

Conclusions from the Fourth Meeting on Donor Coordination in the Western Balkans

Brussels, 13 March 2018

The Fourth Meeting on Donor Coordination in the Western Balkans was held in Brussels on 13 March 2018. The objective of the Meeting was to map and coordinate donor activities in the Western Balkans so as to help achieve a better alignment of governments' regional development priorities and donors' sectoral interventions. The meeting called for synergies in donor coordination process for implementation of SEE 2020 Strategy and Regional Economic Area in the WB region.

The meeting gathered all major donors, financial institutions, implementing organisations and agencies active in the Western Balkans as well as representatives of international organisations and SEE 2020 and MAP REA beneficiary governments. RCC was represented by the Secretary General and the team engaged in the implementation of SEE 2020 Strategy and MAP REA.

The meeting was opened with the introductory remarks from the RCC's Secretary General Goran Svilanovic who stressed that this, fourth donors' gathering, aims at raising the donors coordination in the region to a higher level of communication. He pointed out that the Western Balkans' economies are fully committed to implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy and the complementary MAP REA, involving substantial reforms, adjustments and harmonization. Consequently, the required funding should follow the same lines. Therefore, the meeting aims at providing an excellent opportunity for the beneficiaries and donors to exchange information on the actual needs, gaps and opportunities, leading to successful completion of the undertaken tasks. Equally important, the meeting was stressed as an opportunity for donors to synergize and coordinate their efforts, where good starting point is provided by RCC by RCC-coordinated need assessment for MAP REA implementation in the region in the areas of investment, mobility and digital integration and CEFTA-coordinated assessment in the area of trade.

The meeting was organised in three panels i.e.: High level panel: Key policy reforms for development of a Regional Economic Area, Panel on need assessments for development of a Regional Economic Area and Panel on SEE 2020 priorities.

The first panel focused on the presentation of the key policy reforms for the Regional Economic Area and finding the ways to bring together the perspectives from the region and the donors. The panel served to emphasize the main challenges in the policy design to comply with MAP REA objectives. The second panel provided a snapshot of the needs assessment on REA from the WB6 perspective, elaborated by the six MAP National Coordinators. The MAP NCs provided their views on the most urgent needs to implement the MAP REA actions from each economy's perspective, outlining gaps in policy, technical assistance, administrative capacity, as well as investment needs. CEFTA and RCC Secretariats provided additional insights and a regionally systematized overview of policy gaps and needs. Finely, the third session informed on the main programming priorities defined in the Programming Document (PD) for 2018 in relation to SEE2020 implementation. SEE2020 Coordinators and NIPAC Office representatives presented the national priorities for implementing the SEE2020 targets, complemented by regional perspectives from key SEE2020 Regional Dimension Coordinators.

Representatives of the donor community outlined their views and results from the past support granted within the SEE2020 policy dimensions, as well as the future priorities, programmes and instruments and prospective plans for continued support for the Strategy and the MA REA activities.

In the continuation of the meeting the participants were thoroughly informed on the needs and gaps, in policy design and reforms, technical assistance, capacity building and investment needs related to the MAP REA implementation in each economy, and additionally at regional level. The meeting attempted to ensure the alignment of any future donor financial support with the SEE2020 and MAP REA objectives, matching the available funding with adequate opportunities, avoiding duplication, ensure timely planning and complementing financing from national levels. Also, the discussion pointed out to the areas in which technical assistance is much needed, both at national and regional levels.

Conclusions and Follow-up:

1. The participants of the Fourth Meeting on Donor Coordination in the Western Balkans welcome the annual structured regional donor coordination, facilitated by the Regional Cooperation Council;
2. The participants of the Meeting welcomed and acknowledged the RCC efforts in systematizing regional priorities and needs in areas of relevance of the SEE2020 Strategy and the Multi-annual Action plan for Regional Economic Area;
3. The European Commission representatives put the focus on the realistic perspective of the Western Balkans as per the newly published Enlargement Strategy with regional cooperation at the heart of it, as well as the EC's continued support to regional cooperation, including financially, and to the implementation of the MAP for establishing the WB6 REA;
4. Participants acknowledged that Programming Document entails regionally-owned programming priorities based on the real needs, providing consensual prioritization by all participating economies validated through regional intergovernmental platforms and as such merits the attention of donors in deciding on the support to be provided for the region;
5. The meeting recognised the ambitious agenda of the MAP REA, hence synergies and resource pulling are necessary for its successful implementation. The stocktaking and need assessment report jointly prepared by the RCC and CEFTA Secretariats provides the systematized regional needs and interventions toward the establishment of Regional Economic Area, validated through the national consultations in all WB6.
6. The meeting informed the participants on the deliverables for the High Level up-coming EU-Western Balkan Summit, to be held in Sofia in May this year;
7. The meeting also took note of the preparatory work for the Berlin Process Prime Ministers Western Balkan Summit to be held in London in July this year;
8. The participants benefited from the active engagement in discussions of the representatives of donors, IFIs, implementing organisations and agencies. Through their interventions they presented their views on the potential support for the WB6 economies under their current strategic programs, aiming to achieve greater alignment of the future programming financial assistance.