

CONCLUSIONS

OF THE WESTERN BALKANS DIGITAL SUMMIT 2021, PODGORICA

Western Balkan Six (WB6) have progressed on the digitalisation front despite the challenges and difficulties induced by Covid-19, which have given rise to the additional need for rapid adjustment and use of all benefits of digital transformation, both in business and private life.

With the Common Regional Market (CRM) 2021-2024 Action Plan, endorsed on 10 November 2020, WB6 have committed to work jointly towards further integration of the region into the Pan-European digital zone, hence putting forward ambitious goals for enhancing the regional digital transformation towards a digitally-driven economy based on EU standards and practices.

The WB6 recognise the necessity to align with the EU Digital Compass 2030 vision and ambitions so as to contribute to increasing the convergence with the EU Digital Single Market. Moreover, WB6 acknowledge the importance of EU support through IPA III, guided by the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), and implemented, amongst others, through the Western Balkans Investment Fund (WBIF), in assisting the implementation of digital investment projects.

Successful implementation of Roam-Like-At-Home regime as of 1st July 2021 brought significant benefits to Western Balkan citizens and reconfirmed readiness to embark on regional initiatives of mutual interest.

Gathered in Podgorica for the Digital Summit, we have agreed on the following:

- **Welcoming the 4th edition of the Western Balkans Digital Summit**, as a flagship event on digital transformation in the region, which for years represents the successful regional cooperation not only in the digital field but in several other aspects, agendas and levels of cooperation, we commit to greater contribution and cooperation in the organisation of the following Digital Summit;
- Acknowledging the intense work undertaken towards the **Roadmap** for Lowering Roaming Charges between the EU and Western Balkans, **we endorse** the overall vision of the Roadmap **to lower the roaming prices with EU close to domestic prices in 2027**, contributing to a decrease of roaming charges **by more than 90%** in the currently most expensive WB mobile networks;
- Understanding the necessity for continuous improvement of business environment for mobile operators across the region **we commit to undertake ambitious reforms** to unlock opportunities for new investment and opening up new opportunities for economic growth and connectivity;
- Recalling on the principle of shared responsibility among all stakeholders involved in the implementation of the Roadmap, including WB government and Regulators, we commit to establish **an open, transparent and inclusive process of consultation** with mobile operators in the Western Balkans and EU, including through structured Regulatory Dialogue; We call on the mobile operators **to take part in a constructive and timely**

manner in the Regulatory Dialogue to enable swift enforcement of the Roadmap's objective;

- Recognising the support of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) and European Commission (EC) in facilitating the process of preparation of the Roadmap, **we call upon the RCC to facilitate and coordinate the implementation of regional actions, and call for support and advice from the European Commission;**
- Recognising the importance of the EU Digital COVID Certificates, we welcome the possibility of linking as many WB partners as possible to the **digital COVID certificate and continuing work with the others**, with the aim to facilitate the movement of citizens between the WB and the EU;
- Acknowledging the benefits of joint work in the area of 5G networks, we commit to expedite the work on the implementation of the **Memorandum of Understanding on 5G Roadmap for Digital Transformation** signed on 2nd November 2020 in Tirana, with the aim to have a regional coordinated approach to secure 5G networks and timely harmonised measures to deploy 5G services;
- Recognising the recently adopted **Common Union Toolbox for Connectivity**, we reiterate the importance to embark on regional initiatives and align with the EU best practices on the matter;
- Welcoming the opportunities of the new EU funding programme - **Digital Europe programme**, we strive to be part of it and we call upon the EU to support the inclusion of the Western Balkan economies with the aim to accelerate the recovery and drive the digital transformation of the Western Balkans;
- Recalling on the actions outlined in the **Memorandum of Understanding on Regional Interoperability and Trust Services in Western Balkan Region** signed on 2nd November 2020, we welcome the endorsement of the **Joint Statement on the Interoperable Western Balkans**, which will, among others, contribute to the recognition of eIDs and Trust Services in the region, as well as to the launch of a pilot project on cross-border/boundary services;
- Noting the progress made by all Western Balkan economies in **digital upskilling and reskilling** for different target groups and reiterating the importance of **digital skills** to deepening digital integration of the region, we welcome the launching of the fully-fledged assessment of digital skills gaps and needs in public administration at both central and local level in each Western Balkan economy, and we support extending the assessment to interested groups with the aim to lower the digital skills gaps, particularly of vulnerable groups, such as Roma;
- We commit to work towards the establishment of the **Western Balkans Digital Skills Jobs and Coalition** mirroring the EU practice and building on the best practices from the region to support digital upskilling and reskilling;
- Agreeing that developing digital skills from childhood is fundamental and acknowledging the success of the **21st Century Schools programme**, which has been working in all WB6 to build long-term and sustainable skills, we encourage the continuation of this programme to build self-sustainability on the matter;

- Recognising the need to establish a regional framework to foster free flow of data within the Western Balkans, we welcome the endorsement of the **Joint Statement on Free Flow of Data in the Western Balkans Region**, we commit to work on the implementation of the actions on regional and economy level aimed at achieving greater alignment with the EU, increasing competitiveness and enhancing the process of digitalisation in the Western Balkan region;
- Calling upon the RCC, the European Commission and other relevant regional and international institutions to help us mobilize necessary funding to implement the commitments taken in the framework of these Conclusions;
- Highlighting the importance to have a regional evidence-based regulatory framework on better-quality statistics in the Western Balkans established in line with the European Union norms and practices, and with the aim to ensure agile and evidence-based progress of digital transformation in the region, we commit to **establish a sustainable monitoring framework** and assess regularly **Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)** indicators for Western Balkans based on EU DESI methodology;
- Restating the importance of **Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs)** and their impact on business processes and further development of digital transformation in the Western Balkan region, we commit to support and undertake regional activities to foster the development of DIHs, as well as enhance regional cooperation through developing tailor-made services and implementation of potential actions that could assist DIHs developments in the coming years;
- We commit to enhance the cooperation on **cybersecurity** within the region, cooperate intensively with **the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA)**, while improving regional protection in the field of cybersecurity, and we call upon the EC to support the region to become more compatible on the matter;
- Welcoming successfully organised regional competition event – **Balkathon 2.0**, which represents a great opportunity for innovative young people from the WB region for developing new and practical digital solutions with the aim to contribute to further growth of digital transformation, we commit to support this and similar activities;
- Acknowledging the importance of strengthening cooperation with all partners within the Western Balkans and the necessity to improve communication for better implementation of the CRM activities, we commit to enhance the cooperation and coordination through the implementation of regional actions, including cooperation with the EU and other partners.

Podgorica, 13 October 2021