



On 13 September, the **Western Balkans Rail Summit** in Belgrade gathered the entire Western Balkans region – Ministers in charge of transport of Southeast European Parties of the Transport Community Treaty, international financing institutions, European institutions, rail infrastructure managers, directors of rail companies and many other rail professionals. For the first time, under the auspices of Ministry of Construction, Transport, and Infrastructure of Serbia, and organised together with the Transport Community, the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Infrastructure and Development, all rail stakeholders

of the Western Balkans got together with a united message: the time has come to **invest in rail and to develop a strong and competitive rail transport industry, with open and competitive rail transport market, to improve the interoperability and safety of rail networks and to develop rail transport infrastructure in the Western Balkans.**

Transport leaders of the region committed to a number of priorities such as to rebuild direct intercity train links connecting the region and the EU, to enhance digitalisation of the railway systems and to exchange data for cross border passenger and freight transport. Building a modern, digitalised rail network, with direct express train connections between major cities will help **establish better connectivity and provide safer and environmentally sustainable mode of transport** for people and businesses in the Western Balkans.

This was recognised as key priority of the Dedication to Rail<sup>1</sup> signed by six ministers in charge of transport in the region. Furthermore, railway infrastructure managers from the region signed a Memorandum of Understanding<sup>2</sup> that will pave the way for the implementation of intelligent transport systems for rail and for the development and maintenance of the rail TEN-T network infrastructure. The summit was organised to coincide with the arrival of Connecting Europe Express train. As part of the European Year of Rail, the train was welcomed with trumpets and traditional dance in Belgrade on 12 September and continued to Skopje the next day. On 13 September, before opening the summit, the Prime Minister of Serbia HE Ana Brnabić delivered opening remarks at the Central Railway Station in Belgrade demonstrating **highest level of political support to “put the rail back on track” in the Western Balkans.** The train then made its way through Western Balkans with an evening stop in North Macedonia. Transport Community is dedicated to working with our regional partners, EU and IFI's on **modernisation of rail Corridor X** with the aim to have a reliable and fast connection Belgrade-Skopje-Thessaloniki.



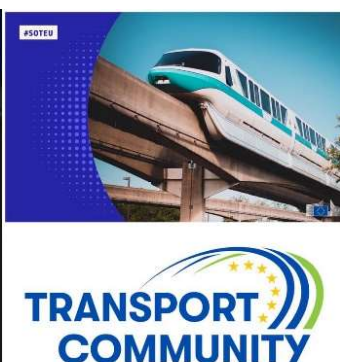
<sup>1</sup> <https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Dedication-to-Rail-09092021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MoU-of-Infrastructure-Managers-WB-10092021.pdf>

Director Zakonjšek's visit to Slovenia on 24 September was an opportunity to welcome the Connecting Europe Express train in Ljubljana and present priorities in the rail sector at the South East Europe Strategic Alliance for Rail Innovation high level conference in Ljubljana.

In the days before and after the summit, Transport Community held a series of constructive meetings focused on rail. On 12 September, meeting was held with the Vice President of the European Investment Bank Lilyana Pavlova to highlight the two institutions' dedication to **investments in rail in the Western Balkans, which are making the region greener and better connected**. A day after the summit, a meeting at the Transport Community Headquarters with the European Railway Agency Director Josef Doppelbauer focused on joint **work on technical assistance and capacity building for rail sector** in the region.

During a **visit to North Macedonia** on 6 September, Transport Community delegation met with Minister of Transport and Communications Blagoj Bochvarski for discussions on rail transport, with focus on Corridor VIII linking Skopje and Sofia, important developments in the area of road safety, as well as ongoing road infrastructure projects. On the same day, during a meeting with the Director of Macedonian rail infrastructure company Mr Hari Lokvenec, Director Zakonjšek stressed that North Macedonia will be able to use its geostrategic position when the railways linking Corridors X and VIII become fully operational and start being used by passengers and freight. A day before in Skopje, Transport Community's work was presented to future leaders of the region, participants of the School of Politics within the Presidential Center for Political Education. Key theme of the stimulating discussion was, how to utilise connectivity as basis for regional cooperation and EU integration. A positive development in this regard, happened on 16 September during a joint government session between North Macedonia and Kosovo\* when



the authorities signed the **Customs agreement on railway transport**. The agreement will pave the way for establishment of joint controls at border crossing Hani i Elezit and strengthen ties between people.

Connectivity's importance was also noted in State of the Union remarks of the European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen who announced the EU's new connectivity strategy, while also stating that *"investment in the future of the Western Balkans is the investment in the future of the EU"*, fully in line with priorities of the

Transport Community.

On 1 September, Director Zakonjšek spoke at the 16th Bled Strategic Forum (BSF), in a session titled Building connectivity in CEE – the Case of the Three Seas Initiative. The main topics of the BSF included post – pandemic



recovery, green and digital transformation, and the future of EU enlargement process – all areas in which transport plays a crucial role.

Transport Community took active part in the **European Mobility Week** events in Belgrade and on 19 September, together with the Mayor of Belgrade and the EU Delegation highlighted the importance of sustainable mobility, while paying special attention to healthy lifestyles. Sustainable mobility was again in focus on 21 September at a workshop during which Transport Community presented its Sustainable and Smart Mobility for the Western Balkans.



To mark the **World Maritime Day** and highlight the role of Western Balkans ports, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy of Albania and the Port of Durres organised on 30 September a **conference “Towards a resilient, competitive and sustainable maritime sector in the Western Balkans”**. On this occasion, Transport Community highlighted its **active engagement in defining actions for sustainable maritime transport in the region**. The first important milestone on this path was the development



of the **Action Plan for Waterborne Transport and Multimodality**, with numerous other initiatives planned in the upcoming period. The event gathered for the first time the entire maritime sector of Transport Community to highlight enormous potential of connecting ports Durres and Bar to their hinterlands. Potential of hinterlands was discussed at a roundtable organised by the Montenegrin Ministry of Capital Investments in Bar on 28 September to which Transport Community also offered its insights. During the visit to Bar, Transport

Community met with the management of Montenegro’s Maritime Safety Department.

Deputy Director Ljupka Siljanoska participated in the 8th Western Balkans Civil Society Forum in Skopje on 30 September presenting the views on **contribution of the civil society and importance of social dialogue for the sustainable transport development in Western Balkans**.

To mark a successful end of a busy month, Svilaj bridge, connecting Bosnia and Herzegovina with Croatia, has been completed and officially opened on 30 September. This EU-funded infrastructure project can now start serving citizens by reducing travel time and strengthening connectivity between the region and the EU.