

3rd Western Balkan Roadmap Coordination Meeting, 3 July 2020

Intervention by
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Good morning to you all. It is good to be back with you. I am one of the usual suspects of our regional meetings and we are in this together. It is important to be clear that we all demonstrate a very strong commitment to the efforts under the Roadmap. We managed to continue despite the difficulties on the ground, throughout the Covid period.

The Western Balkans as you said remain the top priority for the European Union and that includes some engagements on security matters. We see that criminals have large capacities to adapt and it is crucial to pursue our efforts to tackle security threats and transnational crimes.

Since our last meeting in January in Berlin, the EU has kept a ceaseless engagement with the Western Balkans. Let me recap it very briefly: in February we launched the new methodology to make the accession negotiations more effective, more credible and more dynamic.

In March the Council agreed to open accession negotiations with North Macedonia and Albania. On yesterday we presented negotiating frameworks for both countries.

In April the EU adopted the global response package on support to the Western Balkans. That was a Covid response, but also a specific envelop for the Western Balkans announcing an overall package of 3.3 billion euros.

In May the EU and the Western Balkans heads of States gathered virtually under the auspices of Croatian presidency.

In June the Council adopted the new conclusions on counter- terrorism and countering violent extremists and externally dimension thereof.

So, in each of these mayor events and initiatives the importance of strengthening cooperation on security with the Western Balkans has been reiterated. We are committed to developing a strong dimension under the upcoming Security Union Strategy and subsequent initiatives on countering arms trafficking, trafficking of human beings, drugs etc. In this context the Western Balkans Roadmap will be integrated in the upcoming EU Action Plan 2024. My colleague, Olivier Onidi from DG HOME will give you more details on that.

So, as I said we remain committed to the region, we remain committed to the security of the region which we share, and we'll keep these security matters centrally in the course of the accession process. The efforts of the WB to fight the organized crime and trafficking of illicit weapons including building a robust track record of investigations, prosecutions and convictions in this field will be carefully assessed in the enlargement package that we will publish this autumn.

Progress reached in the recent years must be sustained and made irreversible. I am glad to announce that the Committee that is in charge of managing the instrumental pre- accession assistance will soon consider our proposal of additional funding of 5 million euros to SEESAC for a new regional project which will have two specific aims: First- to strengthen the strategic and cooperation capacity of the Western Balkan authorities to conduct the firearms investigations and exchanging the information through the firearm's focal points. Second- to increase the response to factious fueling demand and misuse of firearms in the Western Balkans. The support will specifically complement the CFSP funding, mentioned by Joanneke and will represent the first direct contribution to the implementation of the Roadmap from the European Commission budget. Small projects - means also more coordination and we remain committed to provide our share integrate cooperation efforts and synergies built under the Roadmap. Thank you very much.

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