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The Credible Enlargement Perspective for the Western Balkans through the lenses of the Berlin Process

By Zoran Nechev, Jelica Minić, Adnan Ćerimagić and Klodjan Seferaj

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IMPRESSUM

INTRODUCTION

The Berlin Process (Western Balkans Summit) has kept enlargement on the EU agenda and the interest for the EU in the Western Balkans. This Process bridged a political (and even technical) standstill in the enlargement process, which started in 2014 and ended in 2018. It served as an inspiration and provided substance to the new incentive offered by the European Commission to the Western Balkan countries in February 2018 - 'A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans'.[1] The Commission's 6 Flagship Initiatives cover some of the areas in which considerable progress was reached through the Berlin Process. The document and its endorsement by the EU member states in Sofia in May and at the June Council show that EU stands firmly behind its content. Once again, the flexibility, "variable geometry" approach and innovative capacity of the EU institutional structure was demonstrated where a group of member states, organised in an intergovernmental forum, were able to establish a side way to lead to the enlargement mainstream.

The Berlin Process produced a number of visible and latent results in the area of: *connectivity* (the Transport Community was established and Energy Community re-energized), *reconciliation and bilateral issues* (Macedonia-Greece name issue, Montenegro-Kosovo and Montenegro-Bosnia and Herzegovina border issues) *and youth cooperation* (the Regional Youth Cooperation Office and Western Balkan Fund were created).[2] Maybe even more importantly, the Berlin Process and the presence and specific

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[1] European Commission, "A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans," February 6, 2018,
https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/communication-credible-enlargement-perspective-western-balkans_en.pdf

[2] Zoran Nechev et al., "The Berlin Process. What Worked and What Did Not Work? And Why?," July 2017,
http://wb-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/the-Berlin-Process.-what-worked-and-what-didnt-work-And-why.pdf

focus of crucial EU governments and political personalities managed to create a positive and encouraging atmosphere in which Western Balkan political leaders felt comfortable and confident enough to make progress in all of the discussed policy areas. It achieved a very subtle result, i.e. it contributed to changing the mindset of these elites and influenced them in recognising that regional cooperation was essential for the overall advancement of the region and of each individual country. This process paved the way to a historic visit by an Albanian prime minister to Belgrade in November 2014, first after 68 years.[3] The common understanding of Albanian and Serbian prime ministers was also instrumental for swift agreement on establishment of the RYCO.[4]

By acknowledging this, the Berlin Process should continue far beyond its initial five-year framework. The Warsaw Summit, in 2019, is the beginning of a new phase and at the same time it presents a challenge having in mind the current state of affairs within the EU. In order to continue to produce results, remain relevant and original in its approach and the topics discussed, in light of the recently endorsed strategy on *A Credible enlargement perspective,* it needs to be modified. The topics discussed and the intergovernmental structure of this international fora give ground for proper upgrading of this initiative in order to meet new challenges and at the same time avoid duplicating of the accession process. If the Berlin Process remains a kind of "accession laboratory" it can encourage the European Commission to undertake even more substantial engagement.

[3]   Maja Poznatov, "'Historic' Albanian Visit to Serbia Leaves Bitter Aftertaste," Euractiv.com (blog), November 13, 2014, https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/historic-albanian-visit-to-serbia-leaves-bitter-aftertaste/

[4]   Ivana Nikolić, "Serbia, Albania Back Balkan Youth Cooperation Plan," September 1, 2015, http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/belgrade-tirana-pledge-support-to-regional-cooperation-office-09-01-2015.

CONNECTIVITY

Since the Berlin Process was launched, in 2014, connectivity has become the key word of the initiative. First, it was about transport infrastructure and electricity interconnections in the Western Balkans 6. Later, it was extended to the Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans (REA) comprising regional connectivity in the area of trade, investment, labour market and digitalization.[5] Connectivity was supposed to be primarily directed at the Western Balkans. However, in the area of transport, energy and recently ICT infrastructure it is also expected to improve connections of the region with the EU providing supportive environment for including regional businesses into European value chains.

The Connectivity Agenda has had a twofold approach: investment in hard infrastructure and introduction of soft measures, meaning considerable advancement in transport and energy policies. Both were supposed to get the region more integrated, closer to the EU and with more uniform policies contributing to the mobility of goods and people and higher quality of services.

Political willingness of regional countries is indispensable for development of infrastructure. But, a favourable trade and investment climate as well as mobility of labour are also needed to facilitate the supply and demand for this kind of services, making expensive investments in infrastructure justified. Due to the slow reconciliation and many open issues in bilateral relations it was necessary to get a strong external impetus like the Berlin Process to intensify

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[5]   Maja Poznatov, "'Historic' Albanian Visit to Serbia Leaves Bitter Aftertaste," Euractiv.com (blog), November 13, 2014, https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/historic-albanian-visit-to-serbia-leaves-bitter-aftertaste/

regional cooperation in recovering and building infrastructure and opt for connectivity as a strategic choice in the investment policies of the WB6 that could bring the region closer to the EU. This cannot change the fact that Western Balkan countries missed out a huge amount of funds for upgrading the infrastructure that were available to the EU newcomers in the previous decade helping their successful convergence with the old member states,[6] This opportunity was lost, but the recently expressed readiness of the EU to connect the region with Trans-European networks[7] should not be missed.

Through the Berlin Process the issue of financing infrastructure has got the due attention. This is crucial because of the scarce resources and high indebtedness of Western Balkan countries which have to rely upon mechanisms like the Western Balkan Investment Framework, combining national budgetary resources, EU's, IFIs' and other donors' grants and loans as the main support to the Connectivity Agenda for the Western Balkans.

At the Western Balkan Conference in Berlin, 2014, in the Final Declaration by the Chair, connectivity was presented as the "backbone" of the process. It was stated that the European energy policy was of increasing importance to the countries of the Western Balkans and that "regional cooperation within the framework of the Energy Community for South East Europe is an important component, particularly as regards energy security, energy efficiency targets and climate protection".[8]

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[6] Richard Grieveson, Julia Grübler, and Mario Holzner, Western Balkans EU Accession: Is the 2025 Target Date Realistic? (The Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies, 2018), 11, https://wiiw.ac.at/p-4526.html

[7] European Commission, "A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans," 13–14

[8] "Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans," August 28, 2014, 2.

At the Vienna Summit, in 2015, the initiative was operationalised by a set of 10 regional connectivity projects (6 in transport and 4 in energy) agreed to be co-financed by 1 billion EUR from IPA II in the period 2015-2020. They include an intermodal terminal, two bridges and three railway projects, as well as four projects increasing capacity or connecting the electricity grid in the region. These projects were followed by a set of "soft measures", improving national policies in both areas in a coordinated manner. The projects endorsed at the Vienna Summit were supposed to enhance connectivity between Western Balkan countries as well as with EU networks.[9] At the Paris Summit, three new transport infrastructure projects were added and at the Trieste Summit five new transport and one energy infrastructure project completed the list.

A study by the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies assessed that such a comprehensive infrastructure investment package could lead to an additional growth push of up to one percentage point per year for the countries of the region over a period of 15 years. It is also calculated that some 200,000 new jobs could be created in the region.[10]

Trieste Summit opened a new chapter in enhancing connectivity in the Western Balkans adding increased trade, investment and qualified labour mobility (with focus on dual education and innovation/R&D) and digitalization (Digital Agenda for the region to be developed). *The Multi-annual Action Plan on a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans (MAP REA)[11]* was endorsed proposing concrete measures and policies to achieve these goals.

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[9] Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit," August 27, 2015, 4–5, https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/policy-highlights/regional cooperation/20150828_chairmans_conclusions_western_balkans_summit.pdf

[10] Grieveson, Grübler, and Holzner, Western Balkans EU Accession, 7

[11] Regional Cooperation Council, "Consolidated Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six." https://www.rcc.int/docs/383/multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six

From summit to summit, it was obvious that the Berlin Process has amplified respectable achievements of a number of existing regional organizations related to the connectivity development in the Western Balkans, pulling them together and giving them new tasks. It has also supported national administrations in the region to make more effective use of European measures for bringing them closer to the EU via the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), but through opening additional channels for getting EU technical, policy and financial support as well.[12]

The South-east Europe Transport Observatory, which main task is to streamline and foster the development related to the Indicative Extension of TEN-T Comprehensive Network to the Western Balkans, has got the leading role in providing coordinated proposals for transport infrastructure projects and soft measures to be supported by the Connectivity Agenda. Due to the high political profile of the Berlin Process, after many years, it was possible to sign and during the year 2017 ratify by all Western Balkan countries the Transport Community Treaty with the aim to provide a deeper integration of the Western Balkan region with the EU transport market towards common standards, network efficiency and quality of service offered to citizens and businesses.[13]

Also, the Berlin Process re-energized the Energy Community[14] as an international organisation which brings together the European Union and its neighbours, first of all candidates and potential candidates for EU membership, to create an integrated pan-European energy market.

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[12] Ibid. p. 1

[13] European Commission, "Fact Sheet: Establishing a Transport Community between the European Union and the Western Balkans," 2017,
https://ec.europa.eu/transport/sites/transport/files/2017-factsheet-commmunitytreaty-wb.pdf

[14] See Energy Community at
https://www.energy-community.org/aboutus/whoweare.html

From the very beginning, the Regional Cooperation Council has been involved in most of the activities related to the Connectivity Agenda and in particular in developing the Regional Economic Area (REA) which aims to "enable unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour, making the region more attractive for investment and commerce, accelerating convergence with the EU and bringing prosperity to all its citizens."[15]

Depending on the specific areas that REA covers, a couple of other regional organizations or networks are involved in its implementation. First of all is the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA 2006) Secretariat[16], facilitating trade in goods and services and investment, in order to boost socio-economic development in the region through trade development and promotion. There is also the Western Balkan Chambers Investment Forum[17], with the Secretariat inaugurated during the Trieste Summit, aiming to strengthen connections of business entities, to remove barriers to more successful doing business and to more effectively support the investment in the region including investment in infrastructure.

Although the initiative started without ambition to establish new institutions, following new rules or additional laws, or so as to engage new funds, more or less, changes in all three aspects of regional cooperation were inevitable. Under its auspices, only in the connectivity domain, the Transport Community Treaty was signed after long delay; the Secretariat of

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[15] Regional Cooperation Council, "Consolidated Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six," 1

[16] CEFTA - Central European Free Trade Agreement, "Priorities," accessed June 29, 2018, http://cefta.int/priorities/

[17] See the Chamber Investment Forum at http://www.wb6cif.eu/

the Chambers of Commerce of the Western Balkans was established; the Western Balkan Regional Electricity Market is under construction, as well as a Regional Railway Strategy; and the process of establishing the Western Balkans Research Foundation started.

From the 13 connectivity projects selected in the transport and energy sector in 2015 and 2016, construction works have started for 4 of them, for 3 projects works will start late 2018, for another 3 in 2019 and for 4 of them in 2020. For all of them financing agreements were signed. From 6 connectivity projects approved in 2017, at the Trieste Summit, 5 projects have financing agreements signed, for 3 of them construction works will start in 2019 and for another 3 in 2020.[18] If the assessment proves to be correct, next two years will be marked by intensive construction works in the region.

Operationalisation of the Multiannual Action Plan for Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans, adopted at the Trieste Summit, also brought at the regional scene a number of demanding sectoral policies, platforms and networks. All WB6 economies endorsed the Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA); endorsed the Recommendation to Launch the Negotiations on Mutual Recognition Agreement on Professional Qualifications and reached an agreement on the key principles of the joint model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications in WB; agreed about the format of regular WB6 Digital Summits (with the 1st WB6 Digital Summit held in Skopje on 18-19 April 2018) and establishment of the Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRTs) from WB6, and reached an Agreement to extend the current Regional Roaming Agreement (RRA) and introduce a

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[18] From 13 projects selected in 2015 and 2016, 4 projects are connecting regional electricity grid and 9 projects are related to the transport infrastructure. From 6 projects selected in 2017, 1 is cross-border gas interconnector and 5 others are related to the transport infrastructure. All together, 8 projects connect regional railway network and 6 are related to the road infrastructure. The table with the status of each project can be found at the following site. https://www.wbif.eu/content/stream//Sites/website/library/2015-2017-Connectivity-Projects-STATUS-08-February-2018.pdf

"Roam Like At Home" principle in WB6[19]. These were the achievements in the period from Trieste to the London Western Balkan Summit.

Regarding financing of numerous projects and initiatives developed under the Berlin Process guidance, the Western Balkan Investment Framework[20] has been the main channel for raising and coordinating necessary grants and loans using the Multi-beneficiary Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance as the Core funding. Thus, from the very beginning, the Berlin Process has had a strong backing of the European Commission although only a couple of EU member states were involved in this initiative.

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[19] Regional Cooperation Council, "RCC at the Sofia Western Balkans Summit: Regional Cooperation Council Proliferated Regional Cooperation across All Sectors," 1, accessed June 29, 2018, https://www.rcc.int/news/376/rcc-at-the-sofia-western-balkans-summit-regional-cooperation-council-proliferated-regional-cooperation-across-all-sectors.

[20] See Western Balkans Investment Framework at https://www.wbif.eu/

BILATERAL ISSUES

The Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans in Berlin 2014 revealed that bilateral issues would be one of the main topics that would be discussed in this specific international forum.[21] The standpoint for these issues that were to be discussed was the one of 'increased stability in the region'. Two main disputes were outlined in the declaration: 1) between Serbia and Kosovo, as a Western Balkan internal dispute, and Greece and Macedonia dispute between an EU member state and a candidate country from the Western Balkans. It was also announced that the participating 'countries should make use of the positive influence of regional neighbours'. This is particularly important as there are many disputes pertaining rights of national minorities in the Western Balkans.

Breakthrough of the Berlin Process was achieved during the Vienna Summit in 2015. It witnessed the signing of the Declaration on Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes by all Western Balkan 6 countries in the presence of Austria, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Slovenia, the European Commission, and the European External Action Service. In the Declaration, the governments from the region 'commit to resolve any open questions through bilateral negotiations or other means of peaceful settlement of disputes'.[22] Also they pledge to report about the progress made in this regard on every consecutive Western Balkans Summit. However, there is a transparency issue related to these reports. They are neither publically available, nor there is a mechanism for tracking their implementation.[23]

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[21] Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans.

[22] Vienna Western Balkans Summit, "Annex 3: Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes," 2015, http://wb-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Regional-Cooperation-and-the-Solution-of-Bilateral-Disputes.pdf

[23] Ana Marjanović Rudan, ed., CSF Policy Brief No. 03: Legacy Issues in the Western Balkans (Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkan Summit Series, 2018), http://wb-csf.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/CSF-PB-03-Legacy-Issues-in-the-Western-Balkans.pdf

The summit was also used for signing of two border agreements: 1) between Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, and 2) between Montenegro and Kosovo. The former came in effect in April 2016 after it was ratified by both parliaments, whereas both parties ratified the latter in 2018 when Kosovo President Thaci and Montenegrin President Vujanović, signed an Annex to the Vienna border demarcation agreement. The Paris summit in 2016 and Trieste 2017 did not witness positive results in relations to resolution of bilateral issues, despite the formal confirmation of readiness for solving these disputes.[24] Insofar, 2018 has been marked by two additional significant accomplishments in the realm of bilateral issues and both were achieved by Macedonia. The country managed to resolve and upgrade its relations with Bulgaria by signing the Agreement for friendship, good neighbourly relations and cooperation. By exchanging the ratification documents, the Agreement entered into force in February 2018.[25] The second one is the agreement between Greece and Macedonia, ending the three decades long dispute with Greece over the name issue.[26] The Macedonian parliament already ratified the deal. It is expected that the process will continue in good will regarding its implementation, thus unblocking Macedonian prospects for commencing EU accession negotiations and procedures for the NATO membership.

The resolved bilateral issues would not only have an effect on the present relations between the countries, but would also have a positive impact on their future relations in general.

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[24] Nechev et al., "The Berlin Process. What Worked and What Did Not Work? And Why?"

[25] European Western Balkans, "The Agreement between Macedonia and Bulgaria Enters into Force," European Western Balkans (blog), February 14, 2018, https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/02/14/agreement-macedonia-bulgaria-enters-force/

[26] Helena Smith, "Macedonia Agrees to New Name after 27-Year Dispute with Greece," The Guardian, June 12, 2018, sec. World news, http://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jun/12/macedonia-agrees-to-new-name-after-27-year-dispute-with-greece

This could support peace and stability in and outside the region. This is perceived as one of the greatest achievements of the Berlin Process, as it managed to create a momentum for the countries to start resolving outstanding bilateral issues. The intergovernmental format that included countries such as Germany, France, Austria, Italy and others provided the necessary political backing for Western Balkan leaders to engage in such endeavors. By resolving these issues, the Process actually produced a side effect of creating a positive pressure on other governments and leaders in the region to resolve their disputes and to showcase that they also can contribute to the greater cause i.e. more peaceful, stable and prosperous region.

CULTIVATING COOPERATION THROUGH INTENSIFIED CONTACTS

At the preparatory meeting for the Trieste Summit of the six Western Balkan prime ministers in Sarajevo, in March 2017, EU commissioner for enlargement, Johannes Hahn, praised the fact that they were meeting for the first time in one of the Western Balkan states and added that this was "exactly the symbol we need at this moment."[27] A mere fact political leaders were meeting regularly was considered a success.

There is a common understanding that it was the Berlin Process that contributed to the emergence of the cordial relationship between the Serbian and Albanian prime ministers, Aleksandar Vucic and Edi Rama. Arguably, the meeting when the Process was initiated in Berlin, held in August 2014, has paved the way to a historic visit by an Albanian prime minister to Belgrade in November 2014, first after 68 years.[28] Their common understanding was also instrumental for swift agreement on establishment of the RYCO.[29]

The Berlin Process, next to meetings of prime ministers and foreign ministers, also included meetings of economy and transport ministers. In particular, ministries of infrastructure, at the political and technical level, as well as economy ministers, discussed concrete policy issues, cooperated, coordinated and to a certain extent competed (for their projects to be

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[27] European Commission, "Speech by Johannes Hahn at the Western Balkans Six Leaders' Summit," March 16, 2017, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/commissioners/2014-2019/hahn/announcements/speech-johannes-hahn-western-balkans-six-leaders-summit_en

[28] Poznatov, "'Historic' Albanian Visit to Serbia Leaves Bitter Aftertaste.

[29] Nikolić, "Serbia, Albania Back Balkan Youth Cooperation Plan.

selected at least) and moved things forward. The UK chairmanship announced earlier this year that it would convene ministers of interior/security of Western Balkan countries under the auspices of the Summit for the very first time.[30]

It also involved meetings and exchange between EU and Western Balkan politicians, where they have arguably seen each other "in action", but also to build personal links and understanding. It was the personal link between the German chancellor Angela Merkel and BiH's authorities, built also during the Berlin Process that allowed for targeted but crucial German support for BiH to fulfill one of the conditions on the EU path in 2016.[31]

Intensifying personal contacts among high officials from the Western Balkans and with the high officials from several EU Member States and EU institutions in an endeavor to increase political will for cooperation, regional solidarity and good neighbourly relations is an unquestionable achievement of the Berlin Process which is not praised enough.

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[30] Jelka Klemenc and Ivana Boštjančič Pulko, "The Berlin Process as an Actor in Internal Security and Counter-Terrorism: Opportunities and Pitfalls," Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje, July 2018

[31] "Bosnia Signs Protocol Adapting EU SAA," ArmedPolitics, July 19, 2016, https://www.armedpolitics.com/3193/bosnia-signs-protocol-adaptation-eu-stabilization-association-agreement/

BERLIN PROCESS AND THE 2018 EU CREDIBLE ENLARGEMENT PERSPECTIVE

The February 2018 Commission's Strategy set out a perspective for accession of these countries. This perspective is perceived by the European Commission as a 'key driver of transformation in the region'.[32] In order to support this, the Commission will support six Flagship Initiatives targeting transport and energy connectivity, digital agenda, socio-economic development, rule of law, security and migration as well as reconciliation and good neighbourly relations.[33] From the content of the Strategy it is obvious that much of the decisions reached and actions taken within the framework of the Berlin Process contributed to the preparation of this document.

Increased connectivity is recognized as crucial for greater economic integration within the region and with the EU. Therefore, it is expected from the Western Balkan candidates to comply with the Energy Community Treaty, Transport Community Treaty and European Aviation Area rules and standards "well before accession". It is expected that the CEFTA and other regional agreements will be kept fully operational including the REA commitment.

Regarding enhanced connectivity, it is considered as a strategic interest for both sides, as the region is surrounded geographically by EU Member States. Besides increased funding of

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[32] European Commission, "A Credible Enlargement Perspective for and Enhanced EU Engagement with the Western Balkans."

[33] European Western Balkans, "Six Flagship Initiatives for the Western Balkans," European Western Balkans, February 7, 2018,
https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2018/02/07/six-flagship-initiatives-western-balkans/

energy, transport and digital networks, through WBIF and IPA, the Commission expresses willingness to use provisions of the Connecting Europe Facility for Western Balkan countries. It is also suggested that all of the dimensions of the EU's Energy Union should be expanded to the Western Balkans. To support that intention, completing of the Regional Electricity Market in the Western Balkans will be followed by its integration into the EU Internal Electricity Market.

In the area of transport, agreements between two sides on priority transport corridors as part of the trans-European transport network were already concluded. Western Balkan countries are expected to remove administrative bottlenecks and barriers at borders, to adopt a new regional rail strategy and road safety strategy.

The Commission announced that together with the partners from the region it would launch the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans that will include a roadmap for lowering the cost of roaming. The growing interest of the EU to include the region in the development of digital society includes support to the deployment of broadband within the Western Balkans, development of digital skills, digitalization of industry, government services, procurement and health services.

It is also foreseen to increase funding in the fields of transport, energy, social sector, environment and private sector development including digital economy, with the enhanced role of the Western Balkan Investment Framework. The more effective participation of the Western Balkans in the EU's Framework Programmes open to them will be also facilitated,

in particular regarding knowledge networks including research and innovation. Funding under the Erasmus+ programme will be doubled to support cooperation in this area.

Economy and the single market, energy, transport and digital policy, as well as education, and research and innovation are listed among the key areas where the EU will enhance its policy engagement. This implies increased participation of Western Balkan leaders at informal Councils, as well as ministerial level contacts, participation in technical committees and Commission working groups and increased technical assistance in these areas.[34]

When it comes to the resolution of bilateral issues, the message in the Strategy is that the EU does not intend 'to accept to import these disputes' and that 'definitive and binding solutions must be found and implemented before a country accedes'. Significant convergence with the priorities of the Berlin Process can be observed in this regard. Since its launch in Berlin, one of the key issues that the process is focused on is bilateral disputes. Regional cooperation has been detected as an essential basis 'to resolve outstanding bilateral questions as quickly as possible in the interests of good neighbourly relations and increased stability in the region.'

[34] Ibid p.9

CONCLUSION

The Berlin Process has substantively contributed towards enhanced engagement of European institutions and certain EU member states in the Western Balkans. Particular credit for the 2018 EU Credible enlargement perspective to the Western Balkans can be given to this international forum. However, in light of this new situation and increased engagement of the EU, the main question remains: how to maintain the relevance of the Berlin Process and how it can be advanced in order to add value to the enlargement process in general? That is, while keeping its original approach and avoiding duplication with the initiatives coming from the credible enlargement perspective, how to keep the European Commission enthusiastic to even more substantial engagement.

The intergovernmental setting is particularly suitable to produce tangible results in a number of policy areas originally covered by the Berlin Process. Among others, it has been proven that connectivity and bilateral disputes could be one. In addition, close cooperation of Western Balkan political elites under the watchful eye of their European counterparts is by itself crucial for progress in each of these areas.

The connectivity package in the Strategy is encouraging but also very demanding. It is a real challenge for national administrations in the region and other actors like public enterprises in related sectors, chambers of commerce, specialized agencies and banking

institutions, educational and R&D institutions and others that are supposed to bear a part of responsibility in increasing connectivity in the region. The political encouragement and political guidance practiced through the Berlin Process is beneficial and leads towards streamlining the efforts of all the actors involved. Connectivity is easier to communicate and make visible than some other Berlin Process achievements or enlargement issues.

Since the Berlin Process started in 2014, there has been a proven track record of successes in resolving bilateral disputes in the region, among Western Balkan countries but also between Western Balkan countries and EU member states. Kosovo-Montenegro border issue and Macedonia-Greece name issue are the last examples of this. This atmosphere of resolving disputes that started to be felt in the Balkans already produced positive pressure on those that oppose this.

The proposal made by Chancellor Merkel for Poland to host the next summit in 2019 and the invitation for Greece to take part in London reflected the direction of thinking in Berlin. The German government is not sticking only to the countries already participating in the Berlin Process. It opens the process to other interested parties. It might be an opportunity for countries in Southeast Europe to be included in the process and host future Berlin Process annual summits, increasing the number of participants, areas and forms of experimenting in this kind of 'accession laboratory'.

ANNEX 1

2015 and 2016 Connectivity Agenda Projects

1.	Albania – Macedonia Power Interconnection (I): Grid Section in Albania (Fier - Elbasan - border between the two states)
2.	Albania – Macedonia Power Interconnection (II): Grid Section in Macedonia (Bitola - Ohrid - border between the two states)
3.	Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor (I): Grid Section in Montenegro (Lasta - Pljevlja - border with Serbia)
4.	Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor (II): Grid Section in Serbia (Kragujevac –Kraljevo)
5.	Mediterranean Corridor: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia CVc Road Interconnection (Svilaj – Odžak, and Svilaj Bridge)
6.	Core Network: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia R2a Road Interconnection (Banja Luka – Gradiška, and Gradiška Bridge)
7.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Macedonia – Kosovo* R10 Rail Interconnection (Fushë Kosovë / Kosovo Polje – border between the two states)
8.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Montenegro – Serbia R4 Rail Interconnection (Bar – Vrbnica section in Montenegro)
9.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia – Macedonia CX Rail Interconnection (Niš - Brestovac section in Serbia)
10.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia – Bulgaria CXc Rail Interconnection (Sićevo – Dimitrovgrad section in Serbia)
11.	Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro- Albania – Greece Rail Interconnection (Tirana - Durrës section in Albania)
12.	Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro- Albania – Greece Rail Interconnection (Tirana - Durrës section in Albania)
13.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Macedonia – Kosovo – Serbia R10 Rail Interconnection (Fushë Kosovë/ Kosovo Polje - Mitrovicë/Mitrovica section in Kosovo)

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[35] Western Balkans Investment Framework *"2015 and 2016 Connectivity Agenda Projects"*, 2018.
https://www.wbif.eu/content/stream//Sites/website/library/2015-2017-Connectivity-Projects-STATUS-08-February-2018.pdf

2017 Connectivity Agenda Projects

1.	Project of Energy Community Interest: Serbia (Niš) - Bulgaria Gas Interconnector
2.	Mediterranean Corridor: Bosnia and Herzegovina - Croatia CVc Road Interconnection I (Ponirak - Vraca / Zenica Tunnel Segment)
3.	Mediterranean Corridor: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia CVc Road Interconnection II (Zenica Tunnel - Donja Gračanica Segment)
4.	Mediterranean Corridor: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia CVc Road Interconnection III (Johovac Interchange – Rudanka Interchange)
5.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – Bulgaria CVIII Rail Interconnection (Beljakovce -Kriva Palanka)
6.	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia – Bulgaria CXc Rail Interconnection (Niš - Dimitrovgrad - Border with Bulgaria)

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https://www.armedpolitics.com/3193/bosnia-signs-protocol-adaptation-eu-stabilization-association-agreement/

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http://cefta.int/priorities/;

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INFORMATION ABOUT SEE THINK NET

The SEE Think Net Network was established in mid-march 2018 with the generous support of the European Fund for the Balkans as the first regional network composed of civil society organisations that aim to monitor the topics related to the Berlin Process. The Network encompasses think tanks, civil society organisations and individuals from the 6 Western Balkan countries plus Croatia and Slovenia. Besides the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" (IDSCS) which will coordinate the Network, the SEE Think Net Network includes the Network of the European Movement in Serbia (NEMinS), Open Society Foundation for Albania and its affiliate, the EU Policy Hub, Adnan Ćerimagić, Politikon Network from Montenegro, Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO) from Croatia and the Centre for European Perspective (CEP) from Slovenia. The goal of the SEE Think Net Network is to produce significant policy inputs and provide policy recommendations on topics that derive from the Berlin Process. As such, its activities are devised in order to closely monitor the Berlin process and the policy areas the process encompasses.

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE EUROPEAN FUND FOR THE BALKANS

The European Fund for the Balkans is designed to create and support initiatives aimed at strengthening democracy and fostering European integration by enabling inclusive policy making, supporting capacity development and creating a platform for exchange and co-operation in the Western Balkans. The Fund was launched in 2007 by four European private foundations (King Baudouin Foundation, Erste Foundation, Robert Bosch Stiftung andf the Compagnia di san Paolo), within the framework of the Network of European Foundations.

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