

Strategic Dialogue on the Western Balkans – Leaders Meeting

Statement from the Chair

Geneva, 7-8 November 2019

Context

The World Economic Forum initiated the Strategic Dialogue on the Western Balkans at its Annual Meeting in 2018. This ongoing, structured dialogue serves as a trusted and impartial platform for leaders from the region and relevant partners to discuss the future of the Western Balkans, foster regional cooperation and advance economic development, and prepare for a future that will be shaped by the developments of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The active participation of leaders in the 2018 meeting demonstrated their willingness to cooperate at a regional level and their commitment to tangible outcomes created positive momentum to continue. The Forum has since held three additional Strategic Dialogues:

- The Sofia meeting on 17 May 2018, during Bulgaria’s presidency of the Council of the European Union;
- The Leaders Meeting in Geneva on 1-2 October 2018;
- A session at the Annual Meeting 2019, with the participation of leaders from business, international institutions and civil society.

At the Leaders Meeting in Geneva in October 2018, participants jointly agreed to the Geneva Communiqué, which pledges that the partners in the region will aim to strengthen the ongoing dialogue and deepen the cooperation of the Western Balkan states, especially with respect to inclusive growth, skills and talent development, trade, infrastructure, advancing the leadership in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, fostering public-private cooperation and empowering the next generation.

Objectives

The objectives of this year’s high-level meeting are to provide a trusted platform for leaders from South-East Europe and important partners to discuss the key challenges and opportunities to stabilize the region and to strengthen growth, competitiveness and digital preparedness in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The meeting is convening regional leaders and relevant partners with the aim of identifying areas for further cooperation and agreeing on the next steps for the benefit of the region. The Forum will also explore how the leaders can develop a joint message at the World Economic Forum’s 50th Annual Meeting in January 2020 in Davos, serving as the international platform for public-private cooperation in South-East Europe.

Outcomes

The Chair of the meeting announces the following outcomes of this year’s meeting:

- Strengthening the ongoing dialogue and deepening the cooperation of Western Balkan economies, especially with respect to inclusive growth, skills and talent development, trade, advancing leadership in the Fourth Industrial Revolution, fostering public-private cooperation and empowering the next generation;

- Contributing to a narrative for the region that provides a positive and forward-looking vision for citizens – especially youth in the region;
- Supporting the leaders to find innovative solutions and explore new areas for collaboration;
- Further assessing the possibilities for creating an internal market (the so-called “mini-Schengen” area in the Western Balkans).

Concrete commitments include:

- **Regional Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution:** The Western Balkans will launch a regional Centre for the Fourth Industrial Revolution that will be open to neighbouring countries. The centre will work on the agile governance of emerging technologies for data policy, artificial intelligence and internet of things, robotics and smart cities.
- **Competitiveness and Innovation Accelerator** (Dec 2019/January 2020, Albania): In partnership with the Regional Cooperation Council, the Forum will establish its first regional Competitiveness and Innovation Accelerator for the Western Balkans. The accelerator will be part of a global Forum initiative that aims to identify and scale selected initiatives that can contribute to increasing the diffusion of innovative technologies and business models and build more inclusive and sustainable systems. The Accelerator will start work with a kick-off meeting of the Leadership Group.
- **The World Economic Forum’s 50th Annual Meeting** (21-24 January 2020, Davos-Klosters): The Strategic Dialogue on the Western Balkans will continue with a session at the Annual Meeting that includes key business voices.
- **European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) Western Balkans Investment Summit** (24 February 2020, London): The Forum will participate in this summit to share the outcomes of the Davos discussions with financial institutions and businesses.
- **European Union Summit during Croatia’s Presidency of the Council of the EU** (Zagreb, 6-7 May 2020): The Forum will co-host a high-level session in cooperation with the Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union at the European Union Summit as part of the Strategic Dialogue.
- **Western Balkans Digital Summit** (April 2020, Albania): The Forum will support the Western Balkans Digital Summit, with the aim of preparing for the Fourth Industrial Revolution.
- **Strategic Intelligence on the Western Balkans:** Transformation Maps – the Forum’s Strategic Intelligence platform used by a large community of business and government leaders, academia and youth – will feature dynamic and in-depth analysis dedicated to the Western Balkans to map strategic trends and interdependencies.