

CONCLUSIONS

OF THE WESTERN BALKANS DIGITAL SUMMIT 2026, Herceg Novi

Recognising the comprehensive benefits of digital transformation for citizens, we reaffirm our commitment to Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025-2028 within the Western Balkans and to its full integration with the European Union (EU). We consider this strategic alignment a key mechanism to directly empower citizens and to modernise public administrations in line with the EU acquis.

We are committed to building a digital ecosystem without barriers that places citizens at the centre of regulatory and technological advancements, to creating a secure and resilient digital environment as a pillar of the security and economic stability of the region, and to using Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a catalyst for economic transformation, the modernisation of public administration and enhanced competitiveness.

Convened in Herceg Novi for the Western Balkans Digital Summit, we reiterate our determination to accelerate joint action and regional cooperation, to bring public services closer to citizens and to strengthen digital skills across all parts of society, delivering tangible benefits for citizens, businesses and public administrations.

Gathered in Herceg Novi for the Digital Summit, we have agreed on the following:

- ***Continuing*** our commitment and efforts to strengthen the frameworks supporting affordable electronic communications services across the Western Balkans, including through the introduction of **Roam Like at Home (RLAH) regime with the EU**, we recognise the importance of continued regional exchange, cooperation and peer learning in supporting progress across these areas and contributing to the effective implementation of the relevant frameworks;
- ***Recognising the need to accelerate and facilitate broadband deployment*** across the region, we will continue working with the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) to streamline **permit granting procedures in the telecommunications sector**, as an important enabler of timely infrastructure roll-out. We will pursue follow-up activities in line with the recommendations prepared, including capacity building initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacities of relevant stakeholders. We welcome the continued work of the **Advisory and Coordination Group** in supporting and facilitating these efforts;
- ***Committing to place citizens at the centre of digital transformation***, we will advance the implementation of the **Digital Identity Wallet (DIW)**, enabling citizens to act as the primary custodians and managers of their digital identity and to independently and selectively decide which credentials, such as proof of identity, driving licence or educational qualifications, they share with public and private sector entities, while guaranteeing the highest standards of information security and privacy protection;
- ***We commit to the mutual recognition of digital identities*** across the Western Balkans, ensuring that a digital identity issued within one jurisdiction is legally and technically recognised in all other jurisdictions of the region, through technical and regulatory

standards aligned with the EU acquis and with the long-term objective of achieving **full interoperability at EU level**;

- ***Recognising the potential of the digitalisation of identification documents*** to substantially reduce administrative procedures, we will ensure equal opportunities for secure and seamless access to public services and e-platforms for all citizens, including those in rural areas and members of the diaspora;
- ***Welcoming the development of minimum technical standards*** for the implementation of the DIW, we mandate RCC, EC and GIZ to support the process and strengthen interoperability, trust services and regional pilot initiatives in the Western Balkan Six (WB6);
- ***Welcoming the Artificial Intelligence Roadmap*** at the Western Balkans Digital Summit 2026 in Herceg Novi, with its Vision 2030, five strategic priorities and the cross-cutting measures, as the common regional direction, we mandate the RCC to support the implementation of the ***AI Roadmap for the Western Balkans***, and developing the AI Readiness Assessment and the Implementation Action Plan;
- ***Recognising the importance*** of an enabling environment for the responsible development, deployment and uptake of ***Artificial Intelligence***, we commit to implementing the policy measures and actions set out in the ***AI Roadmap for the Western Balkans***;
- ***We commit to*** using the regional AI Working Group as a key regional mechanism for ***strengthening cooperation with the EU's Apply AI Alliance and relevant EU initiatives***, with a view to facilitating policy dialogue, exchanging best practices, supporting alignment of AI-related policy and regulatory frameworks, and identifying opportunities for joint actions and regional cooperation on the responsible adoption and development of AI;
- ***Calling*** for the establishment of a **Regional Digital Services Coordination Group** operating under the auspices of the RCC, as a technical coordination mechanism supporting operational readiness and regional convergence ahead of the future **alignment with the EU Digital Services Act (DSA)** and its implementation, with support of the EC, we call for the development of a regional protocol to support coordination on the future implementation of the DSA;
- ***Recognising that no single WB6 can independently counter contemporary and sophisticated cyber threats***, we commit to strengthening joint efforts towards a resilient digital environment, as a critical pillar of domestic security and the economic sovereignty of the entire region;
- ***We commit to full harmonisation with EU standards*** by aligning domestic legislation with the **NIS 2 Directive** and the **EU Cybersecurity Act**, and to closer institutional cooperation with the **European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA)**, with a view to making the Western Balkans an integral part of the European cybersecurity framework;
- ***Recognising the value of the WB6 Cybersecurity Database*** for building cybersecurity resilience in the region, we commit to its active use and regular updating, and to strengthening regional cooperation based on the information it provides, in close cooperation with the RCC, EC and Security Governance Hub (SGH);

- ***Acknowledging that a secure digital environment is unattainable without systemic education***, we will invest in human capital, including through specialised training programmes for public sector experts and broad awareness-raising campaigns on fundamental cyber hygiene for citizens and small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), thereby reducing exposure to cyberattacks;
- ***We commit to the institutional strengthening of domestic CIRT/CERT teams***, developing their technical and operational capacities, including 24/7 operational readiness, and providing them with clear legal powers to enforce mandatory security standards and to exercise oversight over public and private operators of **critical infrastructure**, including energy, healthcare, water supply, transport and telecommunications;
- ***Recognising Artificial Intelligence as a primary catalyst*** for economic transformation, the modernisation of public administration and enhanced global competitiveness, we commit to addressing in a systemic manner the challenges related to security, ethics and regulatory alignment with the EU, in order to harness its full potential;
- ***Acknowledging the unique opportunity AI presents for leapfrogging development***, we will support its use for the optimisation of public services, the automation of complex administrative workflows and the transformation of key sectors such as agriculture, environmental protection, medicine and logistics, as well as for enabling SMEs in the region to achieve global competitiveness;
- ***Remaining committed to the responsible development and use of AI***, we will address the risks of data misuse, algorithmic bias and AI-driven cyber threats through strict ethical and operational safeguards that protect privacy and civil rights, while working to overcome the shortage of advanced computing infrastructure and to counter the outflow of intellectual capital from the region;
- ***We commit to aligning our domestic regulatory frameworks*** with the **EU Artificial Intelligence Act (AI Act)**, recognising that the integration of AI in the Western Balkans is intrinsically linked to the EU accession path;
- ***We will support the establishment of regional centres of excellence (AI Hubs)***, joint research and development initiatives and the development of local talent through strong partnerships between academia and the private sector;
- ***Recognising local authorities as the primary point of contact between citizens and the state***, we commit to supporting their transformation into agile **digital service hubs** tailored to the everyday needs of local communities;
- ***We commit to strengthening data-driven local interoperability*** by digitally interconnecting local authorities with central state registries and consistently applying the **once-only principle**, enabling municipalities to retrieve data already held by public authorities and relieving citizens from collecting and delivering paper certificates and official records;
- ***Committing to reduce administrative and bureaucratic complexity***, we will deploy advanced digital services that enable seamless and secure communication and transactions

between local authorities and citizens, significantly reducing processing times and eliminating unnecessary red tape;

- ***We will foster digital democracy at the local level*** through the introduction of dedicated digital platforms for **participatory budgeting** and **e-consultations**, encouraging active civic engagement;
- ***Acknowledging that accelerated digital transformation requires a substantial improvement of digital literacy*** across all parts of society, we commit to a dual-track approach that simultaneously empowers citizens for the digital economy and upskills public administration;
- ***We commit to adapting education systems*** to the pace of technological change, through the integration of STEM disciplines, coding and critical thinking from the earliest levels of education, and to designing subsidised **upskilling and reskilling programmes** for adults, with an emphasis on high-demand fields such as data analytics, AI and cybersecurity;
- ***Recognising the role of public administration as a genuine, citizen-centric service***, we will establish continuous professional development frameworks for public officials, ranging from fundamental cyber hygiene to the management of advanced e-platforms, with a view to overcoming institutional inertia and fostering a culture of **digital leadership**;
- ***We reiterate our commitment to reducing the digital divide*** between urban and rural areas and across age groups, recognising that new and flexible forms of employment, such as remote work, offer significant potential for retaining young talent in the region, and that access to digital skills should be treated as a universal right rather than a privilege, in order to prevent socio-economic exclusion.

Herceg Novi, 13 October 2026