

10 November 2020 - Seul le prononcé fait foi

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EU-Western Balkans summit - Berlin Process - Président Emmanuel Macron :

Dear Prime Minister – dear Boyko, dear Prime Minister Zaev, dear Chancellor Merkel – dear Angela, dear colleagues.

I would like first of all to congratulate Bulgaria and North Macedonia on their co-chairmanship, and to thank you for your invitation.

Even though we are all very much focused on the COVID-19 situation, it is essential that we maintain and enhance this very important dialogue with the Western Balkans: they belong to Europe, geographically, historically and culturally. Let me reaffirm very clearly that France supports the European perspective of the Western Balkans - and I will say a few words on how we are still very strongly supporting it:

Since the beginning of this year, several positive developments have taken place with respect to the Western Balkans:

First, Member States of the European Union took two important decisions at the end of March, in the midst of the first outbreak of the pandemic: we agreed on a new methodology to make the Enlargement process more credible and more efficient, and we decided to open accession negotiations with Albania and North Macedonia. This is a prospect which has been opened up, and you are all aware of the high standards advocated by France, which also is a form of honesty toward all peoples.

Second, in July, Serbia and Kosovo agreed to restart their dialogue, which had been interrupted for 20 months. The dispute between Serbia and Kosovo is a matter of European security, therefore it is essential that the European Union leads the mediation efforts between the two parties in order to settle this dispute for good.

France contributed to these positive steps and will remain committed to supporting the Western Balkans, be it in their reform efforts or in settling political disputes.

Now turning to today's agenda, I would like to emphasize the importance of enhanced regional cooperation and economic and social development, which are necessary for the approximation of the Western Balkans with the European Union.

Fostering regional cooperation has been the main objective of the Berlin process since 2014. France has actively contributed to strengthening regional cooperation:

On the one hand, through the Regional Youth Cooperation Office, modelled on the French-German Youth Office and with a partnership with the French Development Agency, which was established in Paris during the 2016 Summit of the Berlin process. Ever since, it has become a success story in supporting Youth activities in the Western Balkans;

On the other hand, the French/German initiative to fight the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, which we started in 2017, is delivering results thanks to the commitment of the six Western Balkan countries and the continued strong support by partners. This initiative is a good example on how the region can work closer together and with the European Union, to tackle a major threat for our security.

The EU has made a very substantial effort to support the recovery of the Balkan countries, deeply affected by the pandemic: in the spring the European Union dedicated 3.3 billion euros to meet the most urgent needs and fight the longer-term consequences of the COVID-19 crisis; and a few weeks ago the European Commission presented an Economic and Investment Plan worth 9 billion euros, which is a major contribution to the development of the region.

Overall, the European Union and its Member States are delivering a lot in support of economic and social development in the Western Balkans. Therefore, we expect the Western Balkan countries to display their commitment in three areas:

First, it is essential that the Western Balkan countries strengthen their cooperation. Therefore, I warmly support

the initiative to create a Common Regional Market based on EU norms and principles, including the four European Union freedoms. I welcome the endorsement today of this new initiative by the leaders of the six countries.

Second, we expect the Western Balkan region, and the countries which comprise it, to accelerate structural reforms with a focus on fundamentals reforms, namely the rule of law and economic governance. Further progress in these areas remains indispensable for the region's approximation with the European Union.

Third, we need all the support of the Western Balkan countries to help us better fight against terrorism. As the danger is growing both within the European Union and in the Balkans region, enhanced cooperation will clearly be in all our interests, as will clear messages sent to all our societies.

I want to strongly welcome the adoption of a Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, modelled on the EU Green Deal Action Plan. This is also a sign of ownership from the region and a contribution to the leading efforts of the EU in fighting climate change and protecting the environment.

The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans will help to unlock the economic potential of the green economy in the region, and it will also allow for a better implementation of the Paris Agreement. We stand ready to assist the Western Balkans in fighting climate change.

Let me finally wish for all of us to be able to meet in person next time, as soon as the epidemic situation allows, and to continue making progress on essential issues for the security, stability and prosperity of our Europe.

I thank you all for your attention.