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COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Measures in support of a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans

1. INTRODUCTION

On 6 February 2018, the Commission presented the Western Balkans Strategy in the Communication "*A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans*".

The Communication of 6 February 2018¹, announced that, "*together with the partners in the Western Balkans, the Commission will launch a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans, including a roadmap to facilitate lowering the cost of roaming*". The Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans should be one of the six flagship initiatives of the Western Balkans Strategy.

The Communication sets out five main areas to be covered by the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans:

1. Lowering the cost of roaming based on a roadmap to facilitate such a goal
2. The deployment of broadband
3. The development of eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth, & digital skills
4. Capacity building in trust and security, and digitalisation of industries, to ensure that all sectors benefit from digital innovations
5. The adoption, implementation and enforcement of the *acquis* in the area of the digital single market.

The Sofia Declaration², of 17 May 2018, agreed "*by the leaders of the European Union (EU) and its Member States, in consultation with our Western Balkans partners*", at the 'European Union - Western Balkans Summit' includes the launch of a Sofia Priority Agenda for the EU and the Western Balkans. The Priority Agenda comprises, under the title "*A Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans*", the following points:

- Launch a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans, including a roadmap to facilitate lowering cost of roaming
- Launch a substantial technical assistance package for the identification of potential digital investments (including broadband) through Western Balkan Investment Framework/Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance

The Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans should complement the *Digital Integration* actions agreed by the leaders of the region in the Multi-Annual Action Plan on a Regional Economic Area (Trieste, July 2017)³, and reflect the conclusions of the Western Balkans Digital Summit in Skopje⁴ on 19 April 2018.

¹ [COM \(2018\) 65 final](#), section 5

² http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/34776/sofia-declaration_en.pdf

³ <https://www.rcc.int/docs/383/multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six>

⁴ "We therefore welcome the Commission's Digital Agenda Flagship initiative, which was announced on 6 February 2018 and which fulfils our expectations and complements the actions agreed on in the MAP for REA" See the Skopje conclusions [here](#)

The forthcoming launch of the Digital Agenda benefits from explicit, prior endorsement by the six Western Balkan leaders, who signed a Statement of Support⁵ at the Western Balkans Summit in Sofia on 17 May 2018.

This Staff Working Document (SWD) is a joint effort of the Commission services and describes the measures in support of a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans by referring to the already committed and ongoing measures through which the Commission contributes to the five areas of action set out in the Communication of 6 February 2018. It will do so, *inter alia*, by describing the relevant Union's and other instruments, and the possibilities for the Western Balkan partners to join or benefit from them.

2. MANAGING THE PROCESS AND MEASURING PROGRESS

The implementation of a Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans is a process that foresees concrete actions between 2018 and 2020. It will require close collaboration between the relevant Commission services and the Western Balkan partners, in which the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)⁶ will continue to play a significant role.

The Commission services hold annual ICT Dialogues with the main partners around the world. An ICT Dialogue with the authorities of the Western Balkans could help organise the process of implementation of the Digital Agenda.

To measure progress in the digitalisation of economy and society within the Union, the Commission has established the Digital Economy and Society Index⁷ (DESI), summarising indicators on digital performance and digital competitiveness.

In relation to the Western Balkans, the Commission services are carrying out a study⁸ to monitor progress made towards compliance with the Union rules for electronic communications and information society services, and convergence with the internal market. It will also include DESI indicators in order to allow a closer comparison with the Union.

The first results of the study are scheduled to be published in July 2018 and can help demonstrate the level of integration of the six economies in the Western Balkans into the European digital economy & society. Subsequent reports will be published in 2019 and 2020. Complete datasets from the region for all DESI dimensions are currently missing, and therefore integration with the EU DESI can only take place progressively as the relevant Western Balkan authorities are able to provide the full sets of data, in accordance with the EU acquis on statistics where applicable.

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/statement-support-digital-agenda-western-balkans_en.pdf

⁶ https://www.rcc.int/priority_areas/7/digital-integration

⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/desi>

⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/monitoring-electronic-communications-and-digital-services-western-balkans-and-turkey>

3. FINANCING THE DIGITAL AGENDA

The Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA)⁹ is the means by which the Union supports reforms in the enlargement countries with financial and technical help. The IPA II is the relevant framework for providing pre-accession assistance to the Western Balkans for the period 2014-2020. The framework targets reforms within pre-defined sectors, such as democracy and governance, rule of law or growth and competitiveness. Digital projects can be identified under these sectors – and subsequently incorporated in the IPA National and Multi-Country Programmes, and hence be funded using the existing framework.

The Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF)¹⁰ supports socio-economic development across the Western Balkans through the provision of finance and technical assistance for strategic investments, particularly in infrastructure, energy efficiency, and private sector development. The WBIF coordinates the preparation and selection of priority projects for financing by blending grants from the European Commission's Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) and 20 bilateral donors with loans from participating financial institutions and national finance.

The Commission services proposed to open the investment framework for digital (broadband) infrastructure projects at the 17th WBIF Steering Committee Meeting¹¹ in Frankfurt on 13 December 2017. This would make available funds in 2018 - 2020 for feasibility studies and technical assistance to prepare large-scale investment support from 2021 onwards.

At the Sofia Summit, the Commission announced that it will "*Launch a substantial technical assistance package for the identification of potential digital investments (including broadband) through Western Balkans Investment Framework/Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance*". This technical assistance package for digital (broadband) infrastructure projects was submitted for approval on the 18th WBIF Steering Committee Meeting in Paris on 19 June 2018.

Other possible funding sources include the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF)¹², which can support cross-border connectivity projects with EU Member States and the European Fund for Strategic Investments (EFSI)¹³.

Cross-border cooperation with EU member states is needed to achieve interoperability across borders at transnational / macro-regional level. This would also support the more connected Europe objective¹⁴ – one of the five policy objectives of EU's Cohesion Policy

⁹ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/overview_en

¹⁰ <https://www.wbif.eu/>

¹¹ <https://www.wbif.eu/news-and-events/17th-meeting-of-the-wbif-steering-committee-frankfurt-13-december-2017>

¹² <https://ec.europa.eu/inea/en/connecting-europe-facility>

¹³ <http://www.eib.org/efsi/>

¹⁴ http://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/2021_2027/

in the next multi-financial framework. The Sofia Priority Agenda annexed to the Sofia Declaration, under the heading "Increasing connectivity" identifies a number of actions, including "*support increase take-up of opportunities under the current provisions of the Connecting Europe Facility in the Western Balkans*".

4. PROGRESS TOWARDS A ROADMAP TO FACILITATE LOWERING COST OF ROAMING

The "Regional Roaming Agreement" was signed in September 2014 by ministries responsible for electronic communications from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. It has resulted in lower roaming tariffs¹⁵ among the participating countries, but does not yet cover the whole Western Balkans region. Extending the coverage provide by this agreement to all partners in the Western Balkans would provide a strong signal of support for the regional approach in digital matters.¹⁶

In the Statement of Support¹⁷ signed by the Western Balkan governments on 17 May 2018, they agree "To support and facilitate the processes of lowering the roaming costs for the full coverage of consumers in the Western Balkans region." "To support the implementation of a roadmap to facilitate lowering the costs of roaming, between the Western Balkans and the European Union." and "To improve the investment climate for digital projects in the region; and to facilitate stable, predictable and competitive markets in the telecommunications sector."

Since none of the Western Balkan economies is a European Union member, Union internal market obligations and rights do not apply. This includes the 'Roam Like at Home' (RLAH) regime, which cannot be simply extended towards the Western Balkans due to the legal limitations, for instance coming from the WTO and GATS rules. Hence, any reduction of roaming tariffs can currently only be applied on a voluntary basis, according to companies' business models, commercial interests and in line with applicable competition and trade rules.

Lowering the roaming tariffs would require action by the operators active in the region in the context of stable, predictable and competitive markets under the supervision of independent national regulatory authorities (NRAs).

The role of the Western Balkan NRAs is similar to their EU counterparts. They protect consumer interests, supervise the operators to prevent anticompetitive behaviour, ensure a level playing field for fair competition, fairly and transparently manage common resources, such as radio spectrum and numbers, and stimulate investments in the public network / infrastructure. During the regular Plenary of the Body of European Regulators

¹⁵ <https://www.rcc.int/docs/383/multi-annual-action-plan-for-a-regional-economic-area-in-the-western-balkans-six>

¹⁶ Trieste, July 2017: "...the WB6 will support a regional approach to foster intergovernmental cooperation in digital matters..." See the [Consolidated Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area in the Western Balkans Six](#) , p.4

¹⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/commission/sites/beta-political/files/statement-support-digital-agenda-western-balkans_en.pdf

for Electronic Communications (BEREC) in June 2018, all six Western Balkans NRAs participated in a meeting with the BEREC Board, and announced¹⁸ their readiness to contribute to the development of studies to analyse the domestic and roaming prices.

5. BROADBAND AND DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

Broadband infrastructure and services are fundamental components of today's digital economy and society. A fast and secure digital connection of high quality is a prerequisite for a modern economy and society. The requirements for high-speed networks are fast evolving and necessary to absorb increasing data usage of future applications in tomorrow's digital society – e-government, e-health, e-procurement but also business-related and day-to-day household applications.

5.1. Digital Broadband Connectivity

The Commission adopted a strategy on Connectivity for a European Gigabit Society¹⁹ on 14 September 2016. The Communication sets a vision of Europe where availability and take-up of very high capacity networks enables the widespread use of products, services and applications in the Digital Single Market. It confirms and builds upon the previous broadband objectives for 2020, to supply every citizen of the Union with access to at least 30 Mbps connectivity, and to provide half of European households with connectivity rates of 100 Mbps. Furthermore, it calls for 5G connectivity to be available in at least one major city in each Union Member State by 2020 at the latest.

The Western Balkans region has significantly lower broadband penetration rates, as the following table shows. A technical assistance package for digital (broadband) infrastructure projects was announced²⁰ and approved by the WBIF Steering Committee Meeting in Paris on 19 June 2018.

Table 1 - Fixed broadband Subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, 2016 (Source, World Bank²¹)

	EU28	Albania	BiH	Montenegro	fYRoM	Serbia	Kosovo*
2013	30.1	6.3	14.3	15.3	16.3	16.5	N.A.
2014	31.2	7.1	15.2	16.6	17.0	16.9	N.A.
2015	32.3	8.3	18.0	17.9	17.4	18.8	N.A.

¹⁸ <https://www.rcc.int/news/358/western-balkans-roaming-policy-actions-discussed-at-the-meeting-in-brussels>

¹⁹ [COM \(2016\) 587](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/com_comm_2016_587)

²⁰ <https://www.wbif.eu/news-and-events/more-than-eur-190-million-eu-grant-under-the-fourth-connectivity-agenda-package->

²¹ <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/IT.NET.BBND.P2>

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244(1999) and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

2016	33.4	9.1	18.8	18.3	18.3	20.8	N.A.
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The Western Balkan governments are responsible for identifying suitable digital (broadband) infrastructure projects; and the National IPA coordinators²² prioritise submissions from beneficiaries and submit grant applications via the WBIF Management Information System and in accordance with the deadlines set for each individual call. Project applications and queries regarding the overall implementation of the Western Balkan Investment Framework are the responsibility of the WBIF Secretariat.

5.2. Broadband Cost Reduction aspects

The Directive on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks (2014/61/EU)²³, aims to facilitate and incentivise the deployment of high-speed electronic communications networks by reducing its cost. It includes measures, such as the sharing and re-use of existing physical infrastructure, which are expected to create conditions for a more cost-efficient network deployment.

The measures of the Directive focus on four main areas: access to existing physical infrastructure (e.g. ducts, poles or masts) including those belonging to energy and other utilities, for operators willing to deploy high speed broadband networks; efficient coordination of civil works; faster, simpler and more transparent permit-granting procedures; and equipment of new buildings and major renovations with high-speed physical infrastructures (e.g. mini-ducts, access point) and access to in-building infrastructure.

Alignment with the Broadband Cost Reduction Directive is ongoing, but implementation is uneven and sometimes the lack of coordination between the national level and local municipalities hampers the speed of broadband infrastructure rollout.

5.3. Broadband Competence Offices (BCO)

Deploying new infrastructures can be complex, including complying with applicable laws, acquiring building permits and obtaining the right financing. Broadband Competence Offices (BCO)²⁴ have therefore been set up across the Union (one or several per Member State).

The BCO Network is a key part of the Rural Broadband Action Plan²⁵; and is one of the measures set out in the Commission Communication "Connectivity for a Competitive Digital Single Market Strategy".²⁶ Their role is to advise local and regional authorities on ways to invest effectively in broadband, and help citizens and businesses get better

²² https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/instruments/national-ipa-coordinators_en

²³ Directive 2014/61/EU of the European Parliament and the Council on measures to reduce the cost of deploying high-speed electronic communications networks.

²⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/broadband-competence-offices>

²⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/european-commission-joins-forces-help-bringing-more-broadband-rural-areas>

²⁶ [COM \(2016\) 587](#)

access to broadband services. The BCO network allows the Union member states to share experiences and best practices of broadband rollout. As part of a network, broadband competences offices provide guidance to broadband project promoters, public or private, users or investors. Their objective is to gather all information related to broadband, such as funding, technology or regulatory issues, in one single point of contact within the Union countries.

Today there are no BCOs in the Western Balkans, but their establishment could address the key challenges in the region, including achieving better broadband connectivity in rural areas. Once Broadband Competence Offices (BCO) are established in the Western Balkan economies, they may request access to the BCO Network.

5.4. WiFi4EU

The Commission promotes free Wi-Fi connectivity for citizens and visitors in public spaces such as parks, public buildings and libraries, everywhere in Europe through the WiFi4EU scheme²⁷. The rollout of WiFi4EU in the EU is scheduled to begin in the second half of 2018.

In order to ensure proper implementation and testing at EU level and to allow sufficient time to adjust the model to the specific needs of the region, enlarging the WiFi4EU initiative to the Western Balkans should be further analysed after a successful implementation of this project in the Union. Furthermore, participating municipalities which would be interested in participating in such a project would need already to have appropriate infrastructure with high-speed internet in place to provide the necessary services.

6. DEVELOPING THE DIGITAL ECONOMY & SOCIETY: eGOVERNMENT, ePROCUREMENT, eHEALTH, DIGITAL SKILLS AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP

6.1. eGovernment

eGovernment can help meet the challenge of developing a public administration, which provides public services for citizens and seamless cross-border public services for businesses. The digital transformation can increase the accessibility, transparency, responsiveness, reliability, and integrity of public governance. Efforts in this area focus on deployment of eGovernment services, infrastructure, standards and interoperability.

All the Union Member States and European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries signed the 'eGovernment Declaration'²⁸ in Tallinn on 6 October 2017. The Declaration marked a political commitment at the highest level towards ensuring high quality, user-

²⁷ [Regulation 2017/1953/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Regulations 2013/1316/EU and 2014/283/EU as regards the promotion of internet connectivity in local communities

²⁸ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/ministerial-declaration-egovernment-tallinn-declaration>

centric digital public services for citizens and seamless cross-border public services for businesses.

The Commission eGovernment benchmark report²⁹ assesses eGovernment services across Europe. In order to better understand the progress beyond the EU, the 2018 edition covers Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia, while in 2019, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Albania will also be included in the report.

The ISA² programme³⁰ supports the development of digital solutions that enable public administrations, businesses and citizens in Europe to benefit from interoperable cross-border and cross-sector public services. The reuse of ISA² solutions and deliverables is readily available to the Western Balkans, as is the drafting of a National Interoperability Framework based on the European Interoperability Framework (EIF)³¹. It should be noted that as part of the solutions available for reuse, ISA² do not only make available technical solutions but also non-technical ones. For example, the Open PM2 initiative³² is a Project Management methodology which aims at improving effectiveness in the management, communication and collaboration in projects within and across the European Institutions, Member States, public and private organisations in Europe.

Another example of a non-technical solution is the Sharing and Reuse Framework for IT Solutions³³, which aims at improving interoperability of eGovernment IT systems and services by overcoming known barriers to reusability.

The ISA² programme undertakes also a continuous monitoring on the level of implementation of the National Interoperability Frameworks (NIFs) with the European Interoperability Framework (EIF) through the National Interoperability Framework Observatory (NIFO). This monitoring can provide provides interesting findings that can be used to improve policies and programmes towards Digital Public Administration and better Public Service Delivery.

Digitalising public administrations in the Western Balkans could build on existing EU support programmes in the area of interoperability. The Commission, on behalf of the Union, signed a Memorandum of Understanding³⁴ with Montenegro defining the terms and conditions for Montenegro's participation in the ISA² Programme in order for its representatives to obtain observer status.

²⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/new-study-egovernment-services-europe-improving-cross-border-availability-services>

³⁰ <https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/>

³¹ https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/eif_en

³² https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/solutions/open-pm2_en

³³ https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/actions/promoting-sharing-and-reuse-interoperability-solutions_en

³⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/isa2/news/isa%C2%B2-has-new-member-%E2%80%93-montenegro_en

6.2. eProcurement

The public procurement process can be greatly improved using digital technology and services. This goes beyond simply moving to electronic tools; the objective is to make the processes simpler for businesses to participate in and for the public sector to manage. It also allows for the integration of data-based approaches at various stages of the procurement process. With digital tools, public spending becomes more transparent, evidence-oriented, optimised, streamlined and integrated with market conditions.

Directive (2014/24/EU)³⁵ on public procurement became applicable in April 2016. The new rules make it easier and cheaper for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to bid for public contracts, ensure the best value for money for public purchases and respects the EU's principles of transparency and competition.

eProcurement is currently implemented in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Kosovo and Albania, while the remaining countries in the region are progressively aligning with the requirements of Directive 2014/24/EU.

6.3. eHealth

eHealth refers to tools and services that use information and communication technologies that can improve prevention, diagnosis, treatment, monitoring and management of health and lifestyle. It can also improve access to quality care and efficiency in the health sector.

The EU eHealth Network³⁶ supports cooperation and the exchange of information among Member States within a voluntary network connecting national authorities responsible for eHealth. The rules of procedure³⁷ of the eHealth network allow the authorities responsible for eHealth in the Western Balkans to seek observer status, which would support the modernisation of their health services. Currently the Network is composed of members coming from 28 EU Member States and Norway (as observer).

6.4. Digital Skills

Digital skills are necessary for the development of the digital economy and society in the Western Balkans. The Union and the Western Balkans alike are suffering from a growing professional ICT skills shortage and a digital literacy deficit. This excludes many citizens from the digital society and holds back productivity growth.

The Digital Education Action Plan,³⁸ adopted in January 2018, outlines a number of measures through which the Union will help education systems in the Union to adapt to the ongoing digital transformation. It can serve as inspiration for the development of

³⁵ [Directive 2014/24/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council on public procurement and repealing Directive 2004/18/EC

³⁶ https://ec.europa.eu/health/ehealth/policy/network_en

³⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/health/sites/health/files/ehealth/docs/rules_procedures_ehealth_network_en.pdf

³⁸ [COM \(2018\) 22](#)

national digital skills strategies in the Western Balkans, including, for example, programmes for closing the gender gap or to boost employability.

6.4.1. *Digital Opportunity Traineeships*

The EU launched in December 2017 its Digital Opportunity Traineeship³⁹ giving students and recent graduates an opportunity to acquire hands-on training in digital fields such as cybersecurity, artificial intelligence, coding or digital marketing for their future careers.

The scheme will provide 6,000 cross-border traineeships over the period 2018-2020 offering a valuable hands-on digital work experience and other complementary skills for their future careers. The first traineeships will start in mid-2018. The scheme is open to students and recent graduates from all universities. Traineeship offers will be advertised on ErasmusIntern⁴⁰ and Drop'pin⁴¹. As the pilot project will be financed through Horizon 2020 and implemented through Erasmus+, participation is open to the countries in the Western Balkans that are associated with H2020.

6.4.2. *Code Week*

Coding involves the implementation of a wider skill-set of computational thinking, problem solving, critical reasoning, logic, teamwork and creativity.

EU Code Week⁴² aims to bring coding and digital literacy to everybody in a fun and engaging way. It attracts more than 1 million participants in more than 50 countries in Europe and beyond, with nearly half being girls or women. As part of its contribution to the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan, the Commission has committed to scale up the participation in EU Code Week to reach 50% of the more than 300.000 primary and secondary schools in the EU.

There are Code Week Ambassadors⁴³ from all Western Balkans countries – becoming an ambassador is open for enthusiast individuals that believe in the vision of Code Week and want to promote coding in their country. Code Week Ambassadors are the main point of contact in their country and help spread the vision of Code Week to local communities. They help by encouraging schools, organizations, developer communities, and enthusiastic individuals to start new, beginner friendly events in your country. They connect people, companies and communities; encourage the setting-up of new events in the Code Week framework; answer information requests and promote coding events and success stories in their network.

³⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/digital-opportunity-traineeships-boosting-digital-skills-job>

⁴⁰ <https://erasmusintern.org/>

⁴¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/eures/public/en/opportunities>

⁴² <http://codeweek.eu/>

⁴³ <http://codeweek.eu/beambassador/>

6.4.3. *SELFIE*

SELFIE⁴⁴ is a self-reflection tool for primary, secondary and vocational schools. SELFIE helps schools assess, through a series of questions to teachers, students and school leaders, where they stand with the use of digital technologies for teaching and learning. Schools can customise the tool by adding or selecting questions fit for their particular needs. The school gets a tailor-made report outlining strengths and areas for improvement. As provided in the Digital Education Action Plan, access to SELFIE will be offered to all countries in the Union and Western Balkans. The tool will be presented to the Western Balkan partners in the framework of the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training.

6.4.4. *HEInnovate*

HEInnovate⁴⁵ is a self-evaluation tool that aims to help Higher Education Institutions to nurture and develop entrepreneurial and innovative capacities. The support mechanism provides specific guidelines on how to further develop the Universities' entrepreneurial agenda together with a set of case studies. This includes translation of the questionnaire in the languages of the Western Balkans. The tool will be presented to the Western Balkan partners in the framework of the Western Balkans Platform on Education and Training.

6.4.5. *European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens and the support from the European Training Foundation*

The European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens ("DigComp")⁴⁶ is a tool that can be used to support development and understanding of digital skills in a comprehensive way in order to enable people to develop these competences to support their employability. DigComp and other tools can also be introduced in regional Vocational Education and Training (VET) systems. The use of these initiatives in the Western Balkans can be further explored and assessed. The European Training Foundation (ETF) has actively used and could continue using several EU tools related to skills in the Western Balkans.

6.5. **Innovation & start-up ecosystems – Start-up Europe**

Start-up Europe⁴⁷ is promoting the participation of digital start-ups and scale-ups from the Western Balkans into its existing networks, in order to help develop stronger start-up ecosystems. Start-up Europe Summit gathers the European tech community to meet key policy decision makers to discuss the challenges and successes in advancement of technology and policy in Europe.

⁴⁴ https://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/selfie_en

⁴⁵ <https://heinnovate.eu/en>

⁴⁶ <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/digcomp/digital-competence-framework>

⁴⁷ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/startup-europe-networks>

Start-ups from the Western Balkans are welcome to participate in the Start-up Europe Summit in November 2018, which can help connect and network start-up ecosystems from the region with other major European hubs.

Mapping the Western Balkans start-up ecosystem could lead to a comprehensive overview through the provision of an online mapping platform with relevant information about the stakeholders of the start-ups' ecosystems. Such a mapping initiative would lead to a better understanding of what is happening in the Western Balkans start-up ecosystems and track progress.

One example of a Start-up Europe project is MY-GATEWAY⁴⁸, which aims to strengthen the capacities of high-tech start-ups, and innovative SMEs to become better connected, gain higher market exposure, and have improved, streamlined access to funding opportunities and talents. The project includes Seavus Incubator from the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Start-up Serbia from Serbia and SPARK Business Park from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The cooperation between these two regions will not only strengthen the business connections, but will also create guidelines on how the knowledge and services from MY-GATEWAY can be adapted to the needs of the Western Balkan ecosystem.

7. DIGITAL TRUST, CYBER SECURITY AND DIGITALISATION OF INDUSTRY

Trust and security are at the core of the Digital Single Market Strategy⁴⁹ and a precondition to develop the digital economy in Europe. The February strategy noted that "The Commission will support capacity building in trust and security and the digitalisation of industry in the Western Balkans to ensure that all sectors benefit from digital innovations".

7.1. Trust

Trust is the basis for widespread use of Internet and online services. The Western Balkans authorities' ongoing alignment, where their domestic legal order permits, with the eIDAS Regulation⁵⁰, would help ensure that eIDs are interoperable and recognised across borders, reducing administrative costs and increasing productivity.

To support the Digital Single Market, the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme is developing a set of generic and reusable Digital Service Infrastructures (DSI), also known as CEF building blocks⁵¹. The CEF building blocks offer basic capabilities that can be reused in any European project, including by the Western Balkans, to facilitate the

⁴⁸ <http://mygatewayproject.eu/our-services/balkan>

⁴⁹ COM(2015)192 final

⁵⁰ [Regulation 2014/910/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council on electronic identification and trust services for electronic transactions in the internal market and repealing Directive 1999/93/EC

⁵¹ <https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/About+CEF+building+blocks>

delivery of digital public services across borders and sectors. Currently, there are five building blocks: eDelivery, eInvoicing, eID, eSignature and eTranslation.

More information about the CEF building blocks is publicly available⁵² – both software and user manuals can be downloaded. These building blocks can play a key role in the modernisation of end-to-end public services, enhancing trust and transparency by using for example the building blocks for digital identity (eID), trust services and secure document exchange (eSignature and eDelivery, eInvoicing).

7.2. Cybersecurity

Trans European Services for Telematics between Administrations (TESTA)⁵³ is a secure European network for data exchange between Union Member States, EFTA countries and Acceding Countries public authorities. The Commission operates the network to facilitate data exchange and connect public organisations in the region, cooperating with different public actors such as police forces or taxation and customs authorities. The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is already connected to the network, whereas the analysis for the feasibility to interconnect is ongoing for Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Hercegovina and Albania.

Aligning their regulatory framework to the Directive (EU), 2016/1148 concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union (NIS Directive)⁵⁴ will increase the Cybersecurity capacity in the Western Balkans. Focus should be on the development and implementation of whole-of-government national cybersecurity strategies; the operationalisation of national incidence management capabilities (CSIRTs); the identification of national critical infrastructure; and the strengthening of PPPs.

7.3. Digitalisation of Industries and Digital Innovation Hubs

There are no national digitising industry strategies yet in the Western Balkans. Such strategies can help to ensure that businesses benefit from initiatives under the Digitising European Industry (DEI) initiative⁵⁵. For example, Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs)⁵⁶ are one-stop-shops that help companies to become more competitive with regard to their business/production processes, products or services using digital technologies. They are based upon technology infrastructure (competence centres) and provide access to the latest knowledge, expertise and technology to support their customers with piloting, testing and experimenting with digital innovations. DIHs also provide business and financing support to implement these innovations, if needed across the value chain. The Western Balkans region is already included in the European Catalogue for DIHs, and

⁵² <https://ec.europa.eu/cefdigital/wiki/display/CEFDIGITAL/CEF+Digital+Home>

⁵³ <http://ec.europa.eu/idabc/en/document/2097/5644.html>

⁵⁴ [Directive 2016/1148/EU](#) of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning measures for a high common level of security of network and information systems across the Union

⁵⁵ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/pillars-digitising-european-industry-initiative>

⁵⁶ <http://s3platform.jrc.ec.europa.eu/digital-innovation-hubs>

support may be accessed in the context of their participation in Horizon 2020 for further expanding the network.

8. SUPPORT FOR THE ADOPTION, IMPLEMENTATION AND ENFORCEMENT OF THE ACQUIS IN THE AREA OF THE DIGITAL SINGLE MARKET

The EU's body of law, the *acquis*⁵⁷, has been divided into 35 chapters for the purpose of negotiation between the EU and the candidate member states. The EU Digital Single Market falls mainly under Chapter 10 of the *acquis*, Information society and media, but also under other chapters such as Chapter 7, Intellectual property rights. The EU *acquis* includes specific rules on electronic communications, on information society services, in particular electronic commerce and conditional access services, and on audio-visual media services.

In the field of electronic communications, the *acquis* aims to eliminate obstacles to the creation of the internal market in electronic communications services and networks, to promote competition and to safeguard consumer interests in the sector, including universal availability of modern services.

8.1. Alignment to the EU *acquis*

In line with the relevant provisions of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements, the Western Balkans partners are responsible for the alignment of their national law to the relevant EU *acquis*. The *acquis* is not static; the candidate countries need to ensure that they are aligned with new or revised laws. For example, there is an ongoing revision of the EU's telecoms rules, the European Electronic Communications Code⁵⁸ while the Audio-visual Media Services Directive⁵⁹ is also being revised. Partners in the Western Balkans need to pay particular attention to such new developments and to allocate adequate resources for the alignment to and implementation of the aligned legislation to the new and revised *acquis*.

The Commission assists these countries by providing feedback on draft legislation and keeping the Western Balkans partners updated on the latest changes of the Union legislation in this field. Western Balkan officials can request support with regard to the approximation, application and enforcement of EU legislation as well as facilitating the sharing of EU best practices under the Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument (TAIEX)⁶⁰ of the Commission. TAIEX activities are organised on topics such as electronic communication, radio spectrum policy, broadband infrastructure and audio-visual media services; and can take the form of workshops, export missions or study visits.

⁵⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/policy/conditions-membership/chapters-of-the-acquis_en

⁵⁸ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-18-4070_en.htm

⁵⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/audiovisual-media-services-directive-avmsd>

⁶⁰ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/tenders/taix_en

8.2. Research in information and communication technologies (ICTs)

ICT research, innovation & start-up ecosystems play a key role for the digital economy and society, creating new businesses and services. All six Western Balkan countries are associated to 'Horizon 2020' - the European research and innovation programme for the period 2014-2020. National Contact Points (NCPs)⁶¹ provide guidance, practical information and assistance on all aspects of participation to applicants in their national language.

The 'Research Infrastructures and eInfrastructures'⁶² objective under the Excellent Science pillar of Horizon 2020 supports also the Western Balkans region by integrating and opening national research facilities and developing e-infrastructures as part of the effort underpinning a Digital European Research Area which provides world-class training for a new generation of researchers and engineers and promotes interdisciplinary collaboration.

The 'Leadership in Enabling and Industrial Technologies'⁶³ objective under the Industrial Leadership pillar of Horizon 2020 supports the potential and capabilities of modern Information and Communication Technologies. It aims to develop the next generation of open platforms on top of which a multiplicity of innovative devices, systems and applications can be implemented.

GÉANT⁶⁴ is the pan-European data network for research and education communities. It interconnects National Research and Education Networks (NRENs) with secure, high-capacity networks and is Europe's leading collaboration on e-infrastructure and services for research and education, supported by both national research and education networking organisations and European funding. Currently, four out of the six Western Balkans economies are already connected to the GÉANT network and contributing to the project.

8.3. Incorporating the Western Balkans into existing regulatory bodies or expert groups

8.3.1. BEREC

The Body of European Regulators for Electronic Communications (BEREC) contributes to the development and better functioning of the internal market for electronic communications networks and services. It does so by aiming to ensure a consistent application of the EU regulatory framework and by aiming to promote an effective internal market in telecoms sector. Furthermore, BEREC assists the Commission and the national regulatory authorities (NRAs) in implementing the EU regulatory framework for

⁶¹ https://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/portal/desktop/en/support/national_contact_points.html

⁶² <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/research-infrastructures-including-e-infrastructures>

⁶³ <https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/horizon2020/en/h2020-section/leadership-enabling-and-industrial-technologies>

⁶⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/geant-project-european-success-story>

electronic communications. It provides advice on request and on its own initiative to the European institutions and complements at European level the regulatory tasks performed at national level by the NRAs.

The representatives of all six Western Balkans' National Regulatory Authorities (NRAs) attended for the first time a side event of the 35th BEREC Plenary meeting in Gdańsk on 13 June 2018.⁶⁵ A closer relationship between EU and Western Balkans NRAs will help bring regulatory practice in the region closer to the Union, which is important when dealing with issues like Termination Rates (both fixed and mobile, FTRs and MTRs) or regulatory costs and management of scarce resources (in particular for spectrum) or the capacity building within the region. While four out of six Western Balkan economies are currently observers of BEREC, the BEREC Board agreed to work more closely with all six NRAs of the region. This will still be possible under the revised BEREC Regulation.

8.3.2. *ERGA*

The European Regulators Group for Audio-visual Media Regulators (ERGA) brings together heads or high-level representatives of national independent regulatory bodies in the field of audio-visual services, to advise the Commission on the implementation of the EU's Audio-visual Media Services Directive⁶⁶ but also to facilitate cooperation and exchange of experience on the level of audio-visual media services.

Regulatory bodies from candidate countries may be invited to join ERGA as observers and their representatives may form part of working groups on particular topics. The rules of procedure of ERGA are not linked with the current (or under revision) AVMSD; and therefore candidate countries can be invited according article 2 that states "The Commission may invite as observers States that are candidates for accession to the European Union and representatives of the European Parliament."⁶⁷

8.3.3. *RSPG*

The Radio Spectrum Policy Group (RSPG) is a high-level advisory group that assists the Commission in the development of radio spectrum policy. The group is composed of high-level governmental experts of each Member State and a high-level representative of the Commission. Other representatives from both the national regulatory authorities and the ministries having responsibility for radio participate in the works of this group.

Two Western Balkans economies are currently observers in the group. The rules of procedure for RSPG allow candidate countries for accession to attend the meetings of

⁶⁵ https://berec.europa.eu/eng/news_and_publications/whats_new/4966-berec-meets-western-balkans-nras-to-discuss-the-digital-agenda

⁶⁶ Directive 2010/13/EU of the European Parliament and of the Council on the coordination of certain provisions laid down by law, regulation or administrative action in Member States concerning the provision of audio-visual media services

⁶⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/newsroom/dae/document.cfm?doc_id=4910

RSPG as observers. The ongoing revision of the EU's telecoms rules, the European Electronic Communications Code will not change RSPG's rules of procedure.