

***Launch of the “Working Group on the Western Balkans 2030
for the SDGs and the European Union” - New York, November 22nd 2023***

The Permanent Representative of Italy to the United Nations in New York, Amb. Maurizio Massari, hosted today, together with the Permanent Representative of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Amb. Zlatko Lagumdžija, the first meeting of the “Working Group on the Western Balkans 2030 for the SDGs and the European Union”.

The establishment of the Working Group was proposed by Italy’s Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Antonio Tajani, and endorsed during the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Italy, Croatia and Slovenia with their counterparts from the Western Balkans during the high-level week of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly.

The Working Group – an informal, cooperative platform for the acceleration of regional integration, prosperity and sustainable development - aims at aligning the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union with the implementation of SDGs, two processes that can mutually benefit each other. The launching event of the Group, with the participation of UNDP Administrator, USG Achim Steiner, allowed a first in-depth exchange on how to better sustain cooperation within the region, with a view to pursue sustainable development and socio-economic growth according to the 2030 UN Agenda.

The Group, that will have an open-ended nature, decided that Italy and Bosnia and Herzegovina will assume the role of Co-Chairs in 2024 and will convey meetings regularly, at Head of Mission and expert level.

The Working Group will propose to the United Nations System initiatives aimed at accelerating SDGs implementation and EU integration processes in five key areas: digital transformation, health, green economy, education and economic integration.

Representatives from various settings, including the United Nations System, academia, scientific community, media and NGOs will be invited to contribute to more comprehensive and productive engagement of the Group on specific topics of discussion. UN Resident Coordinators in the Western Balkans will be involved as well to actively participate and advise the work of the Group.