



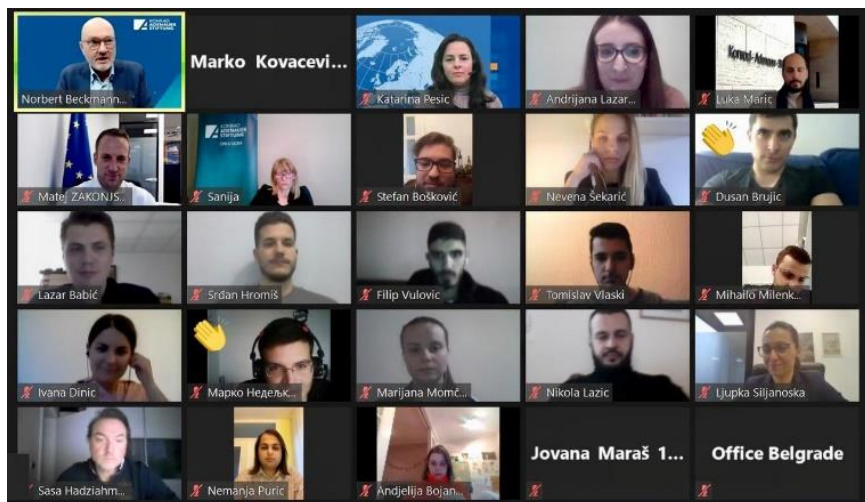
The **COVID-19 pandemic** continues to effect transport across the world. Unfortunately, this is also the case in the Western Balkans. Following the introduction of new restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic on the **border of Greece with North Macedonia and Albania**, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, together with CEFTA Secretariat, issued a joint press statement on 15 March, urging the authorities of Greece to make all necessary steps to alleviate long waiting lines at border crossings that effect economies of the entire

region. In North Macedonia, the inability to import petroleum products from Thessaloniki could potentially lead to shortages of petroleum, which may have a negative impact on its economy and a domino effect on the overall situation in the Western Balkans. Press release: <https://www.transport-community.org/2021/03/15/press-release-transport-community-and-cefta-secretariats-call-on-greece-to-exempt-the-truck-drivers-from-covid-19-measures/>.

The Transport Community **2021 plans and priorities were presented to the EU Member States** on 16 March. Director Zakonjsek highlighted the focus of activities on rail, waterborne transport and multimodality, extension of Green Lanes, road safety and the **Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy - Western Balkans perspective**. The Strategy will serve the region to ensure a harmonised approach in making transport greener, sustainable, and healthier for all citizens. Ambassador Pedro Lourtie, Deputy Permanent Representative of Portugal (that is currently holding a Presidency of the Council of the European Union), also voiced support to the Secretariat's work on this strategic document, which will be essential for Western Balkan's economic recovery. Decarbonisation and use of alternative fuels were discussed during a meeting with the **Energy Community** representatives on 10 March in Belgrade. On the same day, the Secretariat presented the perspectives on sustainable transport beyond the EU at a panel organised by the **European Transport Workers Federation**.



One-stop border crossings and their significance for Western Balkans were highlighted in the interview for "Ekonomija i biznis" magazine in North Macedonia. Tabanovce-Presevo crossing, where customs and police authorities of Serbia and North Macedonia work together at the same facility, is one of the brightest examples of regional cooperation <https://ekonomijaibiznis.mk/News.aspx?IdNews=23990>. The importance of a coordinated approach to dealing with challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic was noted at the meeting with **Serbia's Customs Administration Director, Branko Radujko**, on 26 March. The meeting focused on cross-border traffic between Serbia and Croatia and specifically on concrete steps that could help in reducing waiting times at the border crossing Batrovci / Bajakovo.

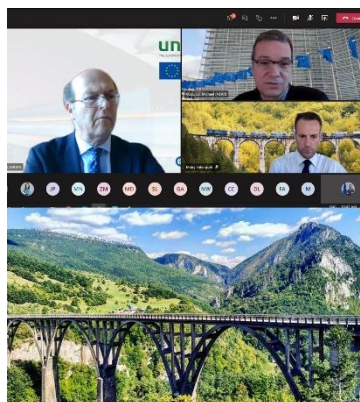


An exciting opportunity to exchange views with future leaders of the region came on 17 March during an online discussion with **Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) scholarship recipients**. Students from Montenegro and Serbia showed remarkable interest in the work of the Transport Community and asked well-researched, thought-provoking questions during a two-hour online discussion on the topic *Without connections, there are no innovations - the challenges of the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat*. A week earlier, a productive meeting was held with KAS representative Norbert Beckmann-Dierkes and the **German Bundestag Member of**

Parliament Marian Wendt, discussing the Connectivity Agenda in the Western Balkans and potential for future cooperation.

Economic potential of **Green Lanes and their extension to neighbouring EU Member States** were the main topics of the interview series coordinated with the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) Secretariat. Newspapers and web portals in all six regional partners published the interview, demonstrating regional media interest in the Transport Community work. Support for the Green Lanes initiative was expressed also by **Romania's Transport Minister Cătălin Drulă** during an online meeting on 11 March. The Secretariat expressed readiness to facilitate the re-establishment of rail passenger transport between Serbia and Romania, as well as construction of TEN-T Route 4 to Timisoara. Press release: <https://www.transport-community.org/2021/03/11/minister-drula-meets-with-transport-community-director-zakonjsek/>

Preparatory activities of the **first Western Balkans Rail Summit**, which shall be organised together with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), continued in March. Productive meetings were held with the host government (Serbia's Ministry of Construction, Transport, and Infrastructure), to jumpstart preparations for this major event in the European Year of Rail.



Investments in rail were the main topic of the UNIFE seminar on 2 March. Director Zakonjsek noted that linking reforms to infrastructure construction, development of multimodal solutions, creation of a regional common rail market and implementation of the TCT Rail Action Plan will be essential for the region's economic development. Finally, in March the Secretariat also marked International Women's Day with leading by example and demonstrating gender balanced staff, and by raising a voice for greater inclusion of women in transport.