

The External Dimension of EU-supported Connectivity: from Berlin Process to Global Gateway

*on 24 April 2024, at Centre for Openness and Dialogue, Prime Minister's Office – Tirana, Albania
and on Zoom platform*

Against the backdrop of increased geopolitical tensions, the connectivity-based EU [Global Gateway](#) initiative constitutes “...[an incredibly important geopolitical tool](#)...” available to the Union when expanding and intensifying its partnerships with 3rd countries.

Embedment of multi-layered connectivity in EU relations with non-EU countries, has been implemented since 2014 in the framework of [Berlin Process](#) (BP) vis-à-vis Western Balkans Six (WB6). A catalyst of EU Enlargement, BP integrates the political will provided by “willing Member States” and by EU, with the Commission expertise and assistance, and the International Financial Institutions (IFI) financial leverage, to support connectivity in and with WB6 and regional cooperation.

BP has been providing political steering and support to EU [Connectivity Agenda](#) (CA) - now part of the [EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#) (EIP). Since 2015 EU has co-financed in WB6 more than 85 connectivity infrastructure projects in transport, energy, digital, environment, etc for a total of EUR 7,7bn in grant support (without counting IFI-leveraged loans). Out of those, [six EU Connectivity Agenda projects](#) are part of the EU [Global Gateway](#). This collection of ongoing connectivity projects is a valuable repository of cases for learning and analysis.

Developments such as the integration of Corridor VIII (which links the Black Sea with Adriatic Sea through NATO member countries) into the EU TEN-T networks, or the imposition of Growth Plan conditionality on EU financial support to WB6 infrastructure projects illustrate the growing prominence of multifaceted connectivity in the European Union's relations in its close neighbourhood.

This kind of connectivity creates a unified framework of EU-driven regulations, norms, and standards. Well beyond roads, bridges, energy or digital networks, it also encompasses people-to-people, business-to-business, and institution-to-institution links between WB6 and EU.

WB6 experience holds unique insights for the EU and for its Member States. After 10 years of Western Balkans experience, EU-supported infrastructure projects in the region provide valuable lessons learnt that can be used in other world regions covered by Global Gateway.

How connectivity can be weaved into EU external relations? What are its comparative advantages when facing competition? How EU good governance practice and norms can contribute to partner countries' development? What can be learned from the Berlin Process when embedding political will in EU infrastructure support in 3rd countries?

To start a debate on those issues, Cooperation and Development Institute (CDI) is organising a half-day conference on 24 April 2024. Its focus will be on deconstructing WB6 connectivity best cases and discussing on how they can be adapted for and upscaled into the global context of Global Gateway.

The conference will bring together policymakers from the EU, EU Member States, and WB6, along with think tank representatives, representatives from international financial institutions (IFIs), and regional cooperation structures, and practitioners. During this gathering, participants will share their perspectives, engage in discussions, and come up with proposals.

This event is under the auspices of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council, and supported by the Belgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Hanns Seidel Foundation and German Federal Foreign Office.

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Hybrid event: 24 April 2024, from 0900hs to 1245hs

at COD – Centre for Openness and Dialogue, Prime Minister’s Office – Tirana and on Zoom platform

Public session

0900hs – 0920hs: Welcome (open)

- H.E. Mr. Frédéric Meurice, Ambassador, Embassy of Belgium in Sofia on behalf of Belgian Presidency of the EU;
- H.E. Mr. Karl Bergner, Ambassador of Germany in Albania;
- Mr. Klaus Fiesinger, Regional Director of South East Europe, Hanns Seidel Stiftung;
- Ms. Enkelejda Muçaj, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Infrastructure and Energy;

0920hs – 1015hs: from Berlin Process to Global Gateway (open)

- “Global Gateway April 2024: State of the Art and next steps”, by Mr. Mathieu Bousquet, Director, Directorate A, DG NEAR - online;
- “Global Gateway: an EU Development instrument or a Geopolitical tool” by Mr. Carlos Buhigas Schubert, Founding Director, Col-Lab;
- “Berlin Process in Western Balkans: one decade of EU expertise in Connectivity”, Mr. Ardian Hackaj, Cooperation and Development Institute.

followed by Q&A and debate with the participants.

1015hs – 1030hs: coffee break

Closed session

1030hs – 1230hs: Insights and experiences gained from the EU's Connectivity Agenda and Economic and Investment Plan Flagship projects in the WB6 (closed – Chatham house rules)

Every **Discussant** will be invited to present key lessons learned and / or recommendation from his / her own experience with CA / EIP / Berlin Process, to be considered when strategizing and executing Global Gateway initiatives.

1030hs – 1130hs: Insights and experiences from EU and EU-connected actors: here representatives from DG NEAR, WBIF, EUDAL, IFI, MS Development Agencies, EU-based business actors, etc will bring forward the challenges and current achievements in supporting infrastructure projects in WB6 region:

- HE Mr. Reinout Vos, Ambassador of Netherlands to Albania;
- Mr. Matej Zakonjšek, Transport Community - online;
- Mr. Daniel Shekerletov, Permanent Representation of Bulgaria to the EU;
- Mr. Knut Fleckenstein, MEP (2009 – 2019) and Rapporteur for Albania – online;
- Mr. Miguel da Silva Santos Dias, European Investment Bank – online;
- Mr. Ilir Basha, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development – online;

- Mr. Oltion Dervishi, Ms. Isabel Schröder, Kreditanstalt für Wiederaufbau - KfW;
- Ms. Mirela Mata, Mr. Sébastien Carreau, Agence Française de Développement;
- Mr. Andrea Ferrero, Mr. Ardian Metaj, EU Delegation to Albania;
- Mr. László Örlós, Hungarian Export Promotion Agency;
- Ms. Anja Quiring, German Eastern Business Association – online
- Ms. Zsuzsanna Beszteri, Advisor for EU Integration at Prime Minister's Office of Albania

1130hs – 1230hs: Insights and experiences from WB6 actors: here WB6 national authorities, local government unit representatives, public companies, PIU, local contractors and sub-contractors, CSO representatives, etc will share their take on specifics of EU-supported projects and how they've engaged to push the project forward:

- Mr. Sonil Bilaj, Directorate for the Administration of EU Financial Assistance, SASPAC;
- Ms. Hykmete Bajrami, Chair of Committee for Oversight of Public Finances, Parliament of Kosovo – online;
- Mr. Gledian Llatja, Mayor of Elbasan;
- Mr. Ergys Verdho, Mr. Bashkim Kasoraho, Albanian Railways;
- Mr. Pirro Vengu, Durrës Port Authority;
- Mr. Nico Suys, Port of Antwerp – Bruges International – online;
- Mr. Driton Rusi, Public Enterprise for Railway Infrastructure Railways of N. Macedonia;
- Mr. Josip Lazarevski, Agency for State Roads, North Macedonia – online;
- Mr. Driton Osmani, Termokos, Kosovo – online;
- Mr. Alban Velo, Mr. Jeshar Peposhi, Korporata Energjetike Shqiptare / SENA;
- Mr. Elena Nikolovska, Center for Environmental Research and Information, Skopje -online;
- Ms. Zsuzsanna Beszteri, Advisor for EU Integration at Prime Minister's Office of Albania
- Mr. Redi Basha, ABKONS.

1230hs – 1245hs: intermediary Take Aways, ...

- Mr. Ardian Hackaj, Cooperation and Development Institute, Coordinator of Tirana Connectivity Forum;
- Ms. Stefania Benaglia, Head of Foreign Policy Unit, Center for European Policy Studies – CEPS.

... Networking Lunch at Enoteka Johan.