



22 June 2022, Brussels

To : President of the European Union Council, Charles Michel
President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron (Presidency of the Council of EU)
President of the European Union Commission, Ursula von der Layen
Heads of states and governments of the Western Balkans

Cc : Heads of Governments of the EU Presidency Trio Programme
Commissioner for Neighbourhood and Enlargement, Olivér Várhelyi
European Union Member States Ministers of Foreign Affairs

Subject: Implementation of the Green Agenda for Western Balkans needs urgent support and involvement of all key stakeholders through a transparent and time-specific process

Dear President Michel, President Macron, President von der Layen, Heads of State of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia,

Civil society organisations would like to bring your attention to important concerns that need to be addressed ahead of the European Union and Western Balkans leaders' meeting on 23 June in Brussels.

We welcome the Western Balkans' inclusion in the French Presidency's Council of the European Union's Programme, with particular attention to the upcoming European Union-Western Balkans leaders' meeting. Still, we have seen a lack of involvement of civil society in setting the meeting agenda, namely issues of climate change and energy transition.

The leaders' meetings should provide an opportunity to consult with civil society organisations, resulting in positive outcomes leading to constructive follow-up actions.

As the civil society working in the region, we have contributed to the process of developing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans in the last two years, which has included outlining collective interests for reaching the Paris Agreement's goals and addressing the climate emergency in an effective and equitable manner.

Nevertheless, nearly two years after the Sofia Declaration on the Western Balkans Green Agenda was endorsed by the political community, progress on reaching the commitments still has been slow. The lack of clear timetables and clarity on specific pathways in the Action Plan for the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans has resulted in very little implementation since then. We must emphasise the need to develop the implementation framework in a transparent and collaborative manner, with particular actions outlined in publicly-consulted national plans.

Furthermore, we appreciate the Regional Cooperation Council's plans, as the authority in charge of developing the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, to invite civil society into the dialogue on the Agenda's development. Unfortunately, the procedure has come to a halt. The Regional Cooperation Council and other bodies responsible for implementing the priorities of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, such as the Energy Community Treaty, as well as the financial enablers of this process cooperating under the Western Balkans Investment Framework, must work together to ensure cohesion in this process. This must also ensure that the process of selection of flagship projects does not include projects which hamper the ambition of climate neutrality. **The current proposal on the summary list of the projects to be financed through the Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans contributes to maintaining the fossil fuel status quo in the region since it foresees fossil fuel projects, which at this stage in the climate emergency cannot be regarded as having any transitional value.**

To this end, the Western Balkan countries need to step up their ambition and firmly commit to setting Paris Agreement compatible 2030 targets as the key to reaching climate neutrality in the region by 2050. Additionally, there is a need to accelerate EU support for the adoption and implementation of adequate national policies and legislative reforms, such as carbon pricing, zero air pollution, renovation for energy efficiency and deployment of sustainable renewable energy sources. Investment support must also be ensured.

Further, public support for EU membership across the region has been declining. The latest opinion polls in Serbia show a drop in support for the EU accession process below 50%, which is of grave concern to us considering the political, geographical and economic interconnection of the region with the European Union. The influence of countries that are laggards in their commitment to the climate change goals set in the Paris Agreement, such as China and Russia, is significantly growing. This highlights that **the EU needs to stand firm in lifting the political deadlocks for all Western Balkan states and show a steady and clear path towards enlargement goals on ensuring a safe, healthier and sustainable future alongside EU membership.**

The energy crisis caused by the war in Ukraine should not be disregarded. CAN Europe has underlined the urgency of the situation by providing *8 recommendations for an accelerated, secure and Paris-compatible energy transition in the EU in the context of the invasion of Ukraine*. The Western Balkans is an integral part of the European continent, making regional integration with the EU energy market the only way forward. **The EU needs to step up its support for the region's energy security and independence from fossil fuels to be achieved.**

In conclusion, we encourage you to debate the above-mentioned concerns at the upcoming leaders' meeting, and we remain accessible should you choose to discuss these challenges and opportunities in further depth.

Yours sincerely on behalf of the below signed organisations,

Chiara Martinelli, Director, CAN Europe

Signatories:

[REC Albania](#)

[Aarhus Center in Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

[Center for Environment Bosnia and Herzegovina](#)

[Eco-team Montenegro](#)

[Center for Environmental Research and Information Eko-svest](#) North Macedonia

[Coalition 27](#) Serbia

[CEE Bankwatch Network](#)

[Just Finance International](#)

[Health and Environment Alliance \(HEAL\)](#)