

Western Balkans warms up to European Green Deal

The Western Balkans have a critical role to play in meeting the EU's objective of a climate neutral Europe by 2050 – the overarching objective of the European Green Deal.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen proudly announced her administrations' first major initiative – the Green Deal. "This is Europe's man on the moon moment," she said.

The deal comes at a time of heightened urgency for the world to tackle climate and environmental challenges. Earth's atmosphere is warming up, glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising, millions of species are at risk of being lost, and forests and oceans are being destroyed.

To respond to these challenges, **the EU has set the ambitious target of becoming the world's first climate-neutral continent by 2050**, which is presented in the European Green Deal and forms part of the Commission's strategy to implement the [United Nations' 2030 Sustainability Agenda](#).

In essence, **the [Green Deal is a roadmap](#) for making the EU's economy sustainable. It's goal is to turn challenges into opportunities across all policy areas and making this transition just and inclusive for all.**

President **Von der Leyen** explained: *"The European Green Deal is our new growth strategy – for a growth that gives back more than it takes away. It shows how to transform our way of living and working, of producing and consuming so that we live healthier and make our businesses innovative. We can all be involved in the transition and we can all benefit from the opportunities."*

Green Deal calls the Western Balkans

Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia, and Serbia can all play a great role in bringing about the transformational change of the Green Deal.

The Commission, in a [communication paper](#), said it will place an emphasis on supporting its immediate neighbours as "the ecological transition for Europe can only be fully effective if the EU's immediate neighbourhood also takes effective action." **Work is currently underway on a green agenda for the Western Balkans which is scheduled to come out early 2020.**

[The European Council on Foreign Relations](#) also points out that the Western Balkan region has attractive assets for supporting Europe's energy transition. Notably, their energy systems are already partly integrated with those of the EU. They also have large, developed renewable energy capacity with the potential to contribute to European energy CO₂ reduction goals.

Since the Western Balkans have a significantly developed hydro-energy capacity, leaving them outside the European Green Deal could lead to electricity price disparity with EU countries.

The integration of the Western Balkans into the European Green Deal is, therefore, key to accelerating the region's transition and increasing the chances of success for an EU climate-neutral agenda right across the continent.

According to Commissioner Mariya Gabriel, [co-operation in the field of innovation between the Western Balkans has produced a positive result](#) so far. The Commissioner recently noted the progress of the Western Balkans in terms of innovation and technological development, adding that the region is doing well within the framework of the Horizon 2020 program.

The EU has been supporting and will continue, as part of the Green Deal ambition, to support a number of actions to

improve the environment, increase energy efficiency measures and to make greater use of clean energy and renewables.

Renewables and energy transition in the region is discussed in the fourth edition of the publication “[Investing in Clean Energy in the Western Balkans](#)” that is prepared by the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) with the support of the Energy Community Secretariat.

Air pollution is one of the most acute environmental problems affecting the Western Balkans, including Kosovo*. In such a context a [major EU-financed project](#) to improve the environmental performance of the ‘Kosovo* B’ thermal power plant, the local largest electricity generator, was launched some days ago during the visit of the High EU Representative Josep Borrell to Pristina. The project is expected to lower emissions, contribute to a reliable and clean energy supply, and improve the health and well-being of the population.

Albania is almost totally dependent on hydropower for electricity generation; nearly 100 per cent of the country’s domestically produced electricity comes from hydropower. The country currently strives for diversifying its supply. [Albania aims to reduce imports by installing solar arrays and facilities running on other alternative sources](#)

When it comes to sustainable and smart development, among the Western Balkans, Montenegro is the first non-EU country to have adopted a Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) in June 2019 in which out of three key strategic directions, representing the general long-term vision of the country’s development, one (Sustainable Montenegro) focuses in particular on sustainable development, energy efficiency and circular economy. Minister Sanja Damjanovic, in her presentation at the the World Science Forum held in Autumn 2019 in Budapest, has underlined moreover how the [SEEIIST complies with all sustainable development goals, and that the Institute would be one of the best green infrastructure examples.](#)

The road ahead

The Commission has already set out their [plans](#) on how they will achieve climate neutrality by 2050. This includes proposing the first European ‘[Climate Law](#)’ by March 2020 which will be followed by an impact assessed plan to increase the EU’s gas emission reductions target for 2030 to at least 50 % and towards 55 % compared with 1990 levels, in a responsible way.

Further to this, the Commission unveiled on 14 January 2020 its one trillion euro [investment plan](#) to put Europe on track to reach the 2050 emissions-neutrality goal. It aims to mobilise that investment, comprising of public and private money, over the next 10 years to finance the “new growth strategy” and meet the climate objectives. In addition to this, the commission estimates that an extra €260 billion in investment will be needed per year just to reach the current 2030 goal – namely cutting emissions by up to 55 %.

More information and news on this topic can be found on our [website](#)

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