



INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA II) 2014-2020

MULTI-COUNTRY

EU4 Connectivity: EU contribution to the budget of the Transport Community

Action summary

The Transport Community Treaty (TCT) intends to develop the transport networks in the Western Balkans and the integration of their transport markets into the European Union (EU) transport market, based on the relevant EU *acquis*.

The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat will be the main tool to support the above referred to development and integration, as well as the implementation of the Transport Connectivity reforms measures aiming at improving the quality, safety and efficiency of the overall transport network in the Western Balkans.

According to the Annex V of the TCT, the contribution to the budget of the Transport Community is divided into two parts: 80% for the EU and 20% for the South East Europe (SEE) parties. The present action aims to meet the 2021 EU commitment as member of the Transport Community.

Action Identification			
Action Programme Title	IPA II Annual Multi-country Action Programme 2020 – part 1		
Action Title	EU4 Connectivity: EU contribution to the budget of the Transport Community		
Action ID	IPA 2020/ NEAR>MOVE.06/MC/TCTS		
Sector Information			
IPA II Sector	9. Regional and territorial cooperation		
DAC Sector	21010 – Transport policy and administrative management		
Budget			
Total cost	EUR 3.3 million		
EU contribution	EUR 2.64 million		
Budget line(s)	22.020401 – Multi-country programmes, regional integration and territorial cooperation		
Management and Implementation			
Method of implementation	Direct management		
<i>Direct management:</i> European Commission	Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, Unit A.2 International Relations (co-delegated by the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations)		
Implementation responsibilities	Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, Unit A.2 International Relations		
Location			
Zone benefiting from the action	Western Balkans (Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Republic of Serbia)		
Specific implementation area(s)	N/A		
Timeline			
Final date for contracting including the conclusion of contribution/delegation agreements	At the latest by 31 December 2021		
Final date for operational implementation	72 months from the adoption of the Financing Decision		
Policy objectives / Markers (DAC form)			
General policy objective	Not targeted	Significant objective	Main objective
Participation development/good governance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	X
Aid to environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Gender equality (including Women In Development)	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trade Development	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reproductive, Maternal, New born ¹ and child health	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
RIO Convention markers	Not targeted	Significant objective	Main objective
Biological diversity	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combat desertification	X	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change mitigation	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>
Climate change adaptation	<input type="checkbox"/>	X	<input type="checkbox"/>

1. RATIONALE

PROBLEM AND STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS

Connectivity is at the very heart of the European Commission's priority to reinforce the integration between the Western Balkans and the European Union (EU). More specifically, connectivity means focusing on investments that improve transport systems and their infrastructure, which in turn strengthens their competitiveness. This also contributes to building bridges in the region, developing good neighbourly relations and promoting peace and reconciliation.

The South-East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) was established by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for development of the SEETO Comprehensive Network, signed in 2004 by the Western Balkans Regional Participants and the European Commission. SEETO aimed for co-operation on the development of the agreed regional transport network as well as for implementation of policies that would facilitate such development. The SEETO Comprehensive Network, which is included in the TEN-T Guidelines, was defined as the TEN-T Comprehensive Network for South-East Europe. This aims at both infrastructure investment and soft measures, including administrative and regulatory procedures.

The SEETO ceased to exist on 31 December 2018 and has been replaced by the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat (TCPS), following the establishment of the Transport Community by the European Union and the South East Europe (SEE) parties, which was agreed at the Western Balkans Summit in Trieste on 12 July 2017.

The Transport Community Treaty (TCT) aims at the creation of a Transport Community in the field of road, rail, inland waterway and maritime transport as well as the development of the transport network between the European Union and the South East European parties. The Transport Community shall be based on the progressive integration of transport markets of the South East European parties into the European Union transport market on the basis of the relevant acquis, including in the areas of technical standards, interoperability, safety, security, traffic management, social policy, public procurement and environment, for all modes of transport excluding air transport.

The maps of the indicative trans-European transport network (TEN-T) extension of comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans are attached to the Treaty in Annex I. The Transport Community will support the development of the indicative TEN-T extension to the Western Balkans according to the Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2016/758. The Regional Steering Committee must report every year to the Ministerial Council on the implementation of the TEN-T in the Western Balkans. Technical committees will assist the Regional Steering Committee in drawing up the report.

According to Article 35 of the TCT, the Regional Steering Committee shall adopt the budget of the Transport Community every year. The budget shall cover the operational expenses of the Transport Community necessary for the functioning of its bodies. The expenditure of each body shall be set out in a different part of the budget. The Regional Steering Committee shall adopt a decision specifying the procedure for the implementation of the budget, for presenting and auditing accounts and for inspection.

Based on Article 36 of the TCT, the Director of the Permanent Secretariat shall then implement the budget and report annually to the Regional Steering Committee on the execution of the budget. The Regional Steering Committee may decide, if appropriate, to entrust independent auditors with verifying the proper execution of the budget. The agreement on the Headquarters² of the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat in Belgrade was signed on 31.01.2019 and ratified by the Serbian Parliament on 14.02.2019 and the inauguration ceremony of the Permanent Secretariat offices took place on 13.09.2019.

² <https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/transport-community-headquarters.pdf>

The Transport Community shall develop a rolling work plan for the development of the indicative TEN-T extension of the comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans, identifying priority projects of regional interest, which shall contribute to balanced sustainable development in terms of economics, spatial integration, environmental and social impact as well as social cohesion. The aim of the Treaty is to have a single transport market between the Western Balkans and the EU. This will benefit both the EU and the Western Balkans in terms of business and investment, as well as, interoperability, safety and security.

In other words, the Transport Community aims at connecting– in the broad sense of the term – Western Balkans with the rest of Europe.

The first priorities have already been identified beginning with:

- A rail strategy for the region;
- Removing physical and administrative obstacles at the border crossing points, preventing efficient border controls, in particular between EU Member States and the Western Balkans; and,
- Improvement of road safety in the region.

The Transport Community is supported by a Permanent Secretariat, based in Belgrade, Serbia. As the TCT Permanent Secretariat becomes fully up and running, it plays a key role in steering and supporting the process of modernising the transport system of Western Balkan partners.

It is tasked, in particular, to:

- provide administrative support to the Ministerial Council, the Regional Steering Committee, the Technical Committees and the Social Forum;
- act as a Transport Observatory to monitor the performance of the indicative TEN-T extension of the comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans;
- support the implementation of the Western Balkans Connectivity Agenda/Connectivity Reform Measures aiming to improve links within the Western Balkans as well as between the region and the European Union.

OUTLINE OF IPA II ASSISTANCE

The action aims to meet the 2021 EU commitment as a member of the Transport Community. According to Annex V of the Transport Community Treaty (TCT), the contribution to the budget of the Transport Community is divided into two parts: 80% for the EU and 20% for the South East Europe (SEE) parties. The Transport Community shall be based on the progressive integration of transport markets of the South East European (SEE) Parties into the European Union transport market on the basis of the relevant *acquis*, including in the areas of technical standards, interoperability, safety, security, traffic management, social policy, public procurement and environment, for all modes of transport excluding air transport.

The aim of the Treaty therefore is the creation of a Transport Community in the field of road, rail, inland waterway and maritime transport as well as the development of the transport network between the European Union and the SEE Parties.

The Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community is one of the institutions set up under the Treaty. It is a new organisation, currently in the start-up phase. Being the only institution with permanent staff, it provides administrative support to the other institutions of the Transport Community (the Ministerial Council, the Regional Steering Committee, the technical committees and the Social Forum), acts as a Transport Observatory to monitor the performance of the indicative TEN-T extension of the comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans and supports the implementation of the Western Balkans' Connectivity Agenda aiming to improve links within the Western Balkans as well as between the region and the European Union. It also reviews the implementation of the obligations under the Treaty.

The IPA assistance to the Transport Community of the Permanent Secretariat is a contribution defined within the Transport Treaty (Annex V), aiming at supporting salaries/running costs /potential externalised assistance, and other activities in line with its mandate.

RELEVANCE WITH THE IPA II MULTI-COUNTRY INDICATIVE STRATEGY PAPER AND OTHER KEY REFERENCES

The action is entirely in line with the Western Balkans Strategy of 6 February 2018³ and its action plan⁴ (*Flagship 4, Increasing Connectivity*), as well as with the 2019 Communication, which supports the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy. Main objective is to improve competitiveness of Transport Sector in Western Balkans, overall business and investment environment, positively improve the business environment and the community in the region and the economic growth and tourism, increase attractiveness for investments, reduce travel time and costs, and facilitate cross-border projects that enable smooth transport flows.

The Permanent Secretariat promotes cooperation on the development of the main and ancillary infrastructure on the multimodal Indicative Extension of TEN-T Comprehensive/Core Network to the Western Balkans. It also enhances local capacity for the implementation of investment programmes, as well as data collection and analysis on the Indicative Extension of TEN-T Comprehensive Network to the Western Balkans. In addition, the Permanent Secretariat fosters co-operation in alignment of certain transport sectors with the EU acquis. This concerns the creation of the SEE railway transport area based on the relevant railway acquis, a road safety forum and a border crossing facilitation as well as an intermodal working group. The Treaty for establishing the Transport Community (TCT) aims at the creation of a Transport Community in the field of road, rail, inland waterway and maritime transport as well as the development of the transport network between the European Union and the South East European Parties. The Transport Community shall be based on the progressive integration of the transport markets of the South East European Parties into the European Union transport market on the basis of the relevant acquis, including in the areas of technical standards, interoperability, safety, security, traffic management social policy, public procurement and environment, for all modes of transport excluding air transport.

The revised Multi-country Indicative Strategy Paper 2014-2020⁵ underlines the priority of the transport sector in the Western Balkans. In particular, it identifies SEETO/TCPS as the regional transport co-operation platform, coordinating further development of the infrastructure network and improvement and harmonisation of regional transport policies and technical standards. The Enlargement Strategy and the Annual Progress Reports set important targets for the implementation of the MoU and strengthening cooperation with SEETO/TC's Permanent Secretariat. They clearly identify the need to enhance the transport policy framework and alignment with the acquis, especially in the railway sector, road safety and maintenance, transport management system, transport operations facilitation, as well as delivery of sound analysis for the transport system.

LESSONS LEARNED AND LINK TO PREVIOUS FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

One of the key priorities in the region as it progresses towards the European perspective is to increase the competitiveness of transport sector by developing the indicative extension of the TEN-T comprehensive and core network in line with EU standards, attract foreign investments, ensure smooth functioning of the transport flows throughout the Western Balkans region.

³ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/annex-communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

⁵ C(2018) 3442, 31.05.2018 - <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180817-revised-multi-country-indicative-strategy-paper-2014-2020.pdf>

Regional cooperation in the transport sector and donors' support have been reinforced over the last years through a number of initiatives in order to address more efficiently the transport challenges in the region. Marking a clear starting point of institutionalised regional cooperation in the transport field, the SEETO Secretariat was first entirely financed under the CARDS Regional Programme and after 2006 partly co-financed by the Participants.

In addition, under the 2006 Regional CARDS Programme the EU also financed the implementation of soft measures of the South East Europe Core Regional Transport Network for the road and road safety sectors with the specific objective to contribute to the reform of the transport sector across the region and support the implementation of the SEETO Multi-Annual Plan 2007-2011. Under the same programme, the EU has also assisted the IPA II beneficiaries in integrating them fully into the European Common Aviation Area and adopting the Single European Sky requirements by 2010 through the implementation of the ECAA *acquis*.

The International Financial Institutions (IFIs) and other bilateral and multilateral donors are extensively supporting the transport sector in the Western Balkans. Cooperation between the European Commission and the IFIs increased through the creation of a number of mechanisms to better coordinate investments such as the Infrastructure Project Facilities (IPF) and the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF).

The EU commitment for the year 2018 as member of the Transport Community has been covered through the IPA II Annual Multi-country Action Programme 2017 (EUR 1 million), and for the year 2019 through the IPA II Annual Multi-country Action Programme 2018 (EUR 2 million). The funds from the IPA II Annual Multi-country Action Programme 2017 had to be de-committed because as of 31 December 2018 the Permanent Secretariat had not yet been established. For the year 2019, the Regional Steering Committee approved a budget for a total amount of EUR 1.48 million, with the EU contribution amounting to EUR 1.304 million. An additional amount of EUR 2.4 million has been allocated under the IPA II Annual Multi-country Action Programme 2019 for the budget 2020 of the Permanent Secretariat. TAIEX and CONNECTA Technical Assistance may be used to support the Permanent Secretariat in identifying the existing gaps and to provide recommendations as regards the alignment of the relevant legislations with the EU transport legislation and related capacity strengthening needs, if necessary.

Potential Pandemic Crises similar to COVID19

In 2019, the Permanent Secretariat of the Transport Community in cooperation with CEFTA Secretariat, drafted a joint action plan consisting of number of measures on setting up “green lanes” and “green corridors” within the region to secure the supply of essential goods through coordinated and accelerated border crossing / sanitary procedures.

The very fact that diseases like COVID-19 pandemic know no borders should be enough incentive for the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat to consider measures (an action plan) that would support transport activities that will ensure smooth transport flows in case of similar diseases or other potential crises in the future.

2. INTERVENTION LOGIC

LOGICAL FRAMEWORK MATRIX

OVERALL OBJECTIVE(S) / (IMPACT(S))	INDICATOR'S NAME	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS			SOURCES & MEANS OF VERIFICATION	
		BASELINES (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)	MILESTONES (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)	TARGETS (INCL. VALUE & REFERENCE YEAR)		
		2018	2022	2027		
<p>Long-term overall objective: To enhance and further develop the regional cooperation in the Transport sector in the Western Balkans and align transport legislation with the EU <i>acquis</i>.</p> <p>Intermediate overall objective(s): To boost connectivity within the Western Balkans as well as between the region and the EU, by focusing investments that will improve transport systems and services for passengers and freight in the indicative extension of the TEN-T network.</p>	<p>a) % of integration of the transport markets in the South East European parties into the European Union transport market on the basis of the relevant <i>acquis</i>.</p> <p>b) Number of mature projects on the indicative extension of the TEN T network ready for investments.</p> <p>c) Number of the road sections with a high accident rates, eliminated or improved road conditions.</p> <p>d) % of fatality rate reduced.</p> <p>e) % of waiting time at the priority border crossing and common crossing points reduced.</p>	<p>a) 0</p> <p>b) Road Mature Projects: 16 Rail Mature Projects: 5. Inland waterways (IWW) 4. Airport 1</p> <p>c) 0</p> <p>d) Number of fatalities 1400</p> <p>e) N/A</p>	<p>a) 30%</p> <p>b) Road – 20. Rail 10, IWW 6</p> <p>c) 300km</p> <p>d) 20% reduced</p> <p>e) Rail Border crossings waiting time reduced by 30%. Road Border crossings (Bus and Trucks) waiting time reduced by 30%. Passenger cars/vehicles reduced by 30%</p>	<p>a) 50%</p> <p>b) Road 30. Rail 10, IWW 8</p> <p>c) 500km</p> <p>d) 40% reduced</p> <p>e) Rail Border crossings waiting time reduced by 50%. Road Border crossings (Bus and Trucks) waiting time reduced by 50%. Passenger cars/vehicles reduced by 50%</p>	<p>Performance monitoring indexes (% of the relevant <i>acquis</i> transposed) will be set up for road, rail, inland waterway and maritime transport, as well as the development of the indicative extension of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T).</p> <p>Reports on implementation of the <i>acquis</i>:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Annual report of the TCT Permanent Secretariat, and/or 2. Enlargement Reports 3. Connectivity Reform Management Plan 4. Survey/study provided by contracted agency/institution. 	
SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE(S) / OUTCOME(S)	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)				SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
<p>Specific Objective 1: To meet the EU contribution to the 2021 budget of the Transport Community (i.e. 80%), thus supporting the achievement of the objectives set out in the Transport Community Treaty through the functioning of a Permanent Secretariat.</p>	% of the 2021 budget of the TCT spent	0			According to Article 35 of the TCT, the Regional Steering Committee shall adopt a decision specifying the procedure for the implementation of the budget,	Permanent Secretariat officially established. Regional Steering Committee established and operational.

					for presenting and auditing accounts and for inspection. Performance monitoring indexes will be set in place to follow the activities of the Permanent Secretariat.	Technical Working Groups (1. Road, Safety, 2.Transport Facilitation/Border crossings, 3.Railway working group, 4. Road resilience, maintenance and innovation) established and operational.
OUTPUTS	OBJECTIVELY VERIFIABLE INDICATORS (*)				SOURCES OF VERIFICATION	ASSUMPTIONS
<p>Output 1 (influencing Specific Objective 1): The level of the alignment with the relevant EU acquis increased</p> <p>Output 2 (influencing Specific Objective 1): The Transport priority projects of regional interest on the indicative TEN-T extension of the comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans identified and mature for investments, in line with best Union practices and standards.</p>	<p>1) Number of relevant EU regulations, directives and decisions fully transposed in the South East European parties.</p> <p>2) Total number of Connectivity Reform Measures fully implemented (and per regional partner)</p> <p>3) Number of Transport priority projects of regional interest identified.</p> <p>4) Number of mature projects prepared for investments.</p> <p>5) Number of projects with secured investments.</p>	<p>1) 0</p> <p>2) 20%</p> <p>3) 0</p> <p>4) 0</p> <p>5) 0</p>	<p>1) 10</p> <p>2) 50%</p> <p>3) 30</p> <p>4) 20</p> <p>5) 10</p>	<p>1) 30</p> <p>2) 100%</p> <p>3) 45</p> <p>4) 30</p> <p>5) 20</p>	<p>a) Annual report of the Regional Steering Committee on the implementation of the TEN-T in the Western Balkans.</p> <p>b) Annual report of the Permanent Secretariat.</p> <p>c) Report on implementation of the Connectivity reform measures management plan.</p>	<p>Permanent Secretariat officially established.</p> <p>Regional Steering Committee established and operational.</p> <p>Technical Working Groups (1. Road, Safety, 2.Transport Facilitation/Border crossings, 3.Railway working group, 4. Road resilience, maintenance and innovation) established and operational.</p>

DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

According to the TCT, the Permanent Secretariat, which is based in Belgrade, shall, among other:

- provide administrative support to the Ministerial Council, the Regional Steering Committee, the Technical Committees and the Social Forum;
- act as a Transport Observatory to monitor the performance of the Comprehensive and Core Networks indicative extension of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) to the Western Balkans;
- support the implementation of the Western Balkans Connectivity Agenda aiming to improve links within the Western Balkans as well as between the region and the EU;
- put in place information system to be used by decision makers in monitoring and reviewing the condition and performance of the indicative TEN-T extension of the comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans;
- prepare annual reports about, among other, the implementation of infrastructure projects on the indicative extension of the TEN-T comprehensive and core networks to the Western Balkans, the implementation of Transport Connectivity reform measures and the transposition of relevant EU regulations, directives and decisions.

The Permanent Secretariat may have recourse to external services for specific activities, such as communication, organisation of events, studies, trainings or audits.

RISKS

Potential challenges of different nature that could affect the proper implementation of the action are:

- Issues of political nature affecting the relations between two/several South East European parties or between one/several South East European parties and the EU;
- Incapacity or unwillingness of one or several relevant IPA II beneficiaries to contribute to the budget of the Transport Community;
- Decision of one or more relevant IPA II beneficiaries to leave the Transport Community.
- Pandemic crises similar to COVID-19 pandemic might have a negative impact on implementation of foreseen activities.

The Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport and the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations will closely monitor the establishment and the inception of operations of the Permanent Secretariat to ensure a smooth start. The action is given high-level political support in both the European Union and the South East European parties.

Furthermore, Article 37 of the TCT defines the procedure to follow to settle disputes between contracting parties.

CONDITIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

The Transport Community's Permanent Secretariat has been set up (and begun to operate at the end of Q1 2019). Offices have been opened but not all administrative / political issues with the host beneficiary solved yet.

Failure to comply with the requirements set above may lead to a recovery of funds under this programme and/or the re-allocation of future funding.

3. IMPLEMENTATION ARRANGEMENTS

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The TCT will be governed according to the following structure:

A Ministerial Council (Article 21 of the TCT), whose main task is to ensure that the objectives set out in the TCT are attained.

A Regional Steering Committee (Article 24) responsible for the administration and proper implementation of the TCT and entitled to establish technical committees to support its work (Article 25).

A Social Forum (Article 26) to address social matters.

A Permanent Secretariat (Article 28), currently run by the Commission following a Decision of the RSC (01/2019). An interim Director has been appointed and set up the overall structure of the Permanent Secretariat :

- staff regulation;
- rules for recruitment;
- financial regulation.

METHOD(S) OF IMPLEMENTATION AND TYPE(S) OF FINANCING (SEE ANNEX IMPLEMENTATION – BUDGET)

The Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations will co-delegate the implementation of the action to the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport. The EU contribution to the budget of the Transport Community for the year 2021 will indicatively amount to EUR 2.64 million.

4. PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT

METHODOLOGY FOR MONITORING (AND EVALUATION)

Performance monitoring indexes will be put in place by the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport as soon as practicable, to follow the activities of the TCT Permanent Secretariat, which is supported by the present action.

The European Commission may carry out a mid-term, a final or an ex-post evaluation for this action or its components via independent consultants, through a joint mission or via an implementing partner. In case a mid-term or final evaluation is not foreseen, the European Commission may, during

implementation, decide to undertake such an evaluation for duly justified reasons either on its own decision or on the initiative of the partner.

The evaluations should be carried out following the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations guidelines on linking planning/programming, monitoring and evaluation⁶. It is recommended that a Reference Group comprising the key stakeholders of this action be set up to steer the evaluation process and ensure the required quality level of the evaluation outputs as well as the proper follow-up of the recommendations of the evaluation. In addition, the Action might be subject to external monitoring in line with the European Commission rules and procedures.

The evaluation reports shall be shared with the IPA II beneficiary and other key stakeholders. The implementing partner and the European Commission shall analyse the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluations and, where appropriate, in agreement with the IPA II beneficiary, jointly decide on the follow-up actions to be taken and any adjustments necessary, including, if indicated, the reorientation of the action.

5. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

GENDER MAINSTREAMING

The staff appointment will follow a policy promoting gender balance. In addition to that, this matter is also defined within Article 27 of the Treaty.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The staff appointment will follow a policy promoting equal opportunities for citizens coming from all Contracting Parties to the Transport Community Treaty, without any kind of exception.

MINORITIES AND VULNERABLE GROUPS

Participation in the implementation of the action will be based on equal access, regardless racial or ethnic origin, religion and beliefs, age or sexual orientation. The financed transport priority projects of regional interest shall provide benefits to all groups of populations without distinction, including people belonging to minorities and vulnerable groups.

Additionally, it will ensure conditioned/planned activities to mitigate problems also in low-income populated areas that are currently not part of existing urban plans. Some settlements are or could be severely affected by floods and other environmental problems. Permanent Secretariat in coordination with other regional stakeholders could help mitigate some of the problems faced by these settlements.

Transport priority projects irrespective the different levels interest will not be considered mature if prepared at the harm of minority and vulnerable groups. Specific attention will be paid to perform risk-assessments for identified projects to ensure that interests of minority and vulnerable groups and/or would-be-affected communities are fully considered and accounted for. The mature projects for implementation (investments secured) will commence only when guarantees exist that legitimate interests

⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/near_guidelines.zip

of minorities and vulnerable groups and communities will be protected, in agreement with the interested groups and/or communities.

ENGAGEMENT WITH CIVIL SOCIETY (AND IF RELEVANT OTHER NON-STATE STAKEHOLDERS)

When feasible, the Permanent Secretariat will in its work and relevant bodies include the representatives of the civil society organizations (CSOs) dealing with or interested in transport in the Western Balkans as defined in Article 26 of the Treaty or representing the interest of e.g. vulnerable persons/groups and minorities, impacted by the investment project. Among others, for example, the Permanent Secretariat can consider involvement of the CSOs in relevant research activities, database on regional transport, monitoring of the implementation of the connectivity reform measures, and similar.

ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE (AND IF RELEVANT DISASTER RESILIENCE)

The implementation of EU transport policies in the Western Balkans region – supported by the TCT Permanent Secretariat – will contribute to reduce the CO2 emission by fostering the modal shift (from road to rail) to the most environmentally friendly modes, in particular rail and inland waterways.

The new regional railway strategy action plan, border crossing action plan as well as the deployment of the Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) on core network are among key priorities of the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat which will contribute on reduction of the CO2 emissions.

The TCT Permanent Secretariat has identified a number of actions deriving from regional rail strategy which will further increase the attractiveness of rail transport sector. In addition to that, support and the expertise offered by the TCT Permanent Secretariat on implementing the connectivity reform measures (border crossings, Intelligent Transport Systems/ITS, rail reforms etc.) will impact positively on reducing waiting times at the border crossing points as well as reduce the traffic congestions and promote other modes of transport which will contribute to the modal shift, all these measures will directly impact on the reduction of the CO2 emissions.

In addition to the above, Article 6 Environment of the Treaty *“The South East European Parties shall implement the relevant environmental Acquis with regard to transport, in particular the Strategic Environmental Assessment, Environmental Impact Assessment, nature-related, water-related and air quality-related directives as set out in Annex I.6.”*

Climate action relevant budget allocation: cannot be quantified

6. SUSTAINABILITY

The EU's financial support derives from the European Union's obligations as a Signatory Party to the Transport Community Treaty, hence ensuring its sustainability.

The Commission's support shall be renewed and increased (if necessary and so decided) unless:

- (1) according to Art. 43 – the Treaty is denounced by any South East European Party and ceases to be in force [...] one year after the date of notification.
- (2) all parties have joined the EU.

In both cases, support for the functioning of the Permanent Secretariat would cease.

7. COMMUNICATION AND VISIBILITY

Communication and visibility will be given high importance during the implementation of the action. The implementation of the communication activities shall be funded from the amounts allocated to the action. All necessary measures will be taken to publicise the fact that the action has received funding from the EU in line with the EU communication and visibility requirements in force. All stakeholders and implementing partners shall ensure the visibility of EU Financial assistance provided through IPA II throughout all phases of the programme cycle.

Visibility and communication actions shall demonstrate how the intervention contributes to the agreed programme objectives, as well as the benefits of the action for the general public. Actions shall be aimed at strengthening general public awareness and support of interventions financed and the objectives pursued. The actions shall aim at highlighting to the relevant target audiences the added value and impact of the EU's interventions and will promote transparency and accountability on the use of funds. Visibility and communication aspects shall be complementary to the activities implemented by the Directorate-General for Mobility and Transport, the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations and the EU Delegations/Office in the Western Balkans. It is the responsibility of the implementing partner(s) to keep the EU Delegations/Office and the European Commission fully informed of the planning and implementation of the specific visibility and communication activities.

Communication actions should ensure that all relevant stakeholders and where possible final beneficiaries, are informed about donors' involvement. Communication should also ensure more visibility of the objectives and results achieved. The approach to communication and visibility in connectivity projects may need to be taken into account to ensure consistency in communicating about EU support to connectivity in the region.

Actions should aim to show the link between the funds invested and the policy priorities behind them. When relevant for a specific intervention envisaged under the action, the communication and visibility plan will be based on an agreed communication narrative and master messages customised for the different target audiences.