commission is invited to come forward with a **robust economic and investment plan** for the region aiming to **boost the economies** while improving their **competitiveness**, to better connect them within the region and with the EU. Investment is of utmost importance to spur the long-term recovery of the region and to support the necessary reforms to continue moving on the European path and to close the disparities by bringing the benefits to the region faster. The Western Balkans should transform into **functioning market economies** able to fully link to the EU's single market, to create jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities to improve the business and investment climate and to promote the rule of law. In this endeavour, a prominent role should be given to the association of the region to the EU's **climate**-related ambitions, in line with the Paris Agreement, to promoting the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, as well as to furthering the digital economy and, strengthening **connectivity** in all its dimensions: transport, energy, digital and people-to-people, including tourism and culture. The focus should also be put on **social development**, and in particular on measures in the areas of health, education, social policy, and creating further **opportunities for the youth**.

12. The EU and the Western Balkans share a number of **security challenges** that demand coordinated individual and collective action. We agree to advance our cooperation on core security issues with more determination and in a more systematic way, including at **operational level**. The partners pledge to complement these efforts by developing inclusive instruments for intra-Western Balkans cooperation, drawing, where relevant, on EU tools and frameworks.
13. Preventing and countering **terrorism and extremism**, including the financing, radicalisation and return of foreign terrorist fighters require particular attention.
14. The EU and the Western Balkans partners recognise that results in the fight against **corruption and organised crime** are essential for the region's political and socio-economic transformation and for regional stability and security, which are in the best interest of their people. Stronger efforts and a solid track record are needed in these areas, building on the significant results achieved through IPA-funded activities.
15. The Western Balkans partners, in cooperation with the EU and with each other, will continue to take resolute actions against **human trafficking, drug cultivation, money laundering and smuggling of human beings and drugs**. The **fight against the illicit trafficking of weapons** provides an excellent example of how we can increase our security when we work together towards a common objective.
16. Our cooperation to tackle **migration challenges**, including combating the smuggling of migrants has demonstrated its value and will be further developed and profit from tools such as the cooperation with Frontex, EASO and Europol. The remaining Frontex status agreements should be concluded without delay. The EU will continue to support the improvement of reception capacities in the Western Balkans.
17. **Energy security** should be prioritised, including the **diversification** of sources and routes.

18. The EU welcomes the contribution of Western Balkans' partners to the EU missions and operations. The EU expects a further deepening of cooperation in the area of **Common Foreign and Security Policy** (CFSP) and reiterates its calls on all partners to progress towards **full alignment** with EU foreign policy positions, notably on issues where major common interests are at stake, and to act accordingly.
 19. In order to further promote our shared interests the EU leaders express readiness to **reinvigorate the political dialogue**, including regularly at a high-level, between the EU and the Western Balkans.
 20. We welcome that our Western Balkans partners align themselves with the above points.
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