



Western
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Summit
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JOINT STATEMENT

LESSONS LEARNED FROM COVID-19: THE WAY FORWARD

6TH JOINT SCIENCE CONFERENCE
WESTERN BALKANS PROCESS / BERLIN PROCESS
VIRTUAL · 1 – 2 JULY 2021

The 6th **Berlin Process Joint Science Conference** discussed lessons learned so far from COVID-19, options to control the SARS-CoV-2 virus as well as priorities for post-pandemic recovery. Scientists and stakeholders recommend the following:

10 POINT PLAN TO CONTROL COVID-19 IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

A new resurgence of infections is to be expected at any time. The Western Balkans went through a particularly dramatic pandemic course, with inter alia high excess mortality, low vaccination rates and weak public healthcare systems. Consequently, the next waves

are likely to hit the region even harder than so far. Not only is there an intense circulation of people and goods between the EU27 and the Western Balkans, but also a circulation of the virus. Therefore, the European continent must be treated as a single epidemiological area.

Short-term (next three months): Control the virus by thinking globally and acting locally.

1. Vaccination: Increase promptly and altruistically the transfer of vaccines to the Western Balkans and thus raise the vaccination rate there;
2. Travel: Regulate travel within Europe under unitary minimal conditions: full vaccination, RT-PCR or Rapid Antigen Tests, forgery-proof EU Digital COVID Certificate used also in the EU Neighbourhood countries;
3. Information: Inform citizens more intensely and repeatedly with evidence and consistent scientific messages;
4. Stay alert: Maintain epidemiological surveillance and prevention measures, at least: protection masks, physical distancing, hygiene, fresh air and sunlight;

Mid-term (next ten months): Help the Western Balkans build resilience.

5. Do not leave the field of humanitarian aid for the Western Balkans open to third countries;
6. Install capacities for diagnostics (testing) and surveillance (tracing and isolating), especially at airports and border crossings; avoid public gatherings and similar events with more than 50 people;
7. Introduce rigorous phased containment procedures, such as “traffic light” systems;

Long-term (next 24 months): Help the Western Balkans secure pandemic preparedness.

8. Invest in the public healthcare system and qualified personnel, including from EU funds;
9. Strengthen and reorganise national civil protection systems to increase their immediate reactive capacity;
10. Invest in pandemic preparedness through an evidence-based, strong public health system.

POST-PANDEMIC PRIORITIES IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Every crisis is an opportunity. The COVID-19 crisis has triggered a momentum to build back better, **focusing on following priorities:**

1. A decent healthcare system;
2. A climate neutral economy and society, particularly with significantly reduced air pollution;
3. A digitalised education, public administration, health system and economy;
4. A cohesive society with less inequalities, care for vulnerable groups, meritocracy and resilient democracy.

Both the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans and the IPA III should be used primarily for these priorities. Similar to EU Member States, Western Balkans governments should develop national recovery and resilience plans as well.

In recovery, the education, research and innovation sector must have a firm place: investments in this area are investments in the future. Matching supply and demand of skills is also essential.

Participants reinforce the commitment to the **Western Balkans Research Fund** and ask the European Commission and the European Council to fund it as a **new instrument in the Widening Component of Horizon Europe**. This fund is an essential instrument to reduce the brain drain from the Western Balkans and enhance research and innovation excellence in the region. Participants commend the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport and expect its timely signing after the 8th Western Balkans Summit of Heads of State and Government of 5 July 2021 in Berlin.

GLOSSARY

EU = European Union

IPA = Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

Western Balkans Process / Berlin Process [Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom as well as the European Commission (*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 resolution and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.)]

The term "science" (and related expressions) refers to the entire spectrum of scientific branches: natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, formal sciences, life sciences, applied sciences etc.

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This statement reflects the position of the participating parties / participants listed above and not necessarily that of the experts invited ad personam or of their organisations of affiliation.

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JOINT STATEMENT OF THE 6TH JOINT SCIENCE CONFERENCE OF THE BERLIN PROCESS / WESTERN BALKANS PROCESS

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