

Western Balkans Summit – Panel “Supporting Mobility – Connectivity Agenda”
(4 July 2019, Poznan)

Panellists: Commissioner Violeta Bulc, Mr. Alain Baron, (*interim*) Director of the Transport Community Treaty, Ms Amélie de Monchalin, French State Secretary for European Affairs, and Ms. Romana Vlahutin, Ambassador at Large for Connectivity, European External Action Service.

Summary:

- Transport issues are horizontal across the Western Balkan countries. The WB6 need to think regionally. Partner's transport systems are too fragmented to be efficient.
- Until the signature of the Transport Community Treaty (TCT), no legal framework was in place. This stable legal framework for the region was greatly lacking.
- Preparations and work done by the WB6 under the auspices of TCT is to be considered as work on the path to enlargement.
- Commissioner Bulc invited WB6 to act now as they were EU Member States – implementing without delay the key legislation - so that, when the times comes for accession, the transition will be as smooth as possible.
- Initially, the three major deliverables to be achieved under the auspices of the TCT are:
 - The regional rail strategy;
 - Border crossing projects;
 - Road safety.
- For the last two, funding for studies/design is already and immediately available.
- In 2020, an extra €15 million has been pledged to regional connectivity projects through WBIF and projects will be carried out in collaboration with the World Bank, EIB and EBRD.
- French State Secretary for EU affairs, Ms Amélie de Monchalin, stressed the importance of connectivity in order to make the WB6 work as a region.
- France will pledge a €100 million per year to the region of the coming years focusing on connectivity (green possibly but not only transport).
- However, the Secretary of State stressed the importance of having viable projects set out that they would be able to fund.
- The panel agreed that projects do not necessarily need to be large ones, smaller sustainable projects are key.
- There was consensus on the panel that what China was providing to the region – in terms of loans – has to be assessed carefully - as a significant share of the projects does not seem financially and economically viable involving little or no risk to the Chinese but a high-risk to the WB6 country concerned. It was also highlighted that there was a lack of transparency from the Chinese side.

- TCT Director Alain Baron, stressed the need for forward thinking in the region. Soft measures and digitalisation should aim to be part of any project and the project objectives should be reasonable.
- The Permanent Secretariat will help changing the transport setting in the region, not only by supporting the implementation of new legislation, but also in providing the appropriate assistance to overcome difficulties.
- The Panel concluded by agreeing that irrespective of the projects currently in place or being foreseen, that there is a need for political will in the region to implement the due reforms in order to move forward.