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Parliamentary Dimension
Bulgarian Presidency of the Council
of the European Union

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Background information

Workshop: Strategic Energy and Transport Connectivity in the Western Balkans

Improving connectivity within the Western Balkans, as well as between the Western Balkans and the European Union, is a key factor for growth and jobs and will bring clear benefits for the region's economies and citizens. However, it is not only infrastructure that will enhance connectivity. Similarly important is the implementation of technical standards and soft measures such as aligning and simplifying border crossing procedures, railway reforms, information systems, road safety and maintenance schemes, railway unbundling and third party access.

Multidimensional connectivity in infrastructure, transport, digital, energy, social sectors is a key factor for promoting investments and fostering young generation to drive positive economic change in the Western Balkans.

Extending the TEN-T core network corridors to the Western Balkans ensures closer relations with the EU as well as the basis for leveraging investment in infrastructure, such as EU support through the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) and the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF).

At the Trieste Summit (July 2016) within the Berlin process, the Transport Community Treaty was signed to pave the way for infrastructure improvements as well as better quality transport services throughout the SEE region, with the countries aligning their national transport laws with those of the EU. The European Commission announced a substantial connectivity package, totalling €194 million in grants, and leveraging investments of €500 million, for seven new regional projects to improve transport and energy links within the Western Balkans and with the EU. The Western Balkans leaders agreed on an action plan to develop a Regional Economic Area to consolidate a market of some 20 million people, and so attract investment and generate growth and jobs.

The EU should further strengthen its energy diplomacy in support of the EU's energy security, diversification efforts and initiatives that promote sustainable energy markets. Energy partnerships and dialogues should continue to be coherent with relevant foreign



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and external policy goals and promote diversification of sources, suppliers and routes, as well as safe and sustainable low-emission and energy efficiency technologies. Energy dialogues should, where appropriate, include discussions of global and regional energy security developments and where possible, take into account particular specificities and existing relevant engagements of EU Member States. They should also ensure that sovereignty and sovereign rights of Member States to explore and develop their natural resources are safeguarded. The EU remains committed to the promotion and continuous improvement of the highest level of standards of nuclear safety in third countries.

