

CHAIR'S CONCLUSIONS

Tirana

21 December 2019

Leaders of the Western Balkans expressed solidarity with the people of Albania after the earthquake in Durres in November. The leaders of North Macedonia and Serbia expressed their commitment to provide continued support.

The meeting reached conclusions on the following subjects. We invite the Western Balkans 6 to join the measures announced below and affirm that each is intended to help the region move toward membership in the European Union.

CIVIL EMERGENCIES

The regional response to the Durres earthquake has been heart-warming – immediate, fulsome, and cooperative. This is a welcome sign of what our region can do when we work together.

The delegations visited the affected areas and met with first responders and families looking to rebuild their homes. They ask for continued support for the recovery of the area. In particular, they call upon regional businesses to increase their engagement with Durres during the recovery period. They also thanked the European Union and international bodies that provided assistance to the affected families and the local authorities.

In order to build the region's cooperation, the Leaders announced their attention to conclude a framework arrangement on regional cooperation in responding to civil emergencies, building on work done already by, and coordinating with, the UN Development Program, the

European Union (including its Civil Protection Mechanism), and other regional and international organisations that have helped to build habits of cooperation and preparedness.

As part of the framework, each of us will:

- provide the help it can upon request;
- coordinate with the rest of the region on an ongoing basis so that assistance can be used efficiently;
- collaborate on an ongoing basis in procurement with a view to increasing the response capacity of the region as a whole;
- participate in planning and training exercises, as agreed, so that first responders and those who coordinate them will be best prepared;
- coordinate requests to the European Union, international agencies, and other regional bodies working on emergency response for resources, training, and assistance in improving the resilience and response of the region to humanitarian disasters, both natural and manmade; and.
- strengthen cooperation on a structured basis between agencies and research centres specialized in addressing and managing civil emergencies.

This agreement will be called the Durrës Protocol and will be open to all the Western Balkans⁶. The relevant agencies will meet in Belgrade in January to conclude the agreement.

IMPLEMENTING THE FOUR FREEDOMS

The Leaders reviewed progress since their announcements in Ohrid on 10 November and Novi Sad on 10 October on intensifying efforts to implement the four freedoms in the region, in furtherance of the aim each country in the region has of joining the European Union. A

primary goal is to make existing regional initiatives effective for all members wherever possible. The Western Balkans 6 are welcome to join these efforts, in the spirit of inclusiveness, regional cooperation, and good neighbourly relations, and with a view to improving the lives of our citizens.

Review of Novi Sad and Ohrid Agreements

Several steps have been taken:

Movement of Goods

Major border crossings between the parties will be open and staffed at all hours, including all necessary services. The meeting welcomed the news that the major border crossing between North Macedonia and Serbia is fully staffed 24/7 and the commitment of Albania and North Macedonia to achieve that as soon as possible. To that end:

- The meeting commended the approval at the CEFTA joint Committee, following on the Ohrid Declaration, of decisions that will contribute to the facilitation of trade, such as the recognition of Authorised Economic Operators and the approval of the strategy on risk management. The meeting called for the adoption by CEFTA without delay of a decision to facilitate trade in fruits and vegetables.
- Albania, Serbia, and North Macedonia have agreed that vehicles transiting from the other parties should be subject to one stop only. A meeting between the customs authorities to discuss the technical aspects of implementation will be held in January 2020.
- Leaders also called for introduction of paperless system within 2020, aligning with the CEFTA framework in the area. In this

regard, Parties agree to intensify collaboration on the approximation with the EU legislation.

- Intensive work with the European Commission, the Permanent Secretariat of the European Transport Community, as well as the World Bank and other international financial institutions has begun to provide electronic documentation, consistent with AP5 of CEFTA, and improved infrastructure including additional lanes at border crossings.

Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia have agreed to intensify the implementation of all CEFTA agreements.

Movement of People and Services

Leaders agreed that each citizen of the Western Balkans should be allowed to live, travel, and work like nationals, contributing thus to the creation of a common economic market.

Albania, North Macedonia, and Serbia committed:

To a framework agreement that will treat citizens of each like nationals for the purpose of travel, residence, and working in each country. We will aim to sign the agreement by end of January 2020 and to complete those processes as soon as possible thereafter. This must build upon the harmonization of domestic legislation on the movement of people, work permits, and residence permits. The agreement will be consistent with EU requirements and open to all the Western Balkans.

To recognize professional qualifications in EU regulated professions granted by each of them by the Zagreb Summit in May. This will apply both to current members of those professions, as well as to future

graduates of accredited programs and of the third studies cycle (PhD's).

Transposition of the Directive on certain aspects concerning contracts for the supply of digital content and digital services.

Leaders have expressed the ambition to enable free movement of services and freedom of establishment based on the relevant EU law. They recognised the adoption of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 6 on Trade in Services as a crucial milestone and legal basis for future steps and committed to ratify it swiftly and invited the other CEFTA Parties to do same in the shortest possible period. They commit to the full implementation of the obligations therein and pledge to take the lead in relation to interregional regulatory cooperation in one of the selected sectors and regulatory dialogue on electronic commerce.

Promote regulatory cooperation on payments with a view of enabling fast, reliable and cheap cross-border electronic payments, based on the EU model.

The parties have agreed to complete bilateral agreements on recognition of Trusted Services and qualified electronic certificates.

The three agreed that persons traveling to the region will be able to move within the parties without further visa or immigration restrictions. This should promote tourism and travel to the region. An agreement to this effect will be developed and signed at the next meeting.

Free Movement of Capital

The Leaders agreed on outreach efforts to private investors globally, coordinated by the chambers of commerce with participation by senior political leadership from across the region. Albania, North Macedonia,

and Serbia have agreed to participate regularly at senior political levels and ask representatives from the Western Balkan 6 to join.

In this regard, the meeting agreed to review bilateral investment treaties in the region with the view of bringing them into conformity with regional standards, compatible with EU standards. The relevant ministries will lead this effort and report to the next meeting.

The Leaders agreed to pursue investment initiatives focused on energy and environmental sectors, as well as tourism, agriculture etc., with the aim of attracting new and additional investment to the region. A working party focused on each sector will be formed, with invitations from the Chambers of Commerce, to include businesses, officials from all governments of the region, experts from academia and civil society, and potential investors from the public and private sectors. A meeting on energy and environment, focused on sustainability, should be held by late February, and it should produce suggestions for policy changes needed and investible opportunities. The parties will work with the European Commission, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), and others to identify opportunities and policy changes needed to attract investment. The parties will ensure that this is coordinated with our accession priorities.

Scorecard

The Leaders noted the importance of a transparent, real-time assessment of how well commitments are implemented. We will implement a web-based, independent assessment system to evaluate progress toward goals.

This system should inform citizens continually and to allow feedback in real time by citizens, customers, businesses.

To that end, the meeting noted the interest of international donors in supporting an independent monitoring and assessment system. The next meeting of this group will review plans with a view to implementing the system by the next Berlin Process Summit.

FUTURE OF ENLARGEMENT

The Leaders reaffirmed the commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkan 6 and reiterated that the meetings in Novi Sad, Ohrid, and Tirana are intended to improve the region's preparation for EU membership of the Western Balkan 6.

The meeting emphasized the importance of a positive decision of the European Council to open the accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia in March 2020.

The Leaders noted especially that progress on the rule of law remains critical and should be integrated in all reform sectors of the region.

The Leaders asked that the Western Balkans be included in the Conference on the Future of Europe.

WESTERN BALKAN GREEN AGENDA

The Leaders recognize that the European Green Deal, announced 11 December 2019, is a flagship initiative of the European Commission.

The Western Balkans 6 already committed to address this issue in Podgorica in February 2019 in the Clean Energy Transition.

The Leaders proposed active engagement with the EU Commission with a view to translate the EU Green Deal into a Western Balkans Green

Agenda with a view toward fostering sustainable development and investment.

WAY FORWARD: BERLIN PROCESS AND REGIONAL ECONOMIC INTEGRATION

Leaders expressed their satisfaction that the next Berlin Process will be co-chaired by North Macedonia and Bulgaria and regard this as a clear sign of regional ownership of the process. The Leaders welcome the joint presidency's intention to have a result-oriented presidency, focused on deepening and not widening the agenda, and to support the themes and priorities developed by the presidency.

The Leaders also agreed to support the adoption of MAP REA 2 at the next Berlin Process Summit and pledged to start broad consultations with the interest groups, business and experts on the next phase of MAP REA 2 so that the process is region-owned, inclusive and pragmatic.