

# EU-Western Balkans summit: improving connectivity and security in the region

President of the European Commission **Jean-Claude Juncker** said: *“This summit has allowed us to forge even closer links with our friends from the Western Balkans who, step by step, each day come a little bit closer to the European Union – each at its own pace and merits. Being anchored in the European Union means sharing values and principles, including respect for the rule of law, independence of the judiciary and freedom of expression – because the European Union is first of all a community of values and law.”*

The [summit](#) and the resulting [Sofia Declaration](#) stress the importance of the Western Balkans’ continued commitment to the rule of law, the fight against corruption and organised crime, good governance, as well as respect for human rights and rights of persons belonging to minorities. The effective implementation of reforms in these areas is key for the region’s further progress along the European path. EU and Western Balkan leaders agreed to take a number of actions to improve energy and [transport infrastructure](#), as well as [digital connectivity](#) in the region. The EU and Western Balkans partners also laid the ground for an ever closer cooperation in the areas of security, migration and in tackling geopolitical challenges.

## **Connecting infrastructures, economies and people**

To support the implementation of the Sofia Declaration and drawing on the Commission’s [Western Balkans Strategy](#) and its six [flagship initiatives](#), President Juncker announced today ([hyperlink to remarks](#)) a new package of measures which will boost connectivity within the region and with the EU, notably through **the Western Balkans Investment Framework**.

- The EU will provide grants for additional 11 high-priority **transport** projects (road, rail, ports) worth **€190 million**. This investment can leverage up to **€1 billion** in loans from international financing institutions. This includes funding for the first two sections of the ‘Peace Highway’ (Nis-Pristina-Durres) and the ‘Blue Highway’ along the Adriatic coast.
- In order to develop the new **Digital Agenda** for the Western Balkans, the EU has earmarked **€30 million** for investments in broadband rollouts across the region. Partners agreed to extend the region’s arrangements to reduce roaming costs to all six partners, while at the same time the EU will develop a roadmap to lower the cost of roaming between the Western Balkans and the EU.
- Moreover, the EU will support the region’s energy transition through promoting **renewable energy** sources, including a sustainable use of **hydropower**.
- In the area of economic connectivity, the Commission continues to support the region’s own plan to develop a **Regional Economic Area**, and

the Summit welcomed commitments to step up work on recognition of qualifications, as well as on trade facilitation within the Western Balkans.

- The Commission will increase its support for **youth and education**, in particular by **doubling the funding for Erasmus+** for the region and by launching a pilot project for mobility in **vocational education and training**. The Commission will also establish a “Western Balkans Youth Lab” in 2018, providing space for innovative policy-making addressing the needs of young people. Finally, it will support the expansion of the **Regional Youth Cooperation Office** and introduce an intra-regional mobility scheme.

Further elements of the EU’s annual Connectivity Package will be presented later on during the year.

In addition, partners committed to the [Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans](#). It will support the move of the Western Balkans towards a digital economy, and includes steps such as a roadmap to lower the cost of roaming as well as a technical assistance package for potential investments in areas such as broadband.

### **Closer cooperation on security**

The EU and the Western Balkans face shared security challenges. At the Summit, the EU and the Western Balkans agreed to step up common work on **key security priorities**:

- countering terrorism including its financing, violent extremism and the return of foreign fighters as well as preventing radicalisation;
- enhanced cooperation in the fight against serious and organised crime, in particular on illicit firearms and drugs trafficking, smuggling of goods and persons, as well as cyber and hybrid threats.

The EU and the Western Balkan partners agreed to build on already substantial on-going efforts by enhancing strategic and operational work in the field of **police and judicial cooperation**, in particular through the participation of the Western Balkans in the EU Policy Cycle 2018-2021, the coordinated EU-wide cooperation against serious and organised crime. With support from the Commission, EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies, such as Europol or CEPOL, will further engage in the Western Balkans for effectively linking internal and external actions against all forms of cross-border crime.

Cooperation in responding to the refugee crisis has demonstrated the value of coordinated efforts. EU and Western Balkan leaders agreed to strengthen cooperation on **migration** and **border management**, including through the liaison officers deployed by the EU.

### **For More Information**

[Sofia Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans summit](#)

Website of the [EU-Western Balkans summit](#)

[Enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans](#)

[Directorate General of European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiation](#)

[Connectivity agenda 2018](#)

[Factsheet Boosting Connectivity](#)

[Factsheet Boosting Digital Connectivity](#)

[Video – Connectivity agenda](#)

[Factsheet – Six new flagship initiatives to support the transformation of the Western Balkans](#)

[Factsheet – The way forward](#)

[Factsheet – Economic relations – Investing in people, infrastructures and reforms](#)

[Factsheet: EU Engagement in the Western Balkans](#)

[Video stockshots – Western Balkans](#)

[Factograph – Montenegro](#)

[Factograph – Serbia](#)

[Factograph – The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia](#)

[Factograph – Albania](#)

[Factograph – Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

[Factograph – Kosovo](#)