



7th MEETING OF THE WBIF STRATEGIC BOARD

Minutes of Meeting (draft)

24 April 2025

Venue: Hotel Renaissance, Brussels, Belgium

Participants: list of participating institutions annexed

I. Introductory remarks by the WBIF Co-Chairs

The meeting opened with introductory remarks by the WBIF Co-chairs:

- Valentina Superti, Director Western Balkans, European Commission Directorate General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood; and
- Irena Alajbeg, Director General for Trade and Development, Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Croatia.

The **DG ENEST Director** welcomed participants and highlighted advances in the roll-out of the Reform and Growth Facility (RGF) and in implementing the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), an integral part of the EU's Global Gateway Strategy. The EU has provided €3b in funding to support the implementation of the EIP, which – together with support provided by the bilateral donors and IFI financing – have mobilised approximately €10.5 billion of investments to 68 key infrastructure projects in the region. Under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance III, the EU is expected to provide a total of €5 billion through the WBIF in the period 2021-2027.

In 2025, the WBIF will have a central role in the implementation of Pillar 4 of the Growth Plan - the Reform and Growth Facility - with up to an additional €3 billion to be implemented through the WBIF for investments in the sectors of transport, energy, digital and human capital development. The total EU contribution to the WBIF budget under the current MFF will therefore be in the range of €8 billion, making this programme the most important EU financial tool to accelerate socio-economic development in the Western Balkans.

The **WBIF Co-chair Croatia** emphasised the importance of ensuring efficient implementation of reforms and targeted investments for the region's accession to the European Union, driven by joint objectives, values and vision.

II. Adoption of the agenda and the minutes

The 7th WBIF Strategic Board members adopted, by consensus, the agenda of the meeting and the minutes of the 6th WBIF Strategic Board (London, 1 July 2024).

III. Intervention by WBIF Stakeholders

For the **European Parliament** (EP), Željana Zovko, MEP, mentioned the importance of further progress to be achieved under the Reform Agenda for Bosnia and Herzegovina, strengthening of democratic institutions and principles, welcomed the central role of digital and human capital initiatives under the RGF and emphasised that stability and security in the Western Balkans is essential for the security and stability of the European continent. Tonino Picula, MEP, also hoped for swift progress to be achieved with Bosnia and Herzegovina, while further mentioning that support under WBIF should be strategically driven and merit-based, and

underlined the strategic role of communication; democratic backsliding and threats that can negatively impact the independence of the media should be seriously considered.

The **Presidency of the European Council**, Poland, welcomed progress achieved with Albania and Montenegro, recommended keeping all Western Balkan partners firmly on the EU accession path and announced strengthening human capital and supporting the region's economic convergence as Poland's priorities. To this end, a study commissioned by Poland on the economic convergence of the Western Balkans will soon be published.

The **WBIF Co-chair Croatia**, representing the Bilateral Donors, thanked Norway for its 18-month tenure as WBIF Co-chair, reiterated the Bilateral Donors' support of the WBIF as the main platform to facilitate investments and reforms in the Western Balkans. In challenging global times, shared values and the common long-term goal of EU accession, supported through WBIF, are more important than ever. The Reform Agendas clearly lay down the political commitments for reforms, and rapid progress should be achieved with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

AFD, in representation of the Financial Partner Organisations, mentioned the landmark character of the adopted performance-based Growth Plan, but also raised the operational challenges in relation to the uncertainty on the availability of funds and the tranche mechanism put in place - on an exceptional basis - for larger projects under the RGF. In that respect, it was proposed to investigate other ways of applying conditionalities in order to ensure an effective roll-out of the RGF. AFD also expressed the need to further discuss the draft guidance note on double funding which may complexify the implementation of the RGF. Finally, AFD passed the baton to EBRD as new representative of the Financial Partner Organisations.

IV. Growth Plan and Reform and Growth Facility (RGF)

EC ENEST updated participants about the state of affairs of the Western Balkan partners and their respective efforts in adopting the Reform Agendas. The main aim of the Reform and Growth Facility is to support Western Balkans partners' alignment with the EU values, laws, rules, standards, policies and practices, with a view to future EU membership, as well as their progressive integration into the EU single market and socio-economic convergence with the EU.

Each Western Balkans partner prepared a Reform Agenda linked to the implementation of specific socio-economic reforms to unlock economic growth potential, as well as key fundamental reforms aligned with the accession process. All except Bosnia and Herzegovina have adopted their respective Reform Agenda, and progress has been made in signing facility and loan agreements and pre-financing disbursements. Qualitative and quantitative steps in fulfilling the reforms as well as meeting the preconditions, general conditions and payment conditions need to be ensured for every release of funds under the RGF.

The RGF foresees seven implementation and reporting periods of the required reform steps, with three periods scheduled in 2025, and two each in 2026 and 2027. Funds will only become available after the adoption of the Commission Implementing Decision approving the release of funds which follows the completion of the EC's assessment of the beneficiaries' reporting on the reforms (at the earliest three months after reporting). Each reform step is accompanied by one or more indicators and a financial value; fulfilment of the reform steps will condition and trigger the payments to be made to the Western Balkan beneficiary.

EBRD enquired about efforts concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina's Reform Agenda and raised concerns about the payment timeframe for all the beneficiaries. **KFW** voiced concerns about the implementation of the carbon pricing system in the Western Balkans, which could lead to significant payment obligations from the Western Balkan partners to the EU, and on the roll-out of the new Guidance Note on "double-funding". **France** welcomed the overall progress made in the operationalisation of the RGF and voiced regret on the stalemate situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. **Bosnia and Herzegovina** informed that the Reform Agenda is being finalised; only the political decision is still missing. **EC ENEST** confirmed that the European Commission has an

extensive ongoing exchange with Bosnia and Herzegovina. Regarding RGF payments related delays, a 12-month grace period applies before “unclaimed” funds are lost. Additional TA can be provided to the Western Balkan partners in the implementation of carbon pricing.

Italy enquired through which instrument the European Commission plans to advise the Western Balkan partners on their choice of industrial policy. The **European Parliament** voiced concerns about the (lack of) administrative and institutional capacity at the beneficiary level and enquired how the European Commission plans to address this issue. **EC ENEST** informed participants about various tools available, assistance under IPA, including TAIX, dedicated TA and/or Jaspers as well as under the RGF.

V. Prioritisation of WBIF investment projects under the RGF

The Western Balkan partners (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) presented their indicative investment project portfolios under the RGF, split over the eligible RGF sectors Sustainable Transport, Clean Energy, Digital Future and Human Capital Development. The Western Balkan partners provided details about the planned number of projects per sector, the types of investments and their respective project maturity levels, i.e. projects already mature, projects mature in 18 months, and the rest, requiring additional efforts (studies) to reach maturity.

Germany enquired about the eligibility of human capital development projects. **EC ENEST** clarified that the eligibility criteria are contained in the applicable call guidelines (available on the WBIF website).

VI. Update of the EWBIF General Conditions [and] Proposal to merge the WBIF Annual Progress and Annual Monitoring Reports

EC ENEST informed participants of the required amendments to the EWBIF General Conditions (GC) to reflect the fact that Western Balkan partners will become, with the RGF, contributors to the EWBIF. The changes to the EWBIF GC will have no material impact on the roles of existing Contributors and Lead Financial Institutions. The changes to the General Conditions are designed to ensure transparency and traceability in the management and use of those contributions. Western Balkan partners' contributions will only be used to (co)finance projects for their own benefit; unspent amounts, interest, and recoveries will also be allocated exclusively to Actions benefitting the contributing partner. Moreover, Western Balkan partners will not become members of the Assembly of Contributors, yet they will receive financial information (from the Fund Managers) and a Summary Implementation Report (via WBIF Secretariat), Annual Implementation Report, and Final Reports on Actions financed by their contributions (both via MIS). The revised General Conditions are expected to be adopted in July-August 2025.

EC ENEST further informed the WBIF Strategic Board of its proposal to merge the Annual Progress Report (APR) and the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) into one new “Annual Report”. The merged “Annual Report” will cover all aspects of the AMR and APR, avoid duplication of data reporting/presentation and inconsistencies due to different adoption/publishing dates and reduce the overall reporting burden.

To enable EC ENEST to move forward with the new “Annual Report” and to already present it to the next WBIF Strategic Board, **EC ENEST** requested guidance by the 7th WBIF Strategic Board.

The 7th WBIF Strategic Board raised no objection to the proposal of merging the Annual Progress Report and the Annual Monitoring Report, into a unified “Annual Report”.

VII. WBIF Secretariat Communication and Visibility

EC ENEST presented communication and visibility (C&V) activities performed in the past year, including new and updated C&V materials, the outreach via the website and social media, the main events and the annual survey. New and updated C&V materials included the Global Gateway logo, additional sector and corridor



factsheets and updated material on Bilateral Donor contributions, all available on the WBIF website; in addition, a new REEP section on the WBIF website was introduced and activated. The annual C&V survey showed a continued overall satisfaction trend with WBIF's C&V materials and activities, in particular the website. Areas for future improvement relate to better coordination of C&V activities and the social media campaigns. Participants were encouraged to subscribe to WBIF social media channels.

A WBIF 15-year video was shown, marking the end of the WBIF 15th anniversary campaign [[link here](#)].

VIII. AOB

EC ENEST informed the participants that the EU intends to lift the freezing of Technical Assistance funds in favour of Kosovo, to allow the preparation of mature investment projects that will be financed by RGF.

While the sequencing of the lifting of the EU measures is currently being worked on at technical level, the EEAS and the Commission have informed Member States about their plans to start the gradual lifting of measures within the mandate given by the Council in its December 2024 Conclusions. It is nevertheless important to highlight that this process is gradual, reversible and conditional.

END OF THE MEETING



**7TH MEETING OF THE WBIF STRATEGIC BOARD
OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY
24 April 2025**

1. Adoption of the Agenda of the meeting and of the Minutes of the 6th Strategic Board meeting of 1 July 2024, by consensus.
2. Guidance by the 7th WBIF Strategic Board of the merger of the WBIF Annual Progress Report (Section 8.2.1 RoP) and the WBIF Annual Monitoring Report (Section 8.2.2 RoP) into an “Annual Report”, as presented by EC ENEST at the 7th WBIF Strategic Board meeting.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: List of Participating Institutions

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24 April 2025

In-person

No.	Stakeholder Group	Organisation
1.	EU institutions	European Commission, WBIF Head of Secretariat EU Parliament
2.	Bilateral Donors / EU Member States	Belgium, Croatia, Czechia, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden
3.	IFIs	AFD, CEB, EIB, EBRD, KfW, World Bank, IFC, CDP
4.	Regional Organisation	TCPS, ECS
5.	Beneficiaries	Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia

Online

No.	Stakeholder Group	Organisation
1.	EU institutions	European Commission, EUD Albania, EUD Bosnia and Herzegovina, EUO Kosovo*, EUD North Macedonia, EUD Montenegro, EUD Serbia
2.	Bilateral Donors / EU Member States	Austria, Czechia, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain
3.	IFIs	AFD, CEB, EIB, EBRD, KfW
4.	Regional Organisations	ECS, RCC

Annex 2: Adopted Agenda

7th MEETING OF THE WBIF STRATEGIC BOARD

AGENDA

24 April 2025

Brussels Hotel Renaissance

08:30 - 09:00 Registration

Please see instructions

09:00 - 09:30 Opening address/es

- EC ENEST, Valentina Superti, Director for the Western Balkans
- Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, Croatia, Irena Alajbeg, Director General for Trade and Development

09:30 - 09:35 Adoption of the Agenda

Adoption of the minutes from the previous Strategic Board meeting

09:35 - 10:10 Statement by representatives of:

- European Parliament – Željana Zovko (EPP), Tonino Picula (S&D), Marjan Šarec (Renew)
- Presidency of the European Council - Syzmon Woytasik, Head of Unit for Western Balkans and Turkiye, MFA, Poland
- Bilateral Donors Chair - Irena Alajbeg, Director General for Trade and Development, MFEA, Croatia
- AFD for the partner financial organisations

10:10 - 10:40 Growth Plan and Reform and Growth Facility (RGF)

- Update EC ENEST, David Hudson, Team Leader
- EC ENEST, Christophe Galand, Head of Unit B1

10:40 - 11:10 Group picture / Coffee Break

11:10 - 12:10 Prioritisation of WBIF investment projects under the RGF

- Update Western Balkan Partners

Discussion

12:10 - 12:30 Update of the General Conditions

Proposal to merge the Annual Progress and Monitoring Reports
EC ENEST

12:30 - 12:45 WBIF Secretariat Communication and Visibility

EC ENEST

12:45 - 13:00 AoB

13:00 - 14:00 Lunch at venue

18.00 - 19.30 Evening event (also at the venue)