The Relaunch of the Berlin Process for the Western Balkans:

Making its Objectives more Ambitious

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Balkans Policy Research Group (BPRG)
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Acronyms

CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CIF	Chamber Investment Forum
CRM	Common Regional Market
EC	European Commission
EBRD	European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
EU	European Union
EnC	Energy Community Secretariat
GDWB	Green Deal for Western Balkans
IFI	International Financial Institutions
IPA	Instrument for Pre-Accession
MAP- REA	Multiannual Action Plan- Regional Economic Area
MARRI	Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative
NIC	National Investment Communities
OPM	Office of the Prime Minister
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RYCO	Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SEE	South East Europe
SEECP	South-East European Cooperation Process
SEFTA	South East Free Trade Agreement
TCT	Transport Community Treaty
WBF	Western Balkan Fund
WB6	Western Balkans Six countries:
	(Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia)

Executive Summary

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz will relaunch the Berlin Summit for Western Balkans (WB) in early November; more than a year from where his predecessor Angela Merkel left it. Leaders of the Western Balkan Six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia) are expected to make agreements on the Free Movement with ID cards, Recognition of Academic Qualifications, and Professional Qualifications. The signing of these agreements will mark a ground-breaking renewal of the Berlin Process, as well as an impetus for one of its most pressing initiatives the Regional Common Market (CRM).

Yet, the renewed Berlin Process needs to move further and undergo a comprehensive review. Germany and its European partners should revisit and reload the initiative's founding objectives, including the resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues, regional economic cooperation, and sustainable growth for the WB, for it to navigate through the outstanding challenges and yield utmost success. This time, special emphasis should be put on clearly and tangibly giving a direction and shape the path for the WB6 toward the European Union (EU). This is pivotal now amidst the geopolitical shifts resulting from the Ukraine war.

When launched in 2014, the Berlin Process envisaged a positive outlook for regional cooperation and the European future of the region. Amongst many of the achievements, it held enough sway to gather the leaders of the WB6 at the same table and on equal terms, revealing that there lies potential on regional cooperation for the WB6. Project selection within the Connectivity Agenda is a showcase of success. Between 2015 and 2021, 45 infrastructure projects were approved, of which 37 were transport and 8 were energy projects. The Digital Agenda, Common Regional Market (CRM), and Green Agenda were launched. Other successful initiatives include people-to-people connectivity platforms such as Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and the Western Balkans Fund (WBF). The agreement and the launching of the Free Roaming Area for the region in 2021, is also an outcome of the Berlin Process. It is difficult to comprehend how these agendas would have been pushed forward – if not within the framework of the Berlin Process.

As it evolved, the Berlin Process revealed some limits to delivering on a few of its declarative objectives. Persisting bilateral issues and a lack of capacities within the WB6 governments hindered its success. Weak political push from the EU Member States and low integration within the EU enlargement framework also played a critical role. Additionally, the Berlin Process lacked continuity between and across agenda priorities and issues. With no monitoring and administering mechanism, its agendas became overpacked and exhausted.

Secondly, to this day, the Berlin Process has not been able to fully mirror the EU's core principle of regional integration- that of four fundamental freedoms of the Single Market (of people, goods, services, and capital). The agreements which are expected to be signed at the upcoming Summit seek to minimise stumbling blocks to the free movement of people.

Thirdly, the Berlin Process was not resilient to time and political changes. The initiative was strongly associated with the legacy of its founder - Angela Markel, and it came to a halt in 2021 when she waved goodbye to Chancellery, further hampering the predictability of the future of the WB6 regional cooperation and their EU integration path.

With the Berlin Process stalled and the EU's low enthusiasm for enlargement, "Open Balkan" took shape in 2021, as a partial regional initiative for trade cooperation, championed by Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia, leaving behind Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and, for now, Montenegro. There is growing concern about its overlapping with the CRM – a trade-related initiative established within the framework of Berlin Process in 2020.

In turn, CRM faces serious challenges in implementing its measures, including the poor legacy of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA)- which serves as a baseline agreement for many of the CRM Action Plan measures. These challenges derive from Kosovo's unequal representation in CEFTA, as well as non-trade barriers imposed by non-recognizing countries in the region, particularly Serbia and BiH.

Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly relations are a condition for the WB6 in their contractual agreement with the EU, namely the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAA's) for their EU integration process. Trust and inclusiveness are vital principles for enabling a regional trade area and achieving economic integration. Up to the present, none of the initiatives has fully served both of these principles at once. If CEFTA cannot be restored to treat all the WB6 on equal footing, the EU, Member States, and the U.S. should push to operationalize a fresher regional trade agreement- and rearrange a clear division of labour between all the competing regional trade agendas.

The upcoming Berlin Process needs to spread beyond a mere continuation of the previous format (2014-2021) and its "business as usual". In its prior form, a wider spectrum of its agendas included the resolution of bilateral issues, connectivity, enabling a regional market, and green and digital transitioning of the region. Over the years it has been presumed that economic cooperation serves as an impetus for cooperation on other more difficult agendas, particularly for the resolution of bilateral disputes. However, this approach has not yielded results, mainly because of the weak political interlink and lack of trust among the WB6, as well as the lack of a robust EU perspective.

Following the November Summit, Germany and the EU should re-establish the Berlin Process. As Chancellor Scholz had promised, this initiative should provide for a more ambitious agenda. This can only be done if it evolves to better integrate with the EU enlargement and the accession process for the WB, increase the funding for Connectivity Agenda, push for the resolution of bilateral disputes as well as provide a platform at which all the WB6 participate and are represented equally. Only if it overarches these actions, the Berlin Process will lead the regional cooperation of WB6.

Recommendations

In more detail, it is critical for Germany, Member States, and the EU to:

● Integrate the Berlin Process within the EU Enlargement policy and the overall WB6 accession process. In turn, it should serve as a driving political initiative for the accession of the Western Balkans into the European Union;

● Strengthen the tools of the Berlin Process for the resolution of bilateral disputes. Condition full and equal treatment of all actors;

● Enhance the connectivity agenda, programs, and projects for the Western Balkans, as well as increase funding;

● Strengthen institutional support and administration of the Berlin Process for managing and following up on yearly summits agendas;

● Reform Central Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) to treat all Western Balkan countries equal. If this is not possible, rearrange a division of labour between the Berlin Process and Open Balkan Initiative, by potentially advancing the letter into a CEFTA II. And that only if it includes all the WB6 countries on an equal footing, without imposing asymmetries. CEFTA II or the Open Balkan should have a trade-area only mandate and evolve as a WB6-only initiative, not including Moldova, which has recently earned the candidate status for EU membership;

● Develop a comprehensive operational strategy outlining key priorities, objectives, and a time-frame to advance the Western Balkans toward the EU membership.

Introduction

German Chancellor Angela Merkel launched the Berlin Process back in 2014, amidst changes in the geopolitical landscape. Growing enlargement fatigue, Russia's annexation of Crimea, as well as fear of the inter-state conflict in the Western Balkans (WB) region are to name a few.[1] From the onset, there was a continuous dilemma if the Berlin Process emerged as a substitute for the European Union (EU) enlargement process or to complement and revitalise it.[2] Beyond that, the common understanding was that Ms. Merkel leveraged the Berlin Process for her ultimate goal of maintaining peace and stability in the region. Whereas, Berlin Process was supposed to push a rebalanced approach between crisis management and accelerating the EU accession process for the WB.

Launched as a conference of WB6 (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia), from a summit to a summit, it built upon a large number of agendas and initiatives until 2021, when the mandate of Chancellor Merkel ended. Under her legacy, the following summits were held in Vienna (2015), Paris (2016), Trieste (2017), London (2018), Poznan (2019), Sofia (2020), and the final one returned back to Berlin in 2021.[3]

This German-led initiative served also as an "incubator" for many regional organisations and initiatives: Regional Cooperation Council (RCC); Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), Energy Community Secretariat (EnC), and Transport Community (TcT). Additionally, Berlin Process also generated new regional initiatives such as the Western Balkans Fund (WBF) in 2015, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) in 2016, and Chamber Investment Forum in 2015 (CIF).[4] Other pressing initiatives operating within the Berlin Process are the Common Regional Market, Connectivity Agenda, and the Green Deal for Western Balkans.

CRM was endorsed in Sofia, in November 2020. It aims to create a regional market based on EU rules and procedures and bring WB closer to the EU Single Market. It includes four pillars, out of which "the regional trade area" heads its agenda, followed by the regional investment area, regional digital area, and regional industrial and innovation area.

The Connectivity Agenda aimed at building convergence between the EU and WB6 through infrastructure projects "hard measures" and policy and reform change, "soft measures". Its agenda includes projects, programs, and initiatives to establish links between WB and EU countries. More specifically, the Connectivity agenda seeks to upscale transport and energy, green transitioning as well as digital connectivity by addressing the infrastructural gaps in the region.

Within the Berlin Process framework, WB6 countries also endorsed the EU-extended and tailored Green Deal for the Western Balkan (GDWB). The GDWB aims at facilitating the region towards making the necessary changes and accelerate the overarching aim of averting the effects of climate change.

With high hopes put on it, the Berlin Process was seen as a vehicle for boosting regional cooperation and somewhat providing the region with what the EU should have ensured but was failing to deliver. Not only it aimed at promoting the EU accession of the region, but to also structurally transform the region for better convergence with the EU and its Member States.

As the process was unfolding, convergence among the countries of the region and with the EU began to simply look like an ambitious and challenging goal. The Berlin Process was supposed to "reload" in 2018.[5] Still, it could not outlive the outstanding bilateral issues. Yet, through tall orders, the Berlin Process

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1   Balkans Group report, *The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Gains and Challenges for Kosovo*, January 2018.

2   In 2014, the then- Candidate for President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker, in his infamous speech, stated that there would not be room for new round of enlargement under his term. Jean Claude Juncker opening statement in the European Parliament plenary session, *"A New Start for Europe"*, July 2014, at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_14_567

3   For more, see Berlin Process website, at: https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/the-goals

4   Balkans Group Report, *Kosovo's Participation and Representation in Regional Organizations: Mapping the gaps and opportunities*, October 2021.

5   Speech by Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel at the 8th Aspen Southeast Europe Foreign Ministers Conference, *"We Need a Berlin Process Reloaded!"*, May 2017, at: https://goo.gl/KRuJ7V and Balkans Group report, The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Gains and Challenges for Kosovo, January 2018, pp. 3.

provided the only platform at which the WB6 countries could gather on an equal footing.

The Berlin Process did not drive forward the EU-facilitated Kosovo-Serbia dialogue. In turn, the Dialogue between the two, which went through a great deal of ambiguity and stalemate turned to hinder some of the Berlin Process agendas, particularly those with a focus on creating a free regional trade area. Besides bilateral issues, a major challenge was the lack of capacities within the WB6 governments. Others were more structural, such as the weak political push by the EU Member States, low integration within the EU supranational institutions and enlargement framework, lack of an institutionalised monitoring mechanism as well as its overpacked agenda and outreach which gradually led to exhaustion.

To this day, the Berlin Process has not been able to mirror the EU core principle of regional integration, enabling the four (4) fundamental freedoms of the Single Market (of people, goods, services, and capital). The CRM is structured around these freedoms and its action plan includes measures related to them.[6] After prolonged negotiations, some progress on brokering these agreements has been made recently, especially on those related to the Free Movement of People. However, much more is expected from this initiative. Bilateral issues that stalled the implementation of CEFTA 2006 were further dragged into the CRM agenda.

In 2021, "Open Balkans", a rebranding of its predecessor the "Mini-Schengen", found the right conditions to rapidly evolve- an initiative that raised concerns about its competitiveness with CRM measures. This is partly because the Berlin Process stalled in 2021 when Angela Markel left the Chancellery. The lack of EU enthusiasm for WB6 enlargement prompted three WB6 leaders (Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia) to explore alternative processes. Thus, deepening the divisions within the region and decreasing the symmetrical participation of all of the WB6 countries.

The Berlin Process has not proven to be resilient to time and political changes. Rather than becoming an institutionalised initiative, it became strongly attached to its founder, Angela Merkel's legacy. During the Berlin Process off-period, it became unclear to the region what path the process will follow, at what pace, who has ownership, and what its stance is vis-à-vis the WB6 enlargement.

In May 2022, the German Chancellor Olaf Scholz expressed a commitment to relaunch the Berlin Process in November this year, "I want to revive the Berlin process. Important now are the advances in setting up a common regional market. Establishing and guaranteeing four basic freedoms: the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital is important for the whole region. I personally engage with my government."[7]

But, if BP is to move beyond a mere continuation of the previous format and carry on its "business as usual", it needs to go through a paradigm change. Interventions in its design are required, ranging from revisiting its format to reviewing its agenda.

Following the launching the Berlin Process in November, its key stakeholders (Germany, EU Commission, key Member States and the U.S.) should take into consideration the challenges of the previous format, as well as the geopolitical spillovers in the region. This policy report provides a comprehensive analysis of these challenges, mostly related to the Berlin Process format and operations. It also offers a viewpoint on the interventions which should be undertaken, to enhance the regional cooperation of the WB6, and to increase the rate of effectiveness of the Berlin Process as the only agenda that could promote the accession of the WB into the EU.

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6   Balkans Group report, *Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans. Regional Economic Area, the "Mini- Schengen" and the Common Regional Market*, January 2021, pp.27-30.

7   Remarks by German Chancellor Olaf Scholz during one of his visits to the region. European Western Balkans, *Scholz: The integration of the Western Balkans one of the greatest tasks for the EU*, May 2022, at: https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2022/07/13/scholz-announces-western-balkans-summit-in-november/

Berlin Process: An open-ended intergovermental format

The Berlin Process aimed towards stronger convergence of the WB6 with few of the EU Member States considered to be close to the region and a few others considered to be very hesitant or rather neutral of their EU accession.[8] Some argue that even though the BP was designed by Germany, it was uncertain if the EU Commission would share the driving seat, or to what degree the division of labour would take place between the two.[9]

Seemingly, a few of the regional organisations established separately from the Berlin Process, and supported by the EU, seized the momentum to justify their existence by finding their place within the umbrella of the Berlin Process.[10] Whereas, the Berlin Process borrowed the EU Connectivity Agenda.[11] To some, through the Berlin Process, the EU Commission outsourced the regional cooperation to its Member States, since its own leverage towards the region was decreasing as a result of "enlargement fatigue".

Against this background and in practice, the Berlin Process commenced in inter-governmental steering, as a politically-driven platform. It was created in the absence of the direct involvement of a supranational agency, the EU Commission. The inter-governmental nature transposed the implementation of the Berlin Process's agendas to the will of the WB6 countries and their respective leaders.

> Maintaining good bilateral relations with one of the EU's strongest political actors, Germany, served as strong leverage towards each of the WB6 countries.[12]

As such, the Berlin Process was much dependent on the EU Member States and the will of the governments of WB6 to cooperate, incentivized by the investment opportunities and grants by the EU Commission, Member States, and International Financial Institutions (IFIs).

Eventually, such incentives were not enough. The intergovernmental logic was weakly pushed politically and lacked well-defined objectives or an operational strategy. The Berlin Process did not have an administrating body nor a monitoring mechanism. The region's leaders hijacked the flexibility of the inter-governmental approach of the whole process. Often, WB6 leaders easily gathered at the table, but failed to ensure effectiveness in political cooperation and trust-building. [13]

The Berlin Process setup was not sufficient to resolve outstanding bilateral issues nor to achieve reconciliation, particularly between Kosovo and Serbia whose bilateral dispute remains a serious challenge to regional cooperation.[14] Kosovo remains underrepresented in regional cooperation fora. The non-recognizing countries Serbia and BiH block its participation on equal footing. Consequently, the leaders of the WB6 committed to numerous agreements and concluded them on technical levels which then stalled at the political level.

> For the past few years, Berlin Process was neither pushed the evolve towards a more politically progressive engagement with steadfast goals nor towards a more institutionalized initiative.

The Berlin Process was neither an institutional nor a procedural component of the overall EU Enlargement policy. Whereas, "Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly relations" are framed as criteria for each

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8   Namely France is considered to be among few of the state's indifferent and/or reluctant of the WB6 EU Accession. Whereas, Poland has only in recent years increased its foreign policy engagement in the WB6 region, due to the Visegrad Group partners and security issues. For more, see: European Movement in Serbia, *Advocacy Strategy for the EU Integration of the Western Balkans Guidelines*, 2016, at: https://events.ceu.edu/sites/default/files/aswb-guidelines-full-version-za-web_0.pdf

9   Balkans Group interview with an expert on Western Balkans, June 2022.

10 Balkans Group interview with an expert on post-conflict peacebuilding and state building, July 2022.

11 Corporation and Development Institute (CDI), *The Berlin Process 2014-2018*, February 2018. At: https://cdinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/The-Berlin-Process-2014-2018.pdf

12 Balkans Group interview with an expert on Western Balkans, June 2022

13 Balkans Group interview with an EU Integration and Regional Cooperation expert, July 2022.

14 Two of the declaring aspects of the Berlin Process political dimension are: 1) Resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues and 2) Achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region. Little efforts have been directed at this. The most pressing one being "the Declaration on Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes", signed at 2015 Vienna Summit, and revisited at London Summit in 2018. Since then, there has not been any significant effort to follow up on the commitments of this Declaration.

of the WB6 countries included in their SAA's.[15] De facto, enhancing regional cooperation is a condition for furthering the EU accession process.

> Simultaneously, the EU should better integrate the Berlin Process within the EU Enlargement policy and the overall accession process of WB6.

The EU Commission is a participant in the Berlin Process, along with other EU Member States. The role of the Commission, particularly through the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) included coordinating with the Berlin Process organisations and initiatives, providing technical and financial assistance as well as political guidance.[16] The inter-governmental steering should be strengthened with a solid political push by both the EU and the Member States, by developing a clear operational strategy as well as supporting a monitoring mechanism. But this can only be done if the EU gives a clear membership perspective.

Portfolio Overview

The 2014 Declaration of German Chair emphasizes four focus areas of the Berlin Process:

1) Resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues;

2) Achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region;

3) Enhancing regional economic cooperation;

4) Laying the foundations for sustainable growth.[17]

The Berlin Process continued to provide a political platform of socialisation for the WB6 country leaders and high-level representatives of EU and the Member States; for advisors of prime ministers, who met quarterly; ministers of energy, transport, trade, and foreign affairs who met once or twice in between summits. Technical meetings took place throughout the year.

Overall, the Berlin Process portfolio can be divided into three clusters: political, economic, and social.[18]

Declaration on bilateral issues	Vienna Summit, 2015
Anti-corruption country commitments	London Summit, 2018
Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, Joint Declaration on Missing Persons, and Joint Declaration on War Crimes	London Summit, 2018
Roadmap for a solution to SALW and their ammunition	London Summit, 2018
Security commitments steering group	London Summit, 2018
Declarations on regional cooperation and good neighborly relations, on missing persons, and war crimes were signed and stocktaking of progress in the resolution of bilateral issues agreed upon	Poznan Summit, 2019
Anti-corruption country commitments were made	Poznan Summit, 2019
Anti-corruption country commitments	London Summit, 2018

Initiatives and Commitments within the Political Portfolio of the Berlin Process

15   Stabilization and Association Agreement between the European Union and the European Atomic Energy Community, on the one part, and Kosovo*, on the other part, 2 October 2015, at https://data.consilium.europa.eu/ doc/document/ ST10728-2015-REV-1/en/pdf. According to Article 8: 'Kosovo commits to continue to foster cooperation and good neighbourly relations in the region including an appropriate level of mutual concessions concerning the movement of persons, goods, capital and services as well as the development of projects of common interest in a wide range of areas, including the rule of law'; The negotiating framework for Serbia, 9 January 2014, at https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/AD%201%202014%20INIT/EN/pdf

16   European Commission, *Common Regional Market. The Western Balkans Common Regional Market – a catalyst for deeper regional economic integration and a stepping stone towards EU Single Market*, at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/enlargement-policy/policy-highlights/common-regional-market_en

17   For more, see Berlin Process website, at: https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/the-goals

18   Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, Berlin Process in a Nutshell, 2018, at: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/The_Berlin_Process.pdf

Within the economic framework, the Berlin Process generated many initiatives and served as an impetus for many economic cooperation mechanisms. The most pressing ones are the Connectivity Agenda and the Common Regional Market (CRM).[19]

Transport Community	Trieste Summit, 2017
Regional Economic Area	Trieste Summit, 2017
Chamber Investment Forum	Vienna Summit, 2015
SMEs support via WB EDIF	Trieste Summit, 2017
WB Research Foundation	Trieste Summit, 2017
Digital Agenda	London Summit, 2018
Anti-corruption country commitments	London Summit, 2018
Common Regional Market (CRM) Successor of the Regional Economic Area)	Sofia Summit, 2020
Green Agenda	Sofia Summit, 2020

Initiatives and Commitments within the Economic Portfolio of the Berlin Process

In Sofia, countries endorsed the Green Deal, which the EU extended and tailored for the WB.[20] It reflects the European standards for navigating through environmental and climate challenges. It derives as a mere reflection of the European Green Deal but it is adjusted to meet the Western Balkan's needs. It envisages actions around five pillars, which are also covered by the European Green Deal.[21]

Climate action, including decarbonization, energy, and mobility
Circular economy, addressing waste, recycling, sustainable production, and efficient use of resources
Biodiversity, aims to protect and restore the natural wealth of the region
Fighting air, water, and soil pollution Sustainable food systems and rural areas
Sustainable food systems and rural areas

Five (5) pillars of the Green Deal for the Western Balkans

Within the social portfolio, the Berlin Process gradually laid the ground for people-to-people connectivity. Through side events, it provided socialisation and cooperation platforms for Civil Society, experts, analysts, and researchers. In 2015, the Regional Youth Cooperation Organization (RYCO) and Western Balkans Fund (WBF) were established.[22]

The Western Balkans Civil Society Forum formalised civil society participation (CFS). Through this platform, Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) gathered together in parallel events to the regular yearly summits. At some point, the role of CSOs became critical in monitoring and evaluating, as well as providing recommendations for the advancement of the process of the Berlin Process.[23]

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19   Balkans Group report, *Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans. Regional Economic Area, the "Mini-Schengen" and the Common Regional Market*, January 2021, pp.27-30.

20   Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), *Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*, November, 2020, at: https://www.rcc.int/docs/546/sofia-declaration-on-the-green-agenda-for-the-western-balkans-rn

21   European Commission, *Guidelines for the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans*, 6 October 2020, at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhoodenlargement/sites/near/files/green_agenda_for_the_western_balkans_en.pdf

22   RYCO is a functional institutional mechanism, which aims to promote the spirit of reconciliation and cooperation among young people in the region through exchange programs. WBF is a grant-making organization which provides direct support to joint regional projects aiming to further strengthen civil society skills in the Western Balkans and to pursue regional cooperation and reconciliation via people-to-people approach. For more, see Balkans Group Report, *Kosovo's Participation and Representation in Regional Organizations: Mapping the gaps and opportunities*, October 2021, pp.33-46, at: at: Kosovos-Participation-and-Representation-in-Regional-Organizations-eng-021121-web.pdf (balkansgroup.org)

23   Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, *Berlin Process in a Nutshell*, 2018, at: https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/The_Berlin_Process.pdf

Western Balkans Fund	Vienna 2015
Regional Youth Cooperation Office	Vienna 2015 and Paris 2016

Initiatives and Commitments within the Social Portfolio of the Berlin Process

Project selection within the Connectivity Agenda, endorsement of the Digital Agenda, CRM and Green Agenda have been marked as promising successes. Others are the establishment of RYCO and WBF. The agreement and the Launching of the Free Roaming Area for the region in 2021 is also a successful element of the Berlin Process.[24] It is impossible to imagine how these agendas would have been advanced – if not within the framework of the Berlin Process.

But still, many of the commitments and agreements reached during the Berlin Process summits were not implemented. Few of them are at an impasse. The most difficult ones to implement are the agreements/ declarations which fall within the political and economic portfolio.

Problems with Agenda Outreach

There hasn't been continuity between and across priorities and agendas of the Berlin Process. Given that the BP proceeds through yearly meetings and summits hosted by the EU Member States, they design and define the respective year's Summits agenda. From summit to summit, host countries added /removed topics from the Berlin Process agenda with little input from the WB countries, often due to their lack of interest. Thus, it became difficult to follow up on their implementation. Consequently, the initiative began to scatter around and was not concretely followed-through.[25]

The Berlin Process lacked a central mechanism- a secretariat that would have managed its agendas and provided a sentiment of predictability. In the absence of institutional support, the initiative became very fluid and failed to build institutional memory. Its coordination became very diversified, ranging from national governments, regional initiatives (RCC and CEFTA), EU MS, and European Commission. Thus, making it difficult to track who is doing what, and who is responsible for what. Unavoidably, this has kept accountability at a very surface level for both the WB6 and Berlin Process organisers.

De facto, Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) became a key coordinating body for a few of the Berlin Process agendas, particularly MAP-REA and its successor CRM. Hence, many saw RCC as the future administrative body of the Berlin Process and insisted that the EU provide external support and oversight agency for the RCC to implement and monitor Berlin Process agendas and initiatives, including the Green Agenda.[26]

Connectivity Agenda

Within the economic cooperation portfolio, the Berlin Process also served as an "incubator" of the EU-Connectivity Agenda for WB. The first phase of project selection took place at the Vienna Summit in 2015.

Throughout the years, Connectivity Agenda forged tangible projects, programs, and initiatives for establishing links between Western Balkans and EU countries. In more detail, the Connectivity agenda aims to upscale transport and energy, green transitioning as well as digital connectivity by addressing the infrastructural gaps in the region. Particularly for connecting the Western Balkans to Trans European Transport Network (TEN-T) and implementing the electricity Projects of Energy Community Interest

24   The WB Roaming Agreement was negotiated under MAP REA in 2019, and became operational from July 2021. For more, see Regional Cooperation Council, *Regional Roaming Agreement Is Clear: Roaming Charges In The Western Balkans Are Now Zero*, July 2021, at: https://www.rcc.int/news/715/regional-roaming-agreement-is-clear-roaming-charges-in-the-western-balkans-are-now-zero

25   For example, Security dimension was tackled during the London Summit in 2018 by UK, alongside economic cooperation and reconciliation. Next year, in 2019, at Poznan Summit, Security topic was put on the agenda and The Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group was set up. On the following years, organizing states had other topics on agenda. Fore more, see Annex 1.

26   Balkans Group interview with a regional cooperation expert, July 2022

(PECI). It also focuses on hard measures, implementation of regional infrastructure, and soft measures, to encourage legal and regulatory reforms with EU acquis.[27]

The connectivity Agenda marks a latent success. Infrastructure projects were approved throughout consecutive Berlin Process summits (Vienna 2015, Paris 2016, Trieste 2017, London 2018, Poznan 2019, and Sofia 2020) and EU-WB6 Summits (Sofia 2018). Between 2015 and 2021, 45 infrastructure projects were selected, of which 37 were transport and 8 were energy projects.[28]

The Connectivity agenda also faces delays in implementation. Lack of technical expertise within the WB6 governments has negatively impacted the successful and timely implementation of projects. Other challenges relate to overall low institutional capacities, lack of inter-institutional coordination, and weak monitoring mechanisms at the WB6 country level. Few of the implementation delays are attributed to the overall life span of infrastructure projects themselves.[29]

Through the dialogue with Serbia and the Connectivity agenda, Kosovo became a member of the TcT, as well as enhanced its representation in the EnC on equal basis with other WB6 countries.[30]

Among all the WB6 countries, Kosovo has benefited the least financial assistance for infrastructure projects from the Connectivity Agenda. Bilateral issues with Serbia, particularly the dispute over property rights and territory in Serb-majority northern municipalities, have caused delays, if not completely obstructed the implementation of the so-called Railway 10- The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Kosovo –Serbia R10-, which was approved in Vienna in 2015.[31] The third phase of the project is now at a deadlock, and its further financial assistance from the EU is closely conditioned with the improvement of the good neighbourly relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Besides the so-called "hard measures", the Connectivity Agenda pushes the implementation of soft measures or "policies". Both hard and soft measures complement one another. Soft measures require legal and regulatory reforms, in line with EU acquis and other EU accession criteria, serving as a baseline for the implementation of projects. Soft measures related to transport projects include aligning/simplifying border crossing procedures, railway reforms, information systems, road safety, and maintenance schemes, unbundling, and third-party access. Whereas, among others, measures related to energy infrastructure projects include unbundling, regulator independence, licensing and permitting regimes, customer switching as well as measures required to enable the development of a real regional energy market.[32] In turn, the low progress of WB6 in complying with reforms has hindered the utmost success of this agenda. Implementation of soft measures depends on the political will, good governance, and capacities of WB6 governments.

Project Funding: An unmatched commitment to project ideas

The Berlin Process did not have a separate budgetary allocation. Yearly summits which were held under the auspices of EU Member States were organised and supported by the respective countries. The Connectivity Agenda is financed through EU funds, the Western Balkans partners through the National Investment Committees (NIC), Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA), and International and National Financial Institutions including the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the World Bank (WB), etc.

27   For an overview of the Connectivity Agenda infrastructure projects, see European Commission, *EU Connectivity Agenda for Western Balkans*, 2020, at: https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/brochure_wb_connectivity_agenda_en.pdf

28   For a list of infrastructure projects, see Annex 2

29   Balkans Group interview with a government official/ EU integration expert, July 2022.

30   Energy Community is an international organization which brings together the EU and its neighbours to create an integrated pan-European energy market. Whereas, the purpose of the Treaty is the establishment of a Transport Community in the field of roads, railways, inland waterways and maritime transport, as well as the development of a transport network between the European Union and the six countries of the Western Balkans. For more, see Balkans Group report, *Kosovo's Participation and Representation in Regional Organizations: Mapping the gaps and opportunities*, October 2021
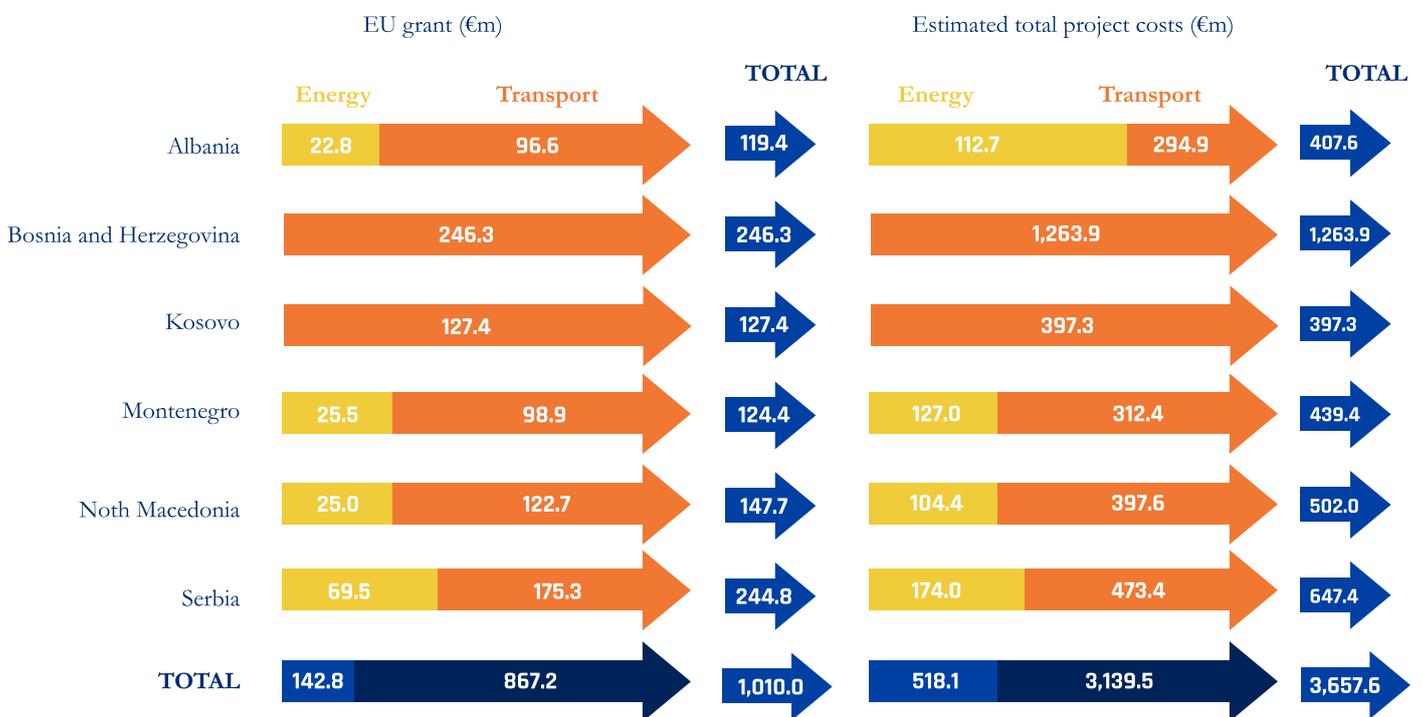
31   The R10 project, aims to connect the three countries, Kosovo, Serbia and Macedonia. It includes building of the railway which starts from Fushë Kosovë to North Macedonia Border, Fushë Kosovë to Mitrovicë/Mitrovica, and Mitrovicë/Mitrovica to the Serbian border. The other transport project selected within the Connectivity Agenda for Kosovo includes: Technical Assistance - Orient/East-Med Corridor: Kosovo –Serbia R7 Road Interconnection, Pristina – Merdare Section- endorsed at EU-WB6 Sofia Summit 2018. Ibid.

32   European Comission, *Instrument For Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) 2014-2020, MULTI-COUNTRY Co-financing of Connectivity Projects in the Western Balkans*, at: https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2018-01/ipa_ii_2015-038-055.01_2016_038-727.01-cofinancing_of_connectivity_projects-amend_1.pdf

Between 2015 to 2020, the EU committed One (1) billion Euros to Connectivity Agenda projects. The funds were drawn from the then IPA II. Consecutive governments of the WB6 were quite reluctant with this level of commitment, claiming that the financial allocation does not match the region's needs.[33]

At the Sofia Summit in 2020, the Commission launched the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) for the Western Balkans. The EIP foresees mobilizing up to 9 billion Euros of EU Grants and an additional 20 billion Euros through the support of the Western Balkans Guarantee Facility (WBGF) for the period 2021-2027. It aims to support the EU Connectivity agenda, particularly for upscaling transport and energy, as well as green transitioning and digital transformation. The EIP derives from IPA III, and it covers two of its critical components, namely Window 3: Green agenda and sustainable connectivity and Window 4: Competitiveness and inclusive growth.[34]

Aside from 9 billion Euros in EU grants, the 20 billion Euros scheme is yet to be secured through the EU's help for reducing the cost of financing as well as risk reduction for potential investors (public and private) via the newly-founded WBGF.[35] Experts from the region highlight the ambiguity over the 20 billion potential investment schemes while claiming that it remains in the "air".[36]

	EU grant (€m)			Estimated total project costs (€m)		
	Energy	Transport	TOTAL	Energy	Transport	TOTAL
Albania	22.8	96.6	119.4	112.7	294.9	407.6
Bosnia and Herzegovina		246.3	246.3		1,263.9	1,263.9
Kosovo		127.4	127.4		397.3	397.3
Montenegro	25.5	98.9	124.4	127.0	312.4	439.4
Noth Macedonia	25.0	122.7	147.7	104.4	397.6	502.0
Serbia	69.5	175.3	244.8	174.0	473.4	647.4
TOTAL	142.8	867.2	1,010.0	518.1	3,139.5	3,657.6

The total sum amount of EU Grants and the overall Estimated total project costs.[37]

The Berlin Process should change the "Mundus Operandi" of financial assistance towards the region, both from the EU and its Member States.[38] Applying a "frontload" methodology which would increase financial assistance before EU accession, is critical. But that is only if accompanied by a robust enlargement perspective and a reformed EU accession process for WB6. For example, there is a growing disparity between the EU funding allocation for the WB6 compared to other South East Europe countries such as Croatia, Bulgaria, and Romania.[39]

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33   Balkans Group report, *The Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Gains and Challenges for Kosovo*, January 2018, pp3-4.

34   Other IPA II Windows such as Window 1: Rule of law, fundamental rights and democracy; Window 2: Good governance, EU acquis alignment, good neighbourly relations and strategic communication; and Window 5: Territorial and cross-border cooperation are not covered by EIP. For more, see European Parliament report, *The Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans: assessing the possible economic, social and environmental impact of the proposed Flagship projects*, May 2022, pp.1, at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2022/702561/EXPO_STU(2022)702561_EN.pdf

35   The Western Balkans Guarantee Facility is a tool tailored for the Western Balkans, which aims at leveraging funds from the private and public sector and promote investments in the Western Balkans for multiplying the effect of the EU assistance. The Western Balkans Guarantee Facility is established under the EU External Action Guarantee and the European Fund for Sustainable Development Plus. For more about the EU External Action Guarantee, see European Commission, *Action Document for "EU Contribution to the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) 2021-2023"*, Annex 1, 2021, at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/system/files/2021-12/AD%2001%20W3W4-MC%20WBIF%202021-2023.pdf

36   Balkans Group interview with an expert on Western Balkans/EU integration, July 2022 and Balkans Group interview with a government official/ EU integration expert, July 2022.

37   For an overview of the Connectivity Agenda infrastructure projects, see European Commission, *EU Connectivity Agenda for Western Balkans*, 2020, pp.24-16, at: https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/brochure_wb_connectivity_agenda_en.pdf

38   Ibid.

39   Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) report, *Sofia Summit 2020, Takeaways and Lesions Learnt*, December 2020, pp.6, at: fhttps://cdinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/SOFIA-SUMMIT-Takeaways-and-Lessons-Learnt.pdf

Common Regional Market (CRM)

The most pressing mechanism established under the economic cooperation portfolio is the CRM, a successor of the Multiannual Action Plan for the Regional Economic Area (MAP REA).

It aims to create a regional market based on EU rules and procedures and bring the Western Balkans closer to the European Single Market.[40] CRM was endorsed at the Sofia Summit in 2020, and it has a broad agenda which evolves around measures that go beyond "trade-related" ones, including diversification of supplies, job creation, offering the best value for low pricing, as well as opening the borders for people to work anywhere in the region. Its measures also include actions to attract and increase competitiveness in investments in the region, amongst others.[41] Overall, CRM is built around four areas.

1. Regional Trade Area	Free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, including cross-cutting measures, such as the Green Lanes, to align with EU-compliant rules and standards and provide opportunities for companies and citizens.
2. Regional Investment Area	Align investment policies with the EU standards and best international practices and promote the region to foreign investors
3. Regional Digital Area	Integrate the Western Balkans into the pan-European digital market
4. Regional Industrial and Innovation Area	Transform the industrial sectors, shape value chains they belong to

CEFTA is given a coordinating and governing role for the CRM implementation alongside RCC.[42] CEFTA Secretariat is in charge of supporting the CRM Action Plan measures which are trade-related, particularly those of the first pillar: the Regional Trade Area which includes actions for enabling the free movement of goods, services, capital, and people. It has supported the measures which closely align with the CEFTA 2006 such as:

• **Reducing waiting time on BCPs/CCPs, by implementing a set of measures that includes an extension of the Green Lanes and simplification of the procedures supported by Systematic Electronic Exchange of Data SEED+;**

• **Reducing the trade costs and bureaucracy through mutual recognition programs;**

• **Facilitating e-commerce by ensuring access to all markets in the region;**

• **Providing a fast track toward a single EU market.[43]**

Giving CEFTA a role under the CRM was a major mistake. CEFTA has been a highly politicised and ineffective mechanism to support regional cooperation. Involving the outdated CEFTA in the implementation of the Berlin Process minimised its prospects, as well as gave a bitter taste to most of the regional stakeholders. Kosovo does not represent itself in CEFTA as UNMIK is still a party on Kosovo's behalf, and Serbia, supported by BiH and Moldova, effortlessly blocks Kosovo's representation and free trade.[44]

Regional experts perceived CRM as an initiative that overlooks the deadlock of CEFTA. By launching the CRM, the EU and MS sought to resolve the issues which CEFTA could not. Within CEFTA, as well as

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40   The Common Regional Market (CRM) was endorsed by the leaders of Western Balkans Six at the Berlin Process Summit in Sofia, Bulgaria on 10 November 2020. The initiative builds upon the achievements and lessons learned from the Regional Economic Area (REA), which had mixed results in implementation. For more, see Balkans Group report, *Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans. Regional Economic Area, the "Mini- Schengen" and the Common Regional Market*, January 2021, pp.27-30.

41   For more, see Regional Cooperation Council, *Common Regional Market Report on Implementation for 2021*, April 2022.

42   CEFTA is a comprehensive regional free trade agreement among Kosovo (under UNMIK), Albania, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), and Moldova. It derives from the EU pre-accession agenda of the WB6 and other South Eastern candidate countries. It aims to foster the economic and trade relations between the participating countries, remove the trade barriers, and consolidate their market economies to eventually ease their way towards European Union (EU) integration. For more about CEFTA, and Kosovo's representation there, see Balkans Group report, *Kosovo's Contested Representation in CEFTA – A Political and Legal Overview*, October 2021.

43   Regional Cooperation Council, *Common Regional Market Action Plan*, November 2020, at: https://www.rcc.int/docs/543/common-regional-market-action-plan

44   Balkans Group report, *Kosovo's Contested Representation in CEFTA – A Political and Legal Overview*, October 2021

CRM, the key obstacle to a full regional trade area remains the unresolved bilateral issues between Kosovo and Serbia.[45]

Measures related to the liberalisation and the facilitation of trade in goods built upon CEFTA Additional Protocol 5 (AP5), and those related to the liberalisation and facilitation of trade in services in CEFTA Additional Protocol 6 (AP6) are critical for the implementation of the CRM Action Plan (2020-2014).

To this end, even though negotiations with CEFTA member countries were concluded, Kosovo has not ratified AP5 on trade facilitation and AP6 on trade in services as a a result of its unequal representation there. Kosovo took part in negotiations for Additional Protocol 7 on Dispute Settlement Mechanism. In turn, the successful implementation of CEFTA measures would pave the way for the implementation of many of CRM measures.

In 2021, further negotiations took place on four (4) agreements, namely:

1) Free Movement with ID cards;

2) Recognition of Academic Qualifications;

3) Mutual Recognition of Professions, and;

4) Third-Party Nationals.[46]

Only recently, on 18 August 2022, following a meeting under the auspices of the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina, the leaders of Serbia and Kosovo reached a deal to enable the freedom of movement with ID Cards between the two countries. Respectively, "Serbia agreed to abolish the entry/exit documents for Kosovo ID holders, and Kosovo agreed to not introduce them for Serbian ID holders".[47]

This move has potentially unlocked a new regional agreement. Leaders of the WB6 have principally agreed on three agreements, ID card, Recognition of Diplomas, and Professional qualifications, which are expected to be approved in Berlin in early November this year. Throughout the negotiations, Belgrade has insisted on a derogation that would shift all the negotiations between Kosovo and Serbia under the EU-facilitated dialogue as opposed to addressing them on a regional level. The three agreements will mark a major progress. Yet, CRM may remain a hostage of its design, particularly because of its reference to CEFTA.

The CRM Action Plan has proceeded too slowly and its predecessor, MAP REA (2017-2020) could not outlive the persisting bilateral issues. It is critical for the CRM to not go on the same path. The Berlin Process should revisit its founding objectives to build a better prospect for regional cooperation, and enable a regional trade area between WB6 countries. It should unify its agendas, ranging from the resolution of bilateral issues, connectivity, CRM, and Green Deal for WB6, and strengthening near-term EU accession possibilities. For that, the Berlin Process agendas should clearly shape and give direction to the future of the region in the EU.

Evolving Competing Agendas

The Berlin Process aimed to bring together and integrate the WB6 regional cooperation initiatives and agendas. Yet, the failure to build a political vision for the integration of the WB into the EU paved the way for other initiatives to emerge. Open Balkans is the key one. This initiative raised considerable concern over its agenda and its competitiveness with the already existing CRM. Both CRM and Open Balkan seek a free trade market.

45   Ibid.

46   Balkans Group report, *Kosovo in Regional Initiatives: Institutional Framework and Coordination,* October 2021, pp. 16-17, at:
          https://balkansgroup.org/en/kosovo-in-regional-initiatives-the-domestic-institutional-framework-and-coordination/

47   EEAS, *Serbia- Kosovo: Remarks by the High Representative Josp Borrell following the deal reached,* August 2022, at:
          https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/serbia-kosovo-remarks-high-representative-josep-borrell-following-deal-reached_en?s=51. The deal reached reiterates the Free
          Movement Agreement reached between Serbia and Kosovo in 2011, again within the framework of the EU facilitated dialogue, which was not successfully implemented.
          For more, see Balkans Group report, *KOSOVO-SERBIA DIALOGUE: Implementing the FoM and IBM for the Benefit of the People,* March 2022, at:
          https://balkansgroup.org/en/kosovo-serbia-dialogue-implementing-the-fom-and-ibm-for-the-benefit-of-the-people/

What's noteworthy, forging a "regional trade area" by enabling the four fundamental freedoms is one out of four agendas of the CRM. Others include the regional investment area, regional digital area, and regional industrial and innovation area. Whereas, the regional trade area is a core, if not the sole agenda of the Open Balkan.

Pushed by the leaders of Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia, the Open Balkan commenced in 2021. Kosovo, BiH, and Montenegro refused to join. The promoters of the Open Balkan claimed to transfer the "ownership" of the regional cooperation dimension inward (coming from the region). Whereas, EU has been a long-term supporter of regional cooperation of WB6 and South Eastern Europe since 1999; the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe (SPSEE) in 1999, CEFTA in 2006, RCC in 2008, and other sector-related organisations and initiatives-few of which now operate within the framework of the Berlin Process (EnC, TCT, MARRI, etc).[48]

In September 2022, during the Open Balkan Summit held in Belgrade, Edi Rama, the Prime Minister of the Republic of Albania, said that Turkey, Greece, Italy, and Hungary should become members of the Open Balkan. This shows that this initiative aims at expanding to a wider geographical area of South Eastern Europe and beyond.[49]

There is a divergence in perceptions among WB6 leaders about Open Balkan. Kosovo rejects this initiative as it fears unequal treatment due to Serbia's refusal to recognize its independence. In November 2021, Albin Kurti, the Prime Minister of Kosovo claimed that he does not uphold an initiative that does not have EU oversight and that there needs to be an absolute EU presence and participation.[50] BiH and Montenegro refused participation in this initiative too, on the grounds that it competes with the Berlin Process and jeopardises the EU accession process, where Montenegro is the most advanced. Podgorica, however, has recently shown signs of its will to participate, by attending Open Balkan summits as an observer.

The EU has shown scepticism too. In 2021, Miroslav Lajcak, the special envoy for the EU facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue defined Open Balkan as an initiative that created "unhealthy competition" with the EU accession process.[51] However, in September 2022, at the Open Balkan Summit in Belgrade, a shift in the EU stance was noticed. Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi recalled a few principles at which Open Balkan should operate, by stating: "First, Open Balkan has to be a step on the path to European integration, as the Common Regional Market is intended to be; Second, it needs to remain open to all, in line with European standards and compatible with your regional and international obligations and, third, EU standards must be at the heart of the initiative. Open Balkan agreements that meet EU standards are moving the region forward on the EU path".[52]

The U.S., which has shown signs of coming back as a solid stakeholder of the WB6 regional cooperation, supported the Open Balkan initiative from the onset, but on concrete conditions. During his addressing speech at the Ohrid Summit, Gabriel Escobar, the U.S. Special Envoy to the Western Balkans called for greater clarity on the functioning and operation of Open Balkan, including more stakeholders such as Chambers of Commerce, strengthening institutional development, harmonisation with other existing economic integration initiatives as to avoid duplication (meaning CEFTA and CRM) as well as for Open Balkan to remain an economic project, rather than a political one.[53] He also highlighted that for Open Balkan to be successful it should be open to all the WB6 countries.

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48   Balkans Group Report, *Kosovo's Participation and Representation in Regional Organizations: Mapping the gaps and opportunities*, October 2021

49   Euronews Albania, *Rama: Turkey, Greece, Italy and Hungary should join the Open Balkan initiative*, September 2022, at: https://euronews.al/en/albania/2022/09/02/rama-turkey-greece-italy-and-hungary-should-join-the-open-balkan-initiative/

50   Euronews Albania, *For it to be an Open Balkan, Serbia will need to change first, said Kurt*, November 2021, at: https://euronews.al/en/kosovo/2021/11/07/for-it-to-be-a-free-and-open-balkan-serbia-will-need-to-change-first-said-kurti/

51   EuroActiv, *Open Balkan initiative could negatively impact region, study says*, August 2022, at: https://www.euractiv.com/section/politics/short_news/open-balkan-initiative-could-negatively-impact-region-study-says/

52   European Commission, *Statement of Commissioner Olivér Várhelyi at the official opening of the Open Balkan Summit in Belgrade*, September 2022, at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2019-2024/varhelyi/announcements/statement-commissioner-oliver-varhelyi-official-opening-open-balkan-summit-belgrade_en

53   He also stated: "first, the Open Balkan should be not just about regional economic cooperation, but integration into broader EU structures; Second, there are already many initiatives to create economic integration. Open Balkan is only one of them. We support all economic initiatives that bring the region together and promote peace and cooperation among the countries of WB6 all of them; Thirdly, in order for this to be successful it should be open to all of them. Every initiative for economic integration should include all six countries of WB6 in an equal footing.". Hear the full speech at: The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, *Open Balkan Summit in Ohrid Opening sessions (ENG)*, June 2022, at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0OpjmP1-bo

The road to Open Balkan

Open Balkan is a rebranding of two other initiatives which surfaced in the past but failed to live through, namely the "Customs Union" and the "mini-Schengen".

In March 2017, Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vucic proposed a "customs union in Western Balkans", raising several political and practical concerns. The rest of the region forcefully rejected any idea that would recall, even at the slightest, the "former Yugoslav Federation."[54]

In July 2017, at the Trieste Summit, the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP-REA) was adopted. MAP-REA, proposed by RCC and supported by the EU Commission, aimed to facilitate the economic cooperation of WB6.[55]

Leaders of Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania proposed the "mini-Schengen" in a parallel process in 2019. At that time, the "Mini-Schengen" admittedly duplicated the MAP-REA agenda and left three out of six countries out (Kosovo, Montenegro, and BiH) which openly opposed this initiative. In September 2020, Kosovo (under the government of Avdullah Hoti) agreed to join the "mini-Schengen" after a Washington Summit at the White House. Montenegro and BiH never joined.[56]

The skeptics within the region saw the "mini-Schengen" initiative as a backdrop to the EU values and the WB6's EU accession path. It emerged amidst an intensified debate over the EU's lack of enthusiasm for opening the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. Four (4) days after the launching of the "mini-Schengen", at the European Council summit, Member States were unable to reach an agreement due to strong opposition by France, Denmark, and the Netherlands.[57]

A year later, in November 2020, during the Berlin Process in Sofia, the most-notable Common Regional Market (CRM) was endorsed.

In July 2021, once again in a parallel process with CRM, the leaders of Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia counter-proposed "Open-Balkans". This initiative emerged at a time when the prospect of opening the accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia became even more distant. By 2021, Bulgaria blocked any progress for North Macedonia's membership bid. This put Albania's bid at an impasse too, given that the EU aimed at grouping their accession processes. At that time, Serbia's accession process was long-stalled. Within the three countries, the discontent with the enlargement and its methodology grew further.

Amidst the public attention of the Open Balkan, Kosovo Prime Minister, Mr. Kurti, proposed the commencement of the South Eastern European Free Trade Agreement (SEFTA). This initiative would have been built upon the EFTA-EEA model.[58] As opposed to other initiatives, SEFTA would have operated within the auspices and authority of the EU institutions.[59]

54   Koha Ditore, *Mustafa: Jo union doganor të Ballkanit Perëndimor*, March 2017, at: https://www.koha.net/arberi/6329/mustafa-jo-union-doganor-te-ballkanit-perendimor/

55   The MAP REA aimed to "enable the unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labor" across the Western Balkans in four components: Trade, Investment, Mobility, and Digital Integration. For more, see Regional Cooperation Concil, *Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six*, 12 July 2017, at https://www.rcc.int/docs/383/ multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six/

56   Balkans Group report, *Regional Cooperation in the Western Balkans: Regional Economic Area, the "Mini-Schengen" and the Common Regional Market*, January 2021, at: https://balkansgroup.org/en/regional-cooperation-in-the-western-balkans/

57   European Parliament, *Failure to open accession talks with Albania and North Macedonia is a mistake*, October 2019, at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20191021IPR64717/failure-to-open-accession-talks-with-albania-and-north-macedonia-is-a-mistake

58   Exitnews, *Kosovo Proposes Free Trade Agreement for the Western Balkans*, 11 June 2021 at: https://exit.al/en/2021/06/11/ comment-kosovo-proposes-free-trade-agreement-for-the-western-balkans/.

59   Balkans Group report, *Kosovo's Contested Representation in CEFTA – A Political and Legal Overview*, October 2021, pp.9.

Open Balkan Trajectory of Events and Agreements

"Mini- Schengen", Novi Sad, Serbia 11 October 2019	The three leaders of Serbia, North Macedonia, and Albania agreed to establish the free movement of people, goods, services, and capital between their respective countries. Within the "Mini-Schengen" framework, the three countries aimed to, at least, enable the free movement of citizens with ID Cards by 2021.
"Mini-Schengen", Online Meeting 9 November 2020	The leaders of Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia initiated the review of the so-called "Mini-Schengen". They also signed the: • Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation in the fight against COVID; • Interstate agreement between the Republic of Serbia and the Republic of Albania on the free movement of citizens with ID cards.[60]
Skopje Economic Forum on Regional Cooperation, Skopje North Macedonia 29 July 2021	The three leaders of the Open Balkan countries launched the rebranding of the Mini Schengen to Open Balkans. They agreed to abolish border controls and facilitate free movement between the three countries by January 1, 2023.[61] Agreements included: • A Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation on Facilitating Import, Export, and Movement of Goods in the Western Balkans; • A Memorandum on Free Access to the Labor Market; • An Agreement on Cooperation in Disaster Protection.[62]
Open Balkan Meeting, Belgrade Serbia 9 November 2021	Parties agreed on the formation of an Implementation Council of Open Balkan commitments.
Open Balkans summit, Tirana, Albania 21 December 2021	They also signed: • The Agreement on free access to the labour market in the Western Balkans, as part of the regional cooperation initiative "Open Balkans"; • The Agreement on connecting the system of electronic identification of citizens of the Western Balkans; • The Agreement on cooperation in the field of veterinary, phytosanitary, food safety, and animal feed control in the Western Balkans (The agreement was signed by Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management, Minister of Agriculture of Albania and Deputy Minister of Agriculture of North Macedonia); • The Agreement on mutual recognition of approvals issued by Authorised Economic Operators for Safety and Security (AEOS) (between the Serbian government and the Council of Ministers of Albania was signed by Serbian Minister of Finance and Minister of Finance and Economy of Albania); • The Agreement on cooperation between accreditation bodies of the three countries was signed on the sidelines of the summit.

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60   The President of the Republic of Serbia, *President Vučić participates in the Mini-Schengen conference*, November 2020, at: https://www.predsednik.rs/en/press-center/news/president-vucic-participates-in-the-mini-schengen-conference

61   Government of the Republic of North Maceodnia, *Joint statement of the leaders of "Open Balkan"*, July 2021, at: https://vlada.mk/node/26063?ln=en-gb

62   European Western Balkans, *"Mini Schengen" renamed "Open Balkan"; Vučić, Rama and Zaev sign three documents*, July 2022, at: https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2021/07/29/mini-schengen-renamed-open-balkan-vucic-rama-and-zaev-sign-three-documents/

Open Balkans summit, Ohrid, North Macedonia 8 June 2022	The three leaders signed the: • The Cooperation agreement in the Western Balkans in the area of mutual recognition of diplomas and scientific degrees issued by higher education institutions and other authorized institutions; • A Memorandum of Understanding on Cultural Cooperation in the Western Balkans; • A Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation of Tax Administrations in the Western Balkans; • A Memorandum of understanding on tourism cooperation.
Open Balkan summit, Belgrade, Serbia 22 September 2022	The representatives of the three countries signed the: • The Agreement on food security between the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of Albania, and the Republic of North Macedonia (The agreement was signed by the ministers of agriculture of the respective countries); • A Memorandum of Understanding in the field of cinematography and audiovisual activities in the Western Balkans (The agreement was signed by the Ministers of Culture of the Respective Countries); • The Agreement on energy and mining cooperation (The agreement was signed by the Ministers of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania and Serbia); • The inter-operational plan on civil emergencies between the Republic of Serbia, the Republic of North Macedonia, and the Republic of Albania (The agreement was signed between the Deputy Minister and the head of the Department of Emergencies, Serbia, the Deputy Director of Civil Emergencies, North Macedonia, and the Director of the National Agency of Civil Emergencies, Albania).

A regional trade area: CRM vs Open Balkan

CRM and Open Balkan both have their drawbacks and advantages. The common viewpoint is that the Open Balkan initiative lacks transparency and inclusiveness, and its measures overlap with CRM measures.

The three leaders of the Open Balkan (Serbia, Albania, and North Macedonia) declared that the underlying objective of this initiative is the economic integration of the region. Non-participatory members believe it is solely a politically driven one. There is persisting concern that the lack of robust promise for EU enlargement served as an impetus. This initiative lacks an action plan, hence making it difficult to comprehend what Open Balkan wants to achieve and how it intends to achieve it. Whereas, CRM has adopted an action plan, with concrete timelines and expected results.

Most notably, Open Balkan "borrowed" some of the CRM measures that could not be implemented at the level of all WB6 and adjusted them at the level of three. An example of this is the CRM Green Lanes measures.[63] CRM Action Plan foresaw the "Adaptation of the Green Lanes, i.e., priority system at the Green Corridor BCPs/CCPs for key products and trust-worthy economic operators and expansion to other BCPs/CCPs". The Customs Administration of North Macedonia established a Green Lane on the border crossing with Serbia, at the Tabanovce/Presevo, and visually signaled it with Open Balkant.[64]

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63   Expected result from Green Lanes is to facilitate a faster border crossing of some specific produces such as perishable goods, fruit and vegetables, live animals, etc., as well as economic operators (e.i. AEOs). For more, see Regional Cooperation Council, Common Regional Market Report on Implementation for 2021, April 2022.

64   Under CRM Green Lanes have been extended to rail intra-CEFTA BCPs/CCPs: Prijepolje – Bijelo Polje (between Serbia and Montenegro) and Tuzi - Bajze (Montenegro-Albania) and, most recently, on 14 October 2021 Presevo - Tabanovce (Serbia-North Macedonia). Ibid.

Another key point of divergence is that Open Balkan has no objective oversight, either by the EU Commission or by MS. Hence, there is no guarantee that the WB6 members will be treated equally and symmetrically. In turn, lack of oversight makes it difficult to track if this initiative is evolving in the direction of EU integration.

Open Balkan has no prospect of receiving financial assistance from any of the EU instruments. CRM is financially supported by the EU Commission, Member States as well as IFIs. It has a structure of coordinating bodies including CEFTA and RCC, as well as the EU Commission, which serves as an oversight mechanism.

A Comparative analysis of CRM (CEFTA related measures) and Open Balkan: Divergences and Overlaps

CRM	Open Balkan (OBI)	Remarks
Regional trade area: free movement of goods, services, capital, and people, including crosscutting measures, such as the Green Lanes, to align with EU-compliant rules and standards and provide opportunities for companies and citizens; • *regional investment area*, to align investment policies with the EU standards and best international practices and promote the region to foreign investors; • *regional digital area*, to integrate the Western Balkans into the pan-European digital market; and • *regional industrial and innovation area*, to transform the industrial sectors, shape value chains they belong to, and prepare them for the realities of today and the challenges of tomorrow.	Accelerating the implementation of the EU Four Freedoms in the Western Balkans (Ohrid Declaration)	CRM has four freedoms at the core but is not limited to them. It also includes activities related to investments, digital, industrial, and innovation areas.
Free Movement of Goods		
1.1. CEFTA-TCT Green Lanes, as a priority system for key products and trustworthy companies and expand it to all crossing points in WB. Expand the system to BCP with the EU MS (Italy and Greece)		The system of prioritization is based on the CEFTA's system of electronic exchange of data (SEED). OBI does not have its system.
2.1.1. CEFTA Recognition Programme for industrial products (text proposed, discussion at expert level)	Trilateral Agreement on Cooperation Between General Directorate of Accreditation of the Republic of Albania (DPA), Institute of Accreditation of the Republic of North Macedonia (IARNM), and Accreditation Body of the Republic of Serbia (ATS) - signed in December 2021	The OBI Agreement sets recognition of testing results as an objective, but no concrete steps are made in this direction. CEFTA document directly seeks to enable it.
2.1.2. CEFTA Decision on Harmonized Veterinary and Veterinary Health Certificates (agreed at expert level)	Agreement on cooperation in the field of veterinary, phytosanitary, food safety, and animal feed control in the Western Balkans – signed in December 2021.	
2.1.2. CEFTA Decision on establishments in sections authorized for trade among CEFTA Parties (agreed at expert level)		
2.1.3. Implementation of the CEFTA Decision on facilitation of trade of fruit and vegetables (implementation advanced)		

2.1.3. Recognition of AEOS programs of AL, MD, MK, and RS in CEFTA (validation completed, waiting for ministerial decision)	Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Authorized Economic Operators (AEOS) between Albania and North Macedonia - signed in December 2021 Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Certificates of Authorized Economic Operators (AEOS) between Albania and Serbia - signed in December 2021 MK-RS already existed	Once adopted CEFTA decision will enable recognition of AL, MK, MD, and RS AEOS programs in the entire CEFTA, not only bilaterally. Also, CEFTA ensures minimum benefits for recognized AEOS.
2.2. Implement CEFTA Customs Risk Management Strategy (implementation advanced)		
2.3. The first pilot joint action was organized in 2022 to expand SEED to all agencies involved in the clearance of goods		
Free Movement of Services		
3.2. CEFTA Decision facilitating tourism services, including recognition of licenses (under discussion by experts)	MoU on cooperation in the field of tourism in the Western Balkans - signed in June 2022	CEFTA Decision seeks to enable the provision of services from one market to another and to simplify the procedure for gaining a license for companies who seek establishment in other markets. OBI MoU refers to this issue for tour operators but with no concrete measures.
3.4. CEFTA Decision on joint procedures on tariff monitoring and other facilitating measures for regional parcel delivery service (agreed by experts awaiting adoption)		The CEFTA decision enables parcel delivery tariffs, making the service more affordable and accessible.
3.5.1. A) Agreement on automatic recognition of qualifications for 4 professions (agreed, awaiting signature) 3.5.1. B) Agreement on automatic recognition for 3 professions (negotiations launched in 2022) 3.5.2 CEFTA Decision establishing a general system of recognition of professional qualification		Enables automatic or faster recognition of qualifications which provides access to markets.
3.6.2. Adopt a framework for mutual recognition of electronic signatures as well as other forms of aids and trust services based on the relevant EU acquis (no progress)	Agreement on the Interconnection of Electronic Identification Schemes for Citizens of the Western Balkans - signed in December 2021	
3.7.1. CEFTA Decision on electronic commerce (agreed, awaiting adoption)		CEFTA Decision simplifies regulatory requirements for e-commerce operators by limiting their obligation to only domestic rules. It also harmonizes key e-commerce rules, such as rules related to returning products.

3.7.2. Adopt regional trade facilitation measures for parcels based on EU practices (e.g. VAT e-commerce package) and WCO standards (early stage, no concrete outcome defined)		
3.7.3. CEFTA Decision on geo-blocking (agreed, awaiting adoption)		CEFTA Decision establishes the obligation for companies not to discriminate against consumers in the region compared to local consumers.
Free movement of capital		
4.1. A) Make WB6 SEPA ready (assessment completed, first activities launched) 4.1. B) Create an interim system for facilitating regional payments (model identified, first steps this year)		Establishing a system that will make payments within the region and with the EU cheaper and faster
Free movement of people		
5.1.2. RCC Agreement on Recognition of academic qualifications in the Western Balkans and enhanced quality of recognition of academic qualifications	Agreement on mutual recognition of academic qualifications – signed in June 2022.	RCC Agreement seeks the recognition of diplomas to facilitate further education.
5.3.2. CEFTA Decision removing work permits For intracompany transfers and service suppliers	Agreement on Conditions for Free Access to the Labour Market in the Western Balkans	CEFTA decision enables people to travel for business purposes to other markets without a working permit (e.g. Posted worker), while OBI also includes direct employment (a person travels to find a job)

In hindsight, the Open Balkan initiative offers a degree of "ownership" as it is a locally owned regional cooperation initiative. It emerged from the region, which indicates that the WB country members (three) have the will and ability to build trust. Additionally, the Open Balkan has had greater longevity to other preceding initiatives -Mini-Schengen and Customs Union- and gained considerable attention and visibility among the local general public. Serbia has also used this initiative to avoid encountering its unresolved issues with Kosovo.

Finally, inter-state coordination and communication have been intensified for boosting the implementation of Open Balkan. The governments of Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia have already optimized their institutional infrastructure for designing and implementing the Open Balkan agreements. At country level, the responsibility to lead the Open Balkan agendas remains within the public institutions, including SHERPA, a few line ministries as well as other agencies. Not only, but the three countries have deepened intergovernmental coordination and communication too. Since the launch of the Open Balkan regular meetings take place throughout institutional levels. A shared commitment to meet, coordinate and communicate is intact.

On the other hand, the WB6 countries lacked the will and commitment to forge inter-governmental coordination and communication for the effective implementation of CRM measures throughout both political and technical levels. Even though regular meetings took place, they were held within the auspices and with the support of the CRM coordinating bodies such as RCC, CEFTA, and the EU Commission.

The Way Forward

Regional cooperation ought to be the backbone of the region's path toward EU integration. It should also be understood as a means to ultimately benefit the people of the WB6 countries. To a certain degree, the Berlin Process did serve as an impetus for cooperation and convergence of the region and the EU. However, much more is expected from the renewed Berlin Process. Enhanced regional cooperation, and convergence between the region and the EU, are especially important now amidst the geopolitical shift as a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

To this day, WB6 neighbours do not share a regional trade area and CRM aspired to offer that. It includes measures related to the four fundamental freedoms of the Single Market. Yet, CRM is much broader than that, it also includes measures that aim at enabling a Regional Investment area, a Regional Digital area, and a Regional Innovation and Industrial area. Whereas, a regional trade area is the core, if not the sole agenda of the Open Balkan.

While the CRM has the support of the EU, Open Balkan derives from three of the countries of the WB6 region. Measures stemming from these two initiatives overlap, but few differ from one another. A common denominator among them is that both lack the foundation of trust and political interlinking of all the WB6 countries. The inclusion of all WB6 countries on an equal footing is the most important principle, along with convergence of trade with the EU.

At the core of these competing initiatives stand three sets of problems:
1) **Long standing disputes between WB6;**
2) **Poor legacy of previous regional initiatives;**
3) **Weak prospect of WB6 integration in the EU.**

The Berlin Process should take a rebalanced approach to treat these problems in parallel, this time around with a special emphasis on providing a robust prospect for the integration of WB in the EU. The current state of play and the existing competing agendas could only deepen the fractions within the WB6 and distance the region from their EU integration path.

The poor legacy of CEFTA is the most difficult one to deal with. With intractable disputes in place and with Kosovo's unequal representation, challenges will prevail in CEFTA and critically affect the CRM and other agendas that derive from the Berlin Process. If the existing CEFTA cannot amend its preamble, namely Article 1 and Article 5 of the agreement, which claims UNMIK as a designated representative on Kosovo's behalf there, then the prospect of a fully-fledged regional trade area is weak.[65] At such an instance, a fresher trade agreement should be sought. By potentially developing into a CEFTA II, the regionally-induced Open Balkan could serve the purpose of achieving regional trade strides. That is only if it includes all the WB6 countries on an equal footing, without imposing asymmetries and with the EU's and MS's oversight.

As opposed to the existing CEFTA which includes WB6 countries + Moldova, CEFTA II would operationalize as a WB6-only initiative, without the latter. Especially now that Moldova was granted EU candidate status. Notwithstanding, a CEFTA II would help to better materialise Berlin Process agendas, including the implementation of CRM, as well as contribute to the overarching goal of the EU accession.

Amid the U.S.'s growing involvement in the WB6 "economic integration", unwavering coherence and alignment between the U.S. and the EU are needed to achieve this goal and envision a positive outlook for the regional cooperation and WB6 path toward EU integration.

Finally, the renewed format of the Berlin Process should intensify the prospect of WB6 enlargement, put an end to the poor legacy of previous initiatives as well as contribute to overcoming the bilateral issues in the region. This can be achieved by increasing the political push, by Germany and other key Member States, as well as by better interlinking of the Berlin Process with the EU Enlargement policy. Increasing funding allocations to match the region's needs for the implementation of the

Connectivity Agenda remain imperative. Additionally, the Berlin Process should keep track of its year-by-year agendas, for it to ensure the continuity of agendas and priorities. Supporting the strengthening of institutional frameworks, inter-institutional coordination and the establishment of monitoring mechanisms at the WB6 country level would facilitate and help keep track of the implementation of the Berlin Process agendas and initiatives.

65   Balkans Group report, *Kosovo's Contested Representation in CEFTA - A Political and Legal Overview*, October 2021

Annex I
A comparative analysis of the Berlin Process and the Open Balkan

	Berlin Process	Open Balkan
Objectives	• Resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues; • Achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region; • Enhancing regional economic cooperation; • Laying the foundations for sustainable growth.	• Regional trade and economic cooperation.
Areas	• Trade, economy, security, youth, energy, transport, digital, green transitioning, political.	• Trade, economy, energy, political.
Participants	• Governments of the six Western Balkans Albania, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH): • civil society (think tank and civil society forum); • businesses (business forum); • youth (youth conference). • EU member states' governments – Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Slovenia, Poland as well as the United Kingdom (EU member until January 2020); • The EU institutions – The European Commission (EC), European External Action Service (EEAS), and the member state holding the Presidency of the Council; • International financial institutions; • Regional initiatives – Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Transport Community Treaty (TcT), Energy Community (EnC), Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO), Western Balkan Fund (WBF); • Connectivity Agenda, Common Regional Market (CRM) and Green and Digital Agenda.	• Government of three Western Balkans (Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia).
Common Regional Market (CRM) Agenda	• Regional Trade Area • Regional Investment area • Regional Digital • Regional Innovation and Industrial area	• Regional trade and economic cooperation.
Structure	• Yearly Summits are organized by Berlin Process Participants, EU Member States; • RCC Secretariat and the CEFTA Secretariat are the coordinating bodies of the CRM; • EU and RCC coordinates the Green and Digital Agendas for the WB; • Berlin Process Organizations and Initiatives have their own secretariats (CEFTA, RCC, TcT, EnC, WBF, RYCO); • EU Commission and EU MS support.	• No Secretariat; • No EU support nor oversight.
Funding	Economic and Investment Plan (IPA III); EU Commission, MS and IFI.	National funds of founding members.
Convergence	Between all the WB6 and EU.	Between three (3) founding members.
Ownership	Led and supported by Germany, EU and Member States.	Led and owned by Serbia, Albania and North Macedonia.

Annex II
Berlin Process Topics and Commitments throughout consecutive Summits

Vienna 2015	
Topics:	• Bilateral issues • Migration and the fight against terrorism • Economic prosperity • Connectivity Agenda • Youth Education and science
Commitments:	• Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Solution of Bilateral Disputes signed • Declaration on Establishment of RYCO signed • Annual Economic Reform Programmes (ERPs) will be prepared • 6 transport and 4 energy infrastructure investment projects agreed upon • The list of "soft measures" to be implemented before the Paris Summit was agreed upon • The establishment of a regional energy market agreed upon • 1 billion euros for connectivity projects will be made available from IPA II • Obstacles to the Transport Community Treaty to be overcome

Paris 2016	
Topics:	• Rule of law and anti-corruption • Youth Environment Migration and fighting terrorism • Connectivity agenda
Commitments:	• 3 new railway projects agreed upon, and the programme for energy efficiency received additional funding • Soft measures to be implemented • A roadmap for setting up of a regional market for electricity agreed upon • Proposals for increasing the access for the region's youth to the Erasmus agreed upon • Western Balkan Sustainable Charter agreed upon • Agreement on the Establishment of the RYCO signed • Young Civil Servants Pilot Scheme launched

Trieste 2017	
Topics:	• Connectivity agenda • Transport Community • Rule of law and fight against corruption • Regional economic integration SMEs development • Education and science
Commitments:	• Treaty Establishing Transport Community signed • Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area adopted • Joint Declaration Against Corruption agreed upon • 7 additional connectivity investment projects agreed upon • A grant for co-financing and the balance loans from the EIB and the EBRD provided • Connectivity Europe Facility (CEF) mobilized for the first time • IT Summit to be held • 48 million euro will be provided for SMEs through WB EDIF • Western Balkans Research Foundation to be established

London 2018	
Topics:	• Security issues • Regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, missing persons and war crimes • Fight against corruption • Digitalisation – youth education
Commitments:	• Principles of regional cooperation in information-exchange for law enforcement agreed upon (Declaration) • Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the WB by 2024 agreed upon • Declarations on regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, on missing persons, and on war crimes were signed and stocktaking of progress in resolution of bilateral issues agreed upon • Anti-corruption country commitments were made • The Berlin Process Security Commitments • Steering Group was set up Funds were pledged for digitalization of schools and for strengthening of democracy in the WB

Poznan 2019	
Topics:	• Economy • Connectivity • Security cooperation • Corruption • Environment and climate
Commitments:	• Principles of regional cooperation in information-exchange for law enforcement agreed upon (Declaration) • Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the WB by 2024 agreed upon • Declarations on regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, on missing persons, and on war crimes were signed and stocktaking of progress in resolution of bilateral issues agreed upon • Anti-corruption country commitments were made • The Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group was set up • Funds were pledged for digitalization of schools and for strengthening of democracy in the WB

Sofia 2020	
Topics:	• Challenges of the global COVID-19 pandemic in the Western Balkan • Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans 2020 • Green Agenda for the Western Balkans • Further support to Roma integration
Commitments:	• 2020 Connectivity Package was put forward with six projects in sustainable transport and clean energy • Declaration on Common Regional Market was signed • Declaration on the Green Agenda was signed

Annex III
Connectivity Agenda: Selected Projects between 2015-2019 and 2020

	Road projects		Railway projects		Maritime/inland ports		Energy projects

List of Projects Selected between 2015-2019

1	Core Network (R2a): Banja Luca - Gradiška and Gradiška Bridge	€38.5m	€7.0m
2	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Odzak and Svilaj Bridge	€109.5m	€25.1m
3	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Johovac - Rudanka	€79.9m	€15.3m
4	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Rudanka - Putnikovo	€164.0m	€38.8m
5	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Putnikovo - Medakovo	€81.0m	€15.9m
6	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Ponirak - Vraca/Zenica	€83.9m	€19.4m
7	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Zenica - Donja Graćanica	€63.4m	€12.3m
8	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Poprikuše - Nermila	€188.3m	€42,1m
9	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Tarćin - Ivan I	€68.8m	€12.0m
10	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Tarćin - Ivan II	€63.1m	€11.8m
11	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Buna - Poćitelj	€44.6m	€9.0m
12	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Poćitelj - Zvirovići	€124.2m	€5.2m TA
13	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Budva Bypass	€187.4m	€42.1m
14	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R7): Nić - Plaćnik	€255.0m	€41.5m
15	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R7): Pristina - Merdare	€207.5m	€4.4m TA
16	Orient/East-Med Corridor (VIII): Kriva Palanka - Deve Bair	€13.7m	€2.5m
17	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R6a): Skopje (Stenkovec) - Blace	€120.8m	€27.2m
18	Orient/East-Med Corridor (VIII): Bukojćani - Kićevo	€105.0m	€13.8m
19	Orient/East-Med Corridor (X): Belgrade Intermodal Terminal	€15.5m	€13.8m
20	Orient/East-Med Corridor (X): Nić - Brestovac	€62.7m	€47.0m
21	Orient/East-Med Corridor (Xc): Nić - Dimitrovgrad	€55.8m	€28.4m
22	Orient/East-Med Corridor (Xc): Sicevo - Dimitrovgrad	€84.4m	€44.7m
23	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R10): Signailing and Telecoms	€56.1m	€27.4m
24	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R10): Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje - Mitrovicë/Mitrovica	€42.4m	€17.6m
25	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R10): Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje - Border with North Macedonia	€94.1m	€39.3m
26	Orient/East-Med Corridor (X): Tabanovce Railway Station	€5.7m	€2.8m
27	Orient/East-Med Corridor (VIII): Beljakovce - Kriva Palanka	€152.4m	€70.0m
28	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R4): Bar - Vrbnica	€44.8m	€20.4m
29	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R4): Bar - Vrbnica	€40.0m	€16.3m

30	Mediterranean Corridor (R2): Tirana - Durrës	€81.6m	€36.2m
31	Rhine/Danube Corridor: Brćko Port	€10.3m	€3.1m
32	Reconstruction of Durrës Port: Quays 1&2	€62.5m	€27.7m
26	Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Obrenovac - Bajina Bašta Grid Section	€59.0m	€13.1m
27	Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Kragujevac - Kraljevo Grid Section	€29.6m	€6.8m
28	Serbia(Niš) - Bulgaria Gas Interconnector	€85.5m	€49.6m
29	Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro	€127.0m	€25.5m
30	North Macedonia - Greece Gas Interconnector	€54.4m	€12.7m
31	Albania - North Macedonia Power Interconnection: Grid Section in North Macedonia	€50.0m	€12.2m
32	Albania - North Macedonia Power Interconnection: Grid Section in Albania	€70.0m	€14.3m

List of Projects Selected in 2020

1	Mediterranean Corridor (Vc): Vanj Tunnel - Buna	€106.3m	€21.1m
2	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R7): Pristina - Merdare	€207.5m	€38.8m
3	Mediterranean Corridor: Tirana Bypass	€150.9m	€32.6m
4	Orient/East-Med Corridor (R4): Bar - Vrbnica	€40.2m	€20.1m
5	Rhine/Danube Corridor: Demining of the Right Bank of the Sava River	€38.0m	€8.2m
6	Fierza Hydropower Plant Rehabilitation	€42.7m	€8.5m

The Balkans Policy Research Group is an independent, regional think-tank based in Pristina, Kosovo. We provide timely policy analysis and recommendations on a wide array of state building issues; institutional and democratic consolidation; minority integration and good neighborly relations; European integration and policy change. We have decades of experience in policy reporting and development, strategic thinking, and advocacy with governmental, international and non-governmental organizations. Our rigorous, detailed, impartial reporting, always based on-depth fieldwork, is the core of our work. We go beyond mainstream positions and seek to make change through creative, feasible, well-measured and forward-looking policy recommendations with the aim of helping develop strong, vibrant democracies, prosperous states and societies based on rule of law in the Western Balkans.

We engage in high-level advocacy, domestically, regionally and internationally, impacting policy discussions and options with regard to the home affairs and European policies toward the Western Balkans.

Balkans Group has developed other tools and platforms to achieve this change:

The Policy Dialogue promotes Kosovo's domestic dialogue, cohesion and reform-making agenda.

The Policy Forum (a Think-Tankers High-level Advocacy Forum) committed to enhancing the dialogue between the civil society and the institutions.

The Kosovo Serbia Policy Advocacy Group (a forum for Cross-Border Civil Society Cooperation) that aims to communicate, promote and enhance dialogue toward full normalization between Kosovo and Serbia, and their societies.

Women in Politics promotes the empowerment of women and girls; their security and inclusiveness; and is committed to strengthen the Women Caucus impact and reach throughout Kosovo.

Youth in Politics promotes an active participation from youth from different political parties in the institutions. The component helps in developing a culture of dialogue and cooperation, by providing capacity building trainings on key policy areas and skills and leadership.

The Dialogue Platform promotes the dialogue process between Kosovo and Serbia, by informing the wider public and generating debate about the agreements, benefits and challenges of the Dialogue.

Expert Support component provides policy support to the government and key institutions on key policy areas, peace and state- building agenda.

Norwegian Embassy

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