
International Conference **Civil Society & Think Tank Forum 2022 in the Framework of the Berlin Process**

**Organizers: Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft) in cooperation with Aspen Institute Germany, supported by the German Federal Foreign Office
Berlin and online, 1 / 2 November 2022**

Report: Friedrich Püttmann, Berlin

Background Information

The conference in Berlin as the second component of the Civil Society Forum (CSF) 2022 built upon the results of the digital preparatory workshop organized on October 19–20, 2022. It was designed as a public presentation of the results and key recommendations elaborated by think tanks and civil society organization at the workshop and a public discussion with decision-makers from the Western Balkans region and the EU. Furthermore, the conference aimed to provide a platform for best-practice exchange and networking among Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) from the region and the EU and to facilitate cross-regional and transnational civil society initiatives and ideas.

Opening Speech by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock

In her opening remarks, the German Foreign Minister recounted how one of her first trips in office was to the Balkans, where she spoke to many civil society representatives whom she deemed very important for bridging social and political divisions in the region. For her, civil society is also the birthplace of “fresh ideas to solve diplomatic impasses.” She declared that her personal goal was to eventually bring the Western Balkans (WB) into the European Union, claiming that this vision was especially impor-

tant in this day and age, following Putin’s attack on Ukraine. According to Baerbock, civil society, ranging from youth exchanges to climate activism to defending independent journalists, was a vital element of the region’s development. Baerbock noted that the WB had experienced the horrors of war themselves, just like Ukraine was now: “You know what it feels like.” Against this backdrop, she said, reconciliation has taken time and so has European integration, but she remained “deeply convinced that together, we can build this European future.”

Day One, Panel 1: Energy Transition and Energy Security in a Time of Crises

Chair of the Panel was Selma Šehović (Project Manager, Energy Transition and Climate Change Policies in Southeastern Europe, Friedrich Ebert Foundation Regional Dialogue SOE, Sarajevo). The panel was opened by *Jovan Rajić* (Chairman of the Board, Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute/RERI, Belgrade) presenting the results and recommendations from the working group. He stated that basically there is no energy transition in the WB but it had only just begun which was due to a lack of strategy and political will among decision makers as well as to the absence of a comprehensive approach. The energy transition would transform the overall economic

system, and this was slowing down the process. Disagreements among the civil society workshop participants were related to the specific approach to steering the energy transition, especially concerning the role of the state versus the role of the market. What was important according to Rajić was the inclusion of all stakeholders, that is trade unions, CSOs, and experts. None of them should be seen as opponents of the state. Moreover, Rajić said that there was a need for more transparency and rule of law in the process of energy transition, especially regarding public procurement. Additionally, Rajić noted that more platforms for meaningful conversations at eye level about this process were necessary.

A video by Deutsche Welle presented the great potential that existed in the WB regarding green energy (sunshine, wind, biomass) – “Just by harnessing wind and sun energy, SEE countries could produce three times more energy than they consume.” – and pointed out how the transition towards this type of energy was often hampered by an unpreparedness of local administrations and bad governance. Meanwhile, according to the video, most energy in the WB today comes from old coal-fired power plants, causing the worst air quality in Europe and 30,000 premature deaths per year.

Dirk Buschle (Deputy Director, Energy Community Secretariat, Vienna/online) agreed with most of the recommendations put forward by civil society but affirmed the role of the market and that this did not mean releasing local governments from responsibility but “quite the contrary”. In this vein, Buschle remarked that WB markets needed to be integrated more into the EU’s common market and that a price reform was needed to create greater incentives to save energy on the one hand and to invest in renewables on the other. Prices had to become more reflective of the costs, and investors needed to be able to see returns, Buschle stressed. Therefore, carbon emissions should be priced more. He also pointed out that more regionalization in energy transition was needed, with joint regional planning rather than state-level action, especially regarding “the painful decision” of phasing out coal. Finally, WB countries should take their commitments more seriously: The en-

ergy transition had to be faster, fairer, and more controlled.

Christiane Hullmann (Head of Division 209 Western Balkans, German Federal Foreign Office) stated that she could also very much subscribe to the recommendations and vividly agreed that WB governments should live up to their commitments more. Hullmann also pointed out that Germany was strongly increasing its efforts to support the energy transition of the WB so Germany could become independent of Russian gas, that the WB could become an exporter of green energy and that this great potential had to be used. Also, the energy transition would provide a lot of jobs for the WB: “There’s no shortage of money for green energy projects but a good framework is needed, and investors need security.” Apparently, WB politicians were aware of all this, but they lacked initiative and were facing diverging local interests.

Sonja Risteska (Program Manager, Powering Past Coal Alliance, Berlin) likewise emphasized that the biggest problem in implementing the WB’s energy transition was that investment in the WB was seen as risky and that more security for investors was needed. *Andreas Chollet* (WPD Eastern Europe GmbH, Stuttgart/online), meanwhile, fully agreed that regionalization of the WB markets was needed to foster investment in the local energy transition; coal should no longer have “an economic advantage.”

Discussion

One participant from the audience disagreed that coal was still used in the region for economic reasons, arguing that many WB countries were already importing it. In her view, the true reason was simply path dependency. Another participant emphasized the relevance of civil society in bringing together the supporters and opponents of the energy transition as well as representatives of the governments and businesses. More direct contact with businesses was needed. *Buschle* agreed and was optimistic that renewable energy production would soon be economically attractive for businesses: “a coal renaissance is unlikely.” *Hullmann*, meanwhile, recognized the challenges for WB administrations in adapting and building new capaci-

ties – but if the political will was sufficient, help would be available, for example, from GIZ.

Panel 2: Climate Change and Environmentally Sustainable Development

The second panel was chaired by *Katja Giebel* (Senior Program Officer, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Berlin) and started with *Endri Haxhiraj* (Director, Institute for Environmental Policy, Tirana) presenting the recommendations of his working group. He particularly emphasized the role of state structures in fostering environmentally sustainable development in the Western Balkans. Similarly to the previous panel, representatives from civil society found that cooperation between governments, CSOs, and experts should be enhanced; CSOs should collaborate more and strive for more involvement in the decision-making process whilst corruption had to be fought, laws had to be implemented more rigorously, and local administrations' capacities had to be further developed. These structural changes were as crucial in moving towards a more sustainable development as supporting a green agriculture or reforestation and that people needed opportunities to conserve or improve their living conditions in the transition towards a more environmentally friendly economy, otherwise it would fail. Finally, *Haxhiraj* called upon external actors (such as the EU) to collaborate more with CSOs instead of with governments.

In response, H.E. Minister *Almira Xhembulla* (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, Republic of Albania/online) pointed out how much the Albanian government was already involving CSOs in their consultation processes. She emphasized that CSOs played a crucial role in Albania's strategy for more sustainable development. Asked whether the construction of the new Vlorë Airport was not in contradiction with environmental protection regulations, the Minister argued that the government had consulted various stakeholders and, as a result, the area where the airport was being built had been removed from the list of protected territory. As *Xhembulla* remarked, the construction was still being monitored by the Ministry of Tourism and Environment and various steps to preserve the ecology of the area were being taken. That said, the importance of the airport for tourism in Al-

bania should not be underestimated in the view of *Xhembulla*, which justified this final decision. *Teodora Grncarovska* (State Counselor on Climate Change, Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning, Republic of North Macedonia/online) meanwhile stressed that instead of exclusively blaming the government for not involving them more in the policymaking process, CSOs themselves should cooperate more with each other and become more transparent about how they work.

Rinora Gojani (Programs and Operations Manager, Balkan Green Foundation, Pristina), the second rapporteur from civil society within this panel after *Haxhiraj*, underlined the link between state institutions, private businesses and individuals in becoming more sustainable. One example she mentioned was the funding of and investment in railway companies as well as the provision of grants and subsidies for private households to make their property more environmentally friendly. Another crucial example was the recycling and waste management sector, where Germany was a role model and more expertise should be harnessed from German organizations such as GIZ, *Gojani* said. Similarly, more data should be collected on climate change but also on the progress made by institutions in preventing it. Finally, according to *Gojani*, in this overall societal transformation, the role of women was vital.

For *Stefan Mager* (Program Manager Waste and Circular Economy, GIZ) another essential aspect of sustainable development was a thorough discussion on the regions' industrial future. Tourism and the environment were often in conflict at first sight and many people were afraid of a greener economy because it connoted job loss and higher living costs for them. These concerns had to be addressed and, in this vein, *Mager* critically remarked that local CSOs, in his view, were too often driven primarily by the values of their donors and insufficiently connected to wider society and average citizens. Likewise, *Frosina Antonovska* (Energy and Climate Policy Officer for Western Balkans, Climate Action Network (CAN) Europe, Brussels/online) said that CSOs spent too much time speaking to each other and too little connecting to and convincing citizens. As an example, she

presented a comic series called “Energy Superheroes” developed by her organization to reach wider society and educate about sustainable development more effectively. In this context, Antonovska stressed that both traditional and social media were important for messages to gain traction.

Finally, *Ifeta Smajić* (Social Development Specialist, World Bank) addressed the connection of sustainable development, or rather the lack thereof, with the emigration of citizens. What was most needed in this regard, in her view, was a facilitation of dialogue between governments and citizens in the WB. This was what CSOs should focus on. This opinion was also shared by a member of the audience who emphasized the current distance and lack of communication between political representatives and citizens in the WB. All this further underlined the importance of institutions, participatory democracy, and addressing citizens’ economic worries about the future for achieving sustainable development in the WB, as stated in the recommendations. On this note, *Stefan Mager* concluded that “green topics” were still “luxury topics” in the WB and, therefore, governments were not allocating budgets to sustainable development and climate change yet.

Panel 3: Information Disorder in the Western Balkans

Invited to introduce her working group’s recommendations by chairwoman *Katharina Naumann* (Coordinator International Media Programs, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Berlin), *Tijana Cvjetičanin* (Editor-in-chief, Raskrinkavanje, Sarajevo) prefaced her remarks with the comment that, besides disinformation and fake news, an even more fundamental problem in the WB regarding the production and consumption of news was the lack of real freedom of the media and the constant pressure from the side of governments. This curtailed many journalists in their work, both in terms of providing news themselves and reacting to news that was identified as fake. Cvjetičanin pointed out that next to enhancing media freedom, the other vital need in the WB was to educate citizens about the existence of fake news, how it was produced, and how important it was to check its validity. Current internet regulations in many WB countries were not help-

ful in this regard, as they made it easy for commercial content to be side by side with news content and thereby facilitated the spread of fake news, as it could be declared as advertising and thus become even less identifiable. One project Cvjetičanin cited as an example for trying to battle these tendencies and raise citizens’ capacities in critically dealing with the media was “Strengthening Quality News and Independent Journalism in the Western Balkans and Turkey”, implemented by BIRN together with various partners.

Jasna Jelišić (Head of Western Balkans Task Force, Strategic Communications and Information Analysis, European External Action Service, Brussels) drew attention to the role of foreign involvement in creating disinformation whilst also discussing the difference between disinformation, which is done with the strategic aim of spreading false information, and misinformation, which has similar effects but is created without ill intentions. Since both existed, citizens’ awareness was all the more important and journalists’ responsibility was especially high. In her view, it was time to move from diagnosing the situation to taking more effective action. Here, she concurred with Cvjetičanin in that a freer environment for media-oriented civil society organizations and critical quality journalism had to be created first. To tackle misinformation, more independent and investigative quality journalism was needed.

On this note, *Adelheid Feilcke* (Director of Programs for Europe, Deutsche Welle, Bonn) raised the underlying question of what quality journalism really was, making the point that this often was not clear to media consumers in the WB. Sources of information were very diverse today, which made it harder for journalists to even reach citizens, especially the young. According to Feilcke, this resulted in very diverse attitudes to media outlets and sources of information among citizens, where general skepticism was high. Still, many people fell prey to sensationalism and false content due to lacking “media literacy”. Local fact-checking institutions should therefore join forces.

Another topic mentioned was the notion of “constructive journalism”, which refers not only

to reporting on issues in the region but also to discussing possible solutions, for example, regarding mass emigration. This could make traditional media more attractive again and steer young people away from fake news outlets. Such outlets, *Armela Krasniqi* (Chairwoman, Audiovisual Media Authority – AMA, Tirana) added, often had their roots in Russia, which made the problem of disinformation especially touchy. She also highlighted the link between disinformation and the spread of conspiracy theories, underlining that her agency was independent of the government and essential in upholding ethical codes in broadcasting in Albania.

Discussion

In reaction to the discussion, one member of the audience critically noted the growing occurrence and influence of fake news also within the EU, as could be seen in the context of Russia's war against Ukraine. This made her wonder if EU member states really could serve as a role model for the WB in this regard, considering European integration and the requirements the WB countries were trying to fulfil to join the EU. Likewise, another member of the audience added that some WB countries, such as Serbia, had more fact-checking organizations than some EU member states, such as Greece, for example. In response, *Jasna Jelišić* argued that there was less "analytical journalism" in the WB than anywhere else in Europe. In her view, the reason for this was that the demand for it had decreased while the demand for "entertainment journalism" was on the rise. In contrast, *Adelheid Feilcke* was of the opinion that there was "too much" so-called analytical journalism and that, as a result, opinions could no longer be distinguished from facts and pure information. On this note, *Armela Krasniqi* accentuated how crucial it was, besides fighting misinformation, to generate and maintain trust in the media as such.

Spotlight 1: Dealing With the Past and Reconciliation Efforts in the Western Balkans

The first spotlight was chaired by *Johanna Deimel* (Independent Analyst Southeast Europe/Balkans, Munich). First speaker *Nataša Kandić* (Founder, Humanitarian Law Centre, Belgrade) agreed with Minister Baerbock's opening words in saying that "reconciliation takes time" and pointed out that the WB were very far from

reconciliation because there were no politicians ready for it yet. Moreover, reconciliation could not be taught by foreigners; it had to come from among the people concerned. Moreover, for real reconciliation, social justice and the recognition of past suffering were necessary. As a result, what was most needed in her view were "the right conditions for reconciliation": naming victims and missing persons, and building more links between civil societies. This was what European institutions should push for.

For *Branka Vierda* (Program Director, Youth Initiative for Human Rights YIHR Croatia/online) reconciliation between the people of the WB was closely linked to integrating the whole region into the EU eventually. Currently, national school curricula and textbooks were perpetuating rather than challenging interethnic hostility and segregation. *Jasmin Hasić* (Executive Director of Humanity in Action, Sarajevo) likewise put an emphasis on the WB youth and on changing the education system. WB youngsters should be raised to be critical of their own democracies and representatives rather than be socialized into hating each other.

Kushtrim Koliqi (Executive Director, NGO Integra, Prishtina) agreed that the lack of data on victims and missing persons was a major barrier to reaching reconciliation because it inhibited an evidence-based way of dealing with the past. Artists were helping to deal with feelings about the past, but too often their output was influenced by dogma. Also, minorities such as the Roma were often forgotten in discussions about reconciliation, as if they were "just a decorative element" of building peaceful coexistence in the WB. At this point, one member of the audience illustrated how the Roma were, for example, entirely dismissed from Kosovo's nation-building process, stating that they were seen as related to the Serbs and therefore not even deserving of integration, which meant that the past injustices they had suffered were not being addressed. No reconciliation could be achieved as long as any group was being excluded, the speaker stressed.

Day Two, Spotlight 2: Amplifying Roma Voices in Policy-Making

Introducing the panel, moderator and journalist

with the Countries of Central, Southeastern and Eastern Europe, South Caucasus and Central Asia, German Federal Chancellery). According to him, there was reason to remain skeptical of major breakthroughs in the Berlin Process in the near future, yet one should recognize and value the small achievements of the past, such as the abolition of roaming charges in the region. Moreover, it was key to see the potential for progress in the region such as greater regional cooperation in the energy sector. As a result, he was hopeful for small-step improvements and emphasized Chancellor Scholz's willingness to push for such. *Pranvera Kastrati* (CRM Coordinator, Regional Cooperation Council) agreed that small-step improvements were essential to keeping up citizens' trust in the accession process, as it showed tangible effects. However, she critically remarked that such improvements only happened when the political will was sufficient in both the WB and the EU, which made the actualization of such improvements very volatile.

Commenting from the viewpoint of private businesses, *Nenad Djurdjevic* (Adviser to the President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Serbia, Belgrade/online) noted that there was a need for institutions to facilitate regional economic cooperation; for example, more authority should be given to local governments. Secondly, like Ukraine, the countries of the WB should receive access to the EU's single market. *Jelica Minić* (President, European Movement in Serbia, Belgrade) reminded the panel of how many people in the WB had at first feared the Open Balkans Initiative and the common regional market as a substitute for full EU integration, despite its benefits. Regional initiatives "bought time" in the long accession process but they had to be well promoted. For *Silvana Mojsovska* (Institute of Economics, Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje), enhancing regional economic cooperation was all about having external support.

Panel 4: Ensuring Sustainable and Resilient Infrastructure Investments

Branimir Jovanović (Economist, Vienna for International Economic Studies/wiiv) chaired the fourth panel. First, summarizing the recommendations and proceedings of the thematic work-

ing group, *Marko Sošić* (Researcher, Institut Alternativa, Podgorica) stated that a simple increase in investment in the infrastructure had crystallized as the biggest need. *Ardian Hackaj* (Research Director and Coordinator of Tirana Connectivity Forum, Cooperation and Development Institute, Tirana) added that another central element was the stability of institutions. Rigorous rule of law and a stable government were not exclusive to each other in the WB but they came together in good governance and that was what was needed. External experts from civil society were crucial in this context: they were not elected and hence had no democratic legitimacy on the basis of which they could demand to be listened to by politicians, so they should not complain; however, they had valuable knowledge and international connections that were useful for politicians to realize infrastructure projects, which would ultimately result in their advice being sought. H.E. Minister *Jovana Marović* (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of EU Affairs, Montenegro/online) agreed with this viewpoint, emphasizing her openness to advice from civil society.

For *Ary Naim* (Regional Manager, Central & Southeast Europe, International Finance Corporation, Belgrade/online), making the region more attractive for foreign investors should be at the top of the region's agenda, and investing in infrastructure was essential in realizing this. The region had to create better conditions for foreign investors through own public investment but also through more accountability in government and the mitigation of risks that foreign investors would face. In his view, public private partnerships could be a useful tool to boost infrastructure investments. Discussing the state of transport and mobility in the region, *Nedim Begović* (Green/Multimodal/Innovative transport solutions Desk Officer, Transport Community, Belgrade/online) highlighted how the physical infrastructure was directly linked to issues of social justice and less carbon emissions as well.

Discussion

In reaction to the panel discussion, one member of the audience argued that prior to improving the transport infrastructure for travelers and building high-speed trains, for example,

the focus should be put on the already existing railways and on making them more conducive to cargo shipments. The speaker pointed out that cargo typically contributed more to transportation companies' revenues and was therefore better and easier to start with. As a result, the ensuing discussion centered around the question of whether goods or people should be prioritized in developing the infrastructure, how the infrastructure should ideally be designed in this regard, and which investments were most urgently needed.

Independently of this question, *Ary Naïm* pinpointed the "huge need" to invest as such if the region wanted to become fit for the future. H.E. Minister *Marović* meanwhile noted that civil society could make a very valuable contribution to this discussion. *Sošič* and *Hackaj* added that another challenge was that the current legal framework made investing in infrastructure complicated and untransparent with regard to tenders, donors, and contracting partners. In conclusion, CSOs' role in publicly monitoring investments in infrastructure and processes of public procurement was highlighted.

Panel 5: EU Integration in a Changing Geopolitical Environment

The panel was chaired by *Stormy-Annika Mildner* (Executive Director, Aspen Institute Germany, Berlin) and *Christian Hagemann* (Executive Director, Southeast Europe Association, Munich). Outlining the recommendations of her working group, *Simonida Kacarska* (Director, European Policy Institute, Skopje) told the audience how the 24th of February 2022 had changed many WB countries' relation to the EU: On the one hand, accession became even more desirable, but on the other, the WB were watching the EU's approach to Ukraine closely and worried to be disadvantaged. Addressing the argument of the EU's absorption capacity, she stressed that if actual integration was postponed, there had to be other benefits prior to it to keep up the WB countries' motivation for reform. In this regard, she also raised the topic of determining a date for potential accession – a highly contentious issue within her working group.

Reporting on the current view of the Balkan youth on the EU enlargement process, *Albert*

Hani (Secretary General, Regional Youth Cooperation Office, Tirana) affirmed that there was no enlargement fatigue among the young but, on the contrary, especially now, they wanted EU accession for their countries more than ever. As an analyst at a think tank, *Jana Juzová* (Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Global Europe Program, EUROPEUM Institute for European Policy, Prague) said she sees her role first and foremost in overseeing how well the WB countries were doing with regard to the fulfilment of the *acquis* criteria and, therefore, is a defendant of a strict conditionality and a critic of the democratic backsliding in the WB. However, she did express concerns about the WB countries becoming disillusioned with the process and, especially given liberal democratic and other shortcomings in various EU member states themselves, raised the question of whether the WB countries could not maybe also be admitted in an imperfect shape so as not to lose them.

Ambassador *Frédéric Mondoloni* (Director for Central Europe, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Paris) recognized the criticism and vowed that strengthening the credibility of the accession process was important. Having said that, he intended to "make it crystal clear" that the new discussion forum launched by France under the name of a European Political Community was not meant as an alternative to EU accession for the WB but was conceived as a forum to discuss important Europe-wide topics in the here and now, such as Russia's war on Ukraine. He also announced that France was open to amending its position on visa liberalization for Kosovo but that it remained skeptical of enlargement at this point.

In response, *Manuel Sarrazin* (German Federal Government Special Representative for the Countries of the WB) expressed that to deepen and solidify the EU, as demanded by France, its institutions should be strengthened, in particular, the European Court of Justice. Likewise, adopting qualified majority voting for the EU made sense with regard to some issue areas but less so for others. In his view, the biggest weakness of the enlargement process in the past years was that there had been too much focus on discussing potential dates for accession and on the question of whether such a

date should be discussed at all. Rather, the aim should be to deliver and focus on actions, that is on tangible progress in the WB and on tangible benefits for them provided by the EU. On this note, Manuel Sarrazin saluted the civil society in the WB for their perseverance. From his perspective, this year's Berlin Process Summit, which would take place the following day, could be deemed successful even if it reached only 30 percent of its ambitious goals: "Nobody expected us to get all WB 6 into the EU in one go."

Reacting to widespread concerns in the region that additional formats, such as the European Political Community or the Berlin Process, could replace the enlargement process, Juzová argued that these fears were due to the fact that the goal of the enlargement process was no longer clear and had to be clarified for the process to remain effective. For her, "staged integration" was the ideal way forward, as it was both in the interest of the EU to keep the WB close and in the interest of the WB to at least come some steps closer to the EU. To achieve this, more EU

member states – especially other "friends of the WB" – should be involved in the process. In a similar vein, Hani reminded the discussants that if the WB did not eventually integrate the EU as countries, their citizens were going to try to integrate the EU as individuals by migrating west. Therefore, keeping up hope in the region was paramount, also because it was the hope and enthusiasm of the youth that was driving politicians and businesspeople in the region to keep making an effort at improving their countries' situation.

The youth's importance for change in the region was also underlined by *Jasna Jelišič*, who commented in private capacity that many of even the most committed and motivated young people in the WB were contemplating moving abroad rather than continuing to hope for a better future in their home country. In conclusion, the panel agreed that restoring trust in the Berlin Process and a renewal of will among WB politicians were key.

Fachkonferenz

Regionale Initiativen auf dem Westbalkan Chancen oder Fallen

Veranstalter: Zentrum für zivile Erziehung (CGO/Centar za građansko obrazovanje) in Podgorica in Kooperation mit der Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft und der Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Belgrad
Ort: Podgorica (Montenegro), 25. Oktober 2022

Bericht von Gudrun Steinacker, Wien

Hintergrund

Das eintägige ExpertInnen-treffen fand wenige Tage vor dem Gipfel im Rahmen des Berliner Prozesses in Berlin am 3. November 2022 statt. Ziel war, die umstrittene regionale Initiative Open Balkan (OBI) in Verbindung mit dem Berliner Prozesse zu erörtern. Bei OBI handelt es sich um eine im Jahr 2019 gegründete Initiative des serbischen Präsidenten Aleksandar Vučić, des albanischen Ministerpräsidenten Edi Rama und es damaligen mazedonischen Ministerpräsidenten Zoran Zaev, um die freie Bewegung von Menschen, Gütern, Dienstleistungen und Kapital zwischen diesen drei Staaten zu erleichtern.

Inzwischen haben mehrere Gipfeltreffen stattgefunden, auf denen Abkommen im Sinne der Initiative geschlossen wurden. Institutionen zur Implementierung der OBI ebenso wie Kontrollmechanismen gibt es bisher jedoch nicht. Hintergrund der Veranstaltung in Podgorica waren Absichtserklärungen der amtierenden technischen Regierung in Montenegro, sich der „von den USA befürworteten“ (so der amerikanische Botschafter in Belgrad, Christopher Hill) OBI anzuschließen. Ministerpräsident Dritan Abazović hat an dem Open Balkan Gipfel in Belgrad am 2. September 2022 teilgenommen. Auch EU Kommissar Olivér Várhelyi nahm an