

Consolidated Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six

Introduction

This draft Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans (MAP) has been developed upon the request of the Western Balkans Six Prime Ministers to prepare a “proposal for a joint approach to furthering economic cooperation in the Western Balkans”¹ in the context of the Berlin process and the Trieste Summit. The MAP puts forward a structured agenda for regional economic integration, along the lines proposed by the Leader’s Meeting, namely: promoting further trade integration, introducing a dynamic regional investment space, facilitating regional mobility, and creating a digital integration agenda. The MAP stems from the commitments undertaken within the framework of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and South East Europe 2020 Strategy (SEE2020) and is based on CEFTA and EU rules and principles as reflected in the Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs). It foresees implementation of actions at all levels in the period between 2017 and 2020 (with some actions extending until 2023).

The implementation of the actions listed herein is intended to result in a CEFTA rules-based and EU-compliant Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six. This will enable unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour, making the region more attractive for investment and commerce, accelerating convergence with the EU and bringing prosperity to all its citizens. The Regional Economic Area is based on the principles of non-discrimination, creating a level playing field for all within the region.

Background

The Western Balkans stands at an important juncture. While the previous decade had brought the region’s per capita GDP almost 8.5% closer to the EU average, this convergence has since halted to a standstill, narrowing the gap by only 1% in the first half of this decade. Reform efforts are underway in most of the economies in the region to address internal structural weaknesses, but considerable growth potential can be unleashed through closer economic integration. Growth strategies have more chance of success if they are embedded in a consolidated system of regional cooperation in all relevant areas.

The foundations for a closer regional economic integration in the Western Balkans have already been laid. The EU accession process has aided greater harmonization between the economies as they align their respective legal and institutional systems to those in the EU; South East Europe 2020 as a convergence framework for EU accession was introduced with common regional targets; tariffs and quotas for trade in industrial and agricultural products have been eliminated and advances were made in trade facilitation and negotiations on trade in services in the context of CEFTA; initiatives to remove obstacles for mobility of highly skilled labour are underway; the Connectivity Agenda is helping integrate the transport and energy systems both within the region and with the EU; and the costs of communications for citizens and businesses have been substantially reduced through ongoing efforts to cut roaming charges.

¹ Statement from the WB6 Prime Ministers Meeting, Sarajevo, March 16, 2017

These efforts should be stepped up. Improving further macroeconomic stability and structural reforms in the context of the Economic reform programmes will create conditions for unlocking greater growth. Regional economic integration can help the private sector reap the economies of scale of a 20 million market, and refocus the growth model towards more indigenous, long-term drivers of growth, such as human capital upgrades, innovation infrastructure investment and digitization of its economies and societies to make them more resilient to the 21st century challenges. Finally, it can serve as an important stepping stone for the Western Balkans to better integrate into European and global value chains, and converge faster with the rest of the continent. Indeed, in the context of the development of global value chains (75% of global trade now comprised of intermediate inputs and capital goods and services), it is essential for the Western Balkans economic operators to meet globally accepted standards - to be able to connect to European value chains and beyond, European standards being recognised on the global market.

For this to materialize, the Western Balkans Six are committed to foster, based on the CEFTA legal framework and individual SAAs, a gradual and progressive rule-based economic integration in the areas of trade, investment, mobility and digital that would ultimately enable unobstructed flow of goods, services, investment and highly skilled labour throughout the region, thus developing a Western Balkans Regional Economic Area.

Components of the Regional Economic Area

The development of a Regional Economic Area, as envisioned by this draft Multi-annual Action Plan, foresees the implementation of far-reaching interventions and actions under the following four components:

I. Trade

The trade policy implemented by the Authorities of the WB6 CEFTA Parties based on the CEFTA Agreement and their bi-lateral Free Trade Agreements with other trade partners ensured a substantial level of trade in goods openness in CEFTA. The trade in goods is liberalised and level of trade openness in our Parties is high. In parallel, during the negotiations of the Additional Protocol 6, significant liberalisation of trade in services has been achieved. WB6 are committed to implement the actions under Action Plan's areas in trade policy to reach the objective to create regional economic area in CEFTA on the basis of the EU compliance to support efforts to attract more investment, decrease the cost of trade and eliminate market access barriers in order to optimize the cost of production. The aim is to transform our Region in which goods, services, investments, and skilled people move freely without tariffs, quotas or other unnecessary barriers, where trade is facilitated higher than WTO Rules, aiming at recognition of all border documents, where applicable (as specified in Additional Protocol 5), procedures, and programmes related to trade once the EU alignment by one or more CEFTA Parties is reached. The CEFTA Secretariat will continue to monitor Non-Tariff Measures (NTMs) over the region; to do so, a report shall be prepared on an annual basis on the main impediments to trade. The report will in particular reflect the current obstacles faced by companies and breach in the level-playing field that should prevail for companies within the region. CEFTA Parties acknowledge the important role the private sector has to play in the systemic monitoring of NTMs in trade in goods and barriers in trade in services, which the Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum (WB CIF) will contribute to structure. CEFTA Parties commit further to deepen the collaboration in the areas of dispute settlement, trade facilitation, liberalisation of trade in services, electronic commerce, movement of highly skilled

people, investment attractive regional environment, full cumulation of origin and duty drawback opportunities. The legal basis is defined in the CEFTA Agreement and the instruments stemming from the Additional Protocols on Trade Facilitation and on Trade in Services; agreements on mutual recognition of professional qualification; on certificates of electronic signature and facilitation of cross-border certification services, regional arrangements on cooperation between regulatory authorities in charge of services; strengthened with more efficient and effective dispute settlement procedures and monitoring mechanism for its full implementation. Regional economic area shall be part of the Pan-Euro Mediterranean Cumulation Zone in equal footing as other Contracting Parties. CEFTA Parties deem necessary to apply full cumulation of origin, by adding production operations instead of the origin of goods, so that in the process of determining the fulfilment, all production operations carried out in the EU and the WB 6 in the process of production are taken into cumulation.

II. Investment

Greater regional harmonization of investment policies holds significant potential for the economies of the WB6 in boosting growth potential, job creation and economic convergence with the EU and higher growth. There is a significant potential to foster regional economic integration in Western Balkans Six economies, through the development of Regional investment reform agenda. The removal of barriers to regional investment offers the opportunity for economies of scale, geographically diversified businesses, and an overall more efficient allocation of resources within a regional market, thereby fostering the integration of companies from the region in international value chains. Hence, the WB6 are committed to design and implement a regional investment reform agenda which will lead to greater harmonization of regional investment policies aligned with EU and international standards and best practices, and will provide significant new opportunities for the private sector. The WB6 will consider formalizing this agenda within the CEFTA legal framework upon conducting thorough analysis and proposing options for appropriate instrument(s) acceptable to WB6 economies, based on the content of the agreed regional investment reform agenda. The regional investment reform agenda is intended to contribute and add value to investment reform efforts, and ensure transparent and fair competition among the economies by mitigating a “race to the bottom” whilst not hindering the interests of our economies. The ultimate goal of this work is to improve the attractiveness of the region for foreign and intra-regional business, and hence facilitate higher inflow of investments and generate higher entrepreneurial activity, trade, and ultimately jobs. The regional investment agenda of the WB6 economies will be formulated by prioritizing and sequencing issues in investment-pertinent policies to be addressed through a regional dialogue in short-term, medium-term and long-term timeframe. The private sector, both from the region and inward investors, will be involved with regard to the development, monitoring and promotion of the regional investment reform agenda. The WBCIF will be involved as well in this exercise. Finally, the WB6 economies will develop a common platform for investment promotion and work jointly on presenting the region as a sound investment destination to the foreign business community. Both business people from the region and inward investors would be involved in the preparation of the regional reform agenda.

Implementing the investment agenda will facilitate the uptake by WB6 of economic development strategies linked to smart growth based on knowledge and innovation, using EU experience and smart specialisation platforms, green growth, the development of value chains, technology transfers and building a knowledge-based digital economy. Tackling issues linked

to access to finance, including through increased resources allocated to EDIF will also allow businesses to take advantage of the more dynamic investment space.

III. Mobility

Local economic spill-overs are generated by the regional agglomeration of activities—both in innovation-driven industries as well as other service industries that follow high-technology. In order to establish and maintain international competitiveness, the retention and subsequent leveraging of human intellectual capital is of fundamental importance for developing knowledge-based economies in the Western Balkans. In an increasingly global economy, the extent to which international high-skilled mobility channels are formed within the region and between the region and the EU is a question of great importance. Better integration of high-skilled professionals and academics into professional and research networks, the European Research Area and the European Higher Education Area, will yield significant benefits for the migratory region of Western Balkans.

To this end the Mobility Agenda aims at: removing obstacles to mobility of professionals, through regional mutual recognition agreements of professional qualifications in sectors of mutual interest (doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers); removing obstacles to mobility of highly qualified workforce, in particular through joint standards and procedures for automatic recognition of quality assured academic qualifications; and removing obstacles to mobility of students, researchers and academics through joint policies, measures and instruments aimed at increasing academic and research mobility and cooperation.

The Mobility Agenda should be underpinned by enhanced collaboration between science and industry, including the sectors represented by the WB CIF, technology transfer and start up creation, smart specialisation strategies, cooperation on regional Centres of Excellence and platforms for the education of young scientists and engineers. Practical steps, such as removal of visas, will contribute to achieving the objective of the Mobility Agenda.

IV. *Digital integration*

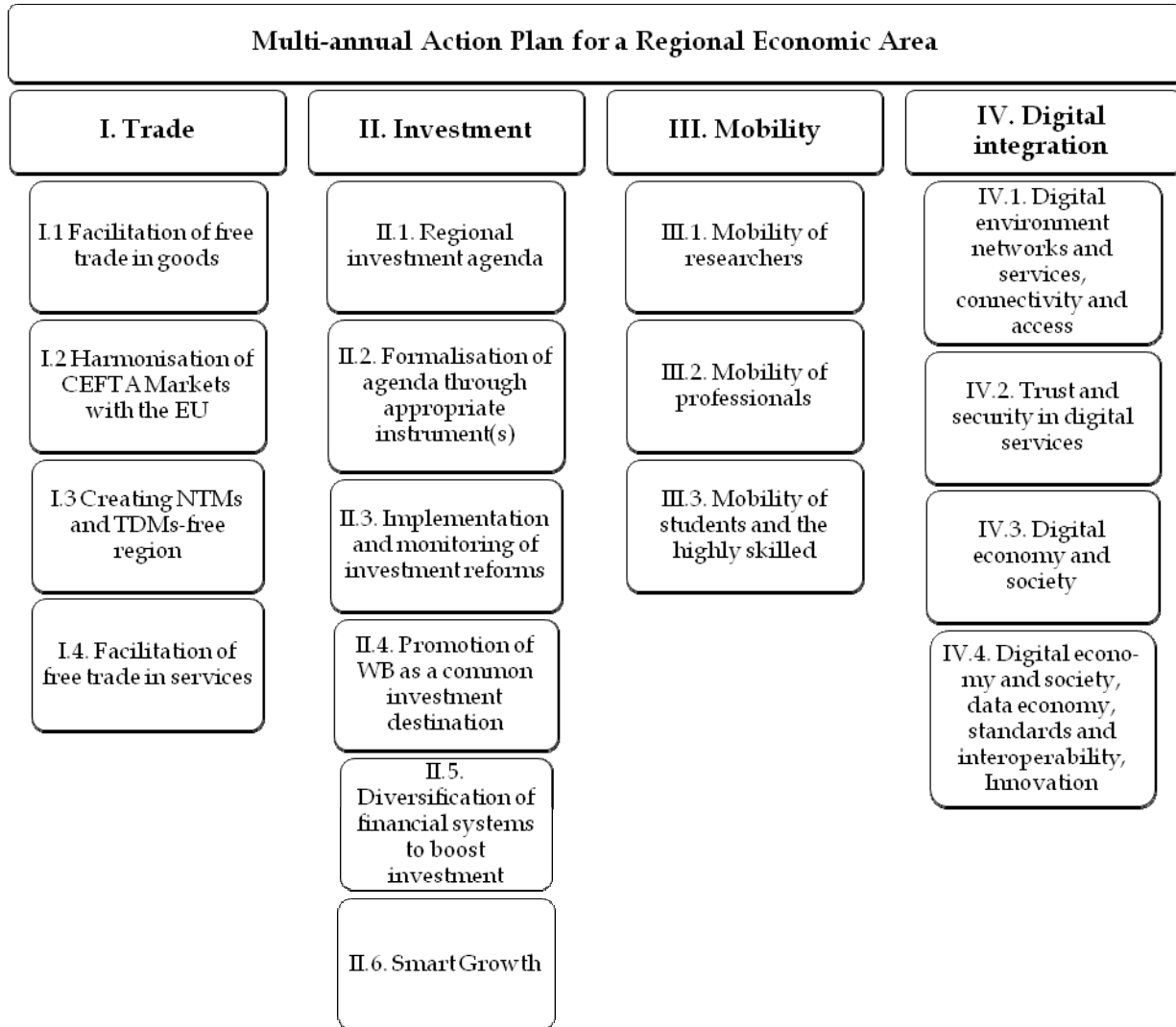
Digital transformation is changing the way we communicate, work, learn and live. It changes the way we do business and interact with WB6 authorities. The use of digital technologies can generate significant benefits in terms of speed, efficiency and transparency across borders in many different sectors. Exploiting the untapped potentials of digital integration ensures the supply of innovative and competitive services to consumers and businesses and acts as an important lever for socio-economic development, high value jobs generation and a vibrant knowledge-based society.

The WB6 Digital Agenda aims to unlock access to the digital economy by integrating the region into the pan-European digital market. This requires future-proof digitization strategies, an updated regulatory environment, improved broadband infrastructure and access and digital literacy.

Under the digital Agenda, the WB6 will support a regional approach to foster intergovernmental cooperation in digital matters and facilitate the integration within the European Digital Single Market. To this end, the digital agenda aims at: digital infrastructure development and improved regional connectivity; harmonized spectrum policies; coordinated

roaming policies towards a roaming free region; enhanced cyber security, trust services and data protection; cooperation in policies that stimulate data economy; upgraded digital skills and accelerated digitization and uptake of smart technologies in our region.

The below chart outlines the policy areas and objectives set forth in the MAP:



The activities, indicative timelines and coordination and implementation responsibilities under each of the above result areas are presented in the Annex to the Multi-annual Plan for a Regional Economic Area.

Governance, coordination and monitoring

WB6 economies acknowledge that successful implementation of MAP will require solid governance with clear lines of communication and regular monitoring of progress. The institutional structure supporting MAP implementation is two-fold: first, WB6 authorities, ministries and institutions which are leading the implementation effort at all levels (in that context, WB6 economies commit to put in place one single coordinator for each economy for following on the implementation of the Action Plan)

and second, the existing regional structures that are charged with coordination of activities and monitoring of progress. The principle of 'all-inclusiveness' should be promoted in all structures involved in the coordination and monitoring of the activities within the MAP. This MAP does not foresee establishment of any new institutions or organizations. Implementation of MAP also would not restrict WB6 economies possibility to lead autonomous trade policy or imply the harmonization of partners' external tariffs.

The detailed guidelines on governance and reporting will be provided by the RCC/CEFTA Secretariats by October 2017.

In this sense, the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat is invited to review and inform the WB6 Summits and/or Sherpas on regular basis on the progress achieved as regards the deliverables defined in the Annex. The regional structures charged with coordination in each of the four results areas will provide inputs for RCC's/CEFTA Secretariats consolidated reporting to the WB6. WB6 Summits and/or Sherpas will regularly review the implementation of the MAP, and discuss possible obstacles and proposals for remedial action, as well as possible adaptation of the MAP.

Reporting on the implementation of the MAP will be the basis for future coordination of donor financial assistance.

Partnership for implementation

Implementation of a comprehensive agenda put forward by MAP will require a strong partnership between the WB6 authorities, the private sector, the international organizations and donors active in providing support in the policy areas outlined above, and the European Union.

WB6 economies are committed to partner with the private sector in the region to ensure that the activities implemented have the full backing of the region's business to ensure that half a million companies operating in the Western Balkans have a better environment in which they can grow, invest, employ and use the Regional Economic Area as a launch pad to external markets.

A structured dialogue with the private sector will be established across the four results areas. Continuous, informed and interactive dialogue with the private sector, open to all representative organisations of the private sector, willing to take part and contribute will be essential. The WBCIF will contribute to this dialogue notably by: 1) a continuous dialogue with different structures within the business community in order to identify the key needs, obstacles and opportunities that could be tackled through MAP implementation in order to boost its contribution to economic growth and job creation and; 2) providing business with tools to effectively take up opportunities created by the MAP implementation (e.g. information dissemination, training, capacity building, piloting, network building, etc.).

The international organizations, IFIs and donors working to support reforms in the policy areas described above are invited to align their assistance programmes with the needs identified in MAP implementation at all levels. This will ensure that the region and its backers are working towards the same goals. A dedicated donor coordination conference could be organised for that purpose before the end of 2017. Regional Economic Area is not an alternative to the EU accession process. Rather, WB6 economies see the Regional Economic Area as a springboard towards EU membership and an important milestone in meeting the Copenhagen economic criteria. The implementation of MAP should

accelerate the accession process in each of the region's economies and support our efforts in harmonizing and complying with the EU rules and standards. In this sense, WB6 economies invite the EU to support and facilitate MAP implementation both through currently available EU instruments and programmes as well as potential new ones, through enabling and facilitating access. This MAP reaffirms the WB6 economies commitment for the shared future in the EU and this goal would be well served by ever more closely involving the Western Balkans in strategic decision making on new and existing EU instruments, especially in the context of the new Multi-annual Financial Framework of the European Union.

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
I. Trade				
I.1. Facilitation of free trade in goods	I.1.1. Strengthening the monitoring and enforcement capacity of CEFTA	a. Launching the negotiations on Additional Protocol on CEFTA Dispute Settlement	2017	CEFTA Joint Committee
		b. Adopting Additional Protocol on CEFTA Dispute Settlement	2019	CEFTA Parties
		c. Ensuring timely entry into force of Additional Protocol on CEFTA Dispute Settlement	2019-2020	CEFTA Parties
		d. Engaging Public-Private Sector Dialogue for better monitoring of the implementation of CEFTA (continuous action)	2017	CEFTA Parties
	I.1.2. Adoption of Additional Protocol 5 and Start of its implementation	a. Adoption of Validation Rules for mutual recognitions in AP 5	2018	CEFTA Joint Committee
		b. Ensuring timely entry into force of the AP 5	2018	CEFTA Parties
		c. Start of Implementation of Mutual Recognition Programmes (Border Documents, where applicable (as specified in AP5), and Authorised Economic Operators Programme)	2020	CEFTA Parties
	I.1.3. Concluding Party level IT interconnections for data exchange between Agencies at all levels	a. Developing the feasibility plans for investments at Party level by SEED Maintenance and Development Project	2017-2018	CEFTA Bodies
		b. Ensuring the allocation of adequate financial resources from the budgets to secure internal level connections for the implementation of SEED+	2018-2020	CEFTA Parties
	I.1.4. Improving joint risk management, border controls and one-stop shop border controls	a. Developing a time-frame for joint risk management, and where appropriate (as specified in AP5): joint border controls, one-stop shop controls, sharing border control equipment	2018-2019	CEFTA Bodies
		b. Adoption and implementation of Regional Strategy for joint risk management, and joint border controls, where appropriate (as specified in AP5), one-stop shop controls, and sharing border control equipment	2019-2020	CEFTA Joint Committee/ CEFTA Parties
	I.1.5. Developing mutual cooperation between market surveillance control authorities of CEFTA Parties	a. Developing a time-frame for mutual cooperation between market surveillance authorities	2018-2019	CEFTA Bodies
		b. Mapping the regulatory requirements for Mutual Recognition Agreement (MRA) in one supply chain, as selected by the project "Support to Facilitation of Trade between CEFTA Parties"	2017-2018	CEFTA Parties
		c. Develop the time-frame to conclude MRA, based on EU compliance, on the selected supply chain	2018-2019	CEFTA Parties
		d. Assess potentials to extend MRA in other supply chains with	2019-2020	CEFTA Parties

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
		regional interest		
I.2. Harmonisation of CEFTA Markets with the EU	I.2.1. Ensuring the application of SAP+ and Full Cumulation	a. Sustaining uninterrupted application of SAP +	2017-2018	CEFTA Parties
		b. Start of Application of Full cumulation and duty drawback in CEFTA	2019	CEFTA Parties
	I.2.2. Potential approximation of CEFTA MFN to EU CET	a. Impact assessment of approximation of CEFTA MFN rates with the EU Common External Tariff	2018	CEFTA Bodies
I.3. Creating NTMs and TDM free Region	I.3.1. Administrative Cooperation between Competition and State Aid Monitoring Authorities	a. Developing the instruments for information exchange between Competition and State Aid Authorities	2019-2020	CEFTA Bodies
		b. Full and sustainable reporting of state aid including state aid schemes and measures	2018-2019	CEFTA Parties
		c. Enhance cooperation among competition authorities by supporting the establishment of a structured network to foster peer learning	2018-2023	CEFTA Parties
	I.3.2. Eliminating and remaining discriminatory practices in public procurement markets	a. Monitoring the elimination of remaining discriminatory practices in public procurement markets	2017-2018	CEFTA Joint Committee
	I.3.3. Systemic Monitoring of NTMs in trade in goods and services	a. Employing deterring monitoring and enforcement mechanisms to eliminate any remaining NTBs	2018-2020	CEFTA Joint Committee
I.4. Facilitation of free trade in services	I.4.1. Implementation of	a. Adoption of the Additional Protocol 6 by negotiating Parties	2017-2018	CEFTA Joint Committee
		b. Ensuring timely entry into force of Additional Protocol 6	2018 -2019	CEFTA Parties
		c. Development of the sustainable mechanism for monitoring trade in services policies, including screening of legislation and mapping of projects and establishment of the efficient dispute settlement mechanism	2017-2019	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services

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	CEFTA Additional Protocol 6 on Trade in Services	d. Establishment of the contact point for services	2018-2019	CEFTA Parties
		e. Establishment and maintenance of the regional transparency platform on services policies featuring channels of communication to private sector and wider circle of beneficiaries	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		f. Review of commitments undertaken by the AP6 in non-liberalized sectors with a view to deepen the market opening in these sectors	2022-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		g. Evaluation of impact of the Agreement on further trade and investment growth, GVC, labour market	2020 2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		h. Establishment and maintenance of the platform for statistical data on trade in services, FATS and FDI	2017-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
	I.4.2. Conclusion of agreements on interregional regulatory cooperation	a. Identification of regulatory barriers that impede trade and proposal for closer cooperation amongst regulatory bodies in sectors and policies of mutual interest	2017-2018	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		b. Establishment and maintenance of database with regulatory heterogeneity indices to perform assessment of implications of arrangements on the region	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		c. Identification of suitable forms for cooperation based on soft laws, recognition of international and EU standards, MRAs	2017-2018	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		d. Negotiation and administering the conclusion of selected arrangements	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
	I.4.3. Development of disciplines on domestic regulation	a. Regular review of any issues of domestic regulation in trade in services	2018-2019 2022-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
		b. Development of any necessary disciplines in specific sectors to ensure that qualification requirements and procedures, technical standards and licensing requirements do not unnecessarily impede the supply of services across the region	2020 2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services
	I.4.4. Launching dialogue on	a. Identify barriers to eCommerce in CEFTA and assess eCommerce impact and launch regional dialogue on regulatory issues in electronic commerce	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
		b. Assess existing geo-blocking measures (focus on digital content and copy right goods) and examine whether fit for purpose with the aim to prevent unjustified geo-blocking while ensuring investment and innovation incentives at the same time	2019-2020	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
	regulatory issues in electronic commerce	c. Launch regional actions aimed at increasing citizen's trust in online services (payment etc.) and coordination on e-Commerce trust marks	2018-2020	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
		d. Identify and apply the best practice to digital market places to grow SME businesses and drive consumer welfare	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
		e. Assess necessity of regional action to ensure high quality delivery of goods (e.g., digital content traded cross-border or physical goods purchased and via electronic means) and services at reasonable costs	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
		f. Establish recognition of certificates of electronic signature and facilitation of cross-border certification services	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
		g. Ensure liability of intermediary services providers with respect to the transmission, or storage of information based on EU compliance	2019-2021	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
		h. Address treatment of unsolicited electronic commercial communications	2018-2023	CEFTA SC on Trade in Services/RCC
II. Investment				
II.1. Investment policy	II.1.1. Develop and establish a regional investment reform agenda	a. Execute detailed mapping of foreign investments in the WB6 region, whereby economies provide access to FDI-relevant data (sectors, reinvestments, employment, etc.)	2017- 2018	RCC SEE Investment Committee (RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion)
		b. Identify and compile a comprehensive inventory/database of key investment policy barriers and inhibitors, as well as best practices, through in-depth consultations with the private sector and review of existing analysis, with economies to provide relevant data on existing policies, laws, and regulations pertaining to investment, relevant system of incentives as well as legal and other comprehensive protection of the acquired rights of investors	2018	
		c. Formulate a regional investment reform agenda by prioritizing and sequencing issues in investment-pertinent policies to be addressed through a regional dialogue in short-term, medium-term and long-term timeframe	2018	
		d. Formulate individual-economy action plans reflecting the regional investment reform agenda and streamlining the individual-economy reform efforts	2018	

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
		e. Adopt individual economy action plans, reflecting the regional investment reform agenda and streamlining the individual-economy reform efforts	2018	WB6 Authorities in charge of investment agenda
	II.1.2. Formalize the regional investment reform agenda through appropriate instruments	a. Conduct analysis and propose options for appropriate instrument(s) acceptable to WB6 economies based on the content of the agreed regional investment reform agenda	2018	RCC SEE Investment Committee (RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion)
		b. Decide on the necessity, format, and scope of appropriate instrument(s) for implementation of the regional investment reform agenda	2018	WB6 Authorities in charge of investment agenda
		c. Initiate and conclude negotiations on regional appropriate instrument(s), depending on the decision reached under b)	2018-2020	WB6 Authorities in charge of investment agenda
	II.1.3. Implement and monitor investment reforms in WB6 as per established regional investment reform agenda	a. Strengthen the regional dialogue on the agreed investment reform agenda under the RCC's (SEE Investment Committee) by revising accordingly the Terms of Reference of Working Group on Investment	2017	RCC SEE Investment Committee (RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion)
		b. Mandate representation of the relevant public institutions with appropriate decision making power in implementation of the agreed regional investment reform agenda	2017	WB6 Authorities in charge of investment agenda
		c. Establish individual-economy focus groups in charge of implementation of agreed investment reforms on individual-economy level	2018	WB6 Authorities in charge of investment agenda
		d. Review the progress of implementation of the regional investment reform agenda and conduct impact assessment through a regular regional dialogue under the RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion meetings and reports	2018-2020	RCC SEE Investment Committee (RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion)
		e. Report on the implementation and impact of the regional investment reform agenda through the RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion and SEE Investment	2018-2020	RCC SEE Investment Committee (RCC-CEFTA Joint

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
		Committee Ministerial Platform and the WB6 summit		Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion)
	II.1.4. Promote WB6 region as a unique investment destination	a. Develop joint investment promotion initiative for WB6 priority sectors and establish an operational platform of investment promotion tools and techniques	2018	RCC SEE Investment Committee (RCC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investment Policy and Promotion)
		b. Implement a small set of focused investment outreach activities in core sectors targeted by the SEE 2020 strategy	2018-2020	
		c. Dedicate part of the individual activities of investment promotion agencies to promoting the region as a sound investment destination	2018-2020	Regional Investment Promotion Agencies
	II.1.5. Diversification of financial systems to boost investment	a. As a first step in this area, create a regional “Capital Market Development Task Force” comprising policymakers and regulators to spearhead capital market development matters and enhance coordination on regulatory and supervisory regimes in the region and beyond (including coordination with the Vienna Initiative Working Group on Capital Markets Union)	2017	WB6 Authorities in charge of capital market policies and regulations RCC
		b. Based on analysis on capital markets development, aimed at identifying gaps and opportunities for broader capital markets integration, assess the need for development of a regional strategy for capital markets development	2018-2020	
II.1.6. Smart Growth	<p>a. Establish regional dialogue and knowledge exchange on developing Smart growth strategies based on EU experience and support the development of smart specialization research and innovation strategies in the WB6 to ensure strategic structural investments and to build competitive advantage</p> <p>i) with the active participation of the business and research & innovation communities, engage with EU-wide smart growth approaches, notably the smart specialisation platforms, to develop and implement smart growth development strategies</p> <p>ii) with the active participation of the business and research & innovation communities, engage with EU-wide work on digitalisation, to develop and implement digital growth strategies</p> <p>iii) develop easier access to finance for business, especially SMEs, start-ups and scale-ups</p>	2018	WB6 Ministries of Science in coordination with the Ministries of Economy WB6 Authorities in charge of investment agenda RCC Expert COM services	

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
III. Mobility				
III.1. Mobility of Researchers	III.1.1. Removal of obstacles to mobility of researchers	a. Identify legal barriers for open merit-based, competitive, international recruitment system and remove the identified legal barriers	2020	RCC/Working group on mobility of researchers
		b. Identify institutional barriers to mobility of researchers, including working conditions, recruitment systems and promotion criteria, and remove identified barriers	2020	
		c. Develop mechanisms and measures to support increased mobility of researchers from WB6 to EU within the existing mobility schemes (for instance Western Balkan Window within the MSC Actions)	2019	
		d. Develop and implement a pilot scheme to support incoming mobility of post-doctoral researchers to the Western Balkans with an aim to build research excellence networks in the region	2019	
		e. Map existing research infrastructure in the region to ensure transparent and available information to researchers interested to cooperate with and in the Western Balkans and to identify gaps	2019	
		f. Develop a new regional Centre of Excellence to promote collaboration between science, technology and industry and to provide a platform for education of young scientists and engineers, based on the mapping and the identified gaps	2020	
		g. Strengthening the capacity of EURAXESS offices in the region and the implementation of Charter and Code principles and Seal of Excellence	Continuous	
III.2. Mobility of Professionals	III.2.1. Removal of obstacles to recognition of professional qualifications	a. Open negotiation on mutual recognition agreements of professional qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers in a multilateral framework	2017	CEFTA - ERI SEE - RCC Joint Working Group on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications
		b. Conclude negotiations on mutual recognition agreements of professional qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers in a multilateral framework	2019	
		c. Establish the Database on Professional Qualifications and Mobility of Professionals in 2018 to be fully operation by December 2019	2018	
		d. Database on Professional Qualifications and Mobility of Professionals fully operational	2019	

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		e. Build capacity to facilitate the data and information collection for the Database on Professional Qualifications and Mobility of Professionals	Continuous	
		f. Explore possibilities to open negotiations and conclude mutual recognition agreements in other sectors and professions of mutual interest	2018-2020	
III.3. Mobility of Students and Highly Skilled	III.3.1. Removal of obstacles to recognition of academic qualifications	a. Draft a proposal on procedure for fast track recognition of higher education qualifications specifying criteria for fast track recognition in the region, on the basis of "National Qualification Frameworks" (NQFs) being developed in accordance with the Bologna Process and other EU norms, as a basis for established learning outcomes and thus recognition	2018	RCC ENIC/NARIC Centres, HEAs, ERI SEE
		b. Adopt and implement proposal on procedure for fast track recognition of higher education qualifications specifying criteria for fast track recognition in the region	2020	
		c. Establish an operational sub-regional network of ENIC/NARIC centres	2019	
		d. Develop a joint online system to share information, including on higher education institutions, qualifications and decisions taken, available to ENIC/NARIC centres and Ministries in the region	2020	
		e. Strengthen cooperation and exchange of information between Quality Assurance Agencies in the region	Continuous	
IV. Digital integration				
IV. 1. Digital environment networks and services, connectivity and access	IV.1.1 Boost digital infrastructure development and regional connectivity, while creating a level playing field for digital networks and services to flourish	a. Advance right/introduce policy and regulatory measures that would incentivise for investments in high speed broadband networks, including transposition of EU directive 2014/61/EU	Continuous	WB6 Authorities
		b. Complete outstanding broadband infrastructure mapping and perform analysis of broadband markets and identify network coverage gaps and investments, as well as policy measures required to bridge those gaps	2020	
		c. Establish regular exchange on business incentive models for rural and underserved areas and on the use of PPPs to address low connectivity	2018-onwards	
		d. Establish regional dialogue on commercialization of spare fibre	2017-2020	

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
		optic assets; identify and address legal and regulatory constraints and implement the agreed commercialization model		
		e. Strengthen regulatory dialogue among all WB6 regulators, as part of BEREC	Continuous	
		f. Complete regional interconnection and integration into the pan-European GÉANT	2023	
	IV.1.2 Harmonize spectrum policy to ensure timely and efficient availability and boost deployment of standardized 5G networks	a. Establish predictable, consistent, and harmonized spectrum policy on regional level and strengthen regional cooperation on spectrum policy harmonisation for 5G, as well as for disaster and emergency services	Continuous	WB6 Authorities
		b. Coordinate regional positions for the World Radio Conference (WRC), CEPT/ECO	Continuous	
	IV. 1.3 Coordinate roaming policies towards a roaming free economic area	a. Continue regional coordination on roaming policies towards a roaming free economic area and prepare mid-term Action Plan for aligning roaming policies with EU RLAH model	2018	WB6 Authorities RCC
b. Follow a multi-stakeholder approach to guarantee transparency and predictability so that all relevant views and expertise on roaming policies are sufficiently accounted for		Continuous		
c. Assess impact of abolishment of roaming charges in the EU on WB6 in a regional position paper		2018		
IV.2. Trust and security in digital services	IV.2.1. Enhance Cyber Security, trust services and data protection	a. Establish and harmonize cyber-security, data protection, and privacy regulations on the basis of a level playing field as key for establishing a functioning and efficient DSM approach	Continuous	WB6 Authorities
		b. Identify and ensure protection of critical IT infrastructures	Continuous	
		c. Set up regional dialogue and information exchange platform among WB6 CSIRTs (Computer Security Incident Response Teams), advance CSIRTs' capacities and strengthen institutional links with EU CSIRTs	2018-onwards	WB6 Authorities RCC
		d. Establish regional dialogue and information exchange platform among authorities in charge of Network and Information Security (NIS)	2018-onwards	
and society, Inc	IV.3.1. Develop and	a. Initiate regional cooperation on certified re/qualification digital skills programmes	2018	WB6 Authorities

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
	strengthen supply of digital skills	b. Pilot a regional intervention aimed at enhancing basic digital skills for citizens to engage online	2018-2019	RCC
		c. Pilot a regional intervention aimed at enhancing skills for IT specialists, that would be closely linked to the demand from and coordinated with digital businesses in WB6 and EU;	2018-2019	
		d. Set up and implement regional training and employability enhancement programme aiming to mobilize and upskill un/underemployed population (women) to seek revenue generation opportunities through online work platforms; with particular emphasis on youth, women, and people with disabilities	2018-2020	WB6 Authorities
IV.4. Digitization, Data economy, Standards and Interoperability, Innovation	IV.4.1. Promote uptake of Smart Technologies and Accelerate Digitization	a. Set up regional cooperative dialogue on digital transformation challenges and prospects in WB	2017	WB6 Authorities RCC
		i. Assess the state of play of the business environment and the multi-faceted benefits an accelerated and regional Digital Transformation would create in the Western Balkans		
		ii. Organize annual regional WB6 Digital Summits so as to contribute to a continuous dialogue among WB6 authorities, nongovernmental organizations, companies, chambers, and academia	2018-onwards	Chambers of Commerce Industry
		b. Foster Data economy (Big Data, Open Data and Open Government):	Continuous	WB6 Authorities
i. Support an open data region and improve quality of open data portals through regional cooperation and best practice exchange				
ii. Strengthen regional coordination on use, exchange and safe and reliable flow, access and transfer of data and integration within the European data ecosystem and economy				
		c. Align standards, complement interoperability frameworks and introduce a pan-European dimension, in line with EIF:	Continuous	
		i. Coordinate regional activities on interoperability standards and facilitate development of standards and interoperability initiatives		

<i>Policies</i>	<i>Objectives</i>	<i>Actions</i>	<i>Timeframe/Deadline</i>	<i>Coordination</i>
		d. Foster cooperation among digital hubs: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Facilitate Business Investments in research and Innovation and in the Creation of Start-Ups ii. Pilot regional cooperation (“twinning”) initiatives among technology/innovation Parks and assess demand and prospects for establishment of regional digital Innovation hubs 	Continuous 2018-onwards	WB6 Authorities Chambers of commerce Industry Academia
<i>Financing of the Action Plan</i>	Securing the human and financial resources needed for the implementation of the Action Plan	a. Prepare a needs assessment of resources needed to implement the Action Plan	2017	RCC CEFTA CEFTA Secretariat
		b. Secure human and financial resources that can be mobilised to meet the needs identified under a)	Continuous	WB6 Authorities
		c. Organise a donor coordination conference in order to coordinate donor support and mobilise the additional resources needed to implement the Action Plan	2017	RCC CEFTA CEFTA Secretariat