

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

Executive Summary

- The Berlin Process faces three significant challenges. First, it lacks an integrative mechanism that would ensure collaboration of involved groups of stakeholders. Second, it doesn't have external monitoring mechanisms for each of its four goals to assess the cumulative effect on annual bases. Third, it lacks direct citizens' involvement and instead replicates a pattern of their exclusion from the policy agenda typical for the WB countries that continue to face declining democracy, authoritarianism, and multi-dimensional instability.
- A solution to these shortcomings requires some form of institutionalisation and organisational framing to strengthen delivery of activities between two summits. The involvement of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) should continue.
- Monitoring and annual reporting could be delegated to civil society and extended to collaboration with RYCO, the Western Balkans Fund and the Joint Science Conference. Stronger collaboration between initiatives established under the Berlin Process is vital for its impact.
- Maintaining support for the solution of bilateral issues is crucial for the EU accession agenda. Participating member states and the EU institutions can engage in mediation and conflict resolution via diplomatic and soft measures.
- Concrete investments in social, economic, and human capital, and the connectivity agenda need to be clearly linked to the EU accession.
- Opening the process to the citizens for regular consultation and sharing information about the developments and achievements of the Berlin Process is a necessary next step.
- It should be used to promote the image of the Western Balkans countries and their citizens in the participating EU member states and the UK to debunk negative myths about the region.

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The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

Introduction

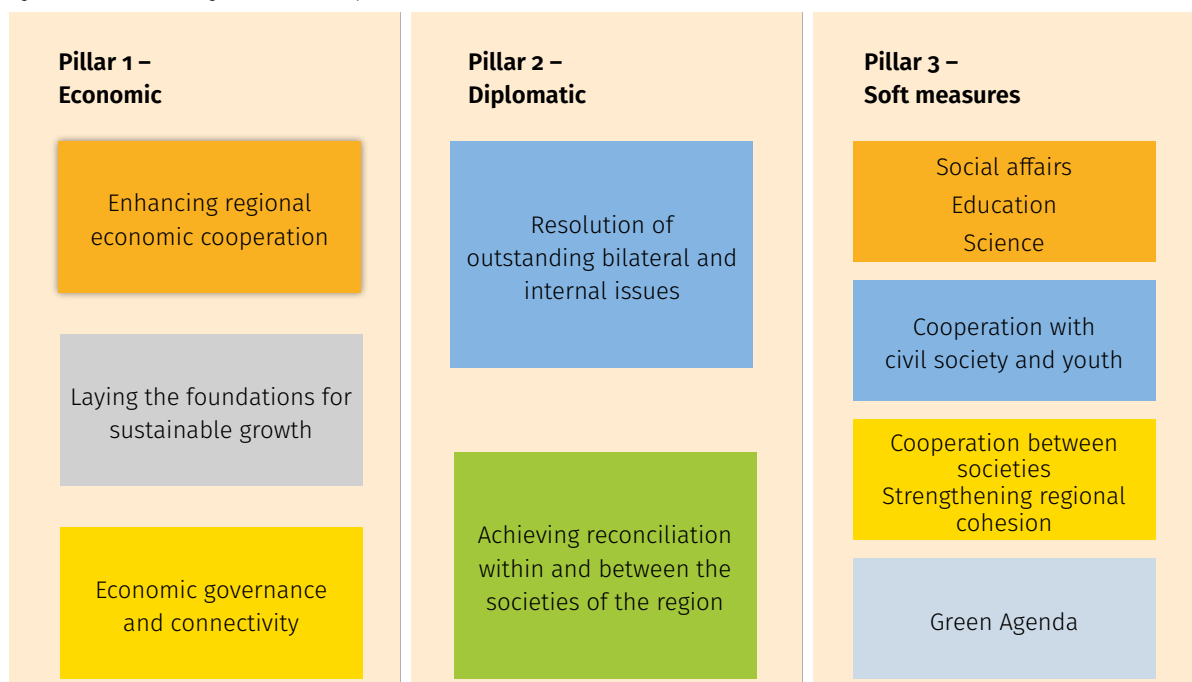
The eighth Berlin Process (BP) Summit 2022, held on 3rd November, demonstrated that it can deliver regional initiatives that benefit all Western Balkan¹ countries. The following three agreements were signed by the Western Balkan leaders: on the Freedom of Movement with Identity Cards, on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, and on the Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists and Architects.² They are components of the Common Regional Market (CRM) Action Plan 2021–2024³ that was already endorsed by the leaders of the six Western Balkan countries at the Berlin Process Summit in Sofia 2020 coordinated by the Regional Cooperation Council.

Freedom of movement for all citizens of the Western Balkans has a strong potential to bring stability to the region by defusing recent tensions, improving connectivity, and strengthening the regional economic outlook. In practice, agreements can be implemented as soon as they have been ratified in national parliaments

or via other appropriate internal procedures. The most important contribution here is bringing an end to the last remaining visa regime between the two Western Balkan countries, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo, and allowing their citizens to move freely for work and personal reasons. The Berlin Process has a track record of ensuring there is a political will to ratify and implement the signed agreements.⁴

The Berlin (Process) Agenda is set on a three-pillar hierarchical structure (different levels of seniority of state and institutional representatives) with three dimensions: economic, diplomatic, and soft (see Figure 1).⁵ This allows the Berlin Process to engage not only with issues linked directly to conditionalities of the EU integration but with the obstacles that must be removed for the countries to progress, such as bilateral disputes, economic governance, connectivity and social affairs. Among its notable contributions is the cooperation with and empowerment of civil society and youth, and engagement with issues of Roma, migration, security, and the Green Agenda.

Figure 1 Berlin Process integrated intervention framework



1 Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia.
 2 Western Balkans Summit Berlin (2022), Chair’s Conclusions, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/975244/2139666/a935447fcf9a80a8988374b9c69a61cb/221103-chairs-conclusion-final-data.pdf?download=1> (accessed 16.12.2022).
 3 Regional Cooperation Council (November 2020), Common Regional Market Action Plan, <https://www.rcc.int/docs/543/common-regional-market-action-plan> (accessed 16.12.2022).
 4 Djolai, M., Nechev, Z. (2018), *Bilateral Disputes Conundrum: Accepting the Past and Finding Solutions for the Western Balkans*, BiEPAG Policy Brief, <http://www.balkanfund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Bilateral-Disputes-Conundrum-Accepting-the-Past-and-Finding-Solutions-for-the-Western-Balkans.pdf> (accessed 16.12.2022).
 5 European Parliament Members’ Research Service (July 2016), *The Western Balkans’ Berlin process: A new impulse for regional cooperation*, European Parliament Briefing, [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586602/EPRS_BRI\(2016\)586602_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/BRIE/2016/586602/EPRS_BRI(2016)586602_EN.pdf) (accessed 16.12.2022).

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

The process has four main goals:⁶

1. Resolution of outstanding bilateral and internal issues,
2. Achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region,
3. Enhancing regional economic cooperation,
4. Laying the foundations for sustainable growth.

Now that the Berlin Process has been revived by the new German government after a period of uncertainty about its future, after eight years of implementation it is no longer a temporary measure to substitute stalled EU accession and the question is how to take it forward. Its success has been mixed and difficult to evaluate due to the lack of external monitoring, which led to criticism about the absence of transparency and questions about the extent of contribution to the EU accession. 2023 will mark the end of the second five-year cycle with the Summit hosted by Tirana. Five years ago, I already argued that the Berlin Process continuation is crucial post-2018 because it strengthens regional cooperation, which is seen as the main precursor of both reconciliation and the EU aspirations of individual WB countries.⁷ Now, there is an opportunity to strengthen the Berlin Process, its implementation, monitoring and delivery, and to set a more progressive post-2023 agenda. The Berlin Process is, and should be, as much about the EU accession as it is about building the capacity of the countries during the transition and preparing them for a scenario in which enlargement does not take place for a foreseeable future.

This paper analyses the achievements and shortcomings of the Berlin Process and is divided into three sections. First, it reviews the main mechanisms, stakeholders and aims of the process since its establishment. Second, it provides a list of the most important outputs, achievements and commitments that directly benefit the citizens in the region and progress of the reforms. The third section specifically focuses on civil society as one of the key stakeholders in the process and how its role can be amplified. The paper concludes

with a concise set of suggestions for the next five-year cycle.

Legacy, Stakeholders, Architecture

The Berlin Process was established in 2014 by then German Chancellor Angela Merkel to show commitment to the enlargement of the European Union and to support internal reforms in the Western Balkan countries. It came after Jean-Claude Juncker, then incoming President of the European Commission, issued a statement about freezing the EU expansion over the next five years.⁸ Back in 2014, Albania, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Montenegro had a candidate status, but only the latter two had started negotiations. It was launched amidst Russia's annexation of Crimea and the Ukrainian grain export crisis, similar to what the world is facing today. Merkel visited Kyiv in a solidarity gesture⁹ only days before launching the Berlin Process, clearly concerned about the wider geo-political impact of the crisis on the EU and its neighbourhood.

Launched as a Conference of Western Balkan States, the initiative mobilised a large number of actors and stakeholders across the region and the EU member states in the following eight years. The aims of the conference were clear: *"Making additional real progress in the reform process, in resolving outstanding bilateral and internal issues, and in achieving reconciliation within and between the societies in the region"*.¹⁰

The participants reaffirmed their commitment to enhancing regional economic cooperation and laying the foundations for sustainable growth. The EU institutions equally recognised the importance of the Berlin Process and were on board from the start, including the European Commission and the European External Action Service, and many other stakeholders.¹¹ International financial institutions, such as the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the World Bank (WB), and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) also came on board. The Western Balkans Investment Framework

6 The Goals of the Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/the-goals> (accessed 16.12.2022).

7 Djolai, M. (December 2017), *Intricate Future of the Berlin Process*, <https://wb-csf.eu/csf-eu-integration-and-regional-cooperation/opinions/intricate-future-of-the-berlin-process> (accessed 16.12.2022).

8 EUbusiness (15.07.2014), Juncker to halt enlargement as EU Commission head, <https://www.eubusiness.com/news-eu/politics-juncker.x29> (accessed 16.12.2022).

9 Goncharenko, R. (23.08.2014), Merkel visits Kyiv, Deutsche Welle, <https://www.dw.com/en/merkels-visit-hope-and-skepticism-in-kyiv/a-17872992> (accessed 16.12.2022).

10 Press and Information Office of the Federal Government (BPA) (August 2014), Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans, <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-en/news/final-declaration-by-the-chair-of-the-conference-on-the-western-balkans-754634> (accessed 16.12.2022).

11 Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), the South-East European Transport Observatory (SEETO), the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP), the Migration, Asylum Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), the EU-WB Ministerial Forum.

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

(WBIF) donor coordination platform was established to provide financing to different portfolios of the BP with some notable multi-sectoral achievements.¹²

At the 2014 conference, the four EU member states Austria, France, Italy, and the United Kingdom¹³ agreed to host the annual summits for the period of four years until 2018, to cover the five-year enlargement moratorium and to play an active role in delivering the four goals of the Berlin Process. Slovenia and Croatia as neighbouring and countries associated with the former Yugoslavia with strategic interests in the region were also participating from the start. Greece and Bulgaria, who both had unresolved bilateral issues with North Macedonia, and Poland joined in 2018, ensuring the sustainability of the Berlin Process with a positive impact on both regional cooperation and the

European future. Unfortunately, Bulgaria has since blocked the EU accession path of North Macedonia.

Summary of The Berlin Process Achievements

The most visible component of the Berlin Process is the annual ministerial summit (list in the table below), a one-day leaders meeting that commonly aims to deliver agreements on a variety of agendas and priorities for the WB countries. Agreements have initiated meetings of the relevant institutions and organisations in WB6 between the two summits, producing concrete outputs.¹⁴ At each summit the results from the previous 12-month period are adopted. Perhaps most importantly, the Berlin Process integrated the WB6 institutions in the relevant EU thematic initiatives, networks, frameworks, and financing streams.

Table 1. List of the Eight Western Balkans Summits

Summit	Signed Declarations/ Conclusions	Thematic Focus	Key Commitments/Results
2014 Berlin Conference of Western Balkan States	Final Declaration by the Chair of the Conference on the Western Balkans	Regional cooperation, transport, support to judiciary and anti-corruption, education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hosting 4 annual summits until 2018
2015 Vienna Summit	Final Declaration by the Chair of the Vienna Western Balkans Summit	Bilateral Issues, migration, connectivity, youth, education and science	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU integration of the WB6 • Good governance • Declaration on Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes • Signed border agreement between BiH and Montenegro and Kosovo and Montenegro. • Regional cooperation within Energy Community for SEE • Building a transport community • Support vocational education through the German business community
2016 Paris Summit	Final Declaration by the Chair of the Paris Western Balkans Summit	Energy, sustainable charter, transport, green agenda, youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EU integration and regional cooperation • Agreement for establishing a Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO) • Connectivity and trade: 3 railway projects (€100 m), energy efficiency (€50 m), sustainable development; Joint Action Plan for Western Balkan Trade and Transport Facilitation • Regional Strategy for Sustainable Hydropower in the Western Balkans • Support to vocational education • In-kind assistance and financial support to tackling migration, fight against terrorism and radicalization

12 Western Balkans Investment Framework and the Berlin Process, <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/western-balkans-investment-framework-and-the-berlin-process> (accessed 16.12.2022).

13 The United Kingdom left the EU on 31 December 2020 but continues to be part of the Berlin Process.

14 Marjanović Rudan, A. (September 2018), The Berlin Process in a Nutshell, Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH, https://www.giz.de/en/downloads_els/The_Berlin_Process.pdf (accessed 16.12.2022).

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

Summit	Signed Declarations/ Conclusions	Thematic Focus	Key Commitments/Results
2017 Trieste Summit	Final Declaration by the Chair of the Trieste Western Balkans Summit	Connectivity (multi-layered), fight against terrorism, irregular migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7 additional connectivity projects (€500 m) • Transport Community Treaty signed • Adoption of a multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area • WB to hold IT Summit with the EC and RCC – accepting EU Digital Single Market elements • Human connectivity: support to RYCO and the Young Civil Servants pilot scheme, and to the Joint Science Conference • Resolving bilateral disputes • Accepting civil society recommendations and the RECOM initiative¹⁵ • In-kind assistance and financial support to fight against terrorism and radicalization • Preventing irregular migration
2018 London Summit	Final Declaration by the Chair of the London Western Balkans Summit ¹⁶	Cooperation and good neighbourly relations, Qualifications for selected professions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support to digital summits and development of national digital strategies • Agreement to open negotiations on a Mutual Recognition Agreement on Professional Qualifications for selected professions • Joint Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations • Joint Declaration on Missing Persons • Joint Declaration on War Crimes
2019 Poznan Summit	Final Declaration by the Chair of the Poznan Western Balkans Summit	Business, economy, social entrepreneurship, connectivity, Roma, green agenda, transport and connectivity, science, youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Economic Area • Declaration on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications • Adoption and implementation of the Individual Reform Action Plans (investment) • Social Entrepreneurship • Clean Energy Transition, Declaration and preparation of the “Green Agenda” • Declaration on Roma Integration • Connectivity Reform Measures • Recognition of the contribution of the Civil Society & Think Tank Forum • Need to include national parliaments and establish parliamentary dialogue¹⁷
2020 Sofia/ Skopje Summit	Chair’s conclusions of the Sofia Western Balkans Summit	Joint Chairmanship, green agenda, common regional market (CRM), Roma Integration, Youth and Youth related policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiative for signing the Regional Agreement for Free Movement • Extension of WB6 Green Corridors/ Lanes Initiative • Digital transformation and establishing a roaming-free region by 1 July 2021 • Multi-action Plan for a Regional Economic Area • Declaration on Common Regional Market + Action Plan 2021–2024 • Declaration on the Green Agenda
2021 Berlin Summit	Chair’s conclusions of the Berlin Western Balkans Summit	CRM, Green Agenda, CEFTA, Digital Transformation, Roma, Youth, Civil society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No agreements were signed but continuous support to CRM and other initiatives pledged. • Germany announced the appointment of a Special Commissioner to oversee the implementation of the Green Agenda in the industrial and energy sectors.
2022 Berlin Summit	Chair’s conclusions of the Berlin Western Balkans Summit	CRM, energy security, Roma, migration, security, youth, climate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Signing of the Agreement on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications in the Western Balkans and the Agreement on Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists and Architects based on EU rules • Signing of the Agreement on Freedom of Movement with ID Cards in the Western Balkans

15 RECOM Reconciliation Network <https://www.recom.link>.

16 The document contains a comprehensive list of the achievements between two summits, the highest annual activity of the entire Berlin Process so far.

17 Regional Cooperation Council (November 2020), Strengthening the Role of Parliaments of the Western Balkans Region in The Berlin Process, <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/110/strengthening-the-role-of-parliaments-of-the-western-balkans-region-in-the-berlin-process> (accessed 17.12.2022).

Institutionalized Outputs and Outcomes

The Regional Youth Cooperation Council (RYCO)¹⁸ is among the more concrete **outputs** of the Berlin Process in the civil society sector; an intergovernmental initiative of the six participating Western Balkan countries that supports youth mobility in the region. It was established in 2016 to allow the regional youth to learn about each other and enhance their intercultural competences and skills. The 2022 Summit established the Western Balkans Youth Culture Fund that RYCO will administer.¹⁹

The Western Balkans Fund is an international organization in Tirana, Albania, founded by the governments of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Serbia. The Fund became operational on 1 October 2017 after being established with an agreement signed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in November 2015. It is an all-inclusive and regionally owned initiative supporting cooperation and the common values between citizens, civil society, and people to people contacts.

The Joint Science Conference is an initiative established and led by the German National Academy (Leopoldina), as one of the important support mechanisms for the first two goals of the Berlin Process. It is represented by national academies of sciences and arts, rectors' conferences, distinguished and junior scientists, while the national government and the EU representatives participate as observers.

The four main goals of the Berlin Process and more concrete deliverables are coordinated along the lines of the three pillars listed above. Nevertheless, there is less clarity about the achieved **outcomes**.

Goal #1, the specific bilateral disputes resolution, was very much in the focus in the first cycle because many of the neighbouring countries had unresolved territorial and border disputes, or political disputes over the questions of state and nationhood, particularly minor-

ity rights of the former Yugoslavia citizens and actions of the kin state to protect them.²⁰ Using the positive momentum of the freshly launched Berlin Process, the Vienna Summit 2015 was a milestone, as the border agreements between Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina as well as between Kosovo and Montenegro were signed.²¹ At the Vienna Summit in 2015 the Western Balkans countries signed the *Declaration on Regional Cooperation and the Solution of Bilateral Disputes*, prepared by BiEPAG,²² that became central to all subsequent declarations. Other bilateral disputes between Macedonia and Greece as well as Greece and Albania were resolved in the following years bilaterally, outside of the Berlin Process framework. Some of the most challenging ones such as between Kosovo and Serbia and a newly open issue between Bulgaria and North Macedonia continue to seriously obstruct the EU accession process²³ and good neighbourly relations and thus damage the reputation of the involved EU countries. This is where the Berlin Process diplomatic pillar has not been successful.

Goal #2, achieving reconciliation, is still far from being reached. However, the Berlin Process has a symbolic meaning of bringing together the leaders of the six WB countries, de facto facilitating reconciliation in a broader sense and bringing resolution to some of the long-term issues. For example, after more than six decades it facilitated a first visit of the Albanian Prime Minister to Belgrade in 2014²⁴ where Edi Rama and Aleksandar Vučić held high level officials talks. The last meeting had been held between Enver Hoxha and Josip Broz Tito in 1947. It also delivered a more formalised commitment to supporting reconciliation and transitional justice.²⁵

Goals #3 and #4: Since 2020, the focus of the Berlin Process has shifted more towards its last two goals, enhancing economic cooperation and supporting sustainable growth in the region. Results, to mention just a few, include 37 transport and eight energy projects, and two sustainability programmes²⁶ as part of the Connectivity Agenda. Other defining initiatives are

18 Regional Youth Cooperation Council, <https://www.rycowb.org>.

19 The Western Balkans Youth Forum has officially started! (RYCO, 2022) <https://www.rycowb.org/?p=13992> (accessed 20.12.2022)

20 Dimitrov N., Djolai, M., Wunsch, N. (2016) *Policy brief: Removing obstacles to EU accession: Bilateral disputes in the Western Balkans*, BiEPAG, <https://www.balkanfund.org/publib/biepag/BiEPAG-Policy-brief-web.pdf> (accessed 16.12.2022).

21 Djolai, M. (April 2016), *The Toolbox: Settling Bilateral Disputes in the Western Balkans*, BiEPAG.

22 Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group, <https://biepag.eu>.

23 E.g. France, one of the original five EU member states in the Berlin Process, demanded a new methodology, and de facto blocked Albania and North Macedonia from opening negotiations.

24 Deutsche Welle (11.10.2014), Albanian PM in historic visit to Belgrade, <https://www.dw.com/en/albanias-premier-makes-historic-visit-to-belgrade/a-18051456> (accessed 16.12.2022).

25 Joint Declaration on Regional Cooperation and Good Neighbourly Relations, Joint Declaration on Missing Persons, and Joint Declaration on War Crimes (London Summit 2018) and Declarations on regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations, on missing persons, and war crimes (Poznan Summit 2019).

26 Full list of the Berlin Process results: <https://www.berlinprocess.de/en/results-of-the-berlin-process> (accessed 16.12.2022)

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

certainly the Common Regional Market and the Green Agenda, both signed at the Sofia Summit (2020), which serve as a stimulus for economic cooperation and sustainable future²⁷ and shape the current activities. Among the key outcomes are removing political and technical obstacles to connecting the region, opening up a market of more than 18 million people with a potential for GDP growth.

Finally, although not explicitly listed as a goal, supporting the EU accession process is central to the Berlin Process where it, unfortunately, remains less successful in ensuring that the WB6 countries move through necessary reforms that strengthen them and bring them closer to European values. More concretely, good neighbourly relations are still a challenge particularly for Kosovo, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Montenegro; democracy is still precarious in all the region combined with widespread economic stagnation; media freedom remains problematic and emigration causing brain drain is on the increase. The problem is that the Berlin Process engages with the WB6 governments, many of whom are culprits of the precarious conditions (declining democracy, authoritarianism) and multi-dimensional instability, and that the process has delegated ownership of all regional initiatives to them without ensuring proper monitoring and clear benchmarks. Furthermore, insufficient public information on the progress of the commitments and their impact in each WB6 country²⁸ prevent informed feedback from citizens and the possibility for public accountability.

The Role of Civil Society in the Berlin Process

Since becoming part of the Berlin Process in 2015,²⁹ civil society has made a significant contribution to the annual summits. A Civil Society and Think Tank Forum, alongside the Western Balkans Youth Forum is organised in the margins of the annual Berlin Process Summit (see Table 2). It delivered an important portfolio of

policy briefs, based on a wider consultation process among civil society actors on the issues that are central to the Berlin Process such as:³⁰

- EU Integration and Regional Cooperation
- Rule of Law and Democratisation
- Security and Migrations
- Socio-economic Development
- Connectivity
- Digital Agenda
- Reconciliation and Good Neighbourly relations

The Western Balkans Civil Society Forums have developed a significant dynamic of regular regional meetings between two annual events, which should be maintained and further developed. However, the fact that the youth and civil society gatherings are separate makes little sense given that many of the participants of both forums are civil society actors.³¹ The two initiatives could be better integrated, with joint meetings.

Over the years, civil society has become more meaningful and formally recognised in the summit declarations. The think-tank community was more formally integrated as well. By engaging civil society, the Berlin Process is steering the WB towards the alignment with Article 11 of the treaty on the European Union, which underlines the need of an open, transparent, and regular dialogue with civil society organisations, for example when preparing proposals for the EU laws and policies. In the WB countries civil society often lacks the possibility for a meaningful contribution to the EU policies even though they continue to address some of the most worrying trends in the region. The practice of preparing policy briefs (and making them available in WB local languages) for the annual summits should be continued, while the key messages that are shared with the ministers and the EU representatives could be shared with a wider group of stakeholders.

27 Balkans Policy Research Group (October 2022), The Relaunch of the Berlin Process for the Western Balkans: Making its Objectives more Ambitious, <https://balkansgroup.org/en/the-relaunch-of-the-berlin-process-for-the-western-balkans-making-its-agenda-more-ambitious/> (accessed 16.12.2022).

28 Hackaj, A, Hackaj, K. (November 2021), *Albania in the Berlin Process: Monitoring the Connectivity Agenda in Transport and Energy*, <https://cdinstitute.eu/2021/12/22/albania-in-the-berlin-process-monitoring-the-connectivity-agenda-in-transport-and-energy/> (accessed 16.12.2022).

29 Led by the European Fund for the Balkans from 2015 until 2020. In 2021 and 2022, the Civil Society & Think Tank Forum was organized by the Southeast Europe Association and the Aspen Institute Germany.

30 Civil Society Forum of the Western Balkans and list of publications: <https://wb-csf.eu/about>.

31 European Commission, Civil Society, European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations, https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/enlargement-policy/policy-highlights/civil-society_en (accessed 16.12.2022).

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

Table 2. List of Civil Society Forum Meetings in the Berlin Process Framework (2015–2022)³²

Summit	Events	Key Topics / Results
2015	Civil Society Forum at Vienna Summit (27 August 2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations on enhancing regional cooperation, media freedom, job creation and solution of bilateral issues presented.
2016	Civil Society Forum Belgrade (11 May 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations for the Paris Summit on youth cooperation, migration crisis, environment, and bilateral disputes resolution.
	Civil Society Forum Skopje (24–26 November 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Discussion topic: State of democracy and the rule of law in the region.
	Civil Society Forum Paris Summit (4 July 2016)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations on climate change and green growth, youth cooperation, bilateral disputes, migration, and democratic governance presented.
2017	Civil Society Forum Tirana (26–28 April 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations for the Trieste Summit on youth cooperation, rule of law and anticorruption measures, business environment, bilateral issues resolution.
	Civil Society Forum Trieste Summit (12 July 2017)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations on regional cooperation and bilateral relations, rule of law, anticorruption, youth cooperation, business climate, environment. Call for transparency and efficient communications of the Berlin Process.
2018	Participation in the Working Groups Meeting in Vienna (26–27 April 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduction of the CSF policy. Briefs (collaboration with GIZ) based on the working group recommendations in accordance with the topics of the London Summit.
	Civil Society Forum at London Summit (10 July 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommendations for the continuation of the Berlin Process to the CSF and the Meeting of the Berlin Process Foreign Ministers. Increased focus on the rule of law, migrations and green topics, structured monitoring of implementation of commitments and increased regional ownership.
	Civil Society Forum in Skopje (7–9 October 2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raising the question of more involvement of local actors and a more proactive agenda-setting by CSOs during the preparations of the Western Balkans Summit. Participation by North Macedonia's Prime Minister and Foreign Minister and creation of an open platform.
2019	Round table "Looking forward to Poznan Summit" (24 January 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review of the achieved results. Participation of a representative from Polish MFA.
	Regional meeting of the representatives of the WB6 MFA and WB CSF (10 May 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improving civil society participation in decision-making process in the Western Balkans, exchange of ideas on how to better address regionally relevant challenges by achieving greater synergy of civil society and public institutions. Plans for CSF participation at Poznan Summit.
	Civil Society Forum of the WB at Poznan Summit (5 July 2019)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Think Tank Forum added. CSF Policy Briefs on Economic issues in the WB region; Legacy issues and rule of law; Civil society and youth participation in decision making process; How to improve cultural cooperation in the SEE region. Local communities in the process of EU Integration. Proposals for accelerating and reenergising the enlargement process. Participation of senior ministers from the Summit and the Polish government.
2020	Western Balkans Think Tank Forum in Skopje under the title "Stimulating strategic autonomy" (8–10 March 2020 Tirana)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participation of think tankers, civil society representatives and academia, foreign ministers from the region together with other state representatives from the EU countries involved in the Berlin Process. Critical dialogue on the main challenges about the Western Balkans.
	Think Tank and Civil Society Forum at Sofia/Skopje Summit (November 9–10 2020)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus on the EU's response to the Chinese activities in the Western Balkans, exploring how geopolitics in the region affect citizens' lives by providing concrete examples by prominent civil society representatives.

32 The list is compiled from the author's experience and online sources.

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

Summit	Events	Key Topics / Results
2021	Digital Conference. Civil Society & Think Tank Forum I – Road to Berlin (1–2 June 2021 online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experts, think tankers, and civil society representatives from the Western Balkans jointly prepared policy recommendations in thematic working groups.
	Civil Society & Think Tank Forum at Berlin Summit (5 July 2021 online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy recommendations (list and policy briefs) on the Future of the EU in the Western Balkans, the Role of Civil Society in Strengthening Democracy, Countering Disinformation and Strengthening Media Independence, Addressing Legacies of the Past and Regional Confidence Building, Acceptance and Rights of Minorities in the Western Balkans, Green Agenda: Energy Transition, Air Pollution, Biodiversity and Nature Conservation, Enhancing Integrity Compliance in Infrastructure Projects, Digitalization in Public Services: Enhancing Transparency, Securing Data Protection.
2022	Digital Preparatory Workshops. Civil Society & Think Tank Forum (19–20 October 2022 online)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Experts, think tankers, and civil society representatives from the Western Balkan countries and the EU discussed and elaborated policy recommendations in thematic working groups, to be presented at the main forum.
	Civil Society & Think Tank Forum at Berlin Summit (3 November 2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy recommendations (list) on: Green Agenda: Energy Transition, Climate Change, and Protection of the Environment and Environmentally Sustainable Development; EU Integration in a Changing Geopolitical Environment; Information Disorder; Infrastructure Investments.

Suggestions going forward

- The Berlin Process is an instrument complementary to the EU accession with advantages of a flexible approach, driven by the needs of the Western Balkans region without being tied by bureaucratic conditionalities. While the structure would benefit from some form of institutionalisation and organisational framing to strengthen the delivery, monitoring of the achievements, and interconnecting the three pillars, the methodology should remain flexible to allow addressing relevant topics, setting annual priorities, financing of joint initiatives and investments and relevant connectivity.
- While being all-encompassing and inviting to different stakeholders in the region, the Berlin Process lacks a successful integrative approach that would urge different stakeholders (youth, civil society, businesses, and ministers) to plan and work together. To overcome this shortcoming, a two-tier approach could be set: (1) focus on cooperation between different stakeholders to deliver commitments and implement initiatives between the two summits and (2) joint goal-setting meetings leading to the Summits and meetings between stakeholders at the Summits (e.g. London and Poznan Summits experience).³³
- To deliver anti-corruption measures and the Green Agenda, and to strengthen regional security, it is a necessity to bring the four actors (ministers + EU institutions, civil society, business, youth) to the same table during the summits for constructive engagement because this rarely happens on the national levels.
- Furthermore, the Berlin Process framework should facilitate the continuous engagement of civil society for the entire annual cycle between two summits which is also essential for expert contribution, checks and balances on the WB governments' signed commitments and transparency towards the citizens.
- Opening the process to the citizens for regular consultation and sharing information about the developments and achievements of the Berlin Process is a necessary next step. For example, following a model of European Citizens' Panels (EPCs) that were a follow-up of the Conference on the Future of Europe.
- Religious institutions and actors are notably absent from the Berlin Process. However, religion plays a very significant role in all the Western Balkan countries and they should be invited to engage with CSF and youth forums.

33 For example, civil society has held direct meetings with WB6 prime ministers and foreign ministers in Trieste, London, and Poznan.

The Berlin Process Multiverse – Ideas for a More Successful Delivery

- The key stakeholders (16 countries) should consider appointing a dedicated coordination body to support the monitoring of agreed actions and to regularly engage with WB stakeholders including the governments, civil society, initiatives established under the Berlin Process (RYCO, WBF) to ensure delivery of the summit commitments.
- In the coming years its strategic focus could extend to improving the image of the Western Balkans in the EU member states that participate in the Berlin Process and in coordinating their policies towards the region. This could be a direct contribution to the EU accession process alongside engagement with individual member states that have blocked WB countries from progressing.
- As a peace and conflict scholar, I place a lot of emphasis on seeking reconciliation that in the region remains confined within the civil society sphere. The establishment of the facts about victims of the wars (RECOM initiative) and prosecution of war crimes, alongside other mechanisms of transitional justice should be returned to the Summit chair's conclusions to address historical and more recent grievances.
- Finally, the Berlin Process regional approach model and lessons learned could be utilised to deal with the legacies of the Ukraine war and the EU accession process of the two new candidate countries, Ukraine and Moldova as well as the aspirant Georgia as this is going to be essential for Europe's future.