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Permanent Mission to the United Nations  
NEW YORK



Permanent Mission of Italy  
UN - New York

## **Concept note - background of the Proposal** ***“Group of Friends of the Western Balkans 2030 for the SDGs and the European Union”***

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Italy propose to foster cooperation and integration among Western Balkan countries in their pursuit of sustainable development and socio-economic growth. By aligning with the SDGs and EU’s agendas in specific targeted areas, the region should promote regional collaboration and shared progress, unlock new opportunities and develop a Western Balkan economic community as well as Western Balkan green, health, digital and education community, while consequently incorporating all of them in applicable EU integration processes.

The Western Balkans countries are sharing their will towards integration with the European Union (EU). Efforts should be carried out gradually and in parallel to chosen areas (trade, green, digital, health, education) of cooperation and integration under the political umbrella of the Belin process and in the framework of the United Nations 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals.

In line with these frameworks, economic growth will have to be inclusive and responsive to the unique needs and priorities of the Western Balkans, preventing it from becoming only an EU Green Deal and therefore aiming to be a regional best practice in the framework of efforts for achieving the 2030 Agenda.

Moreover, in line with the most recent SDG Summit and the UN High-Impact Initiatives and six key transitions for sustainable development, digital connectivity and transformation will be key areas. The ongoing digital transformation within the EU stressed the necessity of integrating the digital transformation efforts of the Western Balkans into this process. Such integration offers a potential remedy for the brain drain challenge, a pressing issue faced by the region.

With digital transformation, the Western Balkans can offer young experts the opportunity to stay in their countries while providing their services to a global labor market. This convergence of digital strategies not only addresses brain drain concerns but also positions the region as an attractive hub for skilled talent and innovative initiatives.

This comprehensive approach seeks to establish a collaborative and integrated framework for sustainable development and progress in the Western Balkans. By aligning regional efforts with the SDGs and EU’s priorities in targeted areas, the region can pave the way for transformative growth, fostering a dynamic and inclusive environment for its people and contributing to the broader European vision.

Hence, we are proposing the formation of an informal group within the United Nations, referred to as the "Group of Friends of the Western Balkans 2030 for the SDGs and the European Union."

In this regard, we kindly suggest that Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina assume the roles of co-chairs for this initiative.

Additionally, we have contemplated potential names for this group, such as "EU-WB SDG European Reform Agenda" or "E SDG (EU-WB) Agenda 2030." Your consideration of these suggestions would be greatly appreciated.

*“Group of Friends of the Western Balkans 2030 for the SDGs and the European Union” a cooperative platform for acceleration regional integration, prosperity and sustainable development.*

### Key Points:

- **EU integration based reforms** and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) implementation are not competing but **complementary and integrated policies** creating synergy effect if executed through **WB/EU/UN shared platform** for Western Balkan in partnership with European Union.
- **EU and WB member states** in cooperation with **the United Nations Sustainable Development system, led globally by the UN Secretary General and Resident Coordinators at country/national level**, will work together to support acceleration of the shared EU-WB-UN SDG platform and EU-WB-UN Agenda 2030.
- **Agenda 2030 will be a guide as it** corresponds with the time frame of year 2030 that is recently announced as a target for **integrating Western Balkan into European Union**. Six countries are in different stages when it comes to candidacy and negotiation for EU membership but not when it comes to SDGs.
- All of them are **sharing same priorities** with ongoing **EU negotiation** process when it comes to **SDGs in areas of Green transformation, Health, Digital transformation, Education** and ultimately creation of **WB/EU Economic Community** or Single Market that guarantee the **free movement of goods, capital, services and people** (known as the **“four freedoms”** that is achieved through common rules and standards that all participating states are legally committed to follow).
- Cooperation in **WB** (under already established **Berlin process**) starting with **these five areas** should result in faster integration of WB in EU along chosen and politically unquestionable projects. On a path to fulfilling Copenhagen Criteria it would be possible gradually to “enlarge” EU in chosen areas by **creating parallel European Green, Economic, Digital, Education, and Health Community (Union)** of 33 (27 plus 6) countries.
- This approach would **prevent** possible growth of **enlargement fatigue in Western Balkan countries** by creating **concrete results** on a way to long lasting promises about **“European future”**
- **Sarajevo** currently serves as the **chair** of the **Western Balkans Sustainable Development Solutions Network** (WB SDSN), which brings together **academic and civil society** leaders in the region. This collaboration includes working closely with the **European Union SDSN** and operates under the auspices of **global SDSN and President of SDSN Professor Jeffrey Sachs**.

- In July, **Bosnia and Herzegovina hosted**, in cooperation with the United Nations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as part of the joint Swedish and SDG Fund SDG4BiH programme – two significant **meetings** at the United Nations Headquarters as part of the HLPF: A Sub-regional Meeting on **SDGs in the Western Balkans** (following on from similar events in 2022 and 2021 that were first initiated in Sarajevo), and a High-Level Meeting focusing on **Financing Frameworks and Sustainable Development Goals**, also convened at the United Nations in cooperation with Indonesia, Serbia and Sweden.
- Permanent Representatives of Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina have been discussing extensively on this issue and came to **shared position on next steps**

## **Proposal**

- ***Formation of an informal group within the United Nations, referred to as the "Group of Friends of the European Union - Western Balkan Agenda 2030."***
- ***Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina assume the roles of co-chairs for this initiative to start a process of EU-WB-UN SDG European Reform Agenda 2030 (EU-WB Agenda 2030).***