

Western Balkans Summit Poznań. Chair's conclusions

05.07.2019

On 5 July 2019, Poland welcomed the Heads of Government of the Berlin Process participants, as well as representatives of the European Institutions, International Financial Institutions, OECD, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office.



The Poznan Summit builds on the previous Berlin, Vienna, Paris, Trieste and London Summits in the framework of the Berlin Process, as well as the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Sofia of 2018. The Leaders agreed that the Berlin Process demonstrates their commitment to achieve a stable, secure and prosperous Western Balkans region. The Western Balkans are part of Europe: sharing the common values, the same history, the same geography, the same cultural heritage and a future defined by common opportunities and challenges. The Leaders unanimously reaffirmed their unequivocal support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans. In this context, the Polish government reiterates its conviction that the future of the entire region is in the European Union.

The Leaders of the Western Balkans, reconfirmed their commitment to strengthening the rule of law, fundamental rights and good governance in the region. They agreed on the importance of regional cooperation, good neighbourly relations and reconciliation, which are essential for the region to progress on its European path. They also committed to overcoming current difficulties in the region in order to achieve substantial progress in areas such as regional economic integration and connectivity for the benefit of the citizens and economic operators.

ECONOMY

Regional Economic Integration

The Leaders of the Western Balkans recognized the importance of regional cooperation, and reaffirmed their strong commitment to the **Regional Economic Area**, implementation of reforms aimed at bringing prosperity to the region and strengthening economic ties among Western Balkans economies and accelerating convergence with the EU. They welcomed the achievements obtained in implementing the Multi-Annual Action Plan of the Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) and recognized the current trade-related difficulties that have affected the capacity of the region to fully deliver. They committed to make their best efforts to overcome these difficulties so as to deliver on the priorities set for 2019/20 outlined by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and CEFTA Secretariats on each of the four pillars.

The **Declaration on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications** (see Annex), which sets forward an automatic recognition model for higher education qualifications and study periods spent

abroad, has been endorsed. The Western Balkans Leaders took note that, despite the progress made, the negotiations of a Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications were not possible to be completed in time for the Poznan Summit and they committed to work to find appropriate forms to ensure the timely delivery of results in this regard. Recognizing the importance of **research and innovation** for the future development of the region the Western Balkans Leaders look forward to launch of the regional research cooperation hub to enable networking between researchers, including a regional research infrastructure map and completion of regional open access protocols to research infrastructure in time for the next Summit.

The Western Balkans Leaders reiterated the importance of regional cooperation on **investment policy** and welcomed the adoption and implementation of the Individual Reform Action Plans in line with the **Regional Investment Reform Agenda**. The ministerial Joint Policy Statement towards developing regionally acceptable standards for negotiating International Investment Agreements, in line with the investment policy framework and standards of the EU (see Annex).

The Western Balkans Leaders undertook to intensify regional cooperation efforts in the area of **financial markets diversification**, with the focus on capital markets aiming to expand access to finance in the Western Balkans. They also welcomed initiative of the World Bank to draft the diagnostics of the Western Balkans financial markets. They took note of the preparation of the practical guidelines for capital markets development and the agreement to replicate and adapt the practical guidelines for all Western Balkans economies.

In respect of digital economy and society development, the Western Balkans Leaders reconfirmed their commitment to the goals set out in the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans and the Regional Economic Area. They endorsed the conclusions from the Western Balkans Digital Summit (see Annex), held in Belgrade on 4-5 April 2019, and particularly welcomed the entry into force of the new Regional Roaming Agreement, which brought lower prices for Roaming among the six Western Balkans partners. This agreement is a clear example of how regional cooperation can bring concrete benefits for the citizens and the businesses of the region. They pledged their support to the organization of 2020 Digital Summit in Albania, to be co-organised by the region, the European Commission, the RCC and business representatives.

The Western Balkans Leaders welcomed the successful start of the implementation of the Additional Protocol 5 (AP5) on Trade Facilitation to support faster, easier and less costly trade. They took note of the agreed Decision on mutual recognition of Authorized Economic Operator programme. They welcomed the agreement on timeframe for the preparation of the Joint Risk Management Strategy. They commended the implementation of revised rules of origin, that allows the full cumulation and duty drawback regime as of 1 July 2019 and implementation of SEED+. The Western Balkans Leaders took note of the conclusions of the report regarding the harmonisation of parties' customs tariff with EU CET.

The Western Balkans Leaders welcomed the agreement on a text of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 6 on Trade in Services and called upon the remaining CEFTA parties to complete the internal procedures for its approval. They called for a swift adoption of this additional protocol. They commended the establishment of the Contact Points for services within the Parties.

The Western Balkans Leaders supported the work invested in cooperation on trade statistics. They took note of work on identification of regulatory barriers on e-commerce and invited the parties to address them effectively. They recognized the importance of undertaking negotiations of CEFTA Additional Protocol 7 on Trade Dispute Settlement. They commended CEFTA Secretariat for contributing to effective public-private dialogue thanks to the signature of a memorandum of understanding with the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum.

Entrepreneurship

The Western Balkans Leaders noted that despite good economic recovery in the region, the labour market situation remains challenging, with a slow pace of job creation and joblessness remaining high, in particular among young people, women, and marginalised groups. They agreed that an educational policy which responds to the demands of inclusive economies in the region remains an important priority, as does cooperation between vocational education and training and the private sector. The **youth of the region** needs to be better equipped with a wide range of skills, from **basic skills to entrepreneurship and soft skills**. This can be achieved through an improved lifelong learning ecosystem starting from early childhood education to adult learning, and a shared governance between education systems and the world of work in order to include the private sector in the design of training and apprenticeship schemes. The Leaders agreed that future skill needs have to be anticipated in order to train the youth of today according to the requirements of the labour market of tomorrow. Without this anticipation, skills mismatches, unemployment, underemployment and social inclusion will be growing sources of concerns.

Social Entrepreneurship

The Leaders acknowledged that social economy enterprises often suffer from a lack of visibility and recognition in the Western Balkans. They welcomed the support offered by the European Commission for awareness raising and policy actions in the five pillars that encompass the sector needs: access to finance, access to markets, framework conditions, social innovation and international dimension. The development of social economy and social entrepreneurship is a promising avenue for the Western Balkans and represents an area of joint interest where reforms combined with dedicated financing can enable a flourishing ecosystem for social economy/social entrepreneurship to grow.

The Leaders welcomed the **EUR 10 million Youth Guarantee** scheme launched by the Commission together with the European Investment Fund at the beginning of 2019. The scheme will support youth employment in the Western Balkans and is expected to leverage investment of at least EUR 60 million for the young people in the region to strengthen their entrepreneurial capacity and provide job opportunities

Private Sector Investment and SME access to finance

The Leaders recognised the need for a healthy private sector to achieving a full potential of the region. Accordingly, the Leaders reaffirmed their full commitment to support private sector development using a toolbox of instruments ranging from facilitating access to finance to improving entrepreneurial capacity. SMEs in particular are key actors for sustainable and inclusive economic growth which require continued support.

The Leaders took note that the EU Contribution to private sector development in the region of EUR 320 million since 2005 through the Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (WB EDIF), the European Fund for Southeast Europe (EFSE) and the Green for Growth Fund (GGF) has leveraged private capital of circa EUR 3.7bn to grow companies across borders, create jobs and promote clean technologies distributed in more than 100 000 loans.

To reinforce these efforts, the European Commission is implementing an additional EUR 150m Guarantee, which will be fully allocated through a Call for Projects later this year. This will open additional opportunities to crowd-in private capital for underserved SME sectors such as agriculture, trade and digitalisation or for green investments by households and municipalities.

Western Balkans Business Forum

The Leaders welcomed the results of the Business Forum that accompanied the Summit. The economic development of the Western Balkans, facilitated by the regional integration initiatives and the Connectivity agenda, rests, ultimately, on the shoulders of the business community. This event, organised in an open format and gathering entrepreneurs representing the entirety of participating

partners and sectors of economy, reinforced links in crucial industries, creating European value chains. Western Balkans Business Forum served as a platform for a public discussion between governments, businesses and civil society on the pivotal issues facing the economy: the energy transition, development of transport infrastructure, financing of entrepreneurship, the digital economy as well as education and vocational training, and social entrepreneurship. The diverse array of voices from the public and private sector enabled an open and honest debate on present challenges and ways forward.

WB CIF

The Leaders welcomed the announcement of planned **EU support to the Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum (WB6-CIF)** and welcomed the establishment of WB6 – EU Business Platform. It will contribute to enhancing the competitiveness of the Western Balkan economies by promoting public-private dialogue in the development of the Regional Economic Area and help to increase cross-border business cooperation in the region by improving the legal and policy framework and facilitating direct cooperation among businesses through support services provided by the chambers. Participants commended efforts of the WB6 CIF on overcoming existing barriers within the region for the business community, promoting the region as a unique investment destination and by demonstrating the importance of the regional cooperation as a prerequisite for sustainable development and overall prosperity.

Smart specialization and Forum of Cities and Regions

The Leaders endorsed the Communications of J. Kwieciński (see Annex), Minister of Investment and Economic Development, summarizing outcomes of the Forum of Cities and Regions and highlighted an important role of local governments as a key stakeholders of the Berlin Process. The Leaders also reaffirmed their will to support the economic transformation of the Western Balkans through establishing smart specialization strategies and public-private partnerships for boosting the competitiveness and innovation in the region. They also agreed to make a more efficient use of EU macro-regional strategies - as an integrated cooperation instrument between Member states and non-EU participants, and appeal for closer cooperation with local authorities and regional organizations under the Berlin Process.

Clean Energy Transition Declaration and preparation of the “Green agenda” for the Western Balkans

The Leaders endorsed the joint “Statement on Clean Energy Transition in the Western Balkans” signed by the Western Balkans Ministers of Energy and of Environment in Podgorica on 21st February 2019 (see Annex). This confirms their will to align as swiftly as possible with the EU's energy, climate and environmental policies, and the long term objectives of the Paris agreement to contribute to the well-being of citizens and the sustainable development of the region. In this perspective, the Leaders intend to work together in the launching of an ambitious **Green Agenda**, to contribute to the leading efforts of the EU in fighting climate change, protecting the environment and to unlock the economic potential of the green, low carbon and circular economy in the region. The Leaders confirmed their readiness to meaningfully contribute to such an agenda, which could be presented at the next EU-Western Balkans Summit to be hosted by Croatia in May 2020.

Roma Integration

The Western Balkan Leaders acknowledged the need for a joint commitment to step up the efforts in integrating the Roma population, as one of the most vulnerable groups in the societies of the region. They agreed that the economic prosperity of the region must go hand in hand with stable social inclusion prospects. Therefore, the Western Balkans Leaders endorsed the declaration on Roma Integration (see Annex). They pledged to take the necessary steps to achieve, by the date of accession,

the concrete commitments taken on Roma integration in the fields of employment, housing, education, health, civil registration and non-discrimination. They also agreed to review the progress made in achieving these in the frame of the upcoming Western Balkans Leaders' Summits.

CONNECTIVITY

Connectivity is a driver for growth and jobs, helps attract investments and by creating links and opportunities for businesses and citizens it also improves competitiveness of the region. Furthermore by bringing the people and economies closer together within the region and with the EU it improves neighbourly relations. The Leaders highlighted the need to promote comprehensive, sustainable and rules-based connectivity in view of providing quality infrastructures for the Western Balkans by mobilizing appropriate resources. They underlined the key role of the Western Balkans Investment Framework for identifying concrete projects to be financed and enhancing synergies between International and European institutions as well as Western Balkans in the field of sustainable connectivity.

Connectivity investment projects

The Leaders committed to enhance connectivity of the core transport and energy infrastructures and digital networks, since it is not only vital for the citizens and economies, but it also enhances the political stability and socio-economic development. The Leaders agreed on adding 8 new connectivity investment projects with a total investment value of over 700 million euros. These investments will be financed through EUR 180 million EU grant co-financing from the European Union and the balance through loans from the EIB, EBRD and KfW complemented by national funding.

The endorsement of the new projects brings the total connectivity infrastructure funding provided under the **Connectivity Agenda** since 2015 to more than EUR 880 million in EU grants for a total of 39 projects with investment costs of more than EUR 3.2 billion. The Leaders confirmed that the implementation of the 8 new and the 31 already approved large-scale infrastructure investments remain a key item on their Agenda and they shall use their best efforts to facilitate the advancement and delivery of the actual investments works. The Leaders agreed on the need to advance in the implementation of the connectivity reform measures to ensure this massive investment provides maximum and sustainable return.

Transport

The Western Balkans Leaders endorsed and committed to implement the policy priorities identified by the **Transport Community** for the period 2019-2020, with the objective to improve the mobility of persons and goods in the Western Balkans. These priorities include a first set of key actions to implement a regional rail strategy, the promotion of safer roads as well as transport facilitation. Parties have welcomed the signing of the agreement on Transport Community Permanent Secretariat and its subsequent operationalisation from the 6th of May. The entry of the TCT framework into force facilitates the development of a comprehensive and sustainable approach to transport policy that promotes regional mobility, low-emissions transportation and inclusivity. Parties have reiterated their support for the planned endorsement of the Regional Rail Action Plan by the end of 2019 and the subsequent works on the development of the regional rail strategy in the Western Balkans. Parties have underlined the role of Transport Facilitation in developing regional supply chains and trade synergies and welcomed the Transport and Trade Facilitation project initiated by the World Bank, complementing the role of national efforts and the European Commission's technical assistance (CONNECTA).

The Leaders welcomed the EU's intention to provide in 2019 and 2020 **financial assistance to design concrete improvements to remove high risk road sections** on the TEN-T network in South East

Europe and at improving the efficiency of operations and the quality of infrastructure and border/common crossing points (see Annex).

Energy and transport: reforms

Furthermore, the Western Balkan Leaders confirmed their commitment to take all the necessary measures to **speed up the smooth transposition and implementation of the *acquis*** under the Transport Community. In this framework, the Western Balkan partners look forward to work with the Permanent secretariat – when fully operational – to achieve this commitment.

They agreed that the urgent completion of the **Connectivity Reform Measures** to establish the organized and coupled electricity markets in the region with the objective of their integration into the EU internal electricity market is of the utmost importance. The discussions have further underlined the importance of efforts to decarbonize the energy system by 2050.

Digital connectivity

The Western Balkans Leaders also welcome the European Commission's support in the area of **cybersecurity** and **broadband development** and are committed to enhance overall capacities in these important areas for connectivity in the region. The Western Balkans Leaders also endorsed the principles of the *Tallinn Declaration on eGovernment* and welcomed the EU's invitation to join a number of European digital initiatives such as the *Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC)* and the *Broadband Competence Offices Network*.

PEOPLE-TO-PEOPLE CONNECTIVITY

The Western Balkans Leaders reaffirmed the essential role of civil society in building the participatory democracies that the Western Balkans are striving to become, and committed to be vigilant against any threat to backsliding and shrinking space for the enjoyment of civic rights as spelled out in the legal frameworks of the region.

The Western Balkans Leaders recognized the crosscutting role that CSOs have in implementing the Western Balkans Strategy, and take good note of the main conclusions and recommendations of the 7th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum that took place in Tirana 16 and 17 of April.

The Leaders reaffirmed the role of integration of the societies and cultural cooperation in fostering regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.

Think Tank Forum and Civil Society Forum

The Leaders welcomed the fact that the expert community from the Western Balkans was included in a structured manner in the preparation for the Summit. The role of the non-governmental organization as partners for government in creating policies related to the public good has been recognized. The Leaders confirmed support for development of regional cooperation among expert groups to increase their capacities and elaborate common proposals of solutions to the crucial problems of the region. The Regional Think Tank Forum in Skopje that was preceded by round tables in all Western Balkan capitals, and the Think Tank Forum in Poznań recommended that the role of local communities in the Berlin Process and European integration should be strengthened through development of their administrative and financial capacities. The Think Tank Forum urged firm support of all stakeholders as regional structures and regional cooperation fundamentally depend on the condition of bilateral relations in the region and recommended for the format to be continued.

The Leaders welcomed the intensive dialogue between Ministers and representatives of Civil Society Organizations, various NGOs and think-tanks during months preceding the Poznań Summit, that has culminated at Civil Society Forum and Business Forum on July 4th.

During numerous panels the following issues were discussed, often with the participation of the ministers and policy makers: development of third sector and its involvement in the cooperation with local governments, but also on the needs and expectations of youth including their skills and capacities on modern labour market, ways in which their entrepreneurial capacities could be strengthened, how environment and climate policies are influencing economic growth and transformation of energy sectors, how new technologies, but also social innovation could be most efficiently supported by public policies how to tackle challenges like: anticorruption, disinformation and hybrid threats to democracy, cultural cooperation, reconciliation, and new spheres of cooperation in between governments. Leaders agreed that such consultations with citizens and representatives of third sector are making Berlin Process more relevant for the integration of the region and the perspective of the integration with the EU.

Youth

The Leaders reaffirmed the importance of young people for the future of the Western Balkans and the need to tackle brain drain. They remain concerned about the persistent shortage of opportunities for young people in the region. They agreed that increased efforts are needed in order to provide opportunities for youth that would encourage participation and entrepreneurship, modernize education, increase job specific skills and employment opportunities, and encourage brain circulation and social and economic inclusion.

Participants took good note of the main conclusions and recommendations of the Youth Forum under the auspices of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union “How to better respond to European Aspirations of the young generations in the Western Balkans”, which was held in Bucharest on 28 and 29 May 2019 (see Annex).

The Leaders commended the progress made by the Regional Youth Cooperation Office and reaffirmed their support for RYCO. They applauded opportunities that RYCO created for the cooperation and mobility of young people in the region, welcoming the launch of the Western Balkans Youth Lab (WB6 Lab), a regional incubator for social entrepreneurship and innovation dedicated to young leaders.

Science

The Leaders welcomed the recommendations from the 5th Berlin Process Joint Science Conference held in May at the Royal Society in London on the societal responsibility of science, particularly when it comes to the proactive role of education and scientific cooperation in shaping reconciliation, good neighbourly relations and inter-societal dialogue in South East Europe. The parties acknowledged the importance of unbiased communication of scientific facts in the digital era. They endorsed the establishment of mechanisms for providing scientific advice in the design of public policies and in decision-making on national level. The parties acknowledged the commitment of organisations of higher education, research and innovation to advance in-house reforms in convergence with EU standards. They reinforced the commitment of the scientific community to undertake necessary steps for the realisation in Trieste of the Western Balkans Research Foundation (WBRF), as decided at the 2017 Trieste Western Balkans Summit. The need to tackle brain drain from the Western Balkans by measures of brain circulation and brain gain as envisaged by the WBRF concept, is persistently acute.

The Leaders welcomed the announcement made by the Polish Academy of Sciences to hold the next Berlin Process Joint Science Conference in 2020, including state-of-the-art scientific debate on future-relevant topics (environment, sustainability, energy, digital transformation), and the exchange between young scientists.

Participants witnessed the signing of the *Memorandum of Cooperation Framework on the South East European International Institute for Sustainable Technologies* at the Summit.

GOOD NEIGHBOURLY RELATIONS

Recalling the commitments of the Governments of the Western Balkans at the Vienna Summit in 2015 and the *Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations in the Framework of the Berlin Process* signed by Leaders in London in 2018, participants welcomed the report *Progress in developing Good Neighbourly Relations* (see Annex). Participants reconfirmed the commitments and good practices discussed at the Berlin Process Foreign Ministers' Meetings on 12 April and 4 July 2019, and at the Berlin Process stocktake seminars in Vienna on 16 November 2018 and in Skopje on 28 March 2019. Participants stressed the importance of the continued implementation of the *Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia*, the historic *Prespa Agreement* between the Hellenic Republic and the Republic of North Macedonia. Participants recalled the commitments to redouble efforts to develop good neighbourly relations and resolve outstanding bilateral issues, in line with the region's EU aspirations. Good examples, such as Montenegro's, commitment to further resolving bilateral border issues, were commended. The Leaders welcomed Sarajevo's offer to host the next Berlin Process stocktake and Pristina's offer to host the second in advance of the 2020 Summit.

RECONCILIATION AND OUTSTANDING BILATERAL ISSUES

The Leaders noted that following the political declarations made at the London summit and the expectations of a change that these created, there has been some progress, albeit low level and incremental. The discussions in Poznan demonstrated the need to work seriously on implementing these commitments and to find acceptable, binding and durable solutions for all sides involved, given the negative impact on the region and its citizens of not doing so. Bilateral issues continue to act as a drag on the progress of the region and are an impediment to developing better co-operation in all fields. The legacy of the past creates particularly an acute sense of unfairness to victims still looking for justice and deep divisions between neighbours and communities. Action is needed at all levels across the region to reduce these impediments and to develop a process of confidence building and reconciliation to fully unleash its potential. In this context, the promotion of culture and inter-cultural dialogue are key drivers for mutual understanding and for socio-economic development, thus directly nurturing peaceful relations in the Western Balkans. Participants underlined their commitment to reconciliation, including through the RECOM initiative.

Missing Persons

Participants recalled the *Joint Declaration on Missing Persons in the Framework of the Berlin Process*, signed in London in 2018. They welcomed the fact that the United Nations Security Council on 11 June 2019 adopted resolution 2474 (2019) on missing persons. Participants welcomed the signing of a Framework Plan in The Hague on 6 November 2018 and the establishment of the Missing Persons Group (MPG) comprising representatives of the domestic institutions responsible for missing persons in Belgrade, Podgorica, Pristina, Sarajevo and Zagreb. Participants welcomed the *MPG Annual Report*, commended progress to date to enhance cooperation and increase effectiveness in accounting for missing persons, and looked forward to further progress, including further exchanges of information on potential gravesites and excavations, the launch of a public regional database, and further updates for representatives of the families of the missing. Participants acknowledged the need to intensify efforts to locate and/or identify the remaining cases and the importance of bringing closure to surviving family members. They looked forward to reporting future progress, including at the next Berlin Process Summit.

War Crimes

Participants recalled the *Joint Declaration on War Crimes in the Framework of the Berlin Process*, signed by the Berlin Process Leaders at the London Summit in 2018, which recognized the urgency to end impunity and overcome the legacy of the past. Participants reaffirmed the importance of recognizing and respecting international and domestic court verdicts on war crimes, rejecting hate speech and the glorification of war criminals, supporting domestic prosecutors in bringing perpetrators to justice, supporting victims and addressing stigma, and strengthening cooperation with the UN International Residual Mechanism for the Criminal Tribunals, particularly the office of the Prosecutor within the scope of its mandate. Participants shared concerns that these values had not been upheld consistently during the previous 12 months and acknowledged their individual and collective responsibility to uphold them. Participants noted the importance of regional cooperation, including between State Prosecutors in May 2019, and considered further collaboration essential to ensure those responsible for war crimes were held accountable.

SECURITY

Participants recognised the range of shared security threats experienced within the Western Balkans and wider Europe. Of particular concern was the exploitation of migratory and vulnerable populations for organised criminality or terrorist purposes. Participants recalled endorsing the *Call to Action to End Forced Labour, Modern Slavery, and Human Trafficking* in London 2018, and reaffirmed their commitment to remain vigilant to ever-evolving domestic and international migratory flows and exploitation opportunities. To respond, participants agreed to maintain high levels of domestic effort, as well as regional and wider international cooperation, to prevent and combat these crimes. The Leaders also recognised the importance of closer cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU on the smuggling of illicit drugs, including synthetic drugs, and express their intention to actively cooperate with the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction.

Information exchange in the field of law enforcement

The Leaders acknowledged the active role of the UK in pursuing the regional dialogue on implementing the principles of information exchange in the field of law enforcement agreed at the Summit in London. They recognize the need for more exchange of real-time information of strategic and operational nature, using state-of-the-art methods and tools, and in full compliance with EU rules on the protection of personal data and commit to use EUROPOL channels more proactively. Committing to further enhancing regional security cooperation, participants recalled the *Joint Declaration on the Principles of Cooperation in the Field of Information-Exchange for Law Enforcement*. Participants reflected on the progress made on frontline law enforcement cooperation as well as the sharing of best practice since the last Summit, but they acknowledged that further work was needed. To effectively tackle serious and organised crime and terrorism, participants recognised that a multi-agency response was required, as well as cooperation with private sector and civil society actors. Participants acknowledged recommendations brought forward by the *Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group* to develop a joint regional multi-agency threat assessment of money laundering and financing of terrorism; to enhance use of existing real-time information sharing mechanisms; and to increase the use of Joint Investigation Teams in support of financial investigations. Delivery of further work would take place in alignment within the existing mechanisms for cooperation.

Launch of hybrid threats risk assessment

The Leaders recognized that hybrid attacks are a threat to national and regional peace and stability and that the societal and state resilience to such attacks needs to be strengthened. This process requires a good evaluation of vulnerabilities, and the Leaders welcomed the offer of the European External Action Service to carry out hybrid threat risk assessments. Four of the Western Balkan partners are undergoing such assessments. The Leaders also invited the EU to mobilize its existing tools to mitigate the risks.

Fighting disinformation

The Leaders acknowledged the importance of a healthy democracy based on sound media policy and legislation and their duty to protect democracy when it can be undermined by the threat of disinformation. They recognised the importance of promoting democratic values and principles, in the context of an information environment subject to external and political influence in a challenging media landscape, that can be subject to steering and malign influences. The Leaders also committed to strengthen resilience of the EU and Western Balkan media and society to address disinformation, strengthen cooperation with institutional partners, key stakeholders, tech giants, and academia.

SALW progress

The Leaders reconfirmed the strategic importance of the *Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and their ammunition in the Western Balkans* and welcomed progress in its implementation, including the adoption of Action Plans by Western Balkan authorities in line with the goals of the Roadmap. They acknowledged the role of Germany and France in actively pursuing work on its implementation. They also welcomed the support to the implementation of the roadmap from the Commission, and the Council, both politically and through additional financial support to SEESAC allocated in 2018. They encouraged international partners and donors to provide financial support to the initiative, in particular by contributing to the funding mechanisms established for that purpose, including the UN Multipartner Trust Fund.

Fight against corruption – follow-up of anticorruption pledges

The Western Balkans Leaders reconfirmed the joint commitment to step up efforts to prevent and tackle corruption and to improve the overall rule of law. The **commitments made in the anti-corruption pledges remain valid**. Corruption and maladministration divert public funds from where they are most needed. They affect society as a whole, while impunity rewards the offender and punishes the compliant. Recalling the introduction of anti-corruption within the Berlin Process in Trieste 2017 and the anti-corruption pledges endorsed by Western Balkans Six Prime Ministers, participants recognised that responsibility for building resilience to corruption lies with multiple public authorities, private sector and civil society, and that aspects of corruption associated with organised crime are of particular relevance to Ministries of Justice, Anti-corruption bodies, Ministries of Finance and Ministries of Interior. Participants agreed that the *Berlin Process Security Commitments Steering Group* membership should be expanded to include representatives from Ministries of Justice, Ministries of Finance and Anti-corruption bodies.

The fight against corruption remains a priority for the region, which is also reflected in the EU's fundamentals first approach. Participants agreed to focus on sharing good practices for tackling corruption and ensure practical implementation of participants' anti-corruption strategies and action plans. In the existing international anti-corruption framework, including the UN Convention Against Corruption, to which the partners in the region are parties, the Leaders are determined to keep the fight against corruption as a top priority on the Berlin Process agenda. They also called on the EU to continue its support for the prevention and fight against corruption in the region.

FUTURE OF THE PROCESS

The Leaders concluded that the Berlin process has delivered in terms of economic co-operation and socio-economic integration. The Connectivity Agenda and the Regional Economic Area are driving economic development and bringing the region closer together for the benefit of all. The process is also an important forum bringing Leaders together for open discussion.

The Leaders consider important to involve the people and their representatives in the Berlin Process' dialogue. To this end, they welcomed the proposal of several of Berlin Process Parliaments to contribute to this dynamic through the organization of a parliamentary dialogue covering all the possible fields of our political, economic, social, cultural and security relations. Participants supported

the prospect of an interparliamentary meeting before the next summit, leaving it is up to Parliaments to define the modalities and content of their exchanges.

The Leaders welcomed the upcoming first joint Presidency of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia for 2020. Holding the co-presidency by the Republic of North Macedonia is an important symbol of greater ownership of the process by the region.