



Balkans & Black Sea Cooperation Forum

Friday June 1st 2018

Press Release

Forum Declaration

“Rail, Road, Rivers Connectivity to the EU via Balkan region”

The 2nd edition of the Balkans & Black Sea Cooperation Forum was successfully held in the city of Athens, Greece, from 30th May to June 1st 2018. The Forum focused on a policy and a business summit with a hot headline: “**Rail, Road, Rivers Connectivity to the EU via Balkan region**” taking into account the various initiatives -or perhaps strategies?- of world’s superpowers in this region.

The participants expressed willingness to actively promote the Balkan and Black Sea region as a pivotal transportation hub and crossroads by accelerating **sustainable connectivity** as a key driver to strengthen the economic development for the region and its collaborators without any discrimination and in line with the international human rights and gender equality standards.

The region is the **interconnector** between Europe, Asia and Africa through its extensive rail, road, air and maritime transport network. **Collective cooperation** - key to the development and the modernization of this network - is of particular importance to this region that is widely affected by trade and tourism.

In this framework, the participants expressed their readiness to contribute to the formulation of a “**Roadmap for inclusive transport system in the Balkans and Black Sea region**” ensuring free movement of people, goods and knowledge in line with international standards. Challenges are found in: 1.) **Policy**, such as the need to improve the regulatory framework, harmonize the national legislation and to collectively promote the region towards stakeholders located outside the region. 2.) **Research and development**, such as digitalization of transport and the lack of adequate infrastructure. 3.) **Capacity building**, such as employment opportunities and investing in people and skills to eradicate digital exclusion, especially of groups vulnerable to exclusion.

In particular Forum’s partners welcomed the Forum Declaration 2018 stimulating further inter- and intraregional cooperation among all relevant stakeholders and to raise awareness and motivate social responsibility with the aim to contribute to: 1.) *increasing* awareness and communication with neighbouring regions regarding the need to develop; 2.) drafting a proposal *upgrading existing* transport infrastructure, *deploying* Belt and Road initiatives crossing this region and *establishing alternative* routes for interregional trade, and; 3.) creating favourable conditions for attracting foreign and national investments, and identifying additional funding mechanisms targeting the Balkans and the Black Sea region.

Forum Partners and participants endorse sharing the Forum Declaration 2018 with more than **30 influential** organizations and stakeholders responsible for policy shaping and business making in and for this region. As such, they aim to contribute to the establishment of an optimal framework for the facilitation of an efficient and inclusive transport system meeting the economic, social and environmental needs of the Balkans and Black Sea region. BBSF will expect their reaction with the aim to create a dedicated community working towards the elaboration of the Roadmap.

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