

CONCLUSIONS

OF THE WESTERN BALKANS DIGITAL SUMMIT 2023, SARAJEVO

Western Balkans (WB) aims to come closer to the EU Digital Single Market by accelerating digital transformation and implementing the commitments from the Common Regional Market (CRM), including the Conclusions of previous Western Balkans Digital Summits.

We share the vision and ambition of a successful and functional region that moves forward following the reforms aiming to create a digitally driven economy on our European path.

By following European Union (EU) developments and targets for 2030 and working together, we can create a thriving economy and ensure that our region remains competitive and prosperous. We must also strive to create a region that is equitable and inclusive, a region where none is left behind and everyone can benefit from the digital revolution.

We are committed to creating an environment that encourages innovation and collaboration, and to fostering the digital skills of the region's population. We must ensure that our citizens possess digital skills and literacy, which is the main focus of this year's Digital Summit.

We acknowledge the importance of EU support with the new investment package through IPA III, guided by the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), implemented, amongst others, through the Western Balkans Investment Fund (WBIF), aiming to close the economic development divide and enhance regional cooperation and integration.

With the new Growth Plan, which aims to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU Single Market, and seek to deepen regional economic integration through the establishment of a common regional market, as well as to accelerate fundamental reforms in the Western Balkans, we stay committed and dedicated to its implementation.

During the 6th edition of the Western Balkans Digital Summit in Sarajevo, we reaffirm our commitment to strengthening regional efforts in digitalization at all levels and creating a safe and transparent digital environment. Finally, we stress the importance of investing in digital infrastructure, new technologies, skills, early education in cyber security, and education in general to ensure the region's digital future.

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

- **Welcoming the 6th edition of the Western Balkan Digital Summit (WBDS)**, which marks the closing of the first round of the Western Balkan Digital Summit, a regional flagship event on digital transformation in the region; For the sixth year in a row WBDS represents regional cooperation not only in the digital field but also in other aspects, and we commit to a greater role of contribution and cooperation in a new cycle of the Western Balkan Digital Summit;
- Acknowledging the intense work undertaken to reduce the **roaming charges between the European Union and Western Balkans**, we welcome the substantial reduction of data

roaming charges from 1 October 2023 in line with the EU/WB Roaming Declaration¹ (hereinafter: the Declaration), for the benefits of our citizens and businesses but not only;

- Welcoming the successful start of data roaming charges reduction between the EU and WB, we commit to further cooperate with all the stakeholders, and call upon other WB and EU telecommunications operators to join the Declaration;
- Recognizing the need of substantial and timely improvement of the business environment in the telecommunications sector in the WB region, we acknowledge the progress made in the implementation of selected policy reforms from the **Roadmap for Lowering Roaming Charges between the EU and WB** (hereinafter: Roadmap) and commit to expedite implementation of other policy reforms from the Roadmap;
- Welcoming the launching of the **Advisory and Coordination Group**, we commit to engaging in discussions with telecommunications operators concerning various regulatory matters pertaining to connectivity, including but not limited to the policy reforms from the Roadmap;
- Recognizing the importance of providing **fixed broadband and 5G connectivity** to the vast majority of households, and taking into account that in line with WB DESI 2022 fast broadband (NGA) coverage in the region was 72.5% compared to the 90.1% in the EU², as well as that the commercial 5G signal is available in only two WB economies, we commit to further accelerate the deployment of broadband networks by simplifying administrative procedures and enhancing the use of EU funding instruments;
- Welcoming the signing of association agreements for the **Digital Europe Programme** with Western Balkans economies, we commit to interact with the European Commission to reap the benefits of the Digital Europe Programme with the aim of accelerating the recovery and driving the digital transformation of the Western Balkans;
- Acknowledging the need to join the Digital Single Market, especially in areas such as e-commerce and cybersecurity, we welcome the new **Growth Plan** for the Western Balkans, which will be built upon the progress achieved and will bring benefits of EU membership to the citizens 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, as well as intensive consultations and undertaken activities afterwards, we commit to work on full implementation of the identified cross-border/boundary use-case(s) pilot project(s);
- Recognising the need to develop **digital identity** in the Western Balkan, we call upon the European Commission to support the region in this regard and facilitate the process of defining and implementing the actions needed for its development;

¹ <https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/eu-wb-roaming-declaration.pdf>

² <https://www.rcc.int/download/docs/WB%20Desi%20Report%202022%2025%2005%202023%20final%20HR.pdf/43a521a624cf08523a2268a67a7be2ff.pdf>

- Reiterating the importance of **digital skills in the process of digital transformation**, we commit to fully support concrete activities also in cooperation with other regional and international organisations, including the discussion on creating an online learning platform related to digital skills, in order to enhance digital upskilling and reskilling in the Western Balkan region, bearing in mind that in line with WD DESI 2022, only 35.3% of WB citizens possessed basic digital skills, compared to the 53.9% citizens in the EU;
- Recognising the need to foster the **free flow of data** within the Western Balkans, both personal and non-personal, we commit to work on the implementation of the actions on regional and economy level in order to achieve greater alignment with the EU, and integrate all economies of the Western Balkans in the work of respective EU bodies for data protection, European Data Protection Board (EDPB) Secretariat;
- Acknowledging the efforts of Western Balkans to join **European High-Performance Computing Joint Undertakings** (EuroHPC), we call upon the EU to support this process through a Growth Plan;
- Restating the importance of **Artificial Intelligence** (AI), we commit to establish regional Working Group, which will support in identifying necessary regional actions as well as ensuring synergies with the EU;
- Welcoming the establishment of evidence-based monitoring instrument **Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI)** indicators for Western Balkans based on EU standards and methodology, we commit to continue consultation with EC to include all Western Balkans in the International DESI Report;
- Acknowledging the importance of cybersecurity, we commit to enhance the cooperation on cybersecurity within the region, including cybersecurity capabilities, resilience and regional awareness. We call upon EU to enable the integration of the Western Balkans in the work of the **European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA)**;
- Following the Chair's Conclusions of the Ministerial meeting of the Interior of Berlin process, and recognising the need to establish a regional joint alert system for cyber threats for all critical infrastructure institutions, we commit to support the implementation of the concrete activities in this matter;
- Welcoming the successfully organised regional competition event – **Balkathon 4.0**, RCC's trademark digital competition, 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 regional cooperation with all partners within the Western Balkans and the need to work on implementation of the Common Regional Market activities, we commit to enhance the cooperation and coordination through the implementation of regional actions, including through cooperation with the EU and other partners.

Sarajevo, 4 October 2023