

Sarajevo, 04<sup>th</sup> October 2021

# **ACTION PLAN**

## **FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOFIA DECLARATION**

### **ON THE GREEN AGENDA FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS**

#### **2021-2030**

## **INTRODUCTION**

This Action Plan represents one of the outputs of the Sofia Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) and is used as a tool to guide its implementation. It embodies the “putting words into actions” paradigm by identifying concrete steps and supporting organisations, as well as defining an indicative timeframe for each implementable measure. The Action Plan sets the framework to coordinate and support its proper implementation and monitor the progress in this regard. The Sofia Summit represented a milestone for the Western Balkan region that should galvanise a shift in development paradigm and bolster the region to undertake a major transformation and to properly and timely address the growing environmental and climate challenges by putting sustainable development, resource efficiency, nature protection and climate action in the centre of all economic activities and turn those challenges into opportunities.

Prepared in an extensive consultation process coordinated by Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), this Action Plan (AP) was developed following a bottom-up approach that involved authorities from the Western Balkans (WB) economies, relevant regional organisations active in the policy areas covered by the GAWB, international financial institutions (IFIs), civil society organisations (CSOs), and other partners. The European Commission (EC), Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR) also played a crucial role in coordinating activities and providing experts’ inputs for all areas through consultations with line Directorates-General (DGs). This participatory approach enabled constructive contributions from various stakeholders, upholding the principle of regional ownership that contributed to its quality through leveraging on different perspectives and bringing heterogeneous knowledge and experience.

This document covers the period from 2021 to 2030 and is designed to be periodically revised according to the needs and new priorities, without decreasing the level of ambitions. Any prolongation of the indicative timeframes will need to be justified. The ten-year perspective of the Action Plan allows its alignment with the most important international and European policy objectives such as the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the European Energy and Climate Policy Framework for 2030, the EU Biodiversity Strategy by 2030, the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Circular Economy and the Zero Pollution Action Plans. The Action Plan will be revised twice: by the end of 2024 and by the end of 2027, using the same consultative process with the Western Balkan authorities and partner regional organisations, thereby analysing the achieved progress against the AP objectives.

This Action Plan outlines the framework for its coordination and monitoring, while the main responsibility for the implementation lies with the Western Balkan authorities following inter-sectorial and inter-institutional cooperation. The Action Plan takes into account the main political

processes, international frameworks and agreements, the most recent policy developments and in particular legislative and non-legislative acts adopted at the EU level. This includes the European Green Deal (EGD) (EU climate framework, the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Farm-to-Fork Strategy, Fit for 55% Package, Zero Pollution Action Plan, etc.), the Western Balkans energy and climate objectives/ambitions for 2030 in line with the EU's intermediate climate targets to reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by at least 55%, as well as many others.

## **ORGANISATION / STRUCTURE OF THE ACTION PLAN**

The Action Plan is structured so as to reflect the seven components of the Sofia Declaration (Climate Action, Energy, Transport, Circular Economy, Pollution, Sustainable Agriculture and Nature and Biodiversity Protection) grouped into five pillars. It includes measures to reach 58 commitments (objectives) from the Sofia Declaration along with an overview of the main regional coordinators and other relevant organisations contributing to a specific objective. For each measure, an indicative timeframe for its implementation is defined in consultations with the regional coordinators and the Western Balkan authorities.

While the first part of the AP contains the measures and deadlines by when a certain action will be completed and which entity will coordinate and support it, the second part presents a more detailed pathway on how this will be achieved through roadmaps for each component. The roadmaps describe the regional actions and steps to be taken, the intermediate objectives, the required outputs and other elements necessary to drive the region towards fulfilment of the commitments stemming from the Sofia Declaration. The seven roadmaps were developed by RCC and the regional coordinators in close communication with the Western Balkan authorities, the European Commission and other relevant partners. The process was conducted through a series of consultations and regular meetings of the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWG Env) in its extended format so as to include other line ministries relevant for the implementation of the GAWB. The pathways defined in the regional roadmaps present essential steps in moving towards ecological and social sustainability and will also be instrumental in helping to deliver on the Paris Climate Agreement through the contribution of various economic sectors. Implementation of these pathways will require the right prioritisation and sequencing complemented by concerted efforts from all relevant actors as well as a strong cross-sectorial cooperation at both economy and regional levels.

The smooth implementation of this Action Plan will need appropriate expertise in all fields of sustainable development, environmental protection and climate change, technical support, decision making power, a solid governance structure, including a comprehensive and useful monitoring mechanism to enable a dynamic and understandable review of the progress, to identify the needs and to intervene with corrective actions or to intensify the effort. Therefore, the third part of this Action Plan provides an overview of the governance, monitoring and reporting mechanisms, as well as a synopsis of other structures to be established and mobilised in order to facilitate implementation, to ensure a multi-stakeholder approach and vertical coordination, and to support the necessary knowledge sharing and awareness raising activities at different levels including local self-government level. The implementation of the Sofia Declaration will entail a huge financial effort, while its success will, to a great extent, depend on adequate financial support complemented with technical assistance and knowledge sharing. Therefore, the third part also contains information that addresses the funding of the AP and activities to support the coordination of available financial sources.

This Action Plan has been developed by taking into account the reality of the region and certain delays in the implementation of relevant EU policies and the alignment process. It aims at reversing negative practices that deteriorate the state of environment in the region, as well as at transforming all economic sectors in line with the green transition principles. In this way, this document will facilitate regional development that meets the needs of present and future generations while opening new economic opportunities and ensuring accelerated growth that does not harm the environment.

## **PART 1 – ACTION PLAN FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOFIA DECLARATION**

This part of the Action Plan sets an indicative timeframe for each commitment of the Sofia Declaration and identifies the main regional coordinators, supporting organisations (where applicable), and relevant structures. The timetable is developed for all five pillars mirroring the structure of the GAWB: 1) Decarbonisation, 2) Circular Economy, 3) Depollution, 4) Sustainable Agriculture and 5) Protection of Nature and Biodiversity.

### **1) DECARBONISATION**

	Action	The main regional coordinator(s)	Indicative timeframe	Comment
1	Align with the EU Climate Law with a vision of achieving climate neutrality by 2050	RCC, (+ EnCS TBC)	2025	Continuous improvement by 2030
2	Set forward-looking 2030 energy and climate targets	EnCS, EC	2022 (Ongoing)	Based on the EC study, NDC, LCDS and NECP; co-benefits for air pollution reduction
3	Develop and implement integrated Energy and Climate Plans	EnCS	2022 (Ongoing)	Based on the EC study; Implementation by 2030
4	Prepare and implement climate adaptation strategies	RCC	2028 (Ongoing)	Based on the NAP processes
5	Align with the EU Emissions Trading System and/or introduce other carbon pricing instruments	EnCS (TBC)	2024 (Ongoing)	Based on the decision on introducing carbon pricing – policy discussion is ongoing
6	Increase opportunities for the deployment of nature-based solutions to mitigate and adapt to climate change	RCC, IUCN	2025	Continuous improvement by 2030; Link with Action 54
7	Ensure participation of WB economies in the European Climate Pact or consider the development of a similar mechanism	RCC	2022	Continuous improvement by 2030

8	Review and revise, where necessary, all relevant legislation to support progressive decarbonisation of the energy sector	EnCS, RCC	2023 (Ongoing)	Continuous improvement by 2030
9	Prepare an assessment of the socio-economic impact of decarbonisation at the individual economy and regional level	RCC	2022	
10	Prioritise energy efficiency and improve it in all sectors	EnCS, TCPS, RCC	Ongoing	Continuous improvement by 2030
11	Transposition and full enforcement of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive	EnCS	2023	Continuous improvement by 2030
12	Support private and public buildings renovation schemes and secure appropriate financing	EnCS	Ongoing	Development of the concept by the EC is ongoing; Continuous improvement by 2030
13	Increase the share of renewable energy sources and provide the necessary investment conditions	EnCS	Ongoing	Updating the <i>acquis</i> is in progress; N.B: any increase of biomass combustion must be done with due consideration to air pollution impacts; Continuous improvement by 2030
14	Decrease and gradually phase out coal subsidies, strictly respecting state aid rules	EnCS	Ongoing	To be indicated in NECPs; Clean air co-benefits.
15	Ensure participation in the Coal Regions in Transition initiative for the Western Balkans	EnCS	Ongoing	Clean air co-benefits from reduced coal combustion
16	Develop programmes for addressing energy poverty and financing schemes for household renovation and providing basic standards of living	EnCS	Ongoing 2024	Continuous improvement by 2030
17	Support the development of smart transport infrastructure, promote fostering of innovative technologies (such as paperless transport, artificial intelligence, multimodal passengers ticketing, mobility as a service, border/boundary crossing applications, 5G corridors, etc.)	TCPS, EnCS	Ongoing	Important for integrated planning of energy and transport/charging infrastructure; Continuous improvement by 2030
18	Implement the Regional Action Plan for Rail Reforms	TCPS	2023	Excepted infrastructure improvement

19	Define rail freight and inland waterway transport corridors	TCPS	2027	The network of rail freight corridors is under revision by the EC
20	Define an overall strategy to shift traffic from road to more environmentally friendly modes	TCPS	2021	Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for WB has been prepared by the TCPS and presented to the TCT Ministerial Council
21	Identify the EU technical standards and ensure their implementation and digitalisation of all transport modes	TCPS	2030	Continuous improvement by 2030
22	Implement the Regional Transport Facilitation Action Plan	TCPS	2023	
23	Implement the Regional Road Safety Action Plan	TCPS	2022	
24	Implement the Road Action Plan	TCPS	2024	
25	Develop and implement climate resilience plans for Western Balkan economies' transport networks	TCPS, RCC	2022	Link with Climate Action
26	Promote preparation and implementation of Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans for urban areas in the Western Balkans	TCPS, RCC (through LSGs Summit)	2025	Clean air benefits; Strong promotion by 2025, Implementation to follow.
27	Define sustainable mobility solutions at the regional level including plans for deployment of alternative fuels	TCPS (alt. fuels infrastructure), EnCS (alt. fuels supply), RCC	2024	Clean air benefits
27a	Define a plan for deployment and building of charging stations for electric vehicles	TCPS	2022	
28	Increase regional cooperation in the area of alternative fuels infrastructure development	TCPS, RCC	2023	Clean air benefits

## 2) CIRCULAR ECONOMY

	Action	The main regional coordinator(s)	Indicative timeframe	Comment
29	Improve sustainability of primary production of raw materials	RCC	2030	Continuous improvement by 2030
30	Apply an industrial ecosystem approach to attain environmentally sustainable, balanced economic recovery	RCC	2025	Through integration of objectives of the new Industrial Strategy for Europe

31	Develop circular economy strategies looking at the entire lifecycle of products	RCC	2023	Economy-wide strategies to be prepared by the end of 2023; Western Balkan economies are developing/ have developed Circular Economy Roadmap
32	Make further progress in the construction and maintenance of waste management infrastructure for cities and regions	RCC	2025	Achieved progress to be reported by 2025; Continuous improvement by 2030
33	Design and implement consumer-targeted initiatives to raise awareness of citizens on waste prevention, separate collection and sustainable consumption	RCC	2022	A regional campaign to be launched by RCC
34	Conclude and implement a regional agreement on the prevention of plastic pollution, including specifically addressing the priority issue of marine litter	EPPA, RCC	2022	EPPA can start the process of developing a regional agreement on marine litter, but due to the limited timeframe of the project (until Sept 2022), it will most probably not be able to see its finalisation; Link with Actions 43 and 52
35	Further implement Smart Specialisation Strategies, place-based, innovation-led transformation agendas for sustainability	RCC	2024	Link with Common Regional Market (CRM) initiative

### 3) DEPOLLUTION

	Action	The main regional coordinator(s)	Indicative timeframe	Comment
36	Finalise the process of ratification of Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its protocols	RCC	2025	WB economies adopted emission reduction plans within EnC; Emission reduction commitments to be established
36a	Support modelling to establish economy-wide emission reduction commitments for	RCC	2025	Possibility of involving the JRC

	the five main pollutants covered by the NEC Directive and the Gothenburg Protocol under the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution			modelling team
37	Develop and implement Air Quality Strategies	RCC, EnCS	2030	Some WB economies developed the strategy within their environment strategies; The implementation - beyond 2030
37a	Increase the uptake of Best Available Techniques in accordance with the Industrial Emissions Directive	RCC, EnCS	2030	
38	Establish an adequate air quality monitoring system, including through accreditation of air quality monitoring networks	RCC, EnCS	2025	Develop the regional quality assurance system
39	Implement relevant EU water-related <i>acquis</i> (Water Framework Directive, Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive and Nitrates Directive)	RCC	2027**	In line with the final deadline for WFD
40	Modernise water monitoring infrastructure and reach good status for all water bodies	RCC	2030**	Continuous improvement by 2030
41	Build the necessary infrastructure for wastewater treatment	RCC	2030**	Continuous improvement by 2030
42	Integrate soil protection in other policy areas and establish a regional soil partnership to improve knowledge exchange and identify examples of best practices for soil protection from pollution and degradation	RCC, SWG RRD	2024	Following the deadlines from the EU Zero Pollution Action Plan
43	Prepare and sign regional agreements on transboundary air and water pollution	RCC	2023	Link with Actions 34 and 52

#### 4) SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE

	Action	The main regional coordinator(s)	Indicative timeframe	Comment
44	Align the agri-food and primary production sector with the EU standards on food safety, plant and animal health and welfare and environment, and address effluent, manure and waste management	SWG RRD	2026	Continuous improvement by 2030
45	Strengthen the official sanitary controls along the entire food chain and improve the traceability and labelling of food products	SWG RRD	2027	Continuous improvement by 2030

\*\* The timeline of implementation of Activities 39, 40 and 41 could be further determined for Western Balkan economies in the framework of negotiations or enlargement process

46	Promote environmentally-friendly (zero pollution) and organic farming and reduction of synthetic chemical products used in food production	SWG RRD	2026	Continuous improvement by 2030
47	Cooperate with scientific, education, business and agricultural holdings to facilitate transfer to innovative and environmentally friendly technologies and farming methods	SWG RRD	2026	Continuous improvement by 2030
48	Devise actions to reduce waste in rural and coastal areas	SWG RRD	2030	Waste management requires extensive financial means to execute and/or implement the target measure
49	Step up efforts for sustainable development of rural areas with implementation of LEADER	SWG RRD	2026	Continuous improvement by 2030
50	Support investments in renewable energy production and technologies as well as GHG emission reductions and adaptation to climate change measures in agriculture	SWG RRD, EnCS	2027	Continuous improvement by 2030

## 5) PROTECTION OF NATURE AND BIODIVERSITY

	Action	The main regional coordinator(s)	Indicative timeframe	Comment
51	Develop and implement a Western Balkans 2030 Biodiversity Strategic Plan	IUCN, RCC	2021-2030	Implementation till 2030
51a	Develop a Western Balkans Biodiversity Report	IUCN	2021-2022	Consultations with WB authorities, CSOs and internat. organisations
51b	Develop a Western Balkans Biodiversity Strategic Plan	IUCN	2022-2024	Consultations with WB authorities, CSOs and internat. organisations
52	Prepare nature protection and restoration plans including for marine areas	IUCN, RCC, EPPA	2022-2024	Extensive consultations with WB and international organisations; Link with Actions 34 and 43
53	Develop and implement a Western Balkans Forest Landscape Restoration Plan	IUCN, RCC	2021-2030	Implementation till 2030
53a	Prepare Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report	IUCN	2021-2022	Consultations with WB authorities, CSOs and internat. organisations

53b	Prepare Forest Landscape Restoration Plan (including a financial plan)	IUCN	2022-2024	Consultations with WB authorities, CSOs and internat. organisations
54	Analyse biodiversity benefits of Nature-based Solutions and opportunities for their integration into the development of climate and other plans	IUCN, RCC	2021-2023	Link with Action 6
54a	Report on climate change and biodiversity linkages	IUCN	2021-2022	
55	Strengthen the mechanisms for regional cooperation and strategic planning on biodiversity conservation and implementation of the commitments under the Convention on Biological Diversity	IUCN, RCC	2021-2030	Including other biodiversity-related agreements; Continuous improvement by 2030
56	Reinforce the engagement with the United Nations Rio Conventions (and synergy between the three), and join efforts in preparing a regional position on a global post-2020 biodiversity agenda	IUCN, RCC	2021-2022	Continuous improvement by 2030
57	Set up the Western Balkans Biodiversity Information Hub to improve knowledge exchange and availability of information	IUCN, RCC	2021-2024	Parameters and indicators need to be aligned with those set up by the EU and CBD; Continuous improvement by 2030
57a	Biodiversity Monitoring and Evaluation Framework	IUCN, RCC	2021-2024	
58	Development of Green Infrastructures and ecosystem connectivity	RCC, EPPA, IUCN	2022-2023	Continuous improvement by 2030

## PART 2 – ROADMAPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION

The seven roadmaps presented in this chapter provide a strategic orientation for the Western Balkans and guidelines on how to initiate and maintain the process of meeting the Sofia Commitments in the first decade of action and establish a solid foundation for achieving climate neutrality by 2050. These roadmaps are prepared based on the most recent developments under the EGD and having in mind the *status quo* in certain policy areas in the Western Balkan economies. The roadmaps represent operationalisation of the key measures agreed by the Western Balkan Leaders in Sofia and provide more detailed instructions on what has to be done in terms of undertaking additional measures, conducting baseline studies, collecting data, developing strategic visions and documents, establishing necessary structures, setting intermediate targets, strengthening cooperation, etc. The following seven chapters identify priorities and necessary steps to facilitate the process of integration of the EGD objectives in the policy and legal framework of the economies in the region aimed at maximising intensity and exploiting the full potential of the foreseen green transition in the first years of implementation.

## 1) Climate Action Roadmap

### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

The number of pledges announcing achieving net-zero greenhouse gas emissions over the coming three decades is increasing globally. By the adoption of the European Green Deal, the EU is determined to be a global leader and drive the transition towards net-zero emissions, helping and inspiring others to follow the same path. The Western Balkans joined this initiative by signing the Sofia Declaration on the GAWB. This commitment underlines the need for defining a clear pathway that explores necessary changes in various economic sectors to achieve this ambitious goal by 2050. The utmost priority in the Western Balkan region is to urgently adapt climate policy, determine transitional 2030 climate (and energy) targets aligned with the increased EU ambitions, transpose the Fit for 55 package and the EU Climate Law, align with the EU Strategy on Adaptation to Climate Change, increase deployment of natural and artificial carbon sinks and ensure a swift green transformation of all economic sectors with a focus on carbon-intensive ones.

Globally coal has been the backbone of the economic development of humanity since the beginning of the industrial era. The Western Balkan region is not an exception with a huge portion of electricity (around 70%) produced in coal-fired power plants. Scientific evidence, the climate change that we are all witnessing, as well as the negative health impact of air pollutants, both short- and long-term, confirm that this economic model is not sustainable in the long run and that this negative practice should cease. Coal combustion causes around 4,000 premature deaths per year in the Western Balkans, with directly attributable health and lost productivity costs estimated to be around € 11 billion annually<sup>2</sup>, including damage caused in the neighbouring EU Member States (MS). However, abandoning technologies that Western Balkan economies heavily rely on and switching from coal to renewable energy will bring serious socio-economic challenges which the Western Balkan region has to resolve in order to prevent unwanted consequences such as unemployment, economic disruption, migration of workforce and other potential negative impacts. This transition is, however, clearly needed for the sake of human health, the environment and the climate.

To make this transition happen, the Western Balkan economies need to define legally binding objectives with timelines and pathways, while ensuring regulatory and financial mechanisms and capacities for implementation. Structured dialogues among stakeholders and target groups are one of the main preconditions for efficient and successful climate actions in the Western Balkan region.

### **Part two: The way forward**

Recognising the need to map out a pathway towards carbon neutrality by 2050, the Western Balkan economies should develop and adopt their long-term, low-greenhouse gas emissions development strategies (the long-term strategies) in accordance with the provisions of the EU Climate Law, Governance Regulation and other elements of the EU climate policy framework, and adopt them without further delay and not later than by 2025. These long-term strategies should focus on decarbonisation of the carbon-intensive sectors (energy and transport) and define economy-wide targets for emission reductions from all transport modes, buildings, agriculture, industry and waste sector.

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<sup>2</sup> Report: EU action on Western Balkans' chronic coal pollution is a unique opportunity to improve health and productivity, <https://caneurope.org/report-eu-action-on-western-balkans-chronic-coal-pollution-is-a-unique-opportunity-to-improve-health-and-productivity/>

To trace the path for a socially acceptable and just phase-out of coal-fired power generation the Western Balkan authorities should establish a Decarbonisation Committee (DcC) with a mandate of developing, by the end of 2024, an Action Programme for Coal Phase-out (APCP). The committee should consist of various stakeholders from the realm of politics, business, environment including representatives of impacted branches and companies, employees' unions, and other interested stakeholders. The Action Programme (to be aligned with National Energy and Climate Plan) should contain a mix of instruments and a strategic vision for a gradual phase-out of coal-fired power generation, including milestones and deadlines, with proposals for necessary legal, economic, social and other measures to prevent and alleviate potential negative impacts. These documents should analyse social, energy and economic aspects of decarbonisation and identify opportunities for resolving the conflict between energy security, climate objectives and social elements including opportunities for creation of new jobs and prevention of increases in electricity costs and aggravating energy poverty problems.

During the development of APCP, Decarbonisation Committees need to take into account and estimate potential impacts of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) on competitiveness and overall economic activity for each Western Balkan economy. These CBAM impact assessments should be prepared by DcC by the end of 2023 and presented to the respective Western Balkan authorities. The prepared impact assessments should also present valuable inputs to the process of alignment with the EU Emission Trading System (ETS) or introducing other carbon pricing instruments. They will also serve as a useful tool for defining a strategic orientation in the development or finalisation of National Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs).

Revision of relevant climate legislation in the Western Balkans should be one of the priorities in the upcoming years to support progressive decarbonisation and ensure a balance between targets, pricing, standards, and supporting measures, as well as the full alignment with the EU Climate Law, latest by the end of 2023.

By 2026, a Western Balkans Regional Adaptation Strategy (RAS) should be prepared to underline common needs, define joint activities towards increasing regional climate resilience and identify potential financial sources. The Strategy should provide a proposal for fostering climate resilience of the region until 2030 with a long-term vision for a climate-resilient Western Balkan region adapted to the unavoidable impact of climate change by 2050. The Strategy should be compliant with the EU Adaptation Strategy, National Adaptation Plans and other relevant documents and should explore opportunities for a broader deployment of nature-based solutions in increasing climate resilience.

To reach climate neutrality by 2050, reducing GHG emissions should go hand in hand with increasing carbon removals. In this regard, the alignment with the revised Regulation on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land-use change and forestry (LULUCF) and its proper enforcement should be one of the priorities for the region in the upcoming decade. Improvement of GHG inventories, developing Forestry Accounting Plans (containing a proposed forest reference level, in line with LULUCF Regulation), adding new categories of carbon storage products, including harvested wood products, should be among the first steps towards this goal. In addition to this and the LULUCF sector's capacities to sequester carbon from the atmosphere, an integrated approach to climate action and a greater contribution from the land sector including optimising land use planning and practices is also urgently needed. Furthermore, the concept of carbon farming to promote land carbon sequestration as a new green business model can also be considered as a new source of income. Therefore, the Western Balkan economies should create an adequate framework for maximising carbon sequestration and develop adequate protocols, tools and

mechanisms for the monitoring, reporting and verification of carbon sequestration. During the first revision of this AP (planned for 2024), an adequate indicator to complement its monitoring system should be defined together with a methodology for data collection and calculation in line with the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) and United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) guidelines and requirements.

The European Climate Pact initiative should be promoted through engagement, coordination and training of Climate Pact Ambassadors from the region to support them in their endeavours, to raise general awareness and motivate as many individuals and organisations to join the initiative, make their pledges, contribute to the common goals and benefit from the achievements in the future. In addition to this, a Western Balkans Climate Information Hub, linked with Climate-ADAPT and other relevant databases, related to climate, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity and pollution should be launched to foster regional cooperation, exchange of knowledge and best practice examples at all levels.

To support and facilitate the foreseen complex green transition in the region, a Regional Capacity Building Programme should be prepared to support authorities and organisations at all levels (including local and private sectors) in developing their capacities necessary in their mitigation, adaptation, disaster risk reduction and decarbonisation endeavours.

## **2) Energy Roadmap**

### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

The Western Balkan economies are facing two key challenges. First, the existing long-standing obligations such as the creation of competitive and integrated energy markets in line with the latest regulations have to be fulfilled. Second, with the lowest hanging fruits already harvested both policy- and ambition-wise (at least apart from energy efficiency), the implementation of reforms is going to become increasingly difficult, and this will take place in a dynamically changing regulatory environment. The Western Balkan economies will not only have to improve the implementation rate of their current obligations, but they will simultaneously need to adapt to the paradigm changes taking place in the EU in all areas, be it energy, transport or climate action, and integrate the most recent objectives into their policy and legal frameworks to ensure achieving climate neutrality by 2050. The Western Balkan energy sector, heavily reliant on fossil fuels, obsolete technologies and ageing facilities, will therefore have a particularly important role. Already complex and demanding transformation and integration of the Western Balkans in the EU energy market will be further challenged with the new increased decarbonisation ambitions and requirements for a profound transformation of the sector, with tight deadlines.

### **Part two: The way forward**

The implementation of current obligations and honouring existing ambitions and commitments under the Energy Community Treaty is the priority. Without creating a solid base to build on, the introduction of the latest objectives and rules foreseen by the EGD will not be feasible. This means that the Western Balkan economies should continue implementing the outstanding provisions of the Third Energy Package and the Clean Energy Package in the electricity and gas sectors including creating functioning markets, with established trading platforms and abundant supplies.

The Western Balkan region should also continue with its endeavours in increasing and diversifying the share of renewable energy in the gross final energy consumption, as well as with designing and implementing economically sustainable support schemes and fostering self-consumption of energy from renewable sources. Achievement of energy efficiency targets, including a widespread renovation of buildings, should also continue but in a systemic and accelerated way.

Limiting emissions from large combustion plants remains one of the biggest challenges for the region. Therefore, the implementation of the Governance Regulation, as well as the development of integrated NECPs should take full effect. The extension of the Energy Community Treaty *acquis* to climate and environment is an important step towards the transition to a low-carbon, energy-efficient, renewables-based society in the Western Balkan region.

The existing obligations for transforming the Western Balkan energy system have to be complemented with new ambitions to speed up the transformation and ensure decarbonisation of the energy sector. Therefore, a political decision on the introduction of carbon pricing in the short-term and an adequate emission trading system in the mid- and long-term for each Western Balkan economy should be taken, where relevant. Besides this, the region should set a clearly defined date and outline process for the phase-out of lignite-based energy production (if applicable). NECPs and DcCs could play an important role in this process.

To enable progress monitoring and well-informed decision making the Western Balkan region should make additional efforts to institutionalise their emission inventories and GHG emission registers, and to develop appropriate monitoring, reporting and verification mechanisms. Not less important, the process of development of NECPs in line with the NDC 2 submissions should continue and accelerate.

Foreseen 2030 targets for GHG emissions, the share of renewable energy and energy efficiency improvement have to be determined soon and adopted by the Ministerial Council of the Energy Community. To support their achievement, among the other elements, the Western Balkan economies should prepare long-term building renovation strategies to support the transition to highly energy-efficient and decarbonised buildings in line with the European Commission's Renovation Wave initiative.

The expected green energy and climate transition in the region will also require a timely upgrading of the relevant legal frameworks through transposing the new provisions brought by the EGD through the Fit for 55 package, and other legislative and non-legislative acts, as foreseen by the Energy Community Decarbonisation Roadmap.

### **3) Sustainable Transport Roadmap**

#### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

The transport sector is one of the main sources of GHG emissions (and NO<sub>x</sub> emissions) in the region and coupled with the energy sector account for two-thirds of the overall share of emissions. In 1990, the transport sector share was 12% while in 2018 it increased to 18%. The increase in emissions continues in parallel with economic activities, while the transport sector's contribution comes from five subsectors: road transportation, railways, aviation, and maritime and inland waterways

transportation. The overall share of transport emissions is dominated by CO<sub>2</sub> from road transport (more than 90%), most evident in large urban areas that also suffer from related high pollution.

The Transport Community Permanent Secretariat (TCPS) together with the regional partners have developed a Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for the Western Balkans. The purpose of this Strategy is to: i) mirror the European Union's Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy; ii) adjust the EU goals, milestones, and actions to the Western Balkan reality; and iii) provide the region with a decarbonisation and digitalisation roadmap for its transport sector and assist the regional partners in drafting their national strategies. The Strategy sets ambitious goals in three key areas: Sustainable, Smart and Resilient Mobility, as well as common regional objectives with a roadmap and set of actions that each Western Balkan economy will be invited to implement. The focus is placed on immediate short and mid-term actions to increase greening and digitalisation of mobility in the region and making transport greener, more sustainable, and healthier for Western Balkan citizens.

### **Part two: The way forward**

Smart mobility foresees integrating digital technologies and automation to transport systems with the aim of increasing the efficiency and sustainability of passengers and freight mobility. This new concept of transportation is one of the three components of the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for the Western Balkans. To implement this Strategy, the economies in the region need to transform their transport sectors by introducing multimodal ticketing, mobility as a service, paperless transport and deployment of various software, or 5G networks and artificial intelligence for optimisation of transport activities. The Strategy also envisages creating cooperation frameworks and partnerships within the region and with EU MS to boost innovation and deployment of innovative technologies.

The TCT Ministerial Council endorsed the Rail Action Plan in October 2020. It represents a blueprint for all reforms and projects that need to be materialised to bring rail back on track and it is composed of five pillars: market opening; passenger rights; trade facilitation/improvement border crossings/common crossing points operation; interoperability; and modernisation of infrastructure. Through its implementation, the Western Balkan economies should strengthen the role of the rail sector, support multimodality and decrease the reliance on road transport, thus having a lowering effect on emissions. Recognising the potential of this Action Plan as an instrument for modernisation of railways in the region at the occasion of the Western Balkan Rail Summit (September 2021), the Western Balkans Transport Ministers signed a joint declaration confirming their commitment to modernising rail. Among the other objectives, the declaration includes developing intercity express train connections between major cities, digitalisation of the railway systems, improving multimodality and rail transport safety in the Western Balkan region.

The TEN-T Comprehensive and Core Network has been defined in Annex I of the Transport Community Treaty. TEN-T revision process on the EU level is currently ongoing. The revision will include Western Balkan economies. The TCPS will coordinate activities between the Western Balkan economies and neighbouring EU MS, together with the EC to support the transformation of the transport sector in the Western Balkans.

Road transport is the dominant transport mode in the Western Balkan region and a significant contributor to GHG emissions and air pollution. Following from the examples set out in the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy for the Western Balkans, the region will increase the share of

other more sustainable transport modes, support multimodality and gradually reduce and discourage the use of road transport, contributing to emission reduction and a green transition.

The Action Plan on Transport Facilitation endorsed by the TCT Ministerial Council in October 2020 envisages actions for road/rail Border Crossing Points (BCPs) and defines measures aimed at removing non-physical barriers along the main transport corridors in the Western Balkans and linking it with EU MS. The Action Plan envisages modernisation and capacity improvements at internal and external BCPs and the deployment of digital technologies and equipment for improving border/boundary management with a view of establishing joint border/boundary operations and one-stop controls. The whole concept should facilitate transport activities in the Western Balkan region and reduce its negative environmental and climate impact.

The Road Safety Action Plan is another strategic document endorsed by the TCT Ministerial Council in October 2020. This Action Plan promotes safety management, safer infrastructure, and protection of road users. Its actions strive to support the zero deaths objective and to encourage regional best practice examples. Implementation of the Action Plan will be monitored by the TCPS through the Technical Committee on Road Safety.

The Road Action Plan also endorsed at the TCT Ministerial Council in October 2020 aims to develop a climate-resilient, intelligent and resource-efficient TEN-T road network in the Western Balkan region by incorporating green and smart elements in road investments. The final aim is to stimulate innovative road transport operations that are fit for a digital age. The document provides a list of short- and medium-term activities aimed at addressing road maintenance, tolling, deployment of intelligent transport systems, network resilience and use of alternative fuels. All identified measures should support the green transition of the transport sector and facilitate the reduction of related emissions and pollution.

The importance of climate resilience of transport infrastructure has been recognised. However, none of the Western Balkan economies has prepared nor approved targeted transport sector strategy for adaptation to climate change. The Road Action Plan envisages preparing a climate change assessment with guidelines at the regional level as a mechanism to increase the climate resilience of the transport network in the region.

Over 25 cities in the Western Balkan region have been suffering from pollution that exceeds prescribed limit values for many years. Harmful pollutants have negative consequences not only for human health but also for the entire economy, such as increasing healthcare system costs and frequent absence from work. Although urban transport is under the jurisdiction of local governments, existing transport policies and financial support should be designed to reflect the importance of urban mobility for the overall functioning of the TEN-T. Therefore, as envisaged by the Sustainable and Smart Mobility Strategy, the TCPS will support the Western Balkan economies to further advance the greening of their transport, promote and assist, if needed, in the creation of sustainable urban mobility plans.

Several impediments prevent the broader uptake of alternative fuels in the transport sector: low demand for sustainable fuels and vehicles, lack of incentives, lack of a suitable refuelling/recharging network and supply limitations. In the Western Balkan economies, oil derivatives are the dominant type of transport fuel. To address the uncoordinated approach in developing infrastructure for alternative fuels (recharging and refuelling stations), the Western Balkan economies should facilitate

the development of a comprehensive network following the EU standards and interoperability requirements. This network should allow the uptake of low- and zero-emission vehicles in the region.

Deployment of alternative fuel infrastructure is a crosscutting issue where different authorities (in charge of energy, transport, etc.), as well as various regional organisations (TCPS, EnCS, RCC, etc.), can have a role. To avoid overlap and encourage synergies, a coordinated approach should be established to support Western Balkan economies in their endeavours to introduce alternative fuels and develop an adequate infrastructure necessary for reducing dependence on fossil fuels in the transport sector and decreasing related emissions and pollution. The TCPS, EnCS and RCC should join forces and coordinate activities to share knowledge and experience, thus building capacities to support the Western Balkan region.

#### **4) Circular Economy Roadmap**

##### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

In Western Balkans, the progress in aligning with waste management legislation, including recycling, plastics, chemicals, eco-design and other circular economy-related provisions is rather slow and limited, while full enforcement of existing legal and policy frameworks represents an even bigger challenge.

The concept of circular economy (CE) is relatively new for the region, and therefore still abstract for many of the Western Balkan citizens and business owners. The region has potential for incorporation and moving towards circular economy but this will be possible only by mainstreaming CE objectives in other policy areas and integrating CE practices in all sectors of economy and at all levels, while simultaneously raising general awareness on the concept and the benefits it can bring.

Waste management and recycling, as the key pillars of the CE concept, are still dominated by a linear, collect-and-dispose approach instead of an integrated sustainable waste management system based on circularity. The region needs the determination of politicians and decision-makers, strong and enabling policy and legislative framework, awareness raising campaigns, and economic and financial incentives to induce the transition towards a circular economy. The new policy framework developed under the EGD, including the new Circular Economy Action Plan, the new Industrial Strategy for Europe and waste and industrial emissions legislation that undergoes revision<sup>3</sup>, together with initiatives on zero-carbon steel making and climate-neutral and circular products provide a strategic orientation towards carbon neutrality, not only for the EU but for the Western Balkans as well. A swift embarking on this initiative will enable exploiting a significant economic potential and achieving environmental benefits.

##### **Part two: The way forward**

In its endeavours to achieve climate neutrality in 2050, the Western Balkans should define a comprehensive framework for the transition towards CE through developing and adopting economy-wide Circular Economy Strategies by 2023. In addition to this, Western Balkan economies should develop/update Circular Economy Roadmaps within the same period. These documents should announce a concrete set of deliverables, and a quantifiable timeline of implementation. They will establish the necessary framework for a swift transition to a circular economy by integrating the

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<sup>3</sup> Including regulations on batteries, end-of-life vehicles, landfills, etc.

objectives of the EGD and closing the gap in the process of alignment with the existing EU *acquis*. In addition, they should identify key drivers, opportunities and barriers, priority sectors, and necessary administrative capacities and bodies to coordinate their implementation.

In the initial phase of implementation of the Sofia Declaration, the Western Balkan economies should concentrate on the promotion and removal of barriers for broader use of climate-neutral and circular basic materials and products, focusing on iron, steel, cement, non-metallic minerals, basic chemicals and aluminium. This includes stimulating demand and development of markets for such products, improving necessary infrastructure, deploying state-of-the-art technologies but also increasing the confidence in recycled materials and products among citizens and businesses through providing adequate and reliable information on their quality and emissions embedded, introducing green standards and labels for products.

The foreseen economy-wide Strategies, as well as the Roadmaps, should provide a vision and corresponding plans on creating an enabling environment for climate-neutral and circular materials and products to stimulate demand and ensure their availability and affordability through price reduction due to economies of scale. These plans should also address resource productivity including new business models, efficient use of resources (materials and energy), long life cycles, sustainable consumption (including green public procurement), proper treatment at the end of products' use phase, as well as waste management. These plans should trace the way towards improving the sustainability of primary production of raw materials and making sustainable products the norm in the Western Balkans.

By 2025, all Western Balkan economies should integrate the objectives of the new Industrial Strategy for Europe and transpose other elements of policy and legal framework necessary for integration of circular economy principles in the industry sector. The first precondition for achieving climate neutrality by 2050 will be curbing emissions from steel, cement, and chemical plants, consistently and significantly. Only through reducing emissions will the region be able to avoid potentially negative consequences of the Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) and losing competitiveness in the EU market or being locked in conventional and obsolete carbon-intensive technologies. The transformation of the industry sector will require a hand-in-hand energy sector transformation including a broader deployment of renewable energies and clean hydrogen as the key enablers of expected industrial transformation. The Western Balkans carbon-neutrality is not possible without the foreseen transformation of the industry sector, significant reduction of its carbon and material footprint and embedding circularity across the economy.

Besides limited progress in alignment with the EU waste management *acquis*, the implementation and enforcement of the existing waste legislation in the Western Balkans is even more challenging. The foreseen Strategies and Roadmaps should develop plans, identify models and supporting mechanisms (subsidies, financial instruments, public-private partnership models) to support construction and ensure proper maintenance of waste management infrastructure for cities and regions. These plans should be aligned with the revised waste legislation in the EU and should focus on reducing waste generation, increasing separate collection and recycling, and stimulating circular business models. Particular attention should be given to the treatment of waste batteries, textile and waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE). Moreover, the Western Balkan economies should define EU-consistent targets for preparation for re-use/recycling of municipal waste by 2035, set ambitious EU-consistent economy-wide targets for packaging waste, for WEEE, as well as for end-of-life vehicles and batteries.

Initiating the circular economy transition in the region requires raising awareness on opportunities and benefits of the new approach and changed production and consumption paradigms. Therefore, during 2022 a regional campaign should be launched, focussing on the identified key value chains in the Western Balkans and aiming to empower consumers, business owners and public buyers, improving knowledge on all CE aspects at various levels. The campaign should be focused at ensuring that consumers obtain reliable and useful information on products (their lifespan, reparability, use of resources, disposal and recyclability, etc.), on developing a model to prevent overstated environmental information and greenwashing, and on raising awareness on requirements for sustainability logos and labels. Particular attention should be given to green procurement - integrating green requirements in public procurement procedures and extended producer responsibility concept. The campaign should promote a new consumption pattern among the Western Balkan citizens and businesses, encourage wise consumption models, minimise consumeristic behaviour and promote maintaining resources in the economy for as long as possible. Additionally, the campaign should include guidelines/instructions for Western Balkan authorities that issue permits for industrial facilities, with best practice examples and recommendations on how to take into account circular economy principles and encourage the investors to apply them, improving resource availability and supply as well as production and distribution efficiency.

Addressing plastic, including micro-plastic pollution, and dealing with marine litter requires a coordinated approach at the regional level. The Environmental Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) will contribute to the preparation of a regional agreement on marine litter. Finalisation and signing of the agreement are expected by the end of 2022.

The Western Balkans should proceed with the preparation and implementation of Smart Specialisation Strategies, including the development of a mechanism for supporting innovation in the CE area to enable a swift transition to new climate-friendly business models and climate-neutral products, and to improve the competitiveness of the economy.

## **5) Depollution Roadmap**

### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

The population of the Western Balkans is exposed to some of the highest concentrations of air pollution in Europe. The pollution is up to five times higher than the prescribed and EU guideline levels<sup>4</sup>. The primary reasons are a widespread use of low-quality solid fuels, old and outdated industry facilities and vehicles, a significant share of electricity generated in thermal power plants (coal-fired), emissions from large combustion plants, as well as households heating. Solid fuels (coal and firewood) are used for domestic heating by over 60% of the population. Only 12% of the buildings in the Western Balkans are connected to district heating systems<sup>5</sup>. All Western Balkan economies monitor the air quality in accordance with the EU legislation and report data to the European Environment Information and Observation Network (EIONET). The Western Balkan air monitoring systems face challenges concerning inconsistent data due to the shortage of financial resources required for maintenance of stations, the lack of certified calibration laboratories and the absence of air quality modelling. Despite the high number of air quality monitoring stations in the Western

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<sup>4</sup> Air pollution and human health: The case of Western Balkans, UNEP, 2019, [Air-Quality-and-Human-Health-Report\\_Case-of-Western-Balkans\\_preliminary\\_results.pdf \(developmentaid.org\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> Sector Study on Biomass Based Heating in the Western Balkans, Energy Community and World Bank Group, 2017, PowerPoint Presentation (wbif.eu)

Balkans, often inadequate installation locations and lack of financing needed for operation and maintenance costs, data quality is still not at the desired level.

Despite the relative abundance of water in the Western Balkans, the region finds itself unprepared for climate change, at risk of droughts and floods, as well as experiencing drinking water shortages in some areas. The shortages occur most notably due to the poor state and outdated water distribution utility networks (with losses of 50%<sup>6</sup>) and purification systems (chemical and microbiological treatment malfunctions<sup>7</sup>). This also leads to the deterioration of drinking water quality in general. A high percentage of wastewater is currently still discharged directly into water courses<sup>8</sup>, while the quality of drinking water is exacerbated due to septic tanks in rural areas that do not meet requirements, thus also causing soil pollution. Although some improvements can be seen concerning the municipal wastewater management sector, the related problems of sludge treatment (50-60%<sup>9</sup>) persist.

Water used in agriculture, mainly for irrigation, causes further deterioration and contamination of open waters due to the prevalent use of pesticides. Additional pressures on waters are created by the rapid development of small hydro power plants (sHPPs). Freshwater quality varies significantly across the region, which holds pristine mountain streams, as well as rivers polluted by industrial and urban wastewater and agricultural run-off.<sup>10</sup> Bathing water legislation is in its infancy and few if any EU Directives on the matter have been transposed.

Concerning soil, the main challenge in the Western Balkans is land degradation, mostly occurring due to landslides, erosion, contamination, unsustainable agriculture, land conversion and improper land use<sup>11</sup>. Substandard storage of chemicals from industrial activities is the predominant source of soil contamination in the region, while illegal disposal practices are widespread. The lack of treatment capacities for hazardous waste (stockpiles, abandoned locations), especially in the industrial and mining sectors, including uncontrolled pesticide use, leads to soil (and groundwater) pollution. The most widespread changes in the extent of land-use categories in the Western Balkans were the extension of artificial surfaces (106 km<sup>2</sup>), followed by the expansion of cropland (65.7 km<sup>2</sup>), as well as the decline of forest areas (21 km<sup>2</sup>) and pastures (20.5 km<sup>2</sup>)<sup>12</sup>.

## **Part two: The way forward**

Some of the Western Balkan economies have not ratified the Convention on Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution and its eight protocols. Therefore, the Western Balkan economies should set deadlines for ratification of the Convention and start monitoring and reporting on their air

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<sup>6</sup> Outlook on water and climate change vulnerability in the Western Balkans, ETC/ICM Technical Report 1/2018

<sup>7</sup> Branko Vucijak, Mugdim Pasic, Izet Bijelonja, "Financial sustainability of public utilities in Western Balkans", International Journal of Engineering XVI(3), 2018

<sup>8</sup> Technical Report 1, Outlook on Water and Climate Change Vulnerability in the Western Balkans, ETC/ICM and consortium partners, 2018

<sup>9</sup> EEA: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/daviz/changes-in-wastewater-treatment-in-13#tab-dashboard-01> and <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/urban-waste-water-treatment/urban-waste-water-treatment-assessment-5>

<sup>10</sup> Western Balkans – Environment and Climate Change Policy Brief, SIDAs Helpdesk for Environment and Climate Change, 2012-11-30

<sup>11</sup> Clindendael, The Green Agenda: Providing breathing space for Western Balkans citizens, 2021

<sup>12</sup> ETC/ICM Technical Report 1/2018

emissions regularly. This will set the framework for future air quality and emission management and will ultimately contribute to cleaner air in the region.

As of 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2018, the Western Balkan economies have started reducing emissions from large combustion plants. This process is based on the Energy Community rules requiring large combustion plants (including coal thermal power plants) currently operating in the Western Balkan region to gradually cut their emissions by the end of 2027 towards the Industrial Emission Directive (IED) minimum requirements. More efforts in the Western Balkans should be focused on investments in air pollution control, especially in large combustion plants. To achieve efficiency of investments and maximise their benefits for human health, new pollution control equipment should ensure that plants reach the most recent EU standards<sup>13</sup>. In this context, full implementation of the National Emission Reduction Plans (NERPs) for large combustion plants and implementation of the IED is urgently needed in the Western Balkans to align not only large combustion plants but all industrial facilities with Best Available Techniques (BATs). In line with the EGD, the Western Balkans should develop National Air Pollution Control Programmes and implement reduction commitments to ensure that the National Emission Reduction Commitments (NEC) Directive is fully implemented. As such, progress is needed in establishing and reporting emission inventories and emissions projections.

In addition, stricter emission standards for vehicles, small-scale industry and sectors that are not covered by IED should be introduced. The Western Balkans should follow the revision of the IED and transpose it, aiming to accelerate the uptake of zero-pollution innovation, support industrial decarbonisation and circular economy and improve public access to information, participation in decision-making and access to justice. Monitoring and inspections of compliance with the legal obligations stemming from the IED are essential for improvements in the state of air quality. In this context, enforcement of the existing legislation on surveillance and compliance checks together with penalty clauses should be encouraged. In parallel, the relevant inspection bodies should be strengthened.

Although the air quality legislative framework in the Western Balkans is largely aligned with the EU legislation, there is still room for improvement. Air pollution in the Western Balkans should be tackled through preventive and remedial actions, including the revision of air quality standards. While implementing air quality legislation in the Western Balkans it must be ensured that air quality monitoring and assessment through modern and extended monitoring systems, air quality management and reporting, as well as the development and implementation of air quality plans to comply with the air quality standards according to the Ambient Air Quality Directives, are respected. Furthermore, the legal provisions on monitoring, modelling and air quality plans should be strengthened to help local authorities, while at the same time improving the overall enforceability of the regulatory framework. In this respect, synergies with the Energy Community Clean Air Regions Initiative shall be explored. To have a fully functional air quality monitoring system, the allocation of financial resources for maintenance of the existing and installation of new air quality monitoring stations, where needed, should be increased, calibration laboratories should be certified and air quality modelling conducted in the Western Balkans. Dedicated information material and IT solutions should be developed and made accessible to the public.

The Western Balkans should focus on better addressing noise pollution, notably by adopting and implementing the relevant EU legislation on noise. Noise action plans required by the Directive should be integrated into Sustainable Urban Mobility Plans.

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<sup>13</sup> <https://eippcb.jrc.ec.europa.eu/reference>

According to the EGD and GAWB, an impact assessment on soil quality from different sectors (transport, industry, agriculture, etc.) should be carried out in the Western Balkans. The impact assessment should also contain measures for better integration of soil conservation and protection in these sectors. There is a necessity to identify and designate areas at risk from soil erosion, decline of organic matter, salinisation, acidification, chemicals contamination, compaction or landslides. Hence, legislation needs to be adopted, programmes and strategies on how to combat these challenges need to be drafted and adopted in the Western Balkan economies. This includes strategies to protect and improve soil quality/status, combat soil sealing and remediate contaminated sites. Data on soil status should be collected following the new EU approach. Significant pressures on soil are created due to recurring accidents. As such, there is a pronounced need in the Western Balkans to assess the risks and consequences of accidents, with the ultimate goal of adopting recommendations/legislation on how to introduce relevant instruments adequate for soil remediation. It is highly recommended to promote the use of green technologies and innovations in soil management and remediation in the Western Balkans.

Prevention and tackling of soil contamination is strongly linked to policies on industrial activities and chemical substances use that have already undergone transposition in the Western Balkans, e.g. the IED, Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH<sup>14</sup>), plant-protection products (PPP<sup>15</sup>), fertilisers<sup>16</sup> and biocides<sup>17</sup> Regulations, and environmental-protection policies for water and air (e.g. the ELD<sup>18</sup>), POPs Regulation<sup>19</sup>, PPP Regulation<sup>20</sup> and Mercury Regulation<sup>21</sup>. To address the use and release of chemicals into the environment, Contaminated Sites Inventories should be set up while remedial works should be initiated in the Western Balkans. Additionally, joint efforts towards the creation of an efficient and well-functioning internal market for chemicals, reduction of risks to humans and the environment posed by certain hazardous chemicals, such as carcinogens and heavy metals, and provisions of a predictable legislative framework for companies should be promoted. Policies must evolve rapidly to comply with the EGD and innovation for the green transition of the chemical industry and the production and use of safe and sustainable chemicals. Particular attention should be given to measures to phase out the most harmful chemicals such as endocrine disruptors and persistent substances, especially in consumer products, as well as to minimise or substitute all such substances in the economy and society.

In line with the EGD, activities should be undertaken in the Western Balkans towards a progressive reduction of pollution by priority substances and phase-out of emissions of priority hazardous substances into surface waters to prevent and limit the input of pollutants into ground waters. The Western Balkan economies are in the process of adoption and implementation of the EU water-related

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<sup>14</sup> Regulation (EC) No 1907/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals (REACH), establishing a European Chemicals Agency, amending Directive 1999/45/EC and repealing Council Regulation (EEC) No 793/93 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1488/94 as well as Council Directive 76/769/EEC and Commission Directives 91/155/EEC, 93/67/EEC, 93/105/EC and 2000/21/EC

<sup>15</sup> Regulation EC 1107/2009 – placing on the market of PPPs; Adoption EC 1107/2009; Directive 91/414/EEC – evaluation, authorisation, approval of active substances at EU-level and national authorisations of PPPs

<sup>16</sup> Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules on the making available on the market of EU fertilising products and amending regulations (EC) no 1069/2009 and (EC) no 1107/2009 and repealing regulation (EC) no 2003/2003

<sup>17</sup> Regulation (EU) No 528/2012 concerning the making available on the market and use of biocidal products

<sup>18</sup> The Environmental Liability Directive 2004/35/EC (ELD)

<sup>19</sup> Commission Regulation (EU) No 757/2010 of 24 August 2010

<sup>20</sup> Council Directive of 15 July 1991 concerning the placing of plant-protection products on the market (91/414/EEC).

<sup>21</sup> Regulation (EC) No 2017/852 of the European Parliament and of the Council on mercury

legislation (i.e. Water Framework Directive<sup>22</sup>, Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive, Drinking Water Directive, etc.) that contain provisions on monitoring and reporting, planning, coordination across relevant sectors, impact assessment capacity, etc. but significant implementation measures are needed to strive towards achieving the goal of good water status for all aquatic ecosystems.

In this sense, the development of River Basins Management Plans should be speeded up, while the identification of key pollution sources and work on the reduction of plastic and other litter, underwater noise and contaminants are essential for the region. There is also a need to step up joint efforts and strengthen regional cooperation to tackle marine litter and regulate discharges into the sea from ships.

Other areas where improvements are needed are the use of energy, sewage sludge management, storm water overflows and urban runoff, bathing water quality management, updated drinking water quality parameters, improvement of the access to water, etc. In line with the EGD, relevant economy-wide strategies should be developed in the Western Balkans, which would define the actions to achieve EU quality levels for surface waters and groundwater. To protect its water resources, the Western Balkan region should improve its planning by introducing recycling and safe reuse of water, and via the introduction of actions to facilitate the uptake of water reuse and address water scarcity and drought, while safeguarding public health and the environment in accordance with the EU Regulation on minimum requirements for water reuse.

## **6) Sustainable Agriculture Roadmap**

### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

The agricultural and rural development sector plays an essential role in human and economic development. The arising need to feed the ever-increasing human population puts pressure on the availability of natural resources and heavily affects the environment. Greening of the agriculture and rural economy is central to improved natural resource conservation, increased efficiency of resource use, reduced negative environmental impacts of farming, strengthened climate resilience of communities, and contribution to climate change mitigation. As a result, green transformation enhances resource and labour productivity, boosts poverty eradication, increases income generation opportunities and improves human wellbeing in rural areas.

Development of a proper agricultural policy and its subsequent implementation that ensures both economic and environmental sustainability is necessary. The legal harmonisation in the areas of agriculture and rural development should follow the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 in line with the Green Agenda measures. Most Western Balkan economies already apply some CAP-like instruments, yet additional efforts are needed to completely reform and modernise existing policies. This also includes the need to establish baselines built on strong data and evidence, in particular on the issues illustrating the relations between agriculture and the environment: the use of pesticides and fertilisers, greenhouse gas emissions level from agriculture, etc. Such baselines will be the first and necessary step to propose evidence-based policy decisions. In addition, building appropriate capacity and knowledge in all relevant bodies is needed to address the priorities

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<sup>22</sup> Groundwater Directive (2006/118/EC); Environmental Quality Standards/Priority Substances Directive (2008/105/EC) as amended by Directive 2013/39/EU; Floods Directive (2007/60/EC); Water Reuse Regulation (EU) 2020/741; Marine Strategy Framework Directive (2008/56/EC); Urban Waste Water Treatment Directive (91/271/EEC); Bathing Water Directive (2006/7/EC); Directive (EU) 2020/2184 on the quality of water intended for human consumption

within the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development (IPARD) framework and to design measures in this framework that are compatible with the EU agriculture and rural development policy and respond to the issues addressed by this Action Plan.

### **Part two: The way forward**

The Western Balkan economies should establish effective food control systems in the selective value chains as a protection mechanism for health and safety of consumers. It is in the Western Balkans best interest to focus on promoting regional and economy-wide food systems based on solid academic standards and principles addressing the entire food chain, improving product traceability and labelling. The establishment of a regional working body among decision-makers and academia will result in the development of guidelines for the Western Balkan economies and the region as a whole. These guidelines will aim to deliver advice to relevant authorities in the region on strategies to strengthen the food control systems, protect public health, prevent fraud, avoid food contamination, facilitate trade among the selective value chains and build trust in the food system among consumers. The evidence-based recommendations will enable authorities to (re)shape and implement their food control systems in terms of legislation, infrastructure and economy-specific enforcement mechanisms.

Compliance with EU Food Quality and Safety Standards on animal and plant products is also essential. The competitiveness of Western Balkan agri-food businesses is further undermined as a result of lack of adequate requirements and standards, poor marketing/branding information, inadequate packaging and labelling, lack of product traceability and continuing mistrust towards the potential benefit of formalised collaboration of businesses. The Western Balkan economies need to develop their programmes and guidance on the implementation of food quality and safety standards complying with the EU requirements. To improve the competitiveness of the sector, the Western Balkan economies need to harmonise their legislations. A Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on Wine and Food Standards which was established in 2018 will continue the work on evidence-based policy and focus on regulatory alignment/harmonisation of relevant legislation amongst the Western Balkan economies and with the EU regulations and quality systems, including regional harmonisation of designations of origin, regional trade agreements amongst the Western Balkans and the EU, regional branding of wine, animal and plant products, etc. Furthermore, the process will be also streamlined under the framework and guiding principles of the Farm to Fork Strategy on ensuring sustainable food production.

Organic agriculture plays a major role in the future development of the sector. Organic farming aims to build up, or at least maintain, soil nutrient reserves through enriching soil organic matter whilst at the same time maximising nutrient recycling and reducing external inputs. As such, interlinkage between enhancing organic farming practices and methods with proper soil management and protection is crucial. This requires major reforming practices in the agri-food sector and policy measures that will ensure compatibility among organic farming and soil management.

To support this process the Regional Expert Advisory Working Group (REAWG) on GAWB will be established with relevant representatives and stakeholders from the respective ministries and related institutions (e.g. IPARD agencies) with two sub-groups under the umbrella of the agri-environmental policies: soil protection and organic agriculture. The groups will focus on the evidence-based evaluation of rural development policy with a focus on agri-environment, and in particular on soil protection and organic agriculture. More specifically:

- REAWG Soil – Objective: Establishment of a regional soil partnership to improve knowledge exchange and identify best practice examples for soil protection from pollution and degradation. This work should take an integrated approach to ensure consistency also with impacts on air and water pollution.
- REAWG Organic – Objective: promoting environmentally friendly and organic farming and reduction of synthetic chemical products used in food production. Support to the process on introduction of control and traceability of organic farming and products.

Cooperation with scientific, education, business and agricultural holdings to facilitate the transition to innovative and environmentally friendly technologies and farming methods will be implemented via knowledge and innovation transfer structures in the Western Balkans as the basis of a regional Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS). It will be followed by the establishment and gradual development of a regional innovation network (AKIS REAWG) to facilitate the transfer of innovative and environmentally friendly technologies and farming methods. Members of the network should include representatives of ministries and scientists in the field of innovation policy, as well as experts from private regional and European innovation champions for technologies in both agriculture and food.

The network will focus on the development of regional and Western Balkan economies' strategic plans for AKIS development, e.g. on innovative and environmentally friendly technologies, food safety and quality and digitalisation. In addition, it will support the process of upgrading selected formal and non-formal educational programmes to address the need for research, innovation and digitalisation in agriculture, to include practical classes in the field of agricultural and food technologies and to align them with the needs of future markets.

National Rural Network should serve as the extended arm to the Ministries of Agriculture, particularly in the framework of IPARD and its implementing tools. To support this process, the National Rural Development Networks (NRDN) and their members need to improve their capacities for rural development promotion and improved service orientation of their respective NRDN. This includes support in a form of knowledge and best practices exchange to rural stakeholders on various issues, in particular modernisation of farms and processing, diversification of rural activities and entrepreneurial opportunities, maintenance and valorisation of the natural, cultural and traditional heritage of rural areas.

In order to guide this process, LEADER's Local Development Strategies of Local Action Groups from the Western Balkan economies supporting inclusive, environmentally and climate-friendly economic diversification are consolidated.

Waste management practices or strategic frameworks are almost close to non-existent in the rural areas of the Western Balkans. Due to a weak rural waste management system, sustainable economic development and proper environmental protection are hard to achieve. Improved policy development and holistic strategies are needed with a strong component of waste prevention and recycling implemented via regional and cross-sectoral stakeholder collaboration and coordination on waste management. This includes monitoring of waste and its sources, planning towards reduction of waste, increased organisational and technical capacity of municipalities/utilities in waste management, entire societal awareness raising on proper waste management and the negative impacts of waste mismanagement, implementation of the floating debris prevention programme and facilitation of cleaning actions with youth and volunteers.

The development of an evidence-based policy paper and assessment report is needed to determine the baseline for current emissions from agriculture in the Western Balkan economies. Establishment of a Regional Expert Advisory Working Group on a technical level that will be responsible for the development of regional and Western Balkan economies' synthesis reports on gaps, challenges, needs and how to adapt to climate change in particular in the agricultural sector is planned.

Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD) will also facilitate the increase in renewable energy production and investments in relevant technologies through the promotion of relevant IPARD measures and IPARD-like support programmes in the Western Balkan economies where such tools are available. Synergies with / risk of negative impacts on air quality will be taken into account.

The process will be implemented via the established REAWG on IPARD that will focus on the improvement of economy-wide IPARD measures and administrative systems among Paying Agencies and Managing Authorities for effective application of the technical support. The REAWG will aim to enable knowledge transfer on relevant EU standards, networking and awareness raising on technical assistance and training measures, as well as building capacities of the administration and the final beneficiaries to improve fund absorption and compliance with EU measures.

## **7) Protection of Nature and Biodiversity Roadmap**

### **Part one: Existing challenges in the Western Balkans**

The Western Balkan region is exceptionally rich in species and habitat diversity. Many of the species found in the region are endemic. Nevertheless, the protection of biodiversity and natural resources is not adequate. Biodiversity and habitat loss is observed across the region with some species being threatened with extinction. Even though biodiversity and ecosystems play a key role in providing freshwater, air and food we consume, provide for climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction, biodiversity aspects and ecosystem services are rarely taken into account in broader policy development. At the same time, institutional arrangements in the biodiversity sector in the region are insufficient and often poorly resourced with little leverage on sectoral policies and law enforcement.

In this area, the main priorities for the Western Balkan region are to halt biodiversity loss, to integrate the EU Biodiversity Strategy targets for 30% of protected areas and 10% of strictly protected areas, to address conservation of biodiversity and ecosystem services and restoration of ecosystems, transpose and ensure enforcement of Birds and Habitats Directives, to integrate all these elements into the 2030 Western Balkan Biodiversity Strategic Plan, to agree on a common regional position for the 15<sup>th</sup> United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) Conference of the Parties (CoP 15) and work toward the achievement of the post-2020 global and EU biodiversity targets.

The Western Balkan rich biodiversity and natural ecosystems provide valuable benefits to the local communities. At the same time, the region is facing challenges in terms of pressures and impacts on nature related to urban development, construction of new roads, dams, illegal hunting and unsustainable forestry practices. The trend of rapid development (particularly the transport corridors) creates increasing pressure on the natural areas and a high risk of habitat fragmentation.

Protection and coordinated sustainable management of the transboundary clusters of protected areas and green corridors are crucial for the long-term sustaining of ecological connectivity in the region.

This means improved regional cooperation in the areas of ecological connectivity and coordinated management of the transboundary natural areas/clusters of protected areas.

The coverage of landscapes with the potential to deliver ecosystem services in the Western Balkan region is high, especially the forests in the mountain areas, the natural ecosystems around the large lakes and extensive natural river systems. The deployment of Green Infrastructure and connectivity between the ecosystems and habitats should be considered with priority. There are significant opportunities to link the green corridors to the wider region, which would further enhance ecological connectivity and make a major contribution to the Trans European nature network.

This will require enhanced cooperation at the regional level, better scientific information and knowledge, proper implementation of nature protection legislation, strengthening of institutional capacity at all administrative levels responsible for nature conservation, awareness raising related to the social and economic benefits of functionally connected ecosystems, engaging stakeholders and the general public in planning and management of ecological networks and ensuring financial resources.

The sectorial policies and strategies should be updated to integrate the EU policy on Green Infrastructure and to mainstream the objectives and practices related to the protection of Green Infrastructure elements.

Enforcement of the existing nature conservation legislation should be pursued by improving the control of illegal practices at site level with direct impact on the quality of connectivity of natural habitats and populations of the endangered species (poaching, illegal logging), and by improving the compliance with environmental standards and permit procedures related to the impact of infrastructure projects on biodiversity and ecosystems (hydropower plants, road infrastructure, raw materials extraction). Detailed habitat mapping, collection and analysis of data from field surveys and monitoring of the populations of umbrella species need to be done also as part of the implementation of the nature protection legislation and the establishment of Natura 2000.

Since the Western Balkan economies are relatively small and often the core biodiversity areas are of transboundary importance, a transboundary and regional coordinated approach is needed. Regional cooperation between the relevant authorities in the designation and management of protected areas is a key factor for better synergies and effective management of the networks of protected areas and ecological networks. For an effective implementation on the ground, a regional mechanism for coordination of joint actions aimed at development of Green Infrastructure and ecosystem connectivity could be established.

## **Part two: The way forward**

The biodiversity pillar of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans will be implemented in three main phases:

The first phase (2021-2022) will aim at developing baseline studies and assessments to support actions 51 to 54 and create opportunities for enhanced transposition of EU nature *acquis* and cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU in the implementation of the GAWB and the post-2020 global biodiversity framework related to actions 55 and 56.

Main outputs include:

- Western Balkans Biodiversity Report will set the baseline to measure the progress of the Western Balkans 2030 Biodiversity Strategic Plan and provide information for the Western Balkan economies' regional plans and assessments such as EU country reports, BSABs, IPBES, CBD reports, etc.;

- Restoration Opportunities Assessment Report for the Western Balkans will identify the extent of forest landscape degradation and priority sites and habitats for ecosystem restoration in the region as a basis for a regional Forest Landscape Restoration (FLR) Plan;
- Report on Climate Change and Biodiversity Linkages and recommendation of entry points for their integration into climate change policies, strategies and plans, including GAWB decarbonisation component, NDCs and NAPs. The report will include key species indicators to track down the impact of climate changes on species and habitats;
- A biodiversity monitoring and evaluation framework will be used as a basis for the development of a Western Balkans Biodiversity Information Hub. Indicators will be aligned with those of the European Environment Agency (EEA), the targets set by the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the CBD post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework.

The second phase (2022-2024) of the component will focus on developing regional strategic documents and plans, and mechanisms for monitoring and reporting, including the (i) Western Balkans 2030 Biodiversity Strategic Plan; (ii) Western Balkans Forest Landscape Restoration Plan; (iii) local nature protection and restoration plans including for marine areas; (iv) development of a roadmap for the creation of the Western Balkans Biodiversity Information Hub.

Phase 2 will promote the alignment of economy-wide and regional policies with the EU Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Green Deal and the CBD post-2020 global biodiversity framework. The Biodiversity Task Force (BDTF) for South East Europe (SEE) will facilitate the regional coordination of economy-wide commitments and propose regional and transboundary initiatives among Western Balkan economies and EU MS.

The work under this phase will aim to integrate EU nature policy and the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework into regional strategies and Western Balkan economies' legislation. Policy documents with actions in line with the implementation of biodiversity-related EU *acquis* for Nature Protection (Birds Directive (2009/147/EC) and Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC), the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030, the EU Forest Strategy for 2030, including Horizontal Legislation - particularly those of INSPIRE Directive (2007/2/EC) and leverage contribution to other key thematic initiatives such as the Bonn Challenge and ECCA30. Other reference documents will include the EU binding targets for ecosystem restoration, the Guidelines on biodiversity-friendly afforestation and reforestation in the EU and the Bonn Challenge.

Phase 2 will conclude in 2024 with a mid-term report of the Western Balkan economy-level and regional progress and the level of ambition of commitments for nature conservation from government and non-government actors in the region. The report will be tentatively presented at CBD COP-16.

Main outputs include:

- Western Balkans Biodiversity Strategic Plan containing targets and indicators aligned with the EU 2030 Biodiversity Strategy, the EU Green Deal and the CBD Post-2020 Global Biodiversity Framework including indicators used for CBD reporting;
- Western Balkans Landscape Restoration Plan, including a financial plan, to promote joint strategies for resource mobilisations for FLR and identify opportunities for enhanced sustainable forest management and restoration. The Western Balkans Landscape Restoration Plan will help identify key areas for restoration and restoration intervention types and leverage internal and international funding for ecosystem restoration;
- Western Balkans Biodiversity Information Hub to complement with relevant biodiversity information systems (e.g. the Biodiversity Information System for Europe (BISE)), and provide detailed guidelines for standardised data collection for each of five species taxonomic

groups (birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles and vascular plants - EU Habitats Directive, Annex 2 and Annex 4), following biodiversity data standards - Darwin Core and ABCD scheme and Western Balkan regional guidelines.

Phase 3 (2024-2030) will focus on supporting the mobilisation of financial and human resources to promote the effective implementation of GAWB commitments and ensure regular monitoring and reporting on economy-wide and regional commitments. The indicators of the post-2020 global biodiversity framework and the Green Agenda indicators will be monitored and reported to the RWG Env regularly. Yearly assessments of the implementation of the action plan including actions proposed in strategic documents developed during phase 2 will be produced by BDTF SEE and presented to the RWG Env.

Main outputs include:

- Annual reports to RWG Env;
- Mid-term progress report on the implementation of the biodiversity pillar of the GAWB in 2025;
- Final report on the implementation of the biodiversity pillar of the GAWB in 2030.

## **PART 3 – GOVERNANCE, MONITORING, REPORTING AND OTHER MECHANISMS TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SOFIA DECLARATION**

### **GOVERNANCE**

To facilitate the implementation of the Sofia Declaration on the GAWB, concerted action is necessary to ensure regional ownership and cooperation, a multi-stakeholder approach, a cross-sectoral collaboration through the involvement of all relevant Western Balkan authorities, as well as strengthening cooperation at different levels. Therefore, RCC endeavours to establish and maintain different platforms through which all these elements will be provided. To navigate the entire process, policymakers and representatives of Western Balkan authorities in charge of various policy areas encompassed by the Green Agenda will be involved from the onset. The Regional Working Group on Environment (RWG Env) established in 2015 as an intergovernmental platform for permanent policy dialogue on environment and climate action, accompanied by other regional coordinators in charge of various components of this Action Plan, will represent a backbone of this process. Supported by the South East Europe Biodiversity Taskforce, established in 2017 as an advisory body in the area of biodiversity and working in an extended format that foresees the participation of representatives of other line ministries, the Regional Working Group will be a mechanism to ensure regional ownership as well as active involvement and steering role of the Western Balkan authorities in the process of meeting Sofia Declaration commitments. Establishing strong cross-sectoral collaboration will be a key element of a successful governance mechanism, having in mind the complexity and multidisciplinary nature of the Green Agenda, as well as the strong need to address environmental and climate issues through a holistic approach.

To facilitate steering of and to enable a well-informed decision-making process, RCC is to ensure and maintain a platform for dialogue with the European Commission services, relevant regional organisations that have activities or mandates in relevant policy areas in the Western Balkan region

(such as the Energy Community Secretariat (EnCS), Transport Community Permanent Secretariat (TCPS), Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD), International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), etc.), international financial institutions, various socio-economic partners, non-governmental organisations, academia and the scientific community. The discussions will take place through regular and extraordinary meetings of the RWG Env at operational level, as stipulated by the Terms of Reference of the Regional Working Group on Environment. This dialogue should enable information exchange and support to Western Balkan authorities based on the alignment requirements, the most recent policy developments and other relevant processes without jeopardising and interfering with regular agendas and mandates of other regional organisations.

In addition to permanent dialogue at operational level, annual ministerial meetings organised under the framework of the RWG Env will review the progress achieved in the preceding year through monitoring and reporting mechanisms established by RCC and regional partners, endorse annual reports on the GAWB progress, and based on these elements and identified priorities, provide an implementation guideline for the upcoming year through joint statements. Similarly to the RWG Env, ministerial meetings can take place in an extended format so as to include ministers in charge of all relevant policy areas encompassed by the GAWB.

This governance model will be supplemented by two additional platforms through which policy-makers from the Western Balkans will be provided with additional inputs, entailing diverse standpoints and experience-based feedbacks as seen from different roles and implementation perspectives. These two platforms are the Non-governmental Organisations' Forum on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (hereinafter: NGO Forum) that will enable experience and knowledge exchange, as well as ensure the facilitation of decision-making process in case of confronting perspectives. The second platform which will ensure vertical coordination mechanism and feedback based on the implementation experience and encountered challenges will be the Green Agenda Days (GAD) initiative. Organised for local self-governments (LSG) as a cooperation process, it will lead up to an annual event to enable knowledge sharing and promotion of activities in the public sector at local level that contribute to meeting the commitments of the Sofia Declaration and improve the wellbeing of citizens in the Western Balkan region.

Funding will be a critical element for the successful implementation of the GAWB. The existing urgent need for a profound green transition through an overhaul of all economic sectors entails extremely costly processes. With high ecological standards being introduced through the EGD and the GAWB, and having in mind the present situation in the Western Balkan region in terms of alignment with the EU policies and enforcement of legislation, this transition imposes high requirements and financial strain. It also brings many socio-economic and other challenges, including the requirements to ensure a just transition and a socially balanced development. In this regard, the Western Balkan authorities will need strong support from the international and donor community in providing not only technical but also financial support. To coordinate this process, enable identification of gaps and priorities and cater for a permanent dialogue on financial needs and possibilities, RCC will cooperate closely with potential donors and organisations interested in supporting the implementation of the Sofia Declaration and organise the annual Donors Coordination Meeting. Coordination of financial support and related activities will be instrumental in ensuring not only the success of this challenging transition but also in accelerating the whole process and consequently enabling the Western Balkan economies to keep pace with EU MS that are already advancing on their path towards climate neutrality. The Donor Coordination Process will also play an important role in closing the gap and increasing effectiveness in capacities of the Western Balkan economies to absorb available financial and technical support and better coordinate available mechanisms, funds and expertise. Through this

process and financial support, the implementation of the Sofia Declaration should provide various opportunities (linked to green growth) for the Western Balkan economies and bring numerous socio-economic benefits.

The governance mechanism elaborated above will safeguard the effective implementation of the Sofia Declaration and will have additional benefits in terms of strengthening administrative capacities for its proper and timely implementation through regional cooperation and the involvement of various stakeholders with their expertise in the process. On the other hand, the dialogue with IFIs and the donor community will help to improve the coordination of financing opportunities, closing certain funding gaps in the implementation and increasing absorption capacities of the Western Balkan economies through maximised synergies and replication of successful initiatives in an efficient manner. To provide backing of the entire process, cooperation and dialogue among members of parliaments as well as the role of environmental committees should be explored and strengthened.

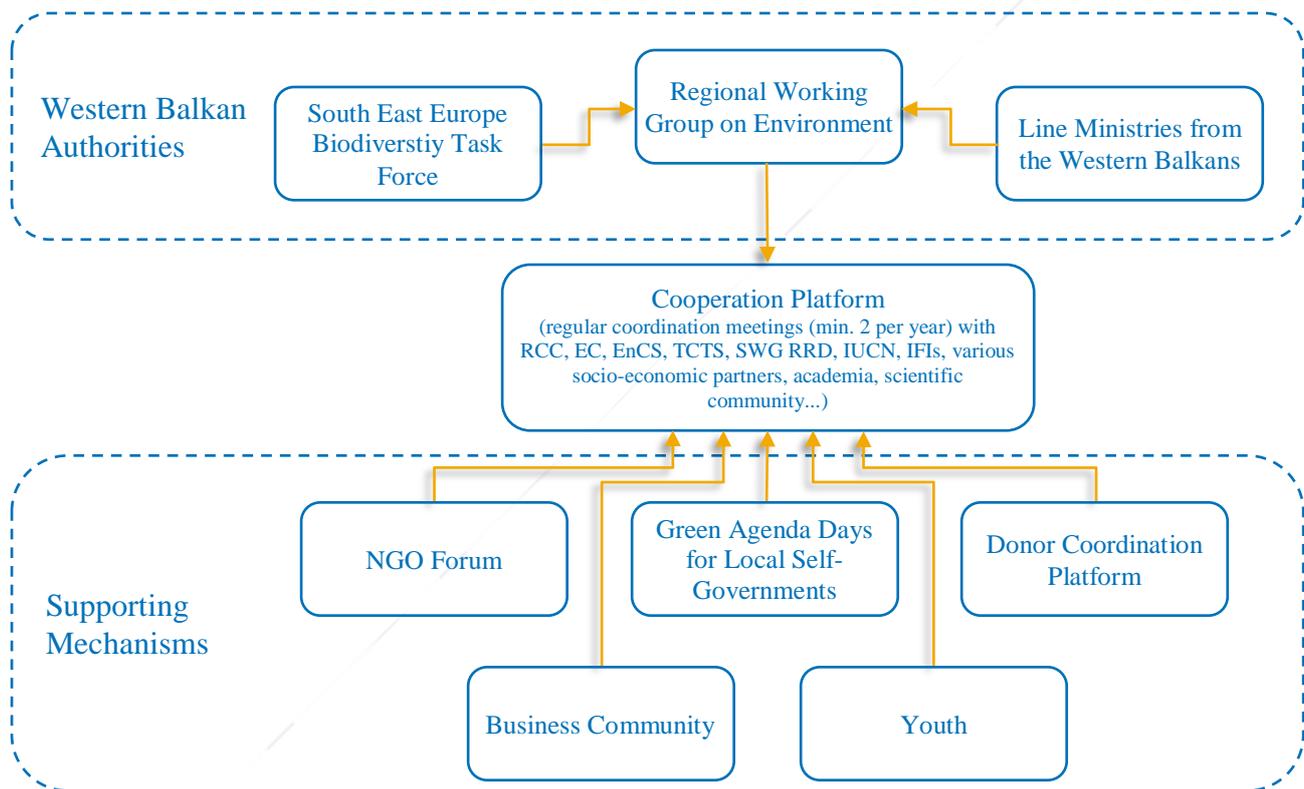


Diagram 1. Governance mechanism

## PARTICIPATION OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Civil society organisations play a significant role in supporting the entire process of meeting the Sofia Declaration commitments and through their know-how and practical experience facilitate an ambitious green transition ahead of the Western Balkan region. Their contribution to the implementation of the Sofia Declaration is enabled through the NGO Forum on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. The Forum enables dialogue among identified

organisations from the Western Balkans and also some prominent and active ones from the EU MS. The dialogue takes place during the regular meetings convened by RCC in close coordination with the EC. Results, conclusions and recommendations from these meetings are communicated by the NGO Forum Chair at the RWG Env meetings. In this way, all relevant decision-making authorities are directly informed about the inputs and recommendations from the NGO sector.

The NGO Forum consists of various identified organisations with expertise and experience gained working in the fields covered by the GAWB. The initial selection of relevant organisations and establishment of the NGO Forum was performed at the beginning of 2021 based on the RCC experience and regular cooperation with organisations active in the policy areas embedded in the Green Agenda. The selection was also made based on the interest expressed by some NGOs in light of the preparation of the Sofia Declaration and willingness to contribute to its implementation. This includes the official Joint NGO Proposal on the GAWB prepared in April 2020 and shared with the EC and RCC, as well as the Joint Statement of civil society organisations submitted to the Western Balkan authorities during the preparation of the Sofia Summit (November 2020). The initial list has been complemented by the environmental NGOs identified under the Environmental Partnership Programme for Accession (EPPA) Project and additionally enriched by NGOs identified through research performed by RCC and in consultation with the EC, DG NEAR. The list of identified NGOs contains more than 50 organisations and is a living document that can be revisited to include other NGOs (to enable accession of other organisations including those that will be established in the future) should they express interest to join the Forum by bringing their expertise and experience in supporting the GAWB endeavours. Particular attention will be given to ensuring the participation of vulnerable groups in the work of the NGO Forum, such as Roma.

Besides its role in supporting policy-making processes, the established NGO Forum has many other objectives and positive effects such as monitoring the progress, based on which new inputs and ideas, as well as certain corrective actions, can be identified and implemented. Through regular meetings and permanent dialogue among representatives of the NGO sector and the possibility to report on the findings and present proposals to policymakers in the Western Balkans, this informal body represents an additional mechanism to support the steering of the GAWB implementation. Activities of the Forum are designed to increase general awareness of Western Balkan citizens on the climate, environment and other policy areas and processes related to the GA, and on the progress achieved, seeking to additionally increase capacities of the NGO sector in the region. Through this joint work on achieving common objectives, regardless of different perspectives, the cooperation between the NGO sector and public administration bodies in the Western Balkans will be strengthened to the benefit of both parties based on the principles of partnership.

The work of the NGO Forum is supported by RCC that coordinates its activities and organises regular meetings twice a year (preferably, before regular meetings of the RWG Env). In case of need and readiness of the Forum participants, extraordinary meetings can also be convened. To support RCC and to facilitate the overall endeavour, the Forum has a Chair with six-month term of office. The Chair is engaged on a voluntary basis and is identified/elected by the Forum participants at regular Forum meetings. The role of the Chair is to cooperate closely and to support the RCC in organising meetings, drafting agenda, developing ideas and identifying priorities for discussion, moderating sessions and drafting meeting conclusions. The Chair's role is also to report on the conclusions at regular and extraordinary RWG Env meetings.

Conclusions of the meetings as well as findings of studies and research performed under the framework of the NGO Forum are presented to relevant authorities of the Western Balkan economies,

relevant regional organisations, IFIs and other partners, through the participation of the NGO Forum Chair at regular meetings of the Regional Working Group on Environment. RCC together with the Chair coordinates and supports this process making sure that the Chair (potentially accompanied by other Forum representatives) is invited to the RWG Env meetings and that an adequate time slot in the meeting agenda is provided for presentation of the Forum's conclusions and proposals. NGO Forum is also invited to provide inputs for the annual reporting process on the GAWB implementation as well as to contribute to the Sofia Declaration monitoring cycle.

In this way, the established permanent dialogue coordinated by RCC, strengthened cooperation between NGOs and the Western Balkan authorities, and also cooperation between regional and European NGOs brings a multitude of benefits and enables the additional capacity building of the non-governmental sector in the Western Balkan region. The NGO Forum also plays an important role in awareness raising and disseminating information on the Green Agenda objectives, status and progress in environmental protection endeavours to all Western Balkan citizens.

## **PARTICIPATION OF LOCAL SELF GOVERNMENTS**

Local self-governments (LSGs) also play an important role in the implementation of the Sofia Declaration and contribute to meeting the commitments of the Western Balkan Leaders agreed during the Berlin Process Sofia Summit. Through spatial planning, local climate actions, public sector energy management, smart energy systems, urban mobility, development of intermodal nodes and transport infrastructure, development of local energy and climate strategies, deploying nature-based solutions through greening urban areas, integrating environmental impact assessment in urban development and planning of urban sprawl, waste management, sewage water treatment, as well as through many other measures, LSGs contribute to and can accelerate green development and desired transformation of the region. On the other hand, their experience in the implementation of relevant policies at the Western Balkan economies' level and enforcement of legal requirements can additionally support policy-making processes providing unique feedback following a bottom-up approach. Understanding the needs and concerns of local authorities and broader engagement of local communities in an inclusive decision-making process with Western Balkan authorities will speed up the whole process and help to set more realistic yet ambitious objectives at the level of Western Balkan economies and in general. Therefore, a vital element for facilitating the implementation of the Sofia Declaration is strengthening cooperation among LSGs in the region and providing vertical coordination feedback to facilitate the policy-making process.

The Western Balkan region has around 520 municipalities with a huge potential to spur green development and support awareness raising among Western Balkan citizens. However, municipalities often lack experience and knowledge, access to funding and have many other challenges in their everyday work, related but not limited to applying measures to protect the environment and address climate change. Municipalities are also in charge of one of the most pressing environmental issues such as waste management and treatment of wastewater. Having this in mind, the RCC intends to establish a cooperation framework for municipalities to enable knowledge-sharing, awareness-raising, and facilitate fundraising activities and replication of best-practice examples contributing to the GAWB objectives in the region. The initiative will be developed in close cooperation with relevant partners such as NALAS, unions of municipalities and many others.

The initiative will be based on annual collaboration cycles and knowledge interchange processes that will culminate in the form of Green Agenda Days for local self-governments. The Green Agenda

Days (GAD) events will be organised in a form of an annual conference preferably convened before regular annual ministerial meetings under the framework of the RWG Env. These events will serve for presenting successfully implemented projects related to the Green Agenda, achievements that contribute to protecting the environment, mitigating climate change and improving the wellbeing of the Western Balkan citizens. GAD will also serve as a platform for knowledge sharing, cooperation and networking among representatives of LSGs. To increase outreach and inspire replication of success stories, one of the outcomes of the GAD will be a bulletin to be printed or distributed electronically to all municipalities in the Western Balkan region. To further motivate representatives of various municipalities to present their achievements and help others through sharing their experience, the GAD will entail Green Agenda Champion awards segment (to be used for further greening of the city/town or promotional activities and campaigns). Successful municipalities that achieve and document major progress on the Green Agenda implementation will be invited to the RWG Env meeting to present the award-winning project. The entire process will be supported by RCC in close cooperation with relevant partners. This initiative will also seek strengthening cooperation with the existing EU and other initiatives such as Covenant of Mayors,<sup>23</sup> European Mobility Week initiative,<sup>24</sup> Urban Alliance,<sup>25</sup> European Green Capital,<sup>26</sup> and similar.

## **DONOR COORDINATION PLATFORM AND FINANCING OF THE GAWB**

In order to streamline available support and to ensure that the scarce resources are used as efficiently as possible, RCC will convene donor coordination meetings on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. These meetings will be organised as regular annual events to identify needs and priorities for the region as well as consider possibilities to intervene in a concerted manner and provide support when available. Annual meetings should encourage better donor coordination, enable sharing of views among donors on the current state of implementation of the Sofia Declaration, and facilitate discussion on various issues and a strategy going forward. This platform should also strengthen ties between donors and the Western Balkan authorities and maximise the development impact of donor-supported programmes through their better alignment with Western Balkan economies' programmes. These meetings will also enable participants to present their programmes, clarify investment needs and promote new project ideas for donor support.

The meetings will discuss the absorption capacities of relevant authorities in the Western Balkan economies and consider possibilities to enhance them through capacity building and cross-border/boundary coordination. These meetings will also serve as a platform to discuss improving the effectiveness and efficiency of provided support through regional cooperation and identify possibilities for replication of successfully implemented initiatives across the Western Balkan region. Donor coordination meetings will also provide the framework for discussion on green and sustainable financing while projects with the biggest positive environmental and climate impacts should be prioritised. RCC will ensure participation of donor community representatives at regular meetings of the RWG Env as the main body for coordinating the implementation of the Sofia Declaration.

The external instruments under the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework (2021-2027), IPARD with its 11 measures and Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) III will be the key funding

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<sup>23</sup> <https://www.covenantofmayors.eu/>

<sup>24</sup> <https://mobilityweek.eu/home/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.iucn.org/regions/europe/our-work/nature-based-solutions/iucn-urban-alliance>

<sup>26</sup> <https://ec.europa.eu/environment/europeangreencapital/winning-cities/>

instruments to kick-start actions and initiate a comprehensive green transition in the Western Balkan region. They can be used for the agriculture and food production sector, as well as for energy efficiency, renewable energies and initiatives towards a resource-efficient, sustainable and low-carbon economy. However, as this will not be enough, additional funds from Western Balkan economies, support from EU MS, mobilisation of private investments, as well as substantial funding from international financial institutions (IFIs) will be essential. The foreseen green transition in the Western Balkan region will require pooling all existing but also developing innovative financial assistance instruments, such as green bonds. Use of the existing sources of financial support will have an important galvanising effect for own sources of Western Balkan economies as well as private and other investors. The potential of the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) with its two existing blending mechanisms, the Green for Growth Fund (GGF) and Regional Energy Efficiency Programme (REEP), which already support many activities related to the GAWB in the region, should be maximised in the future.

### **PARTICIPATION OF BUSINESS COMMUNITY, YOUTH AND VULNERABLE GROUPS, INCLUDING ROMA**

The Western Balkan business community can additionally facilitate and expedite the implementation of the Sofia Declaration commitments. The potential participation of the business community has been discussed with different stakeholders during the initial phases of the implementation of the Sofia Declaration. The common understanding is that there is a need to better inform, support and motivate the business community and through enhanced coordination make it an integral part of the implementation process. On the other hand, the entire Western Balkan business community will be impacted by the foreseen comprehensive ecological transformation under the EGD and planned instruments to support decarbonisation beyond the EU borders. Therefore, the expected processes and transformation of the industry sector will require a swift modernisation and transformation, following the pace determined by the Green Deal ambitions, otherwise, the expected ecological transformation with its objectives might bring certain threats to those who will procrastinate and delay to embrace the new paradigm, risking losing their market share, power and revenues.

The business community in the Western Balkans is encouraged to create the right framework to optimise their practice, to opt for sustainable financing, adopt circular economy principles, prioritise reducing and reusing materials, produce sustainable and recyclable products, reduce packaging and increase the use of reusable and recyclable materials for packaging. Through this new business model, the consumers in the Western Balkans will be empowered to make informed choices, while new products and producers' practices generate positive changes in consumers' behaviour. The business community in the Western Balkans is encouraged to consider a new business model that includes green entrepreneurship, sustainable investments, circular design, and pledges under the European Climate Pact (ECP) initiative while embracing sustainable product policy, extended producer responsibility and preventing environmentally harmful products from being placed on the Western Balkan market. At the same time, waste management enterprises, particularly those engaging vulnerable groups, such as Roma, should be supported to grow and expand, and incorporate innovative business models. In the first phases of the implementation, the focus should be in particular on resource-intensive sectors such as construction, textile, plastics and electronics. In the process of supporting the transformation of the business sector in the Western Balkans, the Western Balkans Chamber Investment Forum (CIF) will play a salient role with RCC ensuring the participation of business community representatives as part of the inclusive governance process.

Another significant actor in the GAWB implementation is youth, as important change agent. It is the youth who will be most affected by the actions of today, particularly concerning the climate emergency, nature crisis, waste management and so forth. Therefore, young generations have vested interest, rights but also obligations to partake in the process by bringing into the picture their innovative ideas, critical thinking and modern approach for the acceleration of GAWB implementation. In this respect, Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) and RCC's Youth Lab will be the main partners for cooperation in this area, while RCC will provide an opportunity for the representatives of youth to present their concerns, views and proposals for improvement, ensuring in such a way their ongoing and committed participation in steering the Sofia Declaration implementation.

Circular economy and green entrepreneurship provide an untapped potential for the empowerment of women, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which heavily affected them. Social and environmental enterprises that instil gender equality and women empowerment in the midst of green recovery are a vital element leading to the sustainable development of Western Balkan societies. An inclusive green economy places a more sustained focus on social and environmental sustainability that can empower women and girls as entrepreneurs and producers. Female-led micro-businesses and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), therefore, should be at the forefront of the economic recovery process, centred on green and just transition.

Finally yet importantly, although Roma represents a great potential for the economies in the Western Balkans, their ability to actively contribute is being largely wasted due to their marginalisation. Around 61% of Roma labour force in the region is engaged in the informal sector, mainly being invisible, but rather very important part of the waste management system. Transformation of this engagement into a declared green innovative work could contribute largely to the achievement of GAWB goals, but also the goals of the Poznan Declaration. RCC's Roma Integration may serve as a partner to ensure mainstreaming Roma in the implementation of the Sofia Declaration.

## **MONITORING SYSTEM**

Continuous monitoring of key parameters of the Sofia Declaration is one of the main prerequisites for safeguarding its smooth implementation. Monitoring will be performed in regular cycles based on pre-defined indicators (provided below) through which it will be possible to track the implementation progress, level of achievements or to identify stalemates and delays. Hence, these indicators will help in identifying and analysing reasons in case of slowing down or stagnation in the implementation process. The monitoring system will also enable designing corrective actions to overcome problems and safeguarding the uninterrupted continuation of activities.

Qualitative and quantitative indicators that constitute the monitoring system are determined based on their relevance for the implementation of the Sofia Declaration as well as the availability of data through annual monitoring cycles.

To provide a visual presentation on the Sofia Declaration implementation progress, RCC will develop a GAWB Observatory - a user-friendly web platform with all indicators grouped per policy areas, per Western Balkan economies or region as a whole, with timelines, web accessories for different parameters, and databases to be filled in through annual data collection cycles. This platform will ensure that various groups of users, including policy-makers, researchers, regional organisations, donors, citizens and many others, have access to a quick and user-friendly platform for better understanding and tracking the implementation status.

## Indicators:

	No.	Indicator	Data source
Climate action	1.	Total GHG emissions (tonnes of CO <sub>2</sub> eq)	GHG inventories / Environmental Protection Agencies / Statistical Offices
	2.	The GHG emission intensity of power generation (tonnes of CO <sub>2</sub> eq)	EnC reports / Environmental Protection Agencies / Statistical Offices
	3.	The number of sectoral policies that include climate change adaptation	EC Progress Report / Communication on EU Enlargement Policy
	4.	Level of climate financing	EC Progress Report / Communication on EU Enlargement Policy
Energy	1.	Implementation ratio electricity	EnC Implementation Report
	2.	Implementation ratio renewable energy	EnC Implementation Report
	3.	Implementation ratio gas	EnC Implementation Report
Transport	1.	Relevant directives/regulations/standards/specifications transposed	TCT Action plan progress report / Technical Committee reports
	2.	Western Balkan Strategies updated with sustainable and smart elements	Sustainable and Smart Mobility progress reports / Ad hoc group meetings
	3.	Infrastructure developed according to TEN-T (related to green elements)	TEN-T Annual Plans
Circular Economy	1.	Domestic material consumption per capita	<a href="http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=r2020_r1110&amp;lang=en">http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=r2020_r1110&amp;lang=en</a> Statistical Offices
	2.	Domestic material consumption	<a href="http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=r2020_r1110&amp;lang=en">http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=r2020_r1110&amp;lang=en</a> Statistical Offices
	3.	Resource productivity	<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_ac_r_p/default/table?lang=en">https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_ac_r_p/default/table?lang=en</a> Statistical Offices
	4.	Generation of waste - Total	<a href="https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_was_gen/default/table?lang=en">https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/databrowser/view/env_was_gen/default/table?lang=en</a> / Environmental Protection Agencies
Depollution	1.	Annual ambient concentrations of PMs, SO <sub>2</sub> and NO <sub>x</sub>	Annual air quality reports for Western Balkan economies / Environmental Protection Agencies
	2.	Annual emissions of PM <sub>total</sub> , PM <sub>10</sub> , SO <sub>2</sub> and NO <sub>x</sub> from large combustion plants	EnC annual implementation reports <a href="http://energy-community.org">Energy Community Homepage (energy-community.org)</a> Environmental Protection Agencies LRTAP Convention NFR tables

	3.	Annual emissions of NH <sub>3</sub> and NMVOC	Environmental Protection Agencies LRTAP Convention NFR tables
	4.	Population connected to public water supply (%) and Population connected to wastewater treatment plants (%)	Statistical Offices of Western Balkan economies, Eurostat
	5.	Artificial land cover per capita by type	Statistical Offices of Western Balkan economies, Eurostat / Environmental Protection Agencies (Corine Land Cover)
	6.	Nitrate in groundwater	Statistical Offices of Western Balkan economies, Eurostat / Environmental Protection Agencies
Sustainable Agriculture	1.	Share of the area under organic farming in the total utilised agriculture area	Environmental Protection Agencies State of the Environment Reports
	2.	Share of land under management requiring reduction in chemical input	
	3.	Mean organic carbon content in agricultural land	Environmental Protection Agencies State of the Environment Reports
	4.	Production of renewable energy from agriculture	
	5.	GHG emissions from agriculture (tonnes of CO <sub>2</sub> eq)	Environmental Protection Agencies State of the Environment Reports
	6.	Number of farms and food processing enterprises receiving (IPARD) support to align with hygiene and animal welfare standards	
Nature and Biodiversity protection	1.	Designated terrestrial and marine protected and conserved areas including OECMs	UNEP-WCMC World Database on Protected Areas (WDPA) <a href="https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/wdpa?tab=WDPA">https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/wdpa?tab=WDPA</a> , World Database on Other Effective Areas-based Conservation Measures (WDOECM) <a href="https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/oecms?tab=OECMs">https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/oecms?tab=OECMs</a>
	2.	Potential Natura 2000 sites and economy-wide ecological networks	European Natura 2000 database, datasets on ecological networks <a href="https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/natura-2000-eunis-database">https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/data/natura-2000-eunis-database</a>
	3.	Species Protection Index	Western Balkan economies' and regional Red Lists <a href="https://www.iucnredlist.org/">https://www.iucnredlist.org/</a>
	4.	Protected areas management effectiveness	Global Database on Protected Areas Management Effectiveness (GD-PAME) <a href="https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/protected-areas-management-effectiveness-pame?tab=Results">https://www.protectedplanet.net/en/thematic-areas/protected-areas-management-effectiveness-pame?tab=Results</a>

5.	Species recovery programmes	Regional and economy-wide species action plans
6.	Area of restored forest landscapes	Bonn Challenge Barometer <a href="https://infoflr.org/bonn-challenge-barometer">https://infoflr.org/bonn-challenge-barometer</a>
7.	Phenology of selected plant and animal species	Indicators and sources of verification to be agreed upon based on the regional biodiversity strategic plan
8.	Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plans for Western Balkan economies (BSAPs)	The reporting system as defined by the Secretariat of the Convention on Biological Diversity in the Global post-2020 Biodiversity Framework <a href="https://www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020">https://www.cbd.int/conferences/post2020</a>

## REPORTING

In close cooperation with regional organisations and the European Commission, RCC will establish a reporting mechanism that will consist of i) an annual narrative report and ii) an annual indicators overview.

The narrative report will be developed jointly with all partners responsible for relevant policy areas and other stakeholders involved in the process of implementation of the Sofia Declaration. Therefore, the narrative part will have a general overview of the progress in all seven components of the Sofia Declaration and it will be supplemented with several more chapters: NGO perspective; Local Self-government outlook; Donor overview; Business community outlook; and Youth appeal. The report will be brief and substantive to provide a concise overview of the activities performed and results attained compared against the set objectives.

The indicators overview will be prepared jointly by RCC and partner regional organisations on key parameters through which progress is tracked. This part will be a visual presentation of the implementation status accompanied by a narrative explication of key parameters providing an elaboration of a relevant status, particularly in case of underperformance or delays in attaining the objectives with proposals for corrective measures.

These elements will constitute an annual Green Agenda Report on Implementation (GARI) that will be compiled by RCC before the regular RWG Env ministerial meetings take place (usually in the last quarter of each year) and presented to the Ministers for endorsement. Based on this annual report, the RWG Env Ministers accompanied by Ministers from other line ministries will adopt a Joint Statement providing further guidance and, if need be, requests for corrective measures or reinforced implementation efforts during the upcoming year. Together with the EC and other partners, RCC will be in charge of integrating elements of the Joint Statements into the work programme for the next year and safeguarding its implementation.

## COMMUNICATION, AWARENESS RAISING AND CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

An important component of the process of the Sofia Declaration implementation will be the involvement of Western Balkan citizens and keeping them informed on the objectives, needs and activities their authorities are undertaking to ensure the comprehensive ecological transformation under the Green Agenda. Keeping citizens up to speed about the achieved progress and properly communicating the objectives of the GAWB should additionally motivate them to personally engage and contribute to the cause by altering their behaviour in line with the common goals of protecting the

environment and responding to climate change. The role of citizens should not be neglected also with regards to reducing emissions through alternative energy sources, insulation of homes, energy management and improved efficiency, alternative and collective transport solutions, decreasing waste generation, waste segregation and recycling, changing consumption patterns and generally can have a significant impact towards reducing the environmental footprint in the Western Balkan region.

Therefore, during this decade, particular attention will be given to adequately communicating the objectives of the Sofia Declaration, its implementation status as well as benefits it brings to all Western Balkan citizens. Jointly with all partners involved in the implementation, RCC will organise various awareness raising campaigns in order to inform Western Balkan citizens and invite them to action, including specifically tailored outreach mechanisms to reach out to those hard to reach, such as Roma and other vulnerable groups. Among other tools, the RCC website together with the GAWB Observatory will be important sources of information on the GAWB implementation. Various materials, flyers and bulletins in local languages, including English, will be produced and disseminated to the wider public. Through the inclusive governance process, all partners will be invited to design and implement awareness raising campaigns and to report in annual reporting cycles. Local self-governments will have a particular role in these endeavours through participation in various initiatives such as Clean Air Regions Initiative, organising car-free days under the European Mobility Week, introducing cycling and pedestrian zones, promoting achievements in energy management, playing an exemplary role in the renovation of public buildings, and many other similar initiatives. The role of LSGs will be promoted and strengthened through the Green Agenda Days initiative.

To ensure continuous promotion and public awareness, as well as a concerted regional approach, the day of adoption of the Sofia Declaration (10<sup>th</sup> November) can be proclaimed the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Anniversary and as part of the established platforms elaborated above all regional organisations, NGOs, local self-governments, business and youth community will be invited to mark this date by undertaking appropriate measures or organising promotional activities.

To complement all these efforts, RCC will also seek to develop and strengthen the network of European Climate Pact ambassadors in the Western Balkans to motivate various organisations to make climate pledges under this initiative.

## ABBREVIATIONS

AKIS	- Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
AP	- Action Plan
APCP	- Action Programme for Coal Phase-out
BATs	- Best Available Techniques
BDTF	- Biodiversity Task Force
BISE	- Biodiversity Information System for Europe
CAP	- Common Agricultural Policy
CBAM	- Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism
CBD	- Convention on Biological Diversity
CIF	- Chamber Investment Forum
CoP	- Conference of the Parties
CRM	- Common Regional Market
CSO	- Civil Society Organisations
DcC	- Decarbonisation Committee
DG NEAR	- Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
DG	- Directorate-General
EC	- European Commission
ECP	- European Climate Pact
EEA	- European Environment Agency
EGD	- European Green Deal
EIONET	- European Environment Information and Observation Network
EnCS	- Energy Community Secretariat
EPPA	- Environment Partnership Programme for Accession
ETS	- Emission Trading System
EU	- European Union
FLR	- Forest Landscape Restoration
GAD	- Green Agenda Days
GARI	- Green Agenda Report on Implementation
GAWB	- Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GGF	- Green for Growth Fund
GHG	- Greenhouse gasses
IED	- Industrial Emission Directive
IFIs	- International Finance Institutions
IPA	- Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance
IPARD	- Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance for Rural Development
IPBES	- Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
IUCN	- International Union for Conservation of Nature
JRC	- Joint Research Centre
LCDS	- Low Carbon Development Strategy
LEADER	- Liaison Entre Actions de Développement de L'économie Rurale (Links between actions for the development of the rural economy)
LRTAP	- Long-range Transboundary Air Pollution
LSG	- Local Self-Government
LULUCF Regulation	- Regulation on the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land-use change and forestry

MS	- Member State
NAP	- National Adaptation Plan
NDC	- Nationally Determined Contribution
NEC Directive	- National Emission Reduction Commitments Directive
NECP	- National Energy and Climate Plan
NERP	- National Emission Reduction Plans
NFR	- Nomenclature for Reporting
NGO	- Non-governmental organisation
NMVOC	- Non-methane Volatile Organic Compound
NRDN	- National Rural Development Network
PPP	- Plant Protection Products
RAS	- Regional Adaptation Strategy
RCC	- Regional Cooperation Council
REACH	- Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals
REAWG	- Regional Expert Advisory Working Group
REEP	- Regional Energy Efficiency Programme
RWG Env	- Regional Working Group on Environment
RYCO	- Regional Youth Cooperation Office
SDG	- Sustainable Development Goal
SEE	- South East Europe
sHHP	- Small Hydro Power Plant
SMEs	- Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
SWG RRD	- Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development
TCPS	- Transport Community Permanent Secretariat
TCT	- Transport Community Treaty
UN	- United Nations
UNFCCC	- United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change
WB	- Western Balkans
WBIF	- Western Balkans Investment Framework