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THE WESTERN BALKANS AND NEVER ENDING MEGA INFRASTRUCTURAL PROJECTS: IS THE BERLIN PROCESS DELIVERING RESULTS?

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A locally owned initiative aiming at fostering regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, the Berlin Process (BP), launched in 2014 by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel, needs to be reviewed. Complementary to the enlargement process and initially conceived as a temporary replacement to the *enlargement fatigue* under former European Commissioner Claude Juncker, the BP was deemed to help the countries working together towards their main aspiration: EU membership. Among its core objectives and plans, connectivity investments lead the group.

Being most probably the follower of the dead Stability Pact in South-Eastern Europe (1999) endowed with a broader multilateral nature, a lack of coordination among donors, missing a clear direction and transparent mechanisms in terms of projects' selection for funding, and with no serious regional involvement, the BP has been built on existing regional organizational formats: the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), and the South-East Transport Observatory (SEETO).

Whether at a first sight an overlap between the BP and the RCC might pop up, distinctions stand up most. On the one hand the former is more an externally propelled framework acting like a compass for guiding the countries in the region on the path ahead. On the other hand, the latter might be looked at as the BP's operational and regionally owned arm. Yet, their mutual *modus operandi* remains unclear. Otherwise said, a more structured working format between the two should be established. As far as SEETO is concerned, its working relationship within the BP is not defined too. Additionally, whether both the RCC and SEETO are functionally integrated into the BP, it remains unclear whom one should ring up to track record on key regional energy and infrastructural/connectivity projects.

Currently, to follow up on the existing mega-investments one must go through each country profile on the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)'s website, where information is missing, and partial data is provided. In short, there is no room for transparency, accountability, and traceability. The BP's overall structure and working relationship with the regional organizations in place show signs of poor performance. In short, the BP should speak with one voice. This is missing at present, but it is never too late. Also, it is a necessary step in terms of accountability. More than € 880 Mill in EU grants for a total of 39 projects with investment costs of more than € 3.2 Bill (2019) have been channeled into connectivity and energy projects in the region. Yet, has the money been invested in the practice?

INTRODUCTION

The BP launched, under German leadership, in 2014 aims at supporting the Western Balkans' European integration. Yet, it is not a substitute for accession. Rather it is complementary to it. That year was not chosen randomly: it commemorated the 100th anniversary after the end of the World War I, and the 10th of the big enlargement to Central and

Eastern Europe. The purpose of the BP was to reenergize regional cooperation and the European integration process in the WB6. Concretely, it provided the space for a joint forum of communication among the regional stakeholders, the EU Member States (MS) and the European Commission (EC), with the purpose of counteracting the enlargement fatigue under former European Commissioner Claude Juncker.

Its foundation didn't come out of the blue. In fact, the BP was based on existing regional organizations: the RCC and SEETO. Yet, its forefather, notwithstanding lack of evidence, might be considered the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Both structures share, in fact, same goals (i.e., boosting cooperation among the WB6 and striving for the EU membership). But the main deficiency of the Pact was of producing a list of projects, rather than comprehensive strategies and action plans. Therefore, a more targeted and well-conceived structure was deemed necessary: RCC was then (2008) founded. Six years later (2014) the BP followed. Yet *was such a Process needed after all?* Particularly, it is to question whether this framework was unavoidable with a look at connectivity and infrastructural projects being at the top of the agenda of both structures. If similarities are evident, differences predominate. Yet, their mutual *modus operandi* is unclear, as for that between the BP and SEETO above. Notwithstanding this, the BP is to be looked at as a guide reminding the regional leaders about the necessary reforms ahead.

This policy analysis is divided into 6 parts. The 1st part portrays the origin, rationale, and purpose of the BP. The 2nd part describes the steps leading to the creation of the BP itself, by passing through the Stability Pact, the RCC and SEETO, while outlining their similarities and differences. Also, it mentions a key sector, being among others at the top of the EU's agenda, all 3 actors are involved in: connectivity (incl. energy) and infrastructural investments. In fact, both the energy and infrastructural sector suffer from key deficiencies across the WB6, because of underinvestment over the years. The 3rd part deals with the BP's working hypothesis, namely that by boosting regional cooperation on core projects and investments, the WB6 are expected to achieve concrete results, while progressing towards the EU. The 4th part refers to the main decisions undertaken among regional leaders and the EU under the BP framework: i) extending the European Core Network to the region, while focusing on key corridors and interconnectors; identifying the next steps in terms of implementation, including the review of the map for the core network extension to the region and agreement on a corridor coordinator's mandate (Pristina, 2015); ii) identification of 3 core network corridors to be extended to the WB, as well as priority projects along sections of these corridors for possible EU funding over a 6 year-term (Riga, 2015); iii) welcoming of the progress achieved in the transport connectivity sector, with the WB6 agreeing on 4 key energy connectivity projects, including power interconnectors and reinforcement to the region's electricity transmission system, with Vienna *de facto* launching the Connectivity Agenda for the WB pushed forward by the EC (Vienna, 2015); iv) stressing the key role played by the RCC in connectivity projects (Paris, 2016); v) signing of the Transport Community Treaty among the regional leaders, by marking a new era of cooperation between the EU and the WB (Trieste, 2017); vi) establishment of a new €150 Mill guarantee instrument to enhance transport connectivity (London, 2018); vii) welcoming of 8 additional connectivity investment projects (tot. investment value of > € 700 Mill) (Poznan, 2019); viii) upgrading the transport network region-wide with resource-efficient transport operations willing to contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions, and endorsement of the EU Green Agenda for the Western Balkans

(Sofia, 2020); ix) EU's recovery package for the WB following the pandemic, while reminding that key energy and infrastructural projects should not be sidelined (Berlin, 2021).

The 5th part describes the project's life cycle from identification, selection, and implementation, while briefly mentioning who oversees what, by particularly focusing on the key role of the WBIF pooling grants, loans, and expertise to prepare financing for priority investment projects, while strengthening coherence and synergies among donors in order to increase the positive impact and visibility of investments in the WB. Also, this section pinpoints the main distinction between the WBIF and the RCC. Yet, it also raises the issue of figuring out who effectively monitors and controls projects' implementation. Currently, this remains uncertain. In fact, there is a lack of an overall supervision. The same part also reminds about the identification of key corridors (i.e., Mediterranean, Orient/East-Med and Rhine/Danube) within the Connectivity Agenda framework. The 6th, and last, section aims at providing an encompassing overview of all current energy and connectivity/infrastructural projects in the WB6, considering that there is not a synopsis (neither on the BP's nor on the WBIF's website) about all projects and their status. In fact, one should, at present, randomly browse each single project's page (WBIF's website) to get an idea about its progress, shortcomings, etc. Besides that, information is various times missing and/or incomplete. This hinders transparency, accountability and traceability of the funds effectively pooled into the projects themselves. The analysis ends with key policy recommendations for EC/EU and WB leaders with a view at rethinking the BP's overall structure for boosting clarity.

I. THE BERLIN PROCESS AND THE WESTERN BALKANS: WHY A PROCESS FOR THE REGION?

The BP a locally owned initiative¹ aimed at stepping up regional cooperation in the Western Balkans, while simultaneously working on their further integration into the European Union, was launched on the 28th of August 2014 by German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in Berlin. It expressly supported the prospect of European integration for all the Western Balkans once they meet the conditions for accession.² It resembles a political multilateral initiative amongst the WB6 under German leadership.³ But it is not a substitute for the EU accession process. Rather, it may be looked at as a reinforcing instrument at the service of the EU accession perspective and of the economic and political ties between the WB6.⁴ Shortly, it is complementary to the EU membership process.⁵

¹Albania in the Berlin Process. Current achievements and upcoming challenges for the Paris Summit Fall 2015: 57 [online]. Available at: <https://cdinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ANGLISHT.pdf> [Accessed: 16 July 2021].

²*Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans*, Berlin, 28 August 2014: 1 [online]. Available at: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/264688/953e9f4b2f0b008d20bf6a65bfb4ebbe/140828-abschlusserkonf-westl-balkan-data.pdf> [Accessed: 12 July 2021].

³European Commission. Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 9 [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/27.%20Vienna-Info-Pack-Final.pdf> [Accessed: 16 July 2021].

⁴Albania in the Berlin Process: 11, *op.cit.*

⁵Albania in the Berlin Process: 60, *ibid.*

Germany aware of its historical responsibility for a peaceful, stable, and democratic society based on the rule of law would have, therefore, significantly supported the region on its path to Europe.⁶ And, whether the Process is guided by Germany, Albania holds the paternity about its name.⁷

The year 2014 marked a particular historical moment for the European continent. It signed both the 100th anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War and the 10th anniversary of the biggest enlargement wave of the European Union towards Central and Eastern Europe. In that context, and with the purpose of giving a fresh impetus to regional cooperation and the European integration process for the Western Balkans, the German Chancellor Angela Merkel hosted the high-level conference on the Western Balkans in Berlin. This provided a joint forum of communication for Western Balkan leaders among themselves, as well as towards the participating EU MS and the EC.⁸ The multilateral diplomacy provided by the BP was a suitable, immediate, and easily available format to fill the gap created by former EC President Junker, following the suspension of the enlargement process till 2019.⁹ In other words, it was conceived at the beginning as a temporary replacement to the slowing down of the enlargement process at that time.¹⁰

Inevitably, the BP created a new impetus in the region, and it would have supported the countries to work together towards their main aspiration: EU membership.¹¹

II. FROM THE STABILITY PACT TO BERLIN: WHOM SHALL I RING UP?

Whether no official statements exist about this, one may consider the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, launched in 1999, as the forefather of the BP. This was initiated by the EU with the aim of establishing and reinforcing peace and security in South-Eastern Europe (SEE)'s involved countries and international organizations as partners.¹² The Pact has been then succeeded in 2008 by the RCC. In fact, the Stability Pact and the BP share similar goals (i.e., encouragement and strengthening of cooperation between the countries in the region and streamlining the existing efforts towards EU membership). But the Stability Pact had a broad multilateral nature clearly showing the donors' lack of capacity to effectively coordinate with each other, when delivering the funds towards targeted intervention areas. Besides that, the Pact lacked a clear direction, it did have ill-conceived and comparatively non-transparent mechanisms for the selection of priority projects for funding, and it did not have a serious regional involvement

⁶*Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans*, Berlin, 28 August 2014: 1, *op. cit.*

⁷Albania in the Berlin Process: 56, *op. cit.*

⁸Albania in the Berlin Process: 9, *op. cit.*

⁹Albania in the Berlin Process, *ibid.*

¹⁰Ardian Hackaj, Gentiola Madhi, and Krisela Hackaj. Albania in the Berlin Process. Monitoring the Berlin Process: From Paris to Trieste, Working Paper, January 2017: 12 [online]. Available at: <https://wbc-rti.info/object/document/15660/attach/Monitoring-the-Berlin-Process-From-Paris-to-Trieste.pdf> [Accessed: 16 October 2021].

¹¹Albania in the Berlin Process: 44, *ibid.*

¹² European Commission. The Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/glossary/terms/stability-pact_en [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

or input in the process itself. In short, *the Stability Pact managed to produce lists of projects rather than comprehensive strategies and action plans.*¹³

Because of its intrinsic structural and operative limitation, a new format was created: the RCC. This *de facto* succeeded the Stability Pact. It is the operational arm of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) being the focal point for guiding, monitoring and supporting cooperation in South East Europe (SEE).¹⁴ The SEECP was launched on Bulgaria's initiative in 1996 for the purposes of creating an atmosphere of trust, good neighbourly relations and stability among all participants from SEE, and transforming this region into an area of peace, security, prosperity and cooperation, with the main goal of full integration of SEE into European and Euro-Atlantic structures.¹⁵

RCC was officially launched at the meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the SEECP in Sofia, on 27 February 2008. It is an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led cooperation framework, co-funded by the EU, engaging RCC participants from SEE, members of the international community and donors on subjects which are important and of interest to SEE, with a view to promoting and advancing the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region. RCC works to develop and maintain a political climate of dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance, and openness towards cooperation, *with the purpose of enabling the implementation of regional programmes for economic and social development* to the benefit of the people in the region.¹⁶

It is a more structured organization than the dead Stability Pact, and it has a proper Statute.¹⁷ Its participants are the WB6, the 27 EU MS, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and a representative of the EC, other countries like Canada, Moldova, Norway, Switzerland, Turkey, UK and USA),¹⁸ as well as various organizations and financial institutions.¹⁹ *Its foundation signed a new momentum by transferring responsibility to the countries of the region.* ²⁰ RCC focuses, among other, ²¹ on improved economic competitiveness, increased volume of trade and exports, boosted investments (foreign and

¹³Albania in the Berlin Process: 26, *op. cit.*

¹⁴I. Principles, objectives, and tasks of the RCC (para.1), Statute of the Regional Cooperation Council [online]. Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/pages/95/statute> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

¹⁵South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) [online]. Available at: <https://www.seecp.info/> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

¹⁶Regional Cooperation Council [online]. Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/pages/2/about-us> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

¹⁷Statute of the Regional Cooperation Council [online]. Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/pages/95/statute> [Accessed: 5 August 2021].

¹⁸Regional Cooperation Council [online]. Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/pages/96/participants> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

¹⁹I.e., Council of Europe, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, International Organization for Migration, South-East European Co-operative Initiative, United Nations, United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Council of Europe Development Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, European Investment Bank, World Bank.

²⁰Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic. Infrastructure Investment in the Western Balkans, Research Report 407, September 2015: 3 [online]. Available at: <https://wiiw.ac.at/infrastructure-investment-in-the-western-balkans-dlp-3661.pdf>

²¹I.e., human capital, digital transformation, justice and home affairs, environment protection, a business-friendly environment, improved access to finance for SMEs, further development of financial markets.

domestic), and the generation of more jobs.²² Over time its agenda shifted towards key interventions in a restricted number of areas. In the coming 3 years, RCC will focus on increased mobility, enhanced connectivity, and improved competitiveness in SEE.²³ All these 3 key goals are strictly pursued by the BP2015 *Connectivity Agenda* mentioned in the next pages. Without doubts there *are common purposes/goals between RCC and the BP*. And, with the former preceding the latter, it is to question whether such a Process was needed after all. Yet, whether at the first sight one could consider the BP overlapping with the RCC, in fact, this idea fades away by looking closer at their respective structure, rationale and concrete activities. While the former is an externally propelled framework (i.e., Germany) with the purpose of boosting, among others,²⁴ connectivity/infrastructural projects among the WB6, the latter mainly deals with reconciliation, tolerance, and cooperation. Also, the BP does not have a proper structure. Rather, it is developed around annual meetings between the EU and regional stakeholders. On the contrary the RCC has its own organizational setup. Besides that, whether the BP may be looked at as a skeleton for gathering the core players on the ground, the RCC might be considered as its operational and regionally owned arm. Shortly, it could be argued that both formats complement each other, rather than overlapping. Yet, their *mutual modus operandi remains unclear*. In fact, a *more structured working format between the two should be established*. Moreover, compared with regional organizations – apart from RCC above – in place (i.e., SP, SEETO, etc.) the Berlin Process’s political leverage is to keep the path of reforms (i.e., connectivity/transport, regional cooperation, etc.) alive. Its annual ministerial meetings are a way to remind local stakeholders about the progress achieved and what is to be done. By using a metaphor, *this format might be looked at as a compass showing the way ahead*. Likewise, it may be agreed with that the BP uses *de facto* the existing regional collaboration platforms to select, prepare and implement its connectivity projects.²⁵

Inevitably pursuing the goals above would not be possible without significantly upgrading the energy sector and the transport network across the Western Balkans suffering from key infrastructural deficiencies because of underinvestment over the years. These undermine not only regional cooperation, good neighbourly relations, and mutual trade. Rather they also create a barrier to foreign direct investments and tourism, thus hindering the region’s overall economic development.

²² Regional Cooperation Council [online]. Available at: <https://www.rcc.int/flagships/2/competitiveness> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

²³ See <https://www.rcc.int/pages/2/about-us> [Accessed: 5 August 2021].

²⁴ I. e., resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues; achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region; enhancing regional economic cooperation; laying the foundations for sustainable growth. See Berlin Process. Available at: <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/the-goals> [Accessed: 16 October 2021]. Also, it has pursued the following: *connecting security* (i.e., creation of a joint external border mechanism among the WB6); *connecting people* (via the Regional Youth Cooperation Office [RYCO]); *connecting businesses* (via the regular inclusion of WB6 business community in the BP Summits agenda), see Ardian Hackaj, Gentiola Madhi, and Krisela Hackaj. Albania in the Berlin Process. Monitoring the Berlin Process: From Paris to Trieste, Working Paper, January 2017: 13 [online]. Available at: <https://wbc-rti.info/object/document/15660/attach/Monitoring-the-Berlin-Process-From-Paris-to-Trieste.pdf>

²⁵ Ardian Hackaj, Gentiola Madhi, and Krisela Hackaj, *ibid.*: 14.

An *ad hoc* body significantly contributing to coordination and expertise in the transport and energy infrastructure²⁶ was established: the South-East Transport Observatory (SEETO). It is a regional transport organization set up for the *development of the Core Regional Transport Network*. A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed on the 11th of June 2004 by the governments of Albania, BiH, Croatia, the then former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (today North Macedonia), Montenegro, Serbia, the then United Nations Mission in Kosovo and the EC.²⁷

Its aim is to *promote cooperation and development of the main ancillary infrastructure* on the multimodal SEETO Comprehensive Network and to *enhance local capacity for the implementation of investment programmes, as well as data collection and analysis* on the SEETO Comprehensive Network. Also, it helps *improving and harmonizing regional transport policies and technical standards* and integrating the SEETO Comprehensive Network in the framework of the wider Trans European Network.²⁸ As for the RCC above, *its working relationship within the BP is not defined too*.

Its annual meeting of ministers is the highest political forum where the progress of the SEETO Comprehensive Network in respect to the MoU is confirmed, SEETO Comprehensive Network's Multi-Annual Plan is accepted, and future strategies are agreed upon. It is attended by the Ministers of Transport of each of the Regional Participants and by the EC.²⁹ The Steering Committee (SC), ensuring co-ordination of the joint work of signatories of the MoU, is the main responsible structure for guiding SEETO's activities and coordinating the transport infrastructure planning, as well as promoting and conducting national reforms in line with the agreed EU and regional driven approach.³⁰

SEETO was founded 2 months before the BP, and it might be looked at as its *locally-driven operational arm for identifying and coordinating key infrastructural projects*. At the same time the BP has been pivotal in keeping the dialogue and the common target of joining the EU alive. Yet, it did not develop overnight.

The BP followed a step-by-step approach. Whether the ill-conceived Stability Pact mentioned in the previous pages is to be viewed at as its forefather, the Brdo-Brijuni Process is to be looked at as the key framework for further development of the BP itself. Initiated by Croatia and Slovenia in 2013, its purpose is of enhancing regional cooperation and strategic dialogue, while increasing the level of trust and the immediate resolution of outstanding bilateral and regional issues.³¹ It contributes to the enlargement process, by also becoming a regular, direct channel to exchange information with the EU.³² It is a high-level initiative gathering once a year the Head of States of the WB6 countries and key representatives from EU MS. Although not

²⁶Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 3, *op. cit.*

²⁷SEETO [online]. Available at: <https://www.ecoroadsproject.eu/consortium/seeto> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

²⁸SEETO, *ibid.*

²⁹See <http://www.seetoint.org/about/> [online]. Accessed: 5 August 2021.

³⁰*ibid.*

³¹Slovenian President Pahor and Croatian President Josipović Host Leaders at Brdo Process in Dubrovnik, 15 July 2014 [online]. Available at: <https://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs-eng.nsf/pages/86AC1F31BD4A4B2FC1257D3400433769> [Accessed: 20 July 2021]

³²Brdo-Brijuni Process [online]. Available at: <https://www.up-rs.si/up-rs/uprs-eng.nsf/brdo-brijuni-process> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

formally part of the BP, the Brdo-Brijuni Process has constituted a platform for regional political dialogue on reciprocal good neighbourly relations and mutual understanding. The annual meeting of July 2014 saw the participation of the former German Chancellor Merkel together with the Presidents of the Republic of Serbia, BiH, North Macedonia, Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro.³³ Specifically, this 2nd meeting focused on the prerequisite to invest in key infrastructural projects and energy policy in the Western Balkans.³⁴ Of all the formats above, RCC and SEETO are functionally integrated in the framework of the BP.³⁵ Yet, *it remains unclear whom one should ring up*. It would be, therefore, advisable for the BP to provide a platform/database on its own website with all key infrastructural and connectivity (incl. energy) projects, along with their status (i.e., progress, shortcomings, challenges, etc.), so as to ensure transparency and accountability. At present, to get an overview of current projects, one should browse in a schizophrenic mood from one project to another on the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF)'s website per country. Yet, uncompleted, and unsatisfactory information is there provided, as referred to in the next pages. The BP mentions an annual report on key results and latest progress (i.e., Annual Report 2020) only.³⁶ Yet, this is not even accessible. Also, it would be beneficial to display not only the recent developments, considering that the Process and its projects were launched much earlier. In short, *what is lacking is accountability, transparency and traceability of the money spent on the ground*.

III. FROM ONE MEETING TO ANOTHER: BERLIN'S WORKING PROCESS

The BP working hypothesis is that *through regional cooperation on projects and joint investments, WB6 countries are expected to reach tangible mutual benefits, while progressing quicker towards their integration into the EU*.³⁷ The process is driven by follow-up meetings to the annual summit.³⁸ Initiated by German Chancellor Merkel, as mentioned in the previous pages, the process was part of her plans on working jointly with the region and bringing it closer to the EU. Two months before the Berlin Conference, officially launching the BP, Merkel clearly stated that all the Western Balkans have a clear EU perspective. Yet, their path to Brussels was still long to go.³⁹

In fact, the Berlin conference was a continuation of the Brdo Summit in Dubrovnik, Merkel had attended in July of the same year, thus confirming the hypothesis of Berlin *de facto* following Brdo, as mentioned in the previous pages. Besides that, the *Berlin Conference* was

³³Slovenian President Pahor, *op. cit.*

³⁴Albania in the Berlin Process: 29, *op. cit.*

³⁵Albania in the Berlin Process: 29, *ibid.*

³⁶Western Balkans Investment Framework and the Berlin Process [online]. Available at: <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/western-balkans-investment-framework-and-the-berlin-process> [Accessed: 16 October 2021].

³⁷Albania in the Berlin Process: 14, *ibid.*

³⁸Albania in the Berlin Process: 15, *ibid.*

³⁹ Klare Perspektive für Balkanstaaten, *Bundesregierung*, 7 June 2014 [online]. Available at: <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/mediathek/kanzlerin-podcast/klare-eu-perspektive-fuer-balkanstaaten-857990> [Accessed: 21 July 2021].

expected to continue and be converted into a longer working process, with the summit in Vienna following in 2015.⁴⁰

In the meantime, the need of addressing the region's key structural economic challenges preventing foreign investments and leading to high unemployment rates, while boosting, among others (i.e., economic reform and fiscal consolidation), competitiveness and job creation and by focusing on improving energy and transport networks and increasing connectivity was re-stated by the EC 2 months after the launch of the BP.⁴¹

At the first conference on the Western Balkans (Berlin, 28th of August 2014) attended by the foreign ministers and economics ministers of Albania, BiH, Croatia, Kosovo, the then FYR of Macedonia (today North Macedonia), Montenegro, Serbia and Slovenia, together with representatives of the EC, Austria, and France, all participating countries agreed that their first meeting should have provided a framework for a period of four years (2014-2018). Also, it should have looked at enhancing regional cooperation and laying down the foundations for sustainable economic growth. In this context, organizations like the RCC would have played an important role.⁴² Besides that, they agreed to meet each year within a four-year time, so as to implement the agenda agreed in Berlin and to support its goals via additional targeted projects.⁴³

Whether other key issues have been on the table,⁴⁴ the participating states well convened that a *transport community for the Western Balkans* could have provided the foundation for further economic development, by upgrading the region's logistical connections to the European markets. This would have also triggered regional cooperation and sustainable economic growth by attracting foreign investments.⁴⁵ Moreover, these would have helped building bridges between the countries and their people.⁴⁶ Shortly, the stability of the region and its European integration could not be achieved without a sustainable economic growth. Therefore, the BP should have been concretized in regional connectivity projects having an economic impact for the countries themselves, while enhancing cooperation and enabling tangible benefits for

⁴⁰Merkel seeks to strengthen EU ties to Western Balkans, *Euractiv*, 29 August 2014 [online]. Available at: <https://www.euractiv.com/section/enlargement/news/merkel-seeks-to-strengthen-eu-ties-to-western-balkans/> [Accessed: 20 July 2021].

⁴¹European Commission. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, COM(2014)700 final, 8 October 2014: 5& 7 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2014/20141008-strategy-paper_en.pdf [Accessed: 5 August 2021].

⁴²Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans: 2, *op. cit.*

⁴³Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans: 1, *ibid.*

⁴⁴i.e., revitalization of a normalization of relations between Serbia and Kosovo; naming dispute between the former FYR of Macedonia and Greece; revitalization of the reform process in BiH; good governance and fight against corruption and organized crime; need of a politically active civil society and its valuable contribution at further strengthening democratic institutions across the region; need of boosting an energy policy with a look at security, energy efficiency targets and climate protection; as well as support to a needs-based academic and vocational training necessary for downsizing youth unemployment. See Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans: 2-3, *ibid.*

⁴⁵Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans: 2-3, *ibid.*

⁴⁶European Commission. Connectivity Agenda: 2, *op. cit.*

their citizens.⁴⁷ It should have propelled infrastructural investments creating new jobs and business opportunities, before joining the EU.⁴⁸ Yet, *such projects need to be complemented by a strategy supporting micro- and small enterprises.*⁴⁹

IV. A CONNECTIVITY AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS: EXTENDING THE CORE NETWORK FROM PRISTINA TO EUROPE

In preparation to the 2nd BP Summit to be held in Vienna in summer 2015, prior inter-ministerial meetings among the Western Balkans and the EU leaders took place for turning connectivity plans into deeds.

At the Belgrade meeting (23rd October 2014) connectivity was looked at as a key factor for growth and jobs. Concretely, the *Western Balkans ministers decided to extend the European Core Network to the region* allowing stepping up policy and regulatory reforms and concentrating on investments on key corridors and interconnectors. Also, they convened that National Investment Committees (NICs) should establish single project pipelines of priority investments counting on the EC and the International Financial Institutions (IFIs) to support them under the WBIF.⁵⁰

The vision for Trans-European Transport Networks (TEN-T) reflect that *rail, road, air and sea transport links are seen as key drivers not just for closer integration between Member States and their peoples, but also for increasing economic competitiveness.* The TEN-T has 2 layers: the “core network” carrying the most important passenger and goods flows; and the “comprehensive network” ensuring access to the core network. Shortly, the core network corridors facilitate the development of the core network itself.⁵¹

At the meeting in Pristina (15th March 2015) the Western Balkan leaders adopted a *Joint Statement reaffirming their commitment to connectivity.* Also, they expressed *their intention of extending the core network linking all EU capitals to the Western Balkans.*⁵²

In Brussels (21st April 2015) discussion on the concrete ways helping to implement the core transport network followed. Concretely, an indicative extension of the TEN-T to Western

⁴⁷Albania in the Berlin Process: 61, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸Albania in the Berlin Process: 51, *ibid.*

⁴⁹Albania in the Berlin Process: 30, *ibid.*

⁵⁰Joint Statement. Western Balkan 6 Ministerial-Economic Governance and Connectivity, Belgrade, 23 October 2014 [online]. Available at: <https://ambbelgrado.esteri.it/resource/2014/Conferenzaregionale23ottobreJointStatement1.pdf> [Accessed: 19 July 2021].

⁵¹European Commission. Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 9, *op. cit.*

⁵²Western Balkans 6 Ministerial Meeting Improved Connectivity and a Strong Core Network, Pristina, 25 March 2015, Joint Statement [online]. Available at: https://view.officeapps.live.com/op/view.aspx?src=http%3A%2F%2Fecas.europa.eu%2Farchives%2Fdelegations%2Fkosovo%2Fdocuments%2Fpress_corner%2F2015%2F20150325_wb6_joint_statement.doc [Accessed: 19 July 2021].

Balkans Core Network transport, (including airport) for roads, railways, inland waterways, seaports, and waterway ports, was drafted.⁵³

Further steps for the integration of the Western Balkans into the TEN-T network were discussed at the high-level transport conference “TEN-T Days 2015” held in Riga (11th August 2015). Specifically, *the maps for the core network extension to the region were reviewed and a corridor coordinator’s mandate was agreed*. The WB6 Transport Ministers tentatively identified 3 *core network corridors* to be extended to the Western Balkans, as well as priority projects along sections of these corridors for possible EU funding over the next 6 years.⁵⁴ The then Transport Commissioner Violeta Bulc greeted the meeting as a milestone in better connecting Europe to its neighbours: *the setting up of an integrated transport network facilitating people’s mobility and trade would significantly contribute to the economic development of the Western Balkans region*. At the same time Bulc recalled that the successful implementation of the core network in the Western Balkans countries would depend on the appropriate identification of “core” priority projects.⁵⁵

One year after the Berlin Western Balkans Summit, the heads of government, foreign ministers and economics ministers of the WB6, as well as Croatia, Slovenia, Germany, France Italy, representatives of the EC and of the European External Action Service (EEAS), together with representatives of IFIs met in Vienna on 27 August 2015 in the framework of the BP.⁵⁶ The participants welcomed the progress achieved in the transport connectivity sector, namely the agreement by the WB6 in Brussels in April on the regional core transport network corridors, and the further agreement (in Riga in June) on the core network corridors ‘projects to be implemented by 2020.⁵⁷ Besides the transport sector, the WB6 also agreed on 4 key energy connectivity investments including power interconnectors and reinforcement to the region’s electricity transmission system.⁵⁸ Findings of a study by the Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (wiiw) show that such a comprehensive infrastructure investment package might bring to an additional growth up to 1% point per year for the countries of the region over a period of 15 years. Some 200.000 new jobs could be created in the region.⁵⁹

The *Connectivity Agenda* at the core of the Vienna summit, identified *de facto* by the previous inter-ministerial meetings, was pushed forward by the EC setting connectivity in the Western Balkans among one of its priorities and to be viewed at as a part and a parcel of the EU

⁵³European Commission. Western Balkans 6 meeting in Brussels, Statement, 21 April 2015 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/STATEMENT_15_4826 [Accessed: 19 July 2021].

⁵⁴European Commission. Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 9, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵Ministerial meeting on the integration of the Western Balkans into the TEN-T network, 11 August 2015 [online]. Available at: <https://www.shortsea.org.mt/news/610/> [Accessed: 19 July 2021].

⁵⁶Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015: 2 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/policy-highlights/regional-cooperation/20150828_chairmans_conclusions_western_balkans_summit.pdf

⁵⁷Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015: 4, *ibid.*

⁵⁸Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015: 5, *ibid.*

⁵⁹Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015: 4, *ibid.*

broader accession strategy.⁶⁰The EC prioritization stems from the awareness that *building and connecting transport and energy infrastructure is a driver for growth and jobs, while helping attract investments*. Also, it creates the opportunities for businesses and people as well as it *contribute to good neighbourly relations* with positive spill-over effects in the region.⁶¹

The EU envisaged investing €1Bill for connectivity projects and technical assistance for the period 2014-2020.⁶²It is an EU long-term investment in the EU's own stability, security, and prosperity, while supporting the political and economic reform process of the countries in the region in their EU accession path. Concretely, the funding is provided under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II). The package includes a € 155Mill programme to help fund major regional infrastructure projects in the energy and transport sector, totaling € 540 Mill.⁶³

The Paris summit (4th July 2016), following the one in Vienna, reiterated that the future of the WB lies in the European integration and regional cooperation. Particularly, the latter is a key condition for the European perspective, and it is crucial for economic growth and increased connectivity between populations, multiplication of cross-border and multi-country initiatives as well as of joint ventures. The key role of the RCC has been stressed in this regard. Building on the previous summits, the Paris conference underlined the need of boosting connectivity and opportunities for mutually beneficial trade in the region. Particularly, it called upon the quick implementation of agreed investment projects. Concretely, on transport the parties supported the aim of a Transport community treaty and welcomed further work towards progress on a common text.⁶⁴

The Trieste conference (12th July 2017) reaffirmed that the connectivity agenda is the core element of the BP. While recognizing that all the Western Balkans have a European perspective, the summit stressed that integrating the Western Balkans with the EU is a strategic investment in peace, democracy, prosperity, security, and stability of Europe as a whole. In Trieste the participants welcomed that the *Connectivity agenda* focusing on regional and TEN-T relevant transport and energy infrastructure and reforms is moving forward and delivering results. Also, they confirmed that *well-connected and functioning infrastructure networks drive economic growth, provide business opportunities, attract investments, and generate jobs*. Moreover, they agreed on 7 additional connectivity projects with a total investment of over € 500 Mill, of which €194 Mill in EU grant co-financing and the balance loans from the EIB and the EBRD and national funding by the Western Balkans. This brings total connectivity funding since

⁶⁰European Commission. Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 2, *op. cit.*

⁶¹Connectivity Agenda-Vienna 2015 [online]. Available at: <https://berlinprocess.info/documents/connectivity-agenda/> [Accessed: 12 July 2021].

⁶²Connectivity Agenda-Vienna 2015, *ibid.*

⁶³EU adopts € 1 billion package to support reforms and regional cooperation in the Western Balkans and Turkey, European Western Balkans, 11 December 2015 [online]. Available at: <https://europeanwesternbalkans.com/2015/12/11/eu-adopts-e1-billion-package-to-support-reforms-and-regional-cooperation-in-the-western-balkans-and-turkey/> [Accessed: 12 July 2021].

⁶⁴Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris Western Balkans Summit 4 July 2016 [online]. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/policy-highlights/regional-cooperation/20160713-01.final-declaration-by-the-chair-of-the-paris-western-balkans-summit.pdf> [Accessed: 21 July 2021].

2015 to more than €1.4 billion for a total of 20 investment projects. Additionally, the Connectivity Europe Facility (CEF) has been mobilized for the first time in the region, providing an EU grant of €11.4 Mill. Also, the Summit welcomed the signature by the EU and 5 partners of the Western Balkans of the *Transport Community Treaty*, while regretting that BiH was unable to sign. The signature came 2 months later following negotiations between governments and political parties with the state.⁶⁵ The Treaty represents the beginning of a new era of cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkans. The core of the Transport Community is to bring the Western Balkans closer to the EU by creating a fully integrated transport network among the countries themselves as well as between the region and the EU, and to reach convergence with the transport operating standards and EU's policies.⁶⁶

The London (10th July 2018) summit reiterated that the connectivity agenda should remain a core element of the BP. Particularly, the announcement by the EC of the establishment of a new €150 Mill guarantee instrument to enhance transport connectivity, and also the signature of the Transport Community Treaty Headquarters agreement have been highly welcomed.⁶⁷

In a keynote speech to the conference “Western Balkans: Infrastructure and Energy from a Geopolitical Perspective” held in Warsaw (20th May 2019) in preparation of the Poznan summit, the Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Szymon Szynkowski vel Sęk said that the *development of infrastructure and energy sectors in the Western Balkans is of key importance for the European integration process.*⁶⁸

At the Poznan summit (5th July 2019) the participants reaffirmed that connectivity is a driver for growth and jobs, helps attract investments, improves competitiveness and good neighbourly relations, while enhancing the political stability and socio-economic development of the region. They restated their commitment to upgrade connectivity of the core transport and energy infrastructures and digital networks. Also, they recalled the key role played by the WBIF for identifying concrete projects to be financed and enhancing synergies between IFIs as well as Western Balkans in the field of sustainable connectivity. Besides that, they welcomed 8 additional connectivity investment projects with a total investment value of over € 700 Mill. Particularly, the endorsement of the new projects brings the total connectivity infrastructure funding, provided under the Connectivity Agenda since 2015, to more than € 880 Mill in EU grants for a total of 39 projects with investment costs of more than € 3.2 Bill. The Western

⁶⁵BiH to sign Transport Community Treaty in Brussels Today, 18 September 2017 [online]. Available at: <https://trackingenlargement.wordpress.com/2017/09/18/bih-to-sign-transport-community-treaty-in-brussels-today/> [Accessed: 6 August 2018].

⁶⁶Trieste Western Balkan Summit. Declaration by the Italian Chair, 12 July 2017 [online]. Available at: https://www.esteri.it/mae/en/sala_stampa/archivionotizie/approfondimenti/trieste-western-balkan-summit-declaration.html [Accessed: 21 July 2021].

⁶⁷Chair's Conclusions of the Heads' meeting of the London Western Balkans Summit, 10 July 2018 [online]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/724295/Heads_Meeting_-_Chair_s_Conclusions.pdf [Accessed: 21 July 2021].

⁶⁸Conference Summary: “Western Balkans: Infrastructure and Energy from a Geopolitical Perspective”, 30 May 2019 [online]. Available at: <https://warsawinstitute.org/westernbalkans/> [Accessed: 6 August 2021].

Balkan leaders and their EU counterpart also endorsed and committed to implement the policy priorities identified by the Transport Community for the period 2019-2020, with the objective to improve the mobility of persons and goods in the Western Balkans.⁶⁹

The previous summits clearly identified a need of improving and boosting the transport network within the Western Balkans and with the EU for enhancing the region's *rapprochement*, while also setting the basis for a deeper regional cooperation increasing economic growth and building on good neighbourly relations.

The following summit in Sofia (November 2020) detected an additional issue to be duly considered when upgrading the transport network region-wide: develop resource-efficient transport operations willing to contribute to the reduction of CO2 emissions. By doing so, the participants endorsed the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans,⁷⁰ laying down key initiatives aimed at a green transition for the region by reforming, among others, the transport and energy sectors, while prioritizing energy efficiency in all endeavours.⁷¹

After its launch in Berlin in 2014, this year (2021) summit has been hosted again in the German capital. Most probably it is a way for Merkel, who has not presented herself as a candidate for the September elections, to thank her partners for their commitments up to now, while stressing the need to work further on the necessary reforms. The conference took place virtually due to Covid and it mainly focused on the economic recovery package for the Western Balkans due to the pandemic.⁷² *However, the current emergency should not shift the attention from the necessary reforms and projects to be implemented in the transport sector as part of the Connectivity Agenda officially launched in Vienna in 2015. Failure to do so will signal a still far European perspective, while keeping the region's economy not competitive and undermining regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations.*

V. FROM PROJECT IDENTIFICATION TO PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION: WHO DOES WHAT?

Moving from high-level ministerial meetings to the practice an infrastructural project is a 4 step-process, involving various actors both local and EU/internationals.

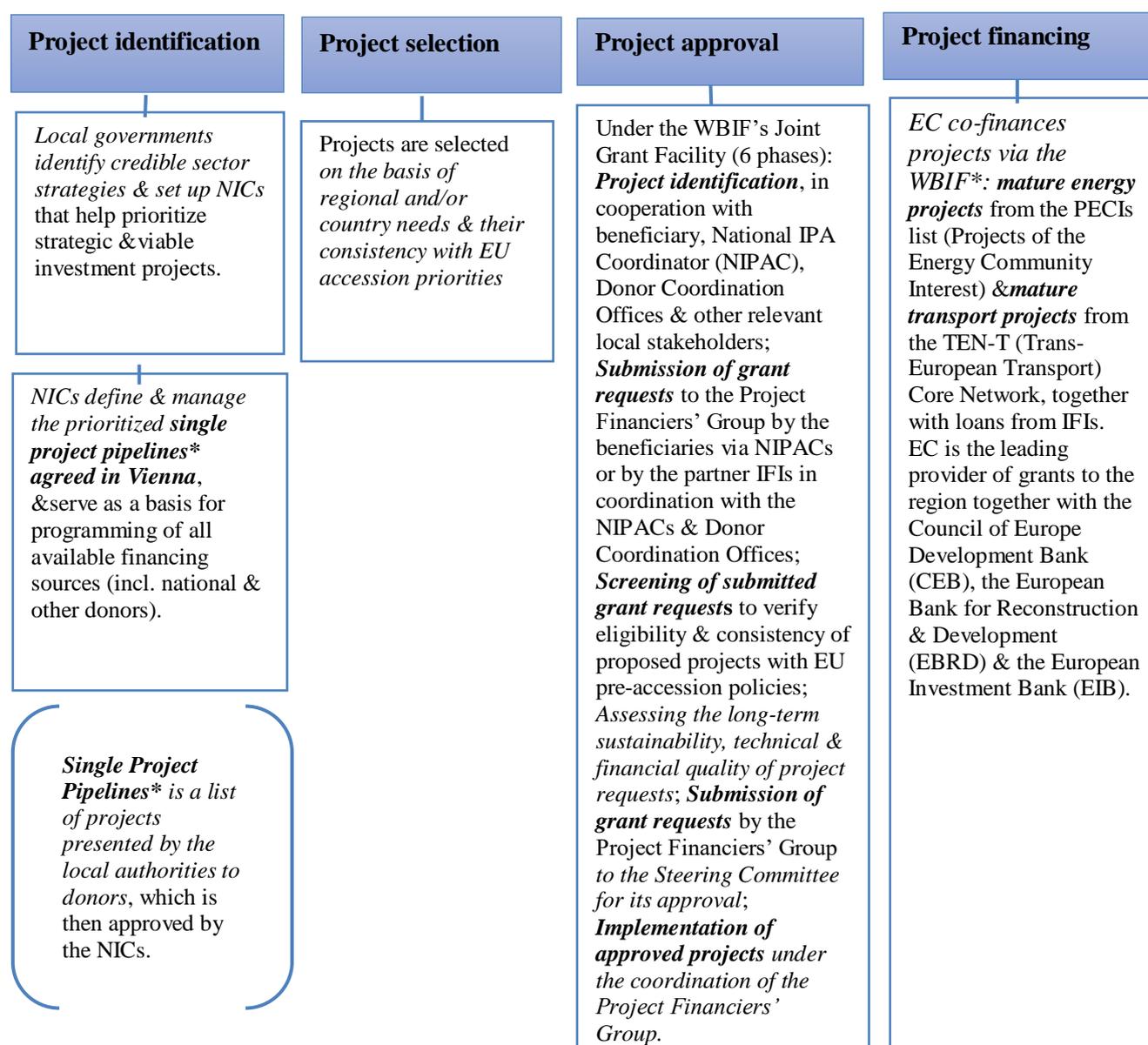
⁶⁹ Western Balkans Summit Poznań. Chair's conclusions, 5 July 2019 [online]. Available at: <https://www.gov.pl/web/diplomacy/western-balkans-summit-poznan-chairs-conclusions> [Accessed: 21 July 2021].

⁷⁰On the EU's Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, with a particular focus on the decarbonization process and trends in the region, see Nicasia Picciano. The EU Green Strategy for the Western Balkans: Decarbonisation Process and Trends in the Region. What are the Options for Kosovo? GLPS, 30 September 2021 [online]. Available at: <http://www.legalpoliticalstudies.org/the-eu-green-strategy-for-the-western-balkans-decarbonisation-process-and-trends-in-the-region-what-are-the-options-for-kosovo/> [Accessed: 16 Octobre 2021].

⁷¹Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, 20 November 2020: 2-3 [online]. Available at: <https://berlinprocess.info/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Leaders-Declaration-on-the-Green-Agenda-for-the-WB.pdf> [Accessed: 22 July 2021].

⁷²Berlin Summit: Western Balkans strengthen regional cooperation and foster closer ties with the EU, 5 July 2021 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/news-corner/news/berlin-summit-western-balkans-strengthen-regional-cooperation-and-foster-closer_en [Accessed: 22 July 2021].

Figure 1. Project Cycle



Source: the table is of the author built via multiple sources.⁷³

⁷³European Commission. Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015:3-4, *op. cit.*; Albania in the Berlin Process: 58, *op. cit.*; The Western Balkans Investment Framework. A new approach to financial support 2010 [online]. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/western-balkans-conference/wbif-a4-def_en.pdf [Accessed: 22 July 2021]; WBIF is a regional blending facility, established in 2009, supporting EU enlargement and socio-economic development in the WB6. Western Balkans Investment Framework [online]. Available at:

In terms of financing a key role is played by the WBIF, already outlined in Poznan, being cooperation of CEB, EBRD, EIB as mentioned above, as well as of the Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau (KfW), the World Bank (WB) and bilateral donors.⁷⁴It is a mechanism combining grants and loans to the needs and demands. It is a joint blending facility of the EC, participating Financial Institutions (FIs), bilateral donors and Western Balkan countries.⁷⁵Particularly, grants are provided mainly for technical assistance, for the preparation of technical documents for infrastructural investments, for research and investment analysis, as well as to support political reforms and institution-building. The WBIF also assists the countries in the region in the preparation of mature projects to the financial institutions.⁷⁶Additionally, it helps plan and coordinate the funding required to turn investments into concrete actions.⁷⁷Shortly, the WBIF has 2 main objectives: pooling of grants, loans and expertise in order to prepare financing for priority investment projects; strengthening coherence and synergies among donors in order to increase the positive impact and visibility of investments in the Western Balkans.⁷⁸

<https://wbif.eu/#:~:text=The%20Western%20Balkans%20Investment%20Framework%20%28WBIF%29%20is%20a,and%20Herzegovina%2C%20Kosovo%2A%2C%20Montenegro%2C%20North%20Macedonia%20and%20Serbia.> [Accessed: 16 July 2021].

⁷⁴Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 3, *op. cit.* See also, Albania in the Berlin Process: 16, *op. cit.*

⁷⁵Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans, 2018: 4 [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/6.%20Connectivity%20Agenda/16.%20Connectivity-Agenda-Co-financing-of-Investment-Projects-in-the-Western-Balkans-2018.pdf> [Accessed: 9 July 2021].

⁷⁶Albania in the Berlin Process. Current achievements and upcoming challenges for the Paris Summit Fall 2015: 57, *op. cit.*

⁷⁷European Commission. Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 4, *op. cit.*

⁷⁸The Western Balkans Investment Framework. A new approach to financial support, *op. cit.*

Figure 2. WBIF. Structures and Related Bodies

<p>WBIF Steering Committee (SC)</p> <p>Taking all decisions related to the Joint Grant Facility* (JGF) includ. project approvals & providing strategic guidance. <i>Composition:</i> representatives of the beneficiaries, EC, partner IFIs & bilateral donors, meeting every 6 months. It is co-chaired by the EC (on a permanent basis) & one of the bilateral donors (on an annual rotating basis).</p>	<p>Project Financiers' Group (PFG)</p> <p>Screening & assessing requests for financial support from the JGF for establishing a pipeline of priority projects; coordinating approved grant operations. <i>Composition:</i> representatives of the EC (DG Enlargement), IFIs & bilateral donors. It is co-chaired by the Commission (on a permanent basis) & the partner IFIs (on a rotating basis every 6 months).</p>	<p>WBIF Secretariat, DG Enlargement</p> <p>5 staff members of DG Enlargement responsible for the day-to-day management, coordination & administration of the WBIF. The Secretariat issues calls for proposals for projects, manages the screening & assessment process.</p>
<p>National IPA Coordinators (NIPACs)</p> <p>Responsible to apply for grant. In case of regional sectoral projects, application can be made by the relevant sectoral organisation (i.e., Energy Community Secretariat) but must be accompanied by official letters of support from relevant NIPACs. NIPACs are responsible for presenting applications supported by the PFG to the SC for approval.</p>	<p>Infrastructure Project Facility (IPF)</p> <p>EC-financed facility providing teams of technical experts to assist beneficiaries & financiers with the preparation of infrastructure projects identified as a priority by WBIF.</p>	<p>IFI Coordination Office – IFI CO</p> <p>EC-financed project supporting better coordination & communic. among EC, IFIs, bilateral donors & beneficiaries in the WB; focusing on policy & strategy issues in key sectors of energy, environ., transport, social issues & private sector development; providing a range of services includ. research & analyses, techn. assistance, communic. & admin. support; sustaining the WBIF Steering Committee & managing the WBIF website.</p>

Source: The table is of the author. WBIF. Practical Guidelines for WBIF Project Application and Submission, January 2014: 15 [online]. Available at: https://wbc-rti.info/object/document/13793/attach/WBIF_Guide_lines_Round_11.pdf [Accessed: 6 August 2021].

Whether the WBIF plays a key role in financing energy and infrastructural projects as an intrinsic part of the Connectivity Agenda within the BP, on a broader level the RCC, as mentioned in the previous pages, is pivotal in boosting connectivity projects, initiatives, and joint ventures. If one might consider the two structures (i.e., WBIF and RCC) as overlapping, they have, in fact, two distinct functions. The former pools funds for projects' implementation, and the latter provides the framework for regional programmes, targeting either economic and/or social development, to be concretized.

SEETO, as previously stated, is a regional transport organization set up for the development of the Core Regional Transport Network with a coordinating role. Besides that, it works on enhancing local capacity for the implementation of investment programmes; and for integrating the SEETO Comprehensive Network in the framework of the wider Trans-European Network. The SEETO Comprehensive Network matches the TEN-T network and it consists of 6,554 km of roads, 4,807 km of rail, 4 rivers, 10 seaports, 17 airports and 8 inland waterway

ports. SEETO is the main entry gate of transport connectivity projects in the Berlin Process.⁷⁹ Yet, it has neither supervisory functions nor executive powers.

Whether it is clear how a project is identified, selected, approved, and then financed, it is less evident who is responsible for the effective control and monitoring of its own implementation. Given the current constellation and the way projects are run in the practice with key examples provided in the next pages, there is a lack of an overall supervision.

In the meantime, core projects have been identified in the following corridors:⁸⁰ Mediterranean corridor, Orient/East-Med corridor, Rhine/Danube corridor⁸¹ within the *Connectivity Agenda* framework. These projects have either received grant funding or have been identified as beneficiaries for EU grants, in order to complement the loan financed under the WBIF. Notwithstanding lack of evidence, it is highly probable that these connectivity projects have been prioritized by the BP because they make use of an existing legal, institutional, and financial regional framework. Additionally, they fall under 2 specific chapters of the *acquis communautaire*, respectively chapter 21 on Trans-European networks and chapter 15 on energy.⁸²

Also, they are large-scale infrastructure investments identified under the SEETO Comprehensive Network Projects⁸³ and/or are part of the Energy Community PECI (Projects of Energy Community Interest) list.⁸⁴

VI. BEYOND STATEMENTS: COMMITMENTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN THE WB6

Infrastructural projects started late in the Western Balkans compared to their European neighbours at the time of the industrial revolution, with Kosovo building its railway line in 1874 and the last one being Albania in 1917 (UK in 1830, Belgium and Germany in 1835, Austria in 1837).⁸⁵ Apart from the railway transport, most Western Balkan countries did not have a modern road network until recently. For instance, the private ownership of passenger cars was prohibited until 1990 in Albania, which has built the most kilometers of motorway in the region over the last decade (over 300 km) only.⁸⁶

On the one hand, the slow pace for development is due to that the Western Balkans were part of the Ottoman Empire in the XIX century, which experienced stagnation starting from the early XVII century. On the other hand, this condition might be attributed to a significant

⁷⁹Albania in the Berlin Process. Current achievements and upcoming challenges for the Paris Summit Fall 2015: 28 [online]. Available at: <https://cdinstitute.eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/ANGLISHT.pdf> [Accessed: 16 July 2021].

⁸⁰For an overview of the corridors' extension see European Commission. *Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 8, op. cit.*

⁸¹European Commission. *Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans in 2015: 9-10, ibid.*

⁸²Albania in the Berlin Process: 20, *op. cit.*

⁸³SEETO Comprehensive Network Projects [online]. Available at: <http://www.seetoint.org/projects/seeto-comprehensive-network-projects/> [Accessed: 23 July 2021].

⁸⁴Albania in the Berlin Process: 20, *op. cit.*

⁸⁵Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 2, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 7, *ibid.*

political fragmentation in the region later on. A short period of industrialization took place under Tito, but it was minimal and with no substantial economic impact.⁸⁷

Yet, the future European integration and the consistent commitment under the Connectivity Agenda is supposed to bring infrastructure in the region up to the EU standards, while boosting economic growth, regional cooperation, and good neighbourly relations.

Improving connectivity within the Western Balkans and with the EU is a key factor for growth and jobs and will bring clear benefits for economies and citizens. The Western Balkans have made the Connectivity Agenda one of their highest priorities, with a special emphasis on the preparation and financing of regional infrastructure investment projects, but also on the implementation of technical standards and accompanying reform measures. An *Infrastructure Project Facility 3*, financed by the WBIF (total cost: € 565,250) and completed in 2016, was tasked with identifying and analyzing: physical gaps in the core energy and transport network infrastructure, and gaps in project development, including an estimate of the costs necessary to bring potential projects to implementation and completion. The study identified a series of projects which would improve connectivity in the region as well as between the region and the EU.⁸⁸

Various projects be they in the energy sector, road transport, railway or waterways are in the pipeline. Yet, few of them have been completed. All others are at different stages of design and/or development. But in many cases key information is missing, and no deadline is provided. Also, it is not clear who is monitoring their effective implementation, as previously outlined, and make sure that the money is properly channeled into these investments. There are too many actors involved from donors (i.e., EIB, EBRC, WBIF, etc.) local authorities and regional organizations (i.e., RRC and SEETO), including an EU-propelled framework (BP), so that competences seem to overlap, or not properly synchronized.

a) Energy/Electricity

In the energy sector, and before the 2015 Connectivity Agenda, the EBRD and the EU developed and funded, jointly with the Energy Community Secretariat the *Regional Energy Efficiency Programme* (REEP), in its implementation phase, for a total cost of € 224,978,000 Mill, with the EU further contributing via the WBIF with an additional € 30 Mill grant in 2016. This is an integrated package of finance, technical assistance and policy dialogue established by the EC in 2013 with a view at addressing the WB6's two energy bottlenecks: energy intensity 3 times higher than the EU average, often because of aged and obsolete energy infrastructure and poorly maintained and/or outdated energy-using capital stock, and strong dependence on energy sources and unclean energy.⁸⁹The REEP consists of 3 windows⁹⁰ and, among them, window 1 is

⁸⁷Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 2, *ibid*.

⁸⁸Regional Connectivity Networks Gap Analysis [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MULTI-TRA-003> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

⁸⁹Regional Energy Efficiency Programme for the Western Balkans-REEP Plus [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MULTI-ENE-011> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

particularly relevant since it aims at facilitating the implementation of energy efficiency projects, particularly in the public sector in all countries in the region.⁹¹

In the meantime, 2 projects only have been completed in the energy/electricity sector across the WB6.

Table 1. Completed Energy Projects

	ALB	Kosovo
Action	feasibility study	rehabilitation
Project Title	<i>Upgrade of the National Electricity Transmission System</i>	<i>Pristina District Heating Improvement (Phase 1 & 2)</i>
Total costs	180,000 €	€ 37,684,971
Status	completed	completed

Source: <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects>. [Accessed: between 13 & 29 July 2021]

All other major investments are at different stages, and comparatively Serbia is the country benefiting from the highest number of grants, under the WBIF, in this sector.

Table 2. Not Completed Energy/Electricity Projects

	ALB		BIH		KOS		MNE	North MKD	
Action	construction	construction	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	construction	construction	construction
Project Title	<i>Albania – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Power Interconnection (I): Grid Section in Albania</i>	<i>Tirana-Durrës Region: Upgrade of the Electricity Transmission Network</i>	<i>Smart Metering/Automated Meter Reading (AMR) System</i>	<i>Energy Efficiency Measures in Public Buildings at Municipality Level</i>	<i>District Heating Systems in Kosovo</i>	<i>Energy Efficiency Measures in Central Public Buildings</i>	<i>Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro</i>	<i>North Macedonia-Serbia 400 kV Power Interconnection: Construction of Section Stip Substation-Serbia Border</i>	<i>Albania-North Macedonia Power Interconnection (II): Grid Section in North Macedonia</i>
Total costs	16,530,000 €	46,154,605 €	124,900,000 €	€ 8,000,000	€ 154,160,000	€ 28,392,000	€ 128,850,000	€ 14,100,000	€ 51,667,000
Stage	expected end Jun. 2020	tendering	Implementation	tendering	preparation	implementation	implementation	implementation	implementation
	SRB								
	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	upgrading	construction	construction	construction	renovation		
	<i>Rehabilitation of District Heating Systems in Serbia-Phase IV</i>	<i>Energy Efficiency Programme in Public Buildings in Serbia</i>	<i>Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: 400 kV Overhead Line Bajina Basta-Kraljevo</i>	<i>Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Obrenovac-Bajina Bašta Grid Section in Serbia</i>	<i>Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Serbia (Kragujevac-Kraljevo)</i>	<i>North Continental South East Corridor</i>	<i>Energy Efficiency Renovation Programme of Central Government Buildings-EERPCGB</i>		
	€ 58,262,000	€ 18,516,000	€ 40,800,000	€ 58,700,000	€ 29,600,000	€ 86,440,000	€ 44,500,000		
	implementation	implementation	preparation	tender preparation	implementation	preparation	preparation		

Source: <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects>. [Accessed: between 13 & 29 July 2021]

⁹⁰i.e., provision of funding and grants to financial institutions for on-lending to private and public sectors energy efficiency and renewable projects (WeBSEFF II); and direct financing of larger renewables and energy efficiency projects of primarily industrial companies (WeBSEFF II).

⁹¹Establishment of a Regional Energy Efficiency Programme (REEP) for the Western Balkans [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MULTI-ENE-006> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

The energy/electricity sector in the WB6 faces various challenges with outdated systems, old metering schemes, and aged district heating. The transmission lines region-wide didn't undergo major overhaul in many cases like in Albania, whose last investments and upgrade go back to the 2000s.⁹² BiH relies on a (approx. 4 years old) metering scheme and unreliable subsequent invoicing, performed by about 200 dedicated employees, adding costs to the electricity tariff and, thus, heavily penalizing domestic and industrial consumers alike.⁹³ Kosovo too faces significant challenges related to aging facilities and inadequate maintenance, meeting only 5% of the total demand.⁹⁴ Serbia does not perform better with obsolete pipelines, substations, and production facilities, and in urgent need of rehabilitating its district heating system in the municipalities/cities, while providing better heating services for its citizens.⁹⁵ North Macedonia⁹⁶ and Montenegro⁹⁷ are also urged to upgrade inter-country transmission lines.

Coupled with the challenges above is a consistent increase in the demand and consumption of electricity. This situation has placed additional strains on the network in Albania.⁹⁸ In Kosovo too demand for heating spaces of collective buildings has been raising up.⁹⁹ Therefore, boosting energy efficiency is necessary to downsize customer's electricity consumption.¹⁰⁰

Inefficient use of energy is a major issue in the region. In Serbia, for instance, the energy use per dollar of GDP is 2 to 3 times higher than the EU average, with 3 main areas of energy use of particular concern (i.e., industrial, residential and public service facilities sector).¹⁰¹ Also, Kosovo faces key challenges in this regard¹⁰² with a focus on central public buildings constructed between the '60s, '80s and the ones after 1999-2000, which must

⁹² Works Commence on the 2015 Connectivity Agenda Project North Macedonia-Albania Power Interconnection, *Western Balkans Investment Framework*, 30 July 2020 [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/news-details/works-commence-2015-connectivity-agenda-project-north-macedonia-albania-power-interconnection> [Accessed: 13 July 2021].

⁹³ Smart Metering/Automated Meter Reading (AMR) System, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-ENE-007> [Accessed: 15 July 2021].

⁹⁴ Energy Efficiency Measures in Central Public Buildings [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-ENE-004> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

⁹⁵ Rehabilitation of District Heating Systems in Serbia-Phase IV [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-003> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

⁹⁶ North Macedonia-Serbia 400 kV Power Interconnection: Construction of Section Stip Substation-Serbia Border [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-ENE-002> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

⁹⁷ Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-ENE-001> [Accessed: 30 July 2021].

⁹⁸ Works Commence on the 2015 Connectivity Agenda Project North Macedonia-Albania Power Interconnection, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ District Heating Systems in Kosovo [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-ENE-009> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

¹⁰⁰ Smart Metering/Automated Meter Reading (AMR) System, *op. cit.*

¹⁰¹ Energy Efficiency Programme in Public Buildings in Serbia (EEP) [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-004> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁰² District Heating Systems in Kosovo, *op. cit.*

undergo renovation in terms of energy efficiency, with the priority for those having the highest energy efficiency potential. For this purpose, the Ministry of Economic Development, responsible for the energy sector, has expressed its interest to address central public service buildings too. Buildings managed by central institutions will be prioritized.¹⁰³

Energy efficiency measures are also underway in Serbia with the expected contribution to at least a 20% reduction in energy consumption in the country.¹⁰⁴ For instance, concrete investments for boosting energy efficiency are at the core of the establishment of the *North Continental South East Corridor*, also referred to as the initial section of the Second Phase of the Transbalkan Corridor, being on the important route of energy transmission from Romania to the Western parts of the region, mainly BiH, Croatia and Italy. Once completed it will largely facilitate electricity transit in the region.¹⁰⁵ Specifically, the *Trans-Balkan Corridor: 400 kV Interconnection Serbia-Montenegro-BiH* in its preparation phase for a total cost of € 50,056,000 is of key regional significance. Its construction supports a strategic electricity transmission corridor running northeast-southwest through the Balkan countries. Once finished the project will provide the basis for the improvement of net transfer capacity to facilitate anticipated load and transit growth in this region, new conventional and renewable generation connections. Besides that, it will contribute to improving the stability and reliability of the regional network, leading to improvements in the overall security of supply, losses, and energy quality. As such it supports the potential to develop the regional energy market SEE and create trading opportunities between SEE and EU countries.¹⁰⁶

Energy efficiency renovation of central government buildings is also part of a key project in Serbia, and it encompasses the upgrading of up to 28 buildings (with a total area renovated of 208,000 m²) in Belgrade of which 50% are classified as heritage buildings. Concretely, this project should result in minimum 30% of primary energy consumption reduction.¹⁰⁷

Various upgrading transmission line projects are in the pipeline, like the establishment of a 400 kV transmission system in the middle of the most congested regional Northeast-Southwest and East-West transmission corridors in Serbia.¹⁰⁸ Also, it is planned the further transition to 400 kV voltage in the central and western part of the country.¹⁰⁹ Besides that, it is foreseen the construction of a new 400 kV transmission line between Kraljevo and Kragujevac with the purpose of upgrading the electricity distribution system in Central and Western Serbia

¹⁰³Energy Efficiency Measures in Central Public Buildings [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-ENE-004> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

¹⁰⁴Energy Efficiency Programme in Public Buildings in Serbia (EEP), *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵North Continental South-East Corridor [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-015> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁰⁶ Trans-Balkan Corridor: 400 kV Interconnection Serbia-Montenegro-BiH [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MULTI-ENE-002> [accessed: 28 July 2021]

¹⁰⁷Energy Efficiency Renovation Programme of Central Government Buildings-EERPCGB [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-017> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁰⁸Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: 400 kV Overhead Line Bajina Basta-Kraljevo [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-006> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁰⁹Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Obrenovac-BajinaBašta Grid Section in Serbia [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-007> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

and interconnect it with systems in the neighbouring EU states.¹¹⁰ Also, these projects aim at helping reduce the number of electricity thefts and losses in the distribution system.¹¹¹ Besides that, some of them will enhance cross-border exchanges in electricity,¹¹² and contribute to the development of the regional market.¹¹³ For instance, the *Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor* contributes to the establishment of a Western Balkans regional electricity market through the creation of a 400 kV transmission corridor between Montenegro, Serbia and BiH. The corridor would be further linked to the EU via the Italy-Montenegro submarine cable. The project is an integral part of the 2015 Connectivity Agenda. Construction works are currently ongoing, with an estimated completion date set for the end of 2022.¹¹⁴ Also, the *Albania-North Macedonia Power Interconnection (II): Grid Section in North Macedonia* is part of the EC's initiative to establish an East-West electricity transmission corridor between Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Albania, Montenegro, and Italy and foreseeing the construction of a 400kV transmission system from Bitola to Ohrid and from there to the border with Albania.¹¹⁵

In addition to the purposes and advantages outlined above, the envisaged projects won't involve population resettlement and will have a minimal impact on biodiversity. In Albania, the new facilities are planned to be built on degraded parklands or agricultural land with low productivity.¹¹⁶ Also, economic growth is expected to rise (i.e., Project *Albania – the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Power Interconnection (I): Grid Section in Albania* will bring an additional € 314.7 Mill to Albania GDP). Moreover, jobs will increase.¹¹⁷ Besides that, most of these projects will have moderate environmental impact,¹¹⁸ with the generation of reduced CO2 emissions¹¹⁹ and downsizing pollution levels¹²⁰ with large-scale integration of renewables in the

¹¹⁰Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Serbia (Kragujevac-Kraljevo) [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-008> [Accessed: 30 July 2021].

¹¹¹Smart Metering/Automated Meter Reading (AMR) System, *op. cit.* See also, Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro, *op. cit.* And, Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Serbia (Kragujevac-Kraljevo), *op. cit.*

¹¹²Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro, *op. cit.*

¹¹³ Works Commence on the 2015 Connectivity Agenda Project North Macedonia-Albania Power Interconnection, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁴Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁵Albania-North Macedonia Power Interconnection (II): Grid Section in North Macedonia [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-ENE-005> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹¹⁶ Works Commence on the 2015 Connectivity Agenda Project North Macedonia-Albania Power Interconnection, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ Works Commence on the 2015 Connectivity Agenda Project North Macedonia-Albania Power Interconnection, *ibid.*

¹¹⁸Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Serbia (Kragujevac-Kraljevo) [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-008> [Accessed: 30 July 2021]. See also, Pristina District Heating Improvement (Phase 1 & 2) [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-ENE-001> [Accessed: 26 July 2021]

¹¹⁹Western Balkans Investment Framework: 2. [online]. Available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/publication/2015/2015-connectivity-package.pdf> [Accessed: 12 July 2021]; See also, Tirana-Durrës Region: Upgrade of the Electricity Transmission Network, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-ENE-003> [Accessed: 13 July 2021]. See also, Rehabilitation of District Heating Systems in Serbia-Phase IV [online]. Available at: [---

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distribution networks,¹²¹ and thus diversifying energy sources.¹²² On the whole most of the investments aim at providing reliable electricity,¹²³ and improving the service for customers (including domestic users and the industry¹²⁴) at the lowest possible cost.¹²⁵ Moreover, they aim at securing power supply¹²⁶ by limiting overloads in the existing systems, and thus reducing the outages.¹²⁷

b) Road transport

Roads across the region have suffered from a lack of investment and neglect over the recent past decades. This dire situation results in poor service for users with a particular adverse impact on more remote communities, excessive journey times, higher levels of accidents and a poor offer for tempting business and inward investment. Also, it has a negative effect on both the economy and social well-being. In the road transport sector 6 projects in total have been completed so far.

Table 3. Transport Road Projects Completed

Action	ALB		BiH		SRB	
	rehabilitation		construction		renovation	
Project title	Improvement of rural roads (Feeder Roads)	Rehabilitation of Regional and Local Roads	Core Network (Road R2): Construction of Mahovljani Interchange	Comprehensive Network (Road R9A): Construction of Brčko Bypass	Belgrade City Integrated Transport	Belgrade Public Transport and Traffic Infrastructure Phase II
Total costs	24,600,000 €	138,500,000 €	33,800,000 €	28,500,000 €	183,900,000 €	126,451,370 €
Stage	completed					

Source: <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects> [Accessed: 13.07 - 30.07.2021].

They targeted key bottlenecks in the region's road transport, such as poor road conditions, traffic congestion, and lost time for travelling and air pollution. Countries like Albania have, for instance, only a small number of local roads being paved, with 75-80% in precarious status, because of prioritizing the expansion of the national road network in recent years. Consequently, a high number of road sections are impassable for parts of the year, hence access to essential services (i.e., primarily health and education) is restricted. This situation obviously

SRB-ENE-003 [Accessed: 28 July 2021]. And, Energy Efficiency Renovation Programme of Central Government Buildings-EERPCGB [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-ENE-017> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹²⁰ Energy Efficiency Measures in Public Buildings at Municipality Level [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-ENE-003> [Accessed: 26 July 2021]

¹²¹ Smart Metering/Automated Meter Reading (AMR), *op. cit.* See also, Albania-North Macedonia Power Interconnection (II): Grid Section in North Macedonia, *op. cit.*

¹²² District Heating Systems in Kosovo, *op. cit.*

¹²³ Rehabilitation of District Heating Systems in Serbia-Phase IV, *op. cit.*

¹²⁴ North Macedonia-Serbia 400 kV Power Interconnection: Construction of Section Stip Substation-Serbia Border, *op. cit.*

¹²⁵ Pristina District Heating Improvement (Phase 1 & 2), *op. cit.*

¹²⁶ Energy Efficiency Measures in Central Public Buildings, *op. cit.* See also, Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Montenegro, *op. cit.* And, Rehabilitation of District Heating Systems in Serbia-Phase IV, *op. cit.* Also, Trans-Balkan Electricity Corridor: Grid Section in Serbia (Kragujevac-Kraljevo), *op. cit.*

¹²⁷ Western Balkans Investment Framework: 4, *op. cit.*

hinders economic growth with a direct impact on agricultural competitiveness.¹²⁸ Also, because of a massive increase (152 % in the period 2000-2008) in vehicle ownership, from a base-line of virtually zero in 1990), Albania witnessed a severe congestion experienced in the capital.¹²⁹ Therefore, the major investments foresee to downsize time for travelling, as for other investments in the region,¹³⁰ especially in the city of Tirana¹³¹ with a view at reducing vehicle operating costs and increasing traffic volumes.¹³² Besides that, such projects aim at decreasing the number of accidents¹³³ and air pollution.¹³⁴ Also, they will create new jobs.¹³⁵ Last but not least, they will boost international cohesion.¹³⁶

Considering Albania's overall length of the total road network between national and secondary/local roads (tot. network about 15.500 km, comprising 3.400 km of national roads and about 12.000 km of secondary and local roads), the significance of undertaking key investments in this sector is obvious. Also, most road improvements are part of the core network of agreed routes suitable for development as defined by SEETO.¹³⁷ Two key completed projects upgraded 1.500 km and rehabilitated 500 km of secondary and rural roads, while improving the transport conditions in the rural areas.¹³⁸ Overall such investments will significantly increase economic growth,¹³⁹ as well as regional transportation such as the two key completed

¹²⁸Improvement of rural roads (Feeder Roads), *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-001> [Accessed: 13 July 2017].

¹²⁹Mediterranean Corridor: Construction of Tirana Bypass (Kashar-Vaqarr-Mullet), *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-005> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹³⁰Corridor X (E-75 & E-80) Motorway-Serbia [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-005> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹³¹Mediterranean Corridor: Construction of Tirana Bypass (Kashar-Vaqarr-Mullet), *op. cit.*

¹³²Improvement of rural roads (Feeder Roads), *op. cit.*

¹³³Comprehensive Network (Road R2b): Reconstruction of Scepan Polje (BiH Border)-Pluzine Main Road [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-001> [Accessed: 27 July 2021]. See also, Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Section Mateševó-Andrijevíca [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-005> [Accessed: 27 July 2021]. Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia-Albania CVIII Road Interconnection, Bukojcani-Kicevo Subsection [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-TRA-015> [Accessed: 28 July 2021]. Corridor X (E-75 & E-80) Motorway-Serbia, *op. cit.*

¹³⁴ Mediterranean Corridor: Construction of Tirana Bypass (Kashar-Vaqarr-Mullet), *op. cit.* See also, Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Section Mateševó-Andrijevíca, *op. cit.*

¹³⁵ Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro-Croatia-Albania R1 Road Interconnection, Budva Pass [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-003> [Accessed: 27 July 2021]. See also, Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Section Mateševó-Andrijevíca, *op. cit.* And, Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia-Albania CVIII Road Interconnection, Bukojcani-Kicevo Subsection, *op. cit.*

¹³⁶Comprehensive Network (Road R2b): Reconstruction of Scepan Polje (BiH Border)-Pluzine Main Road, *op. cit.*

¹³⁷Upgrade of the National Road Network, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-004> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹³⁸Improvement of rural roads (Feeder Roads), *op. cit.* Rehabilitation of Regional and Local Roads, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-003> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹³⁹Upgrade of the National Road Network, *op. cit.*

investments in BiH.¹⁴⁰ In addition to that, they enhanced the quality of the urban public transport, while investing in new energy-efficient technologies like in Serbia.¹⁴¹

Currently, most of the road transport projects are either in their tender/preparation or implementation phase. But neither information is provided on their progress, nor is a deadline given. In some cases, no project description is displayed,¹⁴² and/or key steps for commencing a feasibility study are mentioned.¹⁴³ This does not help in terms of their accountability and credibility.

Table. 4 Road Transport Uncompleted Projects

Action	AIB			BiH	KOS	
	rehabilitation	construction	construction	construction	construction	construction
Project title	Upgrade of the National Road Network	Mediterranean Corridor: Construction of Tirana Bypass (Kashar-Vaqarr-Mullet)	Mediterranean Corridor: Murriqan-Lezhë Route 2b Highway Section	Extension of TENT-T Core Network: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia R2a Road Interconnection	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Kosovo-Serbia R7 Road Interconnection, Pristina-Merdare Section	Comprehensive Network (Road 6b): Construction of Road N9 Pristina-Peja, Section Kijevë/Kiina – Zahaa/Zahac
Total costs	145,460,000 €	150,933,091 €	255,163,215 €	65,000,000 €	204,696,558 €	143,200,000 €
Stage	implementation	tender preparation	preparation	implementation	preparation	preparation
	MNE			North MKD		
	reconstruction	construction	construction	construction	construction	construction
	Comprehensive Network (Road R2b): Reconstruction of Scepun Polje (BiH Border) – Pluzine Main Road	Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro-Croatia-Albania R1 Road Interconnection, Budva Pass	Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Section Mateševa-Andrijevića	Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Bypass Podgorica (Smokovac-Talosi-Farmaci)	Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia-Kosovo Road Interconnection, Blace-Skopje (Stenkovec Interchange) Motorway Section	Core Network (Road Corridor VIII): Construction of Motorway A2, Section Gostivar-Kicevo, subsection Gostivar-Gorna Gjonovica
	64,950,440 €	292,952,000 €	425,400,000 €	191,910,000 €	121,102,867 €	105,000,000 €
	preparation	preparation	preparation	preparation	preparation	preparation
	North MKD		SRB			
	construction	construction	upgrading & construction			
	Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia-Albania CVIII Road Interconnection, Bukajcani-Kicevo Subsection	Corridor X (E-75 & E-80) Motorway-Serbia	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia-Kosovo R7 Road Interconnection, Nis-Merdare Highway			
	105,050,000 €	1,360,000,000 €	740,790,000 €			
preparation	implementation	tender preparation				

Source: <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects> [Accessed: 13.07-02.08.2021].

¹⁴⁰ Core Network (Road R2): Construction of Mahovljani Interchange [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-004> [accessed: 26 July 2021]. See also, Comprehensive Network (Road R9A): Construction of Brčko Bypass [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-005> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

¹⁴¹ Belgrade City Integrated Transport [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-002> [Accessed: 29 July 2021]. See also, Belgrade Public Transport and Traffic Infrastructure Phase II [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-008> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁴² Mediterranean Corridor: Murriqan-Lezhë Route 2b Highway Section, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-016> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹⁴³ Orient/East-Med Corridor (Road R4) Construction of Bar-Boljare Highway [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-011> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

Yet, their relevance for boosting trade, regional integration, and sustainable growth and, thus, having a positive impact in the economies of the concerned countries is tangible. To start with, BiH's ambitious motorway construction programme (total cost: € 2,233,292,528) on the *Mediterranean Core Network Corridor*, in cooperation with its neighbours, foresees the extension of this Corridor, linking the Iberian Peninsula with the Hungarian-Ukrainian border, into the Western Balkans. Once completed this project will connect Central Europe, namely Hungary and eastern Croatia, to BiH and the Adriatic Sea. The project is in its implementation phase,¹⁴⁴ and its construction works continue despite Covid-19.¹⁴⁵ Likewise, the *extension of TENT-T Core Network: BiH-Croatia R2a Road Interconnection* envisages the construction of a border-crossing, a cross-border bridge over the River Sava, as well as motorway connections on the Banja Luka-Gradiska road section. The new extension will connect BiH (the Republika Srpska) to the main transport routes in Croatia leading to the Adriatic ports. The new facilities are estimated to become operational by mid-2022.¹⁴⁶

Boosting economic growth, social development, facilitating trade and economic links with neighbouring countries and the EU MS is also the planned *construction of the midsection (approx. 30 km) of SEETO Route 6B in Kosovo connecting Pristina to Podgorica* via SEETO Route 4. Besides that, the project will positively impact the local environment and safety of the communities living along the existing road, who are currently hit by significant severance, noise, vibration, and local air pollution as well as traffic hazards. Yet, the duration of the preparation phase is unknown.¹⁴⁷

Better connecting countries is the aim of the *construction of the Budva Pass* in Montenegro linking Croatia, BiH, Montenegro and Albania, removing the bottlenecks on SEETO Route 1 along the Montenegrin coast, being in its preparation phase¹⁴⁸ and with an estimated end date by the fall of 2023.¹⁴⁹ Likewise, the *Bar-Boljare highway*, approx. 169 km long, will cross the entire country and connect it, from the Adriatic coast, through Podgorica to Serbia, and onwards, via highway Pozega-Belgrade, to TEN-T Corridor X, Romania, and Central Europe. It will link the ports on the Adriatic Sea to those on the Danube (Corridor VII and Corridor X) too. Moreover, this will be the shortest connection from Hungary and Romania through Serbia and Montenegro to southern Italy and Albania.¹⁵⁰ Yet, this project is still in its preparation phase with no further details given about the next steps. And, the same is valid for the phase II of the project

¹⁴⁴Mediterranean Corridor: Construction of Road Corridor Vc in Bosnia and Herzegovina, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-002> [Accessed: 15 July 2021].

¹⁴⁵Bosnia and Herzegovina. Works on Corridor Vc Progress Despite Covid-19 Disruptions [online]. Available at: https://wbif.eu/storage/app/media/Library/10.Projects/Corridor%20Vc%20BiH%20March%202021/WBIF%20Vc%20Factsheet%20March%202021_eng.pdf [Accessed: 3 August 2021].

¹⁴⁶Extension of TENT-T Core Network: Bosnia and Herzegovina – Croatia R2a Road Interconnection [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-008> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

¹⁴⁷Comprehensive Network (Road 6b): Construction of Road N9 Pristina-Peja, Section Kijevë/Klina – Zahaq/Zahac [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-003> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

¹⁴⁸Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro-Croatia-Albania R1 Road Interconnection, Budva Pass, *op. cit.*

¹⁴⁹Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans, 2018: 20, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁰Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Section Mateševo-Andrijevića, *op. cit.*

(*Bypass Podgorica/Smokovac-Tolosi-Farmac*) for a total length of 18 km with an estimated period for construction in 3 years.¹⁵¹

Speeding up travelling time is also the purpose of a 12.9 km-long motorway to be built on a section of the Orient/East-Med Core Network (Corridor VIII) in North Macedonia, between the village of Bukojcani and the town of Kicevo. The new motorway will allow for travel speeds of 100-120 km/h,¹⁵² and it is estimated to be concluded by the end of 2022.¹⁵³

Also, the planned construction of 20 km bypass to run between Kashar and Muller via Vaqarr in Tirana foresees to reduce travelling time. The project is in its tender preparation, but no information is provided about the further project preparatory work, which is due in order to finalize the designs to the level of detail required.¹⁵⁴

Revitalizing economic and social development of the north-east region of North Macedonia, and facilitating international transport and trade in the area, while linking domestic markets to the Port of Thessaloniki, is the goal of upgrading the existing road between Skopje and Blace, from Stenkovec Interchange (Skopje bypass) to Blace, the border crossing point with Kosovo, as part of the Orient/East-Med Corridor. But no deadline is provided as far as the end of the preparation phase is concerned.¹⁵⁵

Along with the project's goals above, while also boosting tourism especially between Albania and Macedonia is the planned construction of the motorway section A2 Gostivar-Kichevo (42 km), part of the SEETO and TEN-T Core Network extension into the Western Balkans, connecting the Black Sea with the Adriatic Sea. This investment will be implemented in 3 phases, and the detailed design for Phase I (subsection Bukojcani – Kicevo) has already been developed.¹⁵⁶ No further information for phase 2 (subsection Gostivar-Gorna Gjonovica (17 km) and access road towards the Mavrovo Ski Resort (5km)) is provided.¹⁵⁷

Beneficial for freight and passenger transport is the so-called *Peace Highway*, namely the Orient/East-Med Corridor in Kosovo connecting Pristina to Merdare E80/R7 road section continuing into Serbia, via Nis, and then further to the Black Sea, as well as to Albania, up to Durrës Port on the Adriatic. It is the region's shortest route from Durrës Port to South-Eastern and Central Europe as well as to the Black Sea. The planned investment foresees the expansion of the existing infrastructure, in poor conditions, into a 23 km-long dual carriageway from Pristina to

¹⁵¹Construction of Bar-Boljare highway, Phase II: Bypass Podgorica (Smokovac-Tolosi-Farmac) [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-006> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

¹⁵² Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia-Albania CVIII Road Interconnection, Bukojcani-Kicevo Subsection, *op. cit.*

¹⁵³Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans, 2018: 18, *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁴Mediterranean Corridor: Construction of Tirana Bypass (Kashar-Vaqarr-Mullet), *op. cit.*

¹⁵⁵ Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia-Kosovo Road Interconnection, Blace-Skopje (Stenkovec Interchange) Motorway Section [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-TRA-002> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹⁵⁶Core Network (Road Corridor VIII): Construction of Motorway A2, Section Gostivar-Kicevo, subsection Gostivar-Gorna Gjonovica [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-TRA-004> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹⁵⁷Core Network (Road Corridor VIII): Construction of Motorway A2, Section Gostivar-Kicevo, subsection Gostivar-Gorna Gjonovica, *ibid.*

the border crossing in Merdare.¹⁵⁸ Also, it represents more than just a construction project considering its own name. At present the feasibility study is still ongoing and no timeline is provided. The Serbian section is in its tender preparation phase,¹⁵⁹ and the project is expected to be concluded by the end of 2022.¹⁶⁰

The EU, through the WBIF, has been instrumental in identifying the investment needs on this route as well as financing the preparation of the technical documentation for the upgrade to highway standards of the sections Nis-Plocnik (32 km) and Plocnik-Merdare (37 km), including construction of a modern cross-border point in Merdare. The Nis (Merosina)-Plocnik (Beloljin) section is now at the procurement stage. Land ownership issues are to be addressed in the coming period, while an updated environmental and social impact assessment was supposed to be approved by the relevant authorities and participating IFIs by the end of 2020. Yet, no further information is provided in this regard. The Plocnik (Beloljin)-Merdare section is at the preliminary design stage. Following the adoption of an updated Spatial Plan in August 2019, the preliminary design was scheduled for completion in 2020, but there is no update about it.¹⁶¹

Shorter travel route and congestion avoidance is part of the planned investment connecting Montenegro and BiH, thus making up the shortest route between the respective capitals (Sarajevo and Podgorica) and then leading on to Tirana. Also, it will downsize accidents. Besides that, it will have significant economic benefits for both countries. Yet, the project is in its preparation phase with no further details provided.¹⁶²

A clear regional strategic dimension is behind the future construction of *Corridor X (E-75 & E-80) Motorway-Serbia*. Transport Corridor X (1,500 km long), a key Pan-European arterial route running north-south, and passing through Austria, Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia, North Macedonia and Greece, is the backbone of the extension of the TEN-T Network (the European Union's north-south, east-west transport connection strategy) in the Western Balkans. This investment aims at developing quality infrastructure in Europe. By facilitating improved links to the broader geographic area, it will benefit both local and international travelers. However, no timeline for the possible start of the construction works is provided.¹⁶³

An additional strategic infrastructural project for both the WB6 and the entire SEE is the construction of the *Adriatic-Ionian Highway* (estimated length about 1,550 km). Its completion will connect Central Europe and Northern Italy with the Ionian peninsula via Slovenia, Croatia, BiH, Montenegro, Albania, and Greece. This investment is included on the indicative extension of the TEN-T Core Network based on the SEETO comprehensive network. Existing roads on the coast

¹⁵⁸Orient/East-Med Corridor: Kosovo-Serbia R7 Road Interconnection, Pristina-Merdare Section [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-002> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

¹⁵⁹Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia-Kosovo R7 Road Interconnection, Nis-Merdare Highway [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-010> [Accessed: 2 August 2021].

¹⁶⁰Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans, 2018: 26, *op. cit.*

¹⁶¹Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia-Kosovo R7 Road Interconnection, Nis-Merdare Highway, *op. cit.* Also, the e-mail sent to Danko Gavrilovic, WBIF Country Manager Serbia, on the 10th of August 2021, remained unanswered.

¹⁶²Comprehensive Network (Road R2b): Reconstruction of Scepan Polje (BiH Border)-Pluzine Main Road, *op. cit.*

¹⁶³Corridor X (E-75 & E-80) Motorway-Serbia, *op. cit.*

have been designed and built in the 1960s. In the past 50 years traffic volume has increased significantly mainly due to tourism. As a result, the route suffers from heavy congestions. The WBIF delivered € 3,500,000 for the preparation of the feasibility study, which is ongoing, and associated designs. Once completed the project will enable for better connections with neighbouring countries; reduced congestion, fuel consumption, emissions, and noise levels; increased road safety levels; and economic development, particularly in the tourism sector. At present no timeline for the implementation phase is given.¹⁶⁴

c) Railway

The railway transport sector is the one in major need of overhaul with some countries like Albania currently allowing for travel speeds under 60 km/h and with an obsolete signaling system causing frequent interruptions in traffic. Consequently, passenger services are seasonal and freight transport is inefficient.¹⁶⁵ Despite the country's key shortcomings targeted investments are envisaged for ensuring interoperable and multimodal transport connection (i.e., I. between Albania, North Macedonia and Montenegro, and further transport links with Greece and Bulgaria¹⁶⁶ with the first connectivity agenda grant - €35 Mill - being signed in May 2018,¹⁶⁷ and with a contract for rehabilitation works, as part of the 1st large-scale overhaul of the railway network in Albania, being signed last February between the Albanian railways and the Italian company INC Spa; ¹⁶⁸II. with Italy, through the Port of Durres, as well as with North Macedonia and Bulgaria).¹⁶⁹ Besides that, the rehabilitation of the *Mediterranean Corridor (Rail R2): Rehabilitation of Vlorë/Vorë-Han i Hotit Railway Line*, as part of the indicative extension of the TEN-T Core Network in the Western Balkans, has a significant cross-border and regional impact. Albania's international rail link connects the country with Montenegro and the European railway networks. Once complete, this investment will establish an international railway connection between capitals including between Tirana and Podgorica, Belgrade and Zagreb, Ljubljana, and Budapest.¹⁷⁰ It complements 2 other projects being respectively in their

¹⁶⁴Mediterranean Corridor (Road R1, R2): Construction of Adriatic-Ionian Highway in Albania and Montenegro [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MULTI-TRA-002> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹⁶⁵Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVIII): Rehabilitation of Tirana-Durrës Railway Line and Construction of New Line to Rinas Branch, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-002> [Accessed: 13 July 2021].

¹⁶⁶Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVIII): Rehabilitation of Tirana-Durrës Railway Line and Construction of New Line to Rinas Branch, *ibid.*

¹⁶⁷Signature of the First Connectivity Agenda Grant for Albania, WBIF, 5 May 2018 [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/news-details/signature-first-connectivity-agenda-grant-albania> [Accessed: 9 August 2021].

¹⁶⁸EU and EBRD Support Rehabilitation of Tirana – Durres Railway in Albania, WBIF, 4 February 2021 [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/news-details/eu-and-ebrd-support-rehabilitation-tirana-durres-railway-albania> [Accessed: 9 August 2021].

¹⁶⁹Comprehensive Network: Rehabilitation of Durres-Pogradec-Lin Railway Line and Construction of Lin-Border with North Macedonia Line on Corridor VIII, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-007> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹⁷⁰Mediterranean Corridor (Rail R2): Rehabilitation of Vlorë/Vorë-Han i Hotit Railway Line, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-008> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

preparation phase (total cost: € 291,020,000),¹⁷¹ and implementation phase (total cost: € 89,930,000).¹⁷² Yet, no timeline for their envisaged end is provided.

Upgrading the signaling system, which is to a great extent out of order and outdated, is the purpose of the *rehabilitation of the Sarajevo-Podlugovi railway section* in BiH.¹⁷³ In the country the operating speed along the single electrified line is of currently 30-70 km/h, and the project above aims at overhauling the whole section.¹⁷⁴ Of key regional relevance in the country is the rehabilitation of the *Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVc): Track Overhaul of Bosanski Samac-Sarajevo Railway Line, Sections Doboj-Maglah and Jelina-Zenica*, which aims at bringing the line back to its original design speed (80-100 km/h) and, where possible, to 120 km/h. The section going through BiH, belonging to the regional core transport network developed by SEETO, goes from Budapest, through Croatia and BiH, to the port of Ploče on the Adriatic Sea.¹⁷⁵

Outdated signaling and communication systems, seriously affecting traffic flows and safety, also characterize north Macedonia's rail network. The project *Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia Rail Interconnection, Tabanovce Joint Border Station* is expected to upgrade such systems, by recognizing that this is crucial for aligning the railroad to the EU operational and safety standards and, thus, ensure interoperability, while boosting international trade.¹⁷⁶

Years of underinvestment and poor maintenance have left the rail system in a deficient condition in Serbia as well,¹⁷⁷ where travel speeds of only 60 km/h affect large sections of the *Orient/East-Med Corridor (CX)*, running between Salzburg in Austria and Thessaloniki in Greece, and comprising 3,819 km of track in the country. Particularly, the railway line Nis-Presevo is one of the oldest in Serbia and the most important part of Corridor X¹⁷⁸ is there. Therefore, a full renovation of 92 km of railway track is foreseen, and the project is expected to be completed by December 2025.¹⁷⁹ In some cases the maximum allowed speed for trains can also be between 40 and 50 km/h in Serbia, as it is the case on the Stalac-Kraljevo-Rudnica railway line, where a major overhaul of 149 km and upgrading for the traffic speed of up to 120 km/h is

¹⁷¹Comprehensive Network: Rehabilitation of Durres-Pogradec-Lin Railway Line and Construction of Lin-Border with North Macedonia Line on Corridor VIII, *op. cit.*

¹⁷²Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVIII): Rehabilitation of Tirana-Durrës Railway Line and Construction of New Line to Rinas Branch, *op. cit.*

¹⁷³Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVc): Overhaul of Sarajevo-Podlugovi Railway Section, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-003> [Accessed: 15 July 2021].

¹⁷⁴Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVc): Overhaul of Sarajevo-Podlugovi Railway Section, *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVc): Track Overhaul of Bosanski Samac – Sarajevo Railway Line, Sections Doboj – Maglah and Jelina – Zenica [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-007> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

¹⁷⁶Orient/East-Med Corridor (Rail CX): Modernization of Tabanovce-Cevgelija Railway Line [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-TRA-005> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹⁷⁷TA for Railways Infrastructure in Serbia [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-006> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁷⁸The Pan-European Transport Corridor - Europe's arterial network X and important international routes (SEETO route 4, 10 and 11).

¹⁷⁹Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia-North Macedonia CX Rail Interconnection, Nis, Presevo-Border Between the Two States Section [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-001> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

planned.¹⁸⁰ Increasing travel speed from 50 km/h to 120 km/h, while contributing to the development of intermodal transport, is part of the reconstruction of the railway line Ostruznica-Batajnica, with construction works of the Intermodal terminal in Batajnica started in 2019.¹⁸¹ Another major reconstruction and modernization project is to significantly upgrade the current state of deterioration of many stretches along Corridor X through the country, including improvements in the railway connections to Croatia, Hungary and Bulgaria, while contributing to the integration of Serbia with the neighbouring countries and with the EU.¹⁸² Also, the rehabilitation of a 17 km long single-track section between Stalac and Djunis, on the railway line between Belgrade and Nis, as part of the Orient/East-Med Corridor, is in the pipeline. Once completed the entire railway route from the border with Croatia to Belgrade and then Nis will become double track. The feasibility study is now ended but not further information on the start of the rehabilitation works is provided.¹⁸³

In countries like Montenegro rail as a whole is an important part of the economy, accounting for almost 60% of all freight and 10% of passenger travel.¹⁸⁴ Its planned investment *Orient/East-Med Corridor: Montenegro-Serbia R4 Rail Interconnection, Bar-Vrbnica Section* aims at overhauling the line, which did not undergo any further rehabilitation of its signaling systems since it first opened to traffic in 1976.¹⁸⁵ It is estimated to be concluded by the end of 2023.¹⁸⁶ Another key project – *Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro-Albania R2 Rail Interconnection, Podgorica-Border between the Two States Section* – is under preparation in the country with no information in terms of project description and timelines.¹⁸⁷

Considerably shortening travelling time is at the core of the planned investment in North Macedonia, as part of the Orient/East-Med Corridor running between Hamburg and Bremen in Germany, and Thessaloniki in Greece and Varna in Bulgaria. Plans to develop this route date back to the XIX century, with various segments built and/or overhauled until 2004 when all construction ceased because of a *substantial shortage in funding*. The new railway interconnection will shorten the railway link between North Macedonia and the Black Sea by approximately 200 km. Also, it will facilitate international trade and transport in the region, with particular focus on the link between North Macedonia and Bulgaria. Furthermore, it will boost economic development in the North-East area of the country and facilitate social

¹⁸⁰ Orient/East-Med Corridor: reconstruction and Modernisation of Stalac-Krajlevo-Rudnica Railway Line [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-011> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁸¹ Orient/East-Med Corridor: Belgrade Marshalling Yard-Ostruznica-Batajnica Railway Line [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-039> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁸² TA for Railways rehabilitation II (Corridor X) [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-007> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁸³ Orient/East-Med (CX) Corridor: Reconstruction and Modernisation of Belgrade-Nis Railway Line, Stalac-Djunis Section [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-009> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

¹⁸⁴ Orient/East-Med Corridor: Montenegro-Serbia R4 Rail Interconnection, Bar-Vrbnica Section [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-004> [Accessed: 27 July 2021]

¹⁸⁵ Orient/East-Med Corridor: Montenegro/Serbia R4 Rail Interconnection, Bar-Vrbnica Section, *ibid*.

¹⁸⁶ Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans, 2018: 22, *op. cit*.

¹⁸⁷ Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro-Albania R2 Rail Interconnection, Podgorica-Border Between the Two States Section [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MNE-TRA-023> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

integration.¹⁸⁸ Likewise, the *Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia Rail Interconnection, Tabanovce Joint Border Station* will benefit faster border crossing and reduced travel time for passenger and freight traffic along a major European Corridor, as well as improved working conditions for official border staff.¹⁸⁹

Poor conditions, with serious structural constraints limiting traffic to 60km/h also affect Kosovo's railway system especially on the *Orient/East-Med Corridor* crossing the country from the north to the south on Route 10, from the border with North Macedonia to the one with Serbia, and representing its connection to the wider region by rail. The Route 10 is part of the extension of the Core Network Corridors of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T) into the Western Balkans. It has a total length of 256 km long, out of which 149 km are in Kosovo. Its rehabilitation will occur in 3 phases. Phase 1 received the necessary investments with construction works started in July 2019 and expected to be finalized by mid-2021.¹⁹⁰ Phase 2 is in its tendering status and once completed it will enable for a safe and efficient rail transport for approximately 50% of the population of Kosovo. Also, more than 160 new jobs will be created for construction, operation, and maintenance works. Besides that, it will improve trade flows with countries in the region and, thus, have a positive impact on the broader economy of Kosovo.¹⁹¹ Phase 3 is in its preparation, and it foresees to upgrade 47 km of railway track and associated railway stations up to TEN-T standards. Travel time for passengers and cargo rail will be significantly improved. Besides that, the railway network in Kosovo, integrated into the *Orient/EastMed Corridor*, is going to connect the Western Balkans to Austria, Greece and Bulgaria.¹⁹² The *East Railway Line* significantly damaged during the period 1990-1999 and out of function needs a detailed technical project design for carrying out the general rehabilitation and modernization of the line in a later phase, so as to achieve the desired speed (80 km/h up to 120 km/h).¹⁹³ Having an interoperable railway network, improving transport capacities for passengers and freight, enhancing traffic safety, reducing emissions, and developing multi-modal

¹⁸⁸Orient/East-Med Corridor: construction of Rail Corridor VIII in North Macedonia, Sections Kumanovo-Deve Bair [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-TRA-001> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹⁸⁹Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia Rail Interconnection, Tabanovce Joint Border Station [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-MKD-TRA-003> [Accessed: 28 July 2021].

¹⁹⁰Orient/East-Med Corridor: General Rehabilitation of Route 10 Phase 1, FushëKosovë/Kosovo Polje-Border with North Macedonia Railway Section [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-001> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

¹⁹¹Orient/East-Med Corridor: General Rehabilitation of Route 10 Phase 2, FushëKosovë/Kosovo Polje-Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Railway Section [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-004> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

¹⁹²Orient/East-Med Corridor: General Rehabilitation of Route 10 Phase 3, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica – Border with Serbia Railway Section [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-005> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

¹⁹³Comprehensive Network: Rehabilitation of FushëKosovë/Kosovo Polje-Podujevë/Podujevo Railway Line [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-006> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

transport is the purpose of rehabilitating the existing railway line from the capital city Pristina to Pristina Airport.¹⁹⁴

Yet, whether various projects are in the pipeline region-wide one only has been completed so far: TA for railways infrastructure (tot. cost EUR 800,000). It is about a WBIF grant helping to prepare the action plan for implementing the railway component of the Serbian General Transport Master Plan (GTMP) and to provide the necessary support to the Ministry of Transport for use of the transport model for prioritizing railway investments. The project also provides capacity-building to establish effective coordination among involved institutions in Serbia and to revise the legislative framework accordingly.¹⁹⁵

All other major projects are at different stages of their design and/or development, but no information is given about the next steps, if any.

Table 5. Railway Non-Completed Projects

Action	ALB		BiH			MNE		North MKD		
	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation & reconstruction	rehabilitation & reconstruction	construction	construction	modernization
Project title	Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVIII): Rehabilitation of Tirana-Durrës Railway Line and Construction of New Line to Rinas Branch	Comprehensive Network: Rehabilitation of Durrës-Pogradec-Lin Railway Line and Construction of Lin-Border with North Macedonia Line on Corridor VIII	Mediterranean Corridor (Rail R2): Rehabilitation of Vlora/Vorë-Han Hotit Railway Line	Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVc): Overhaul of Sarajevo-Podlugovi Railway Section	Mediterranean Corridor (Rail CVc): Track Overhaul of Bosanski Šamac – Sarajevo Railway Line, Sections Doboj – Maglaj and Jelina – Zenica	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Montenegro-Serbia R4 Rail Interconnection, Bar-Vrbnica Section	Mediterranean Corridor: Montenegro-Albania R2 Rail Interconnection, Podgorica-Border Between the Two States Section	Orient/East-Med Corridor: construction of Rail Corridor VIII in North Macedonia, Sections Kumanovo-Deve Bair	Orient/East-Med Corridor: North Macedonia Rail Interconnection, Tabanovce Joint Border Station	Orient/East-Med Corridor (Rail CX): Modernization of Tabanovce-Cevgelija Railway Line
Total costs	89,930,000 €	291,020,000 €	127,220,000 €	22,500,000 €	128,800,000 €	244,305,335 €	38,500,000 €	283,476,316 €	6,080,837 €	103,800,000 €
Stage	implementation	preparation	preparation	preparation	preparation	implementation & tendering	preparation	implementation	tender preparation	preparation
	KOS					SRB				
	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation	rehabilitation & construction	renovation	rehabilitation	reconstruction	reconstruction	reconstruction
Project title	Orient/East-Med Corridor: General Rehabilitation of Route 10 Phase 1, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje-Border with North Macedonia Railway Section	Orient/East-Med Corridor: General Rehabilitation of Route 10 Phase 2, Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje-Mitrovicë/Mitrovica Railway Section	Orient/East-Med Corridor: General Rehabilitation of Route 10 Phase 3, Mitrovicë/Mitrovica – Border with Serbia Railway Section	Comprehensive Network: Rehabilitation of Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje-Podujevë/Podujevo Railway Line	Comprehensive Network, Pristina Intermodal Terminal: General Rehabilitation and Construction of Pristina-Pristina Airport Railway Line	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Serbia - North Macedonia CX Rail Interconnection, Nis - Presevo - Border Between the Two States Section	TA for Railways rehabilitation II (Corridor X)	Orient/East-Med (CX) Corridor: Reconstruction and Modernisation of Belgrade-Nis Railway Line, Stalac-Djunis Section	Orient/East-Med Corridor: reconstruction and Modernisation of Stalac-Krajlevo-Rudnica Railway Line	Orient/East-Med Corridor: Belgrade Marshalling Yard-Ostruznica-Batajnica Railway Line
	83,252,846 €	47,690,000 €	64,627,000 €	56,850,000 €	1,100,000 €	182,250,000 €	164,000,000 €	107,660,000 €	521,262,881 €	62,175,000 €
	implementation	tendering	preparation	preparation	preparation	preparation	implementation	preparation	preparation	preparation

Source: <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects> [Accessed 12.07-29.07.2021].

d) Waterways

As far as waterways are concerned there are currently 2 projects only in their preparation phase, respectively in Albania and Serbia. Further details about the next steps are not provided. Also, 2 envisaged projects in BiH, officially published on the WBIF's website as per all other connectivity investments mentioned so far (I. *reconstruction and modernisation of the River Port of Brčko Phase 1*, for a total loan of € 7,000,000 in its tender preparation,¹⁹⁶ and II. *Sava and Drina Rivers Corridors Integrated Development Programme: Demining the Right Bank*

¹⁹⁴Comprehensive Network, Pristina Intermodal Terminal: General Rehabilitation and Construction of Pristina-Pristina Airport Railway Line [online]. Available at: <https://www.wbif.eu/project/PRJ-KOS-TRA-011> [Accessed: 27 July 2021].

¹⁹⁵TA for Railways Infrastructure in Serbia, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁶ Reconstruction and Modernisation of the River Port of Brčko Phase 1 [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-009> [Accessed: 26 July 2021].

of the Sava River in Bosnia and Herzegovina project, in its preparation phase and receiving a total loan of € 30,000,000)¹⁹⁷ don't provide any kind of information.

Table 6. Waterways Uncompleted Projects

	ALB	SRB
Action	rehabilitation	construction
Project title	<i>Reconstruction of Durres Port, Quays 1 & 2</i>	<i>Rhine-Danube Corridor: Belgrade Port</i>
Total cost	62,450,000 €	109,820,000 €
Stage	preparation	preparation

Source: <https://wbif.eu/wbif-projects> [Accessed: 12.07-29.07.2021].

In Albania the rehabilitation of quays 1 and 2, in poor state of disrepair and in urgent need of renovation, on the western terminal of the port of Durres, 1 of the 4 existing terminals of the largest seaport in Albania, are on the agenda. Apart from guaranteeing safety of the sea transport in one of the largest port in the country and in the Adriatic Sea, this investment will generate 230 new jobs. Also, it will significantly improve trade flows with countries in the region and, thus, have a positive impact on the broader economy of Albania.¹⁹⁸ Yet, Edi Rama's government has been recently accused of giving concession for 5 years of 1 of the quays in Durres Port to an offshore company, whose owners hide in fiscal heavens, while getting € 30 Mill in his pocket.¹⁹⁹

In Serbia a multimodal transport hub enabling the connection between the future New Port of Belgrade and inland waterway TEN-T Rhine-Danube Corridor with the axes of the most important Serbian roads (E-70, E-75, regional road Belgrade-Vrsac and Belgrade-Zrenjanin), as well as with the railway Belgrade-Kelebija (Budapest) is on the agenda. It is of strategic relevance and ranked as the 5th most important transport sector project. The Project Railway Corridor X Rehabilitation in Serbia with its branches (Xb and Xc), as well as the construction of the railway connection between the New Port of Belgrade and the Belgrade-Kelebija railway line, will provide links of the New Port of Belgrade to some of the most important TEN-T corridors, such as the *Orient/East-Med Corridor*, the *Mediterranean Corridor*, and the *Baltic-Adriatic Corridor*.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷Sava and Drina Rivers Corridors Integrated Development Programme: Demining the Right Bank of the Sava River in Bosnia and Herzegovina [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-BIH-TRA-092> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹⁹⁸Reconstruction of Durres Port, Quays 1 & 2, *Western Balkans Investment Framework* [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-ALB-TRA-013> [Accessed: 14 July 2021].

¹⁹⁹DP Accuses Premier of Abusive Durres Port Quay Concession, *Albanian Daily News*, 6 January 2021 [online]. Available at: <https://albaniandailynews.com/news/dp-accuses-premier-of-abusive-durres-port-quay-concession> [Accessed: 9 August 2021].

²⁰⁰Rhine-Danube Corridor: Belgrade Port [online]. Available at: <https://wbif.eu/project/PRJ-SRB-TRA-031> [Accessed: 29 July 2021].

VII. NOTHING NEW BUT STILL AN ISSUE: KEY SHORTCOMINGS FOR IMPLEMENTING INFRASTRUCTURAL PROJECTS IN WB6

Whether major key energy and infrastructural projects are on the agenda, only a few have been completed. For many of them concrete timelines for moving to the next stage is missing, so that it is unclear about their effective status and their own destiny.

The 2015 Vienna Summit launching the so-called *Connectivity Agenda* identified the need for the countries in the region to speed up domestic reforms in the area of rule of law, economic governance, public administration reform, fight against corruption and organized crime.²⁰¹ The 2018 London summit well acknowledged that particularly corruption hinders economic growth and investment, weakens democratic institutions, destroys public confidence and undermines the rule of law.²⁰²

On the whole lack of transparency of the bidding process, together with corruption being still an issue of concern,²⁰³ adds up to the shortcomings for infrastructural projects.²⁰⁴ Inevitably, connectivity is more than new transport and energy hardware. In fact, such cross-border infrastructures become relevant only if they are complemented by reforms, creating among others a transparent regulatory framework building investor confidence, that allow people and businesses alike to take full advantage of transport and energy links.²⁰⁵ It is difficult to get private investors for many projects, especially when there are uncertainties over the regulatory framework or concern that the tendering procedures are not carried out competitively.²⁰⁶

Moreover, some sources reveal that in many projects national funding was required too by IFIs and donors. However, countries in the region did not always have the sufficient budgetary funds to co-finance the projects.²⁰⁷ Besides that, large infrastructure investments require detailed planning and clarity on the necessary purchases and/or compensations to owners affected by the construction, or any subsequent supply tariffs to toll roads. Yet, the human resources providing these planning services are often not available to the public institutions in the WB.²⁰⁸ In addition to that, cumbersome administrative procedures and weak project preparation is also a major concern.²⁰⁹

Also, instability in the political system may create difficulties. Projects are sometimes associated with the prestige of certain politicians. Following elections, these projects may then be

²⁰¹Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit, 27 August 2015: 2, *op. cit.*

²⁰²Chair's Conclusions of the Heads' meeting of the London Western Balkans Summit, 10 July 2018 [online]. Available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/systems/uploads/attachment_data/file/724295/Heads_Meeting_-_Chair_s_Conclusions.pdf [Accessed: 21 July 2021].

²⁰³Seventeenth Meeting of the WBIF Steering Committee hosted by KfW, Frankfurt am Main, Germany, 13 December 2017: 4 [online]. Available at: https://wbif.eu:/storage:/app:/media/Library/12.Meetings/1.Steering_Committee/17thSC/1%20WBIF-17thSC-MoM.pdf [Accessed: 9. August 2021].

²⁰⁴Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 5, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁵Connectivity Agenda. Co-financing of Investment Projects in the Western Balkans, 2018: 3, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁶Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 5, *op. cit.*

²⁰⁷Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 5, *ibid.*

²⁰⁸Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 5, *ibid.*

²⁰⁹The Western Balkans Investment Framework. A new approach to financial support 2010, *op. cit.*

postponed or completely cancelled and replaced. Moreover, the effects of past conflicts (and indeed current ones) create difficulties, especially for planning at a regional level.²¹⁰In fact, governance decentralization coupled with ethnic animosities might be an issue. For instance, BiH in addition to the two entities (Federation and the Republika Srpska) and a special administrative region (Brcko), has 10 cantons so that it might be challenging to agree on projects. In Serbia, in addition to the central government, there is also the autonomous province of Vojvodina, where more than 1/4 of the population live and the non-recognition of Kosovo also adds up to the shortcomings of boosting any significant infrastructural project in the north of the country. In Montenegro, a delicate system is balanced between minority groups. In North Macedonia, special attention is to be kept for guaranteeing inter-ethnic balance between the Macedonian majority and the Albanian minority populations.

So, there are still key issues to be properly addressed, in order to guarantee a smooth project's implementation. Yet, the road is long to go.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The BP launched by former German Chancellor Angela Merkel in 2014 should be re-examined. Its current format leaves room for a lack of transparency and accountability. Overall, a better structured *modus operandi* among the BP RCC, SEETO should be chased down.

Certainly, the BP's framework should be further promoted, yet under a new form. Its relevance stems from its expressed support for the European integration for all the WB6. Initiated in 2014 it likely continues the work of the dead Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, being replaced by the RCC nine years later. However, whether both the BP and the RCC pursue the promotion and implementation of connectivity (incl.) energy projects, it is less clear their mutual working relationship. Even so, it is the case between the BP and SEETO. To sum up, there is an overall framework (BP) and two regional organizations (RCC and SEETO) dealing with, to a certain extent, complementary projects. Besides that, there is an additional actor, the WBIF, pooling loans and funds on key connectivity and energy projects. If differences in terms of core competences are quite clear, less evident is their coordination, if any.

Rather the impression one gets is to get lost among a plethora of mega-connectivity (incl. energy) projects without effectively knowing when they will – if ever possible – move to the next stage and/or conclusion. Also, there is not a comprehensive, commonly accessible, and public platform/database of all current projects. In short, to get information thereupon would require a certain amount of patience and dedication for browsing from one project to another, and in some cases with key information missing and/or no deadline provided. In the meantime, more than € 3.2 Bill has been pooled into energy and connectivity projects in the region. However, their traceability remains unknown.

After 7 years since its launch, it is time to re-booth both the rationale and overall structure of a step-by-step framework (BP), whose main purpose at that time was of giving new impetus to the enlargement.

²¹⁰Mario Holzner, Robert Stehrer and Hermine Vidovic: 5, *op. cit.*

Recommendations

- There is the need of establishing a **common channel of communication on the progress of key energy and infrastructural projects, so as to provide for transparency and accountability**. For this purpose, the **Berlin Process should provide a platform/database on its own website showing all key infrastructural and connectivity projects, as well as their own status**;
- The current **pandemic should not shift the attention from the necessary implementation of key energy and transport infrastructural projects** as part of the Connectivity Agenda. **The next summits should provide the basis for a reinvigorated impetus in this regard**. Concretely, **key energy and transport infrastructural projects in WB6**, as outlined in this paper, either in their tendering, preparation and/or implementation phase **should be looked at as a starting point for discussion**. Also, **clear timelines for moving to the next stage should be, wherever possible and taking into account the local constraints (i.e., economic and in terms of reforms) agreed upon**;
- A **unit/body endowed with supervisory and executive functions over projects' implementation should be set up**;
- Local authorities in the WB6 should embark on **targeted measures in order to guarantee that the necessary funding for key projects is available**, so as to enable project's implementation;
- Local authorities in WB6 should **keep undertaking the necessary domestic reforms in the area of rule of law, economic governance, public administration reform and fight against corruption, while providing the space for a transparent regulatory framework**;
- Local authorities in WB6 should **provide the necessary human resources for guaranteeing a smooth planning procedure**.

Policy Analysis

Policy Analysis in general is a policy advice paper which particularly aims to influence the key means through which policy decisions are made in both local and central levels of government. The purpose of Policy Analysis is to address, more in-depth, a particular problem, to examine the arguments related to a concerned policy, and to analyze the implementation of the policy. Through Policy Analysis, Group for Legal and Political studies seeks to stimulate wider comprehensive debate on the given issue via presenting informed policy-relevant choices and recommendations to the key stakeholders and parties of interest.



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