



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**  
NEIGHBOURHOOD AND ENLARGEMENT NEGOTIATIONS

D - WESTERN BALKANS  
**D.5 - WESTERN BALKANS REGIONAL COOPERATION AND PROGRAMMES**  
Head of unit

Brussels,  
NEAR.D.5/sa/Ares (2020)

Astrit Istrefi  
Executive Director  
The Balkan Forum  
Email: [astrit@thebalkanforum.org](mailto:astrit@thebalkanforum.org)

**Subject: Reply to the Letter from the Balkan Forum with Recommendations for the Sofia Summit by 39 CSOs in the WB region - 03/11/2020**

Dear Ms Istrefi

Thank you very much for sharing with Commissioner Varhelyi the recommendations of the Civil Society Platform for Democracy and Human Rights related to the Berlin Process summit in Sofia on 10 November. The Commissioner has asked me to reply to your message.

The Berlin Process is an inter-governmental – and not an EU – forum, and therefore your recommendations are primarily addressed to the Leaders of the participating partners. However, we share your overall positive assessment and consider the Process a useful platform promoting closer links in the Western Balkans, and enhancing the engagement of the Member States in the region. It has also proved itself a vehicle to support initiatives in connectivity, green and digital transition, regional market integration, promoting good neighbourly relations and people-to-people exchanges.

Your paper makes four important recommendations concerning: stepping up joint efforts with the region to alleviate the socio-economic impact of COVID-19; a more robust progress monitoring framework; the binding nature of pledges made by the partners; and consistency of actions of the participants with their Declarations. The European Commission broadly shares this assessment and we believe that the Sofia Summit has been a demonstration of progress in all these areas.

Post-COVID recovery has been the key underlying theme of the Summit this year. The Leaders have demonstrated a clear interest in working together to rebuild their economies, and to make them come out of the crisis more resilient, sustainable and interconnected. To demonstrate this, we have seen two important commitments being undertaken by the Leaders of the region: on the Green Agenda and on the Common Regional Market. In addition, the Commission has announced a connectivity package, starting the implementation of its ambitious Economic and Investment Plan for the region.

In terms of monitoring of progress, we believe that the Process has remained broadly on track in terms of focus, and that the initiatives launched in the context of earlier summits are followed up in subsequent events. In some cases this is done through dedicated “commitments groups” (e.g. for security), while in others follow up is given at appropriate ministerial level. There is, however, always room for improvement.

Finally, we share your view that progress in the regional agenda requires strong political commitment, and that the governments should be held accountable for their genuine engagement, while refraining from inconsistent and contradictory actions. We trust that this spirit will prevail in the coming months, and that we will see positive progress in the implementation of the ambitious plans we have together with the citizens of the Western Balkans.

Yours sincerely,

*[e-signed]*

Colin WOLFE

