

## 2<sup>nd</sup> Thessaloniki 2020 Ministerial Forum

During today's teleconference meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, transport was identified as one of the key sectors for region's economic recovery. Better transport links between EU and Western Balkans will be essential in order to jointly handle the challenges posed by the current public health crisis. TCT's central role has been confirmed to identify and support the implementation of the appropriate measures and actions aiming at improving the Connectivity within Western Balkans and with EU Member States.

Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Hellenic Republic, the Republic of Croatia, the Italian Republic, the Republic of Bulgaria, Romania, the Republic of Slovenia and the Western Balkans partners, the Republic of North Macedonia, the Republic of Albania, the Republic of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo\*, the Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement and representatives of European External Action Service and Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs met upon invitation of the Foreign Ministers Nikos Dendias and Nikola Dimitrov.

It was agreed that regional cooperation and cooperation between EU and Western Balkans is needed now more than ever in order to mitigate the impact of the covid-19 pandemic and lay the groundwork for the region's recovery.

The participants welcomed European Commissions' readiness to "associate the region closely with the implementation of its 'Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures". Beyond the financing commitment taken by the EU to support Western Balkans "post COVID-19" recovery, the reinforcement of the connectivity and a better access to the EU market should be among key deliverables that would pave the way to a stronger economic integration between the region and the EU.

Regarding transport, a coordinated framework to safely restore transport and connectivity at bilateral and regional levels should become a priority. In this context the European Commission's initiative to ensure "fast flow of goods through Green Lanes linking the EU and the Western Balkans" will be crucial. The "Green lanes" linking the EU to the Western Balkans must remain "green" also after the end of this emergency period in order to improve significantly the intra WB and the EU-WB's accessibility. This will require progressive removal of all unnecessary obstacles of both administrative and infrastructure nature affecting the flow of goods and passengers between WB and EU. Restoring movement, reopening borders and lifting imposed measures should be a gradual process, based on epidemiological grounds and implemented in a coordinated manner.

Joint statement: <https://www.mfa.gr/en/current-affairs/statements-speeches/2nd-thessaloniki-2020-ministerial-forum-joint-ministerial-statement-on-covid-19-pandemic.html>