EU-WESTERN BALKANS
BOOSTING DIGITAL CONNECTIVITY

July 2018

Fast and secure digital connectivity is an essential element of the reforms required for creating a market- and investment-friendly environment in the Western Balkans. Under the initiative of the European Commission, the EU and the Western Balkans partners have started a process to boost connectivity in the region and improve access to the digital economy and society.

13 September 2017

In his 2017 State of the Union Address, President Jean-Claude Juncker re-affirmed the European future of the Western Balkans: *"If we want more stability in our neighbourhood, then we must also maintain a credible enlargement perspective for the Western Balkans".*

6 February 2018

The Commission adopted the Strategy for the Western Balkans, announcing six flagship initiatives for the region, including the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans, which will include a roadmap to lower roaming costs, supporting the deployment of broadband and of eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth and digital skills.

17 May 2018

The Declaration of the Western Balkans Summit in Sofia announced follow-up actions in the area of connectivity, including €30 million in technical assistance for digital projects in the region.

17 May 2018

Western Balkans partners pledge their joint commitment to the Digital Agenda as a key step on their European path, including support for lowering roaming charges within the region and with the EU.

25 June 2018

Western Balkan partners launch the Digital Agenda at the Digital Assembly in Sofia.

4 April 2019

Western Balkan Ministers sign a new Regional Roaming Agreement in Belgrade.

1 July 2019

People in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia will pay less while using their mobile plan, making and receiving calls, sending texts and using data when they are roaming within the region.

1 July 2021

"Roam like at Home" will be introduced – no roaming charges at all within the region.

CONNECTIVITY AGENDA

In 2015 the European Union launched the Connectivity Agenda to continue reinforcing the economic development of the Western Balkans by improving key transport and energy connections.

€1BILLION
from EU pre-accession funds (until 2020)

That will leverage additional:

€4 billion
in investments

And create:

45,000 jobs
in the region

2018 CONNECTIVITY PACKAGE

€220 MILLION
TOTAL EU GRANTS

€190 million
in EU grants for connectivity projects

€30 million
in Technical Assistance for preparing digital projects

DIGITAL PROJECTS IN THE 2018 CONNECTIVITY PACKAGE

Good connection to high-speed networks is crucial for the digital transition of the Western Balkans' economies.
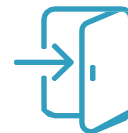
The main aim of the digital projects in the Connectivity Agenda is to increase high-speed broadband coverage in Western Balkans, including:

Overcoming the rural-urban divide by preparing targeted investments

Connecting schools, public authorities and health institutions

Providing better access to eCommerce, eGovernment, eHealth applications.

DIGITAL TRANSITION IN THE EU AND THE WESTERN BALKANS

In the EU

The EU set out ambitious objectives and matches them with the necessary investments in order to achieve a Gigabit society by 2025:

- all schools, transport hubs and main providers of public services as well as digitally intensive enterprises should have access to high-speed internet connections of 1000 Mbps (i.e. 1 Gigabit connection).
- all European households, rural or urban, should have access to networks offering a download speed of at least 100 Mbps, which can be upgraded to Gigabit connection.

98%
of Europeans currently have access to fixed broadband.

75%
of EU homes had in 2016 access to connections with at least 30 Mbps actual download speed with a narrow urban-rural divide.

In the Western Balkans

Large-scale investments are needed to catch-up with the EU and to enable a digital transition towards the EU's 2025 targets.

First steps:

> Identify infrastructure projects that are needed, providing a single detailed **overview of digital connectivity in all six economies in the Western Balkans** by 2018/2019.

> The current digital infrastructure in the Western Balkans could be replaced with a **state-of-the-art, fibre-based broadband** network, providing higher speed and lower latency than traditional copper networks.

STRONG COMMITMENT FROM THE WESTERN BALKANS

The Western Balkans partners have pledged their commitment to the Digital Agenda:

lowering the cost of roaming charges in the region, and supporting the roadmap to facilitate lower roaming costs also between the Western Balkans and the EU;

improving the investment climate for digital projects in the region; and facilitating stable, predictable and competitive markets in the telecommunications sector;

faster deployment of broadband;

development of eGovernment, eProcurement, eHealth;

investing in digital skills;

investing in digital trust and security.