

3RD MEETING OF THE WESTERN BALKAN INVESTMENT FRAMEWORK (WBIF) STRATEGIC BOARD

MINUTES OF THE MEETING

5 December 2022 / 08:30 - 10:30

Venue: nhow Hotel Brussels, hosted by the European Commission

Participants: list of participants annexed.

I. Introductory remarks by the WBIF Co-Chairs

The meeting opened with introductory remarks by the WBIF Co-chairs:

- Katarína Matherňová, Deputy Director-General DG NEAR, European Commission, and
- Francesca Utili, Director-General, International Financial Relations Directorate, Department of the Treasury, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Italy in representation of the WBIF Bilateral Donors.

EC-NEAR opened the meeting, welcomed all members and observers. Deputy Director-General Matherňová highlighted the European Union's unrivalled response in assisting the Western Balkans to deal with the consequences of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. The Energy Support Package was tied together in record time and details will be provided at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Tirana (6 December 2022). Besides this energy related assistance, the enlargement policy has gained new momentum. The European Council granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova and asked for acceleration of the accession process for the Western Balkans, intergovernmental conferences took place with Albania and North Macedonia, and candidate status was recommended for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Italy welcomed participants and recalled the energy related challenges for the Western Balkans. WBIF is an ideal platform to accelerate implementation of sustainable solutions for the energy transition. WBIF offers assistance to the Western Balkans Partners in their efforts related to accelerated implementation of the Economic and Investment Plan (EIP), through public and private blending, accompanied by the Guarantee instrument. The Bilateral Donors will continue to meet demands of small-scale high impact projects in the public utilities and education sectors.

II. Adoption of the agenda and the minutes

The 3rd WBIF Strategic Board representatives adopted, by consensus, the agenda of the meeting and the minutes of the 2nd WBIF Strategic Board (Rome, 21 June 2022).

III. Opening interventions of WBIF stakeholders

The **EU Council Presidency, Czech Republic**, confirmed that the future of the Western Balkans is the European Union and welcomed the progress made by Albania, North Macedonia as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina. The EIP is the backbone of the European Union support in the Western Balkans and is fully supported by the Czech presidency. Close cooperation with the Western Balkans Partners will be required to deliver tangible results.

From the perspective of the **European Parliament**, **MEP** Tonino Picula emphasised the importance of good democratic transformation of the Western Balkans region, especially in the context of misinformation. The EP recommends that EU funding becomes more strategic, transparent, conditional and visible.

The **Western Balkans Partners** reported on their specific challenges, welcomed the European Commission's support through the Energy Support Package, recognised the complementarity of the various support instruments under WBIF and IPA national, mentioned the need to accelerate the energy transition and emphasised the value of inclusiveness under WBIF.

Italy, representing the **Bilateral Donors**, underlined the need to complete the update of the governance documents (General Conditions), highlighting that the amendments should reflect the changes made to the Rules of Procedure, starting with the definition of Contributor, and reflecting the same functions of the governing bodies of the WBIF which are relevant for the General Conditions. Bilateral Donors will continue playing a complementary role by supporting smaller scale projects to improve infrastructure and services for the beneficiary citizens.

The **EIB** recalled the current challenges the Western Balkan Partners face, notably the region's energy transition, and the importance of all WBIF stakeholders jointly tackling these.

IV. Energy Support Package for the Western Balkans

EC-NEAR, presented the European Commission EUR 1billion Energy Support Package to be launched on 6 December by President van der Leyen in occasion of the EU-Western Balkans Summit.

The **Energy Community Secretariat** welcomed the European Commission Energy Support Package. The energy transition is now top priority for the Western Balkans Partners. Green modernisation of the energy sector in the region will be further discussed at an upcoming Energy Community Ministerial Council meeting (15 December), where targets for 2030 will be set for energy efficiency/savings, renewables and greenhouse gas emissions.

V. WBIF Annual Progress Report

EC-NEAR, presented for adoption the 2021 Annual Progress Report

The WBIF Strategic Board unanimously adopted the Report. The report is available on the WBIF website.

VI. AOB and concluding remarks

Italy, representing the Bilateral Donors, announced that Norway will become the WBIF Co-chair in 2023. **Norway** confirmed their intent to become WBIF Co-chair in 2023.

Italy announced Croatia's intent to pledge €500,000 and of their intent to become a "Bilateral Donor" and proceeded to the call for pledges. The following pledges were raised:

- Norway: NOK30 million, equalling around €2.86 million
- Germany: €1.162 million
- France, for AFD: €1.1 million
- Austria: €1 million
- Croatia: €500,000, later increased to €2 million ¹

¹ Croatia increased the pledge amount to EUR 2 million in December, after the Strategic and Operational Boards



Following the pledge by Croatia, the Strategic Board unanimously welcomed Croatia as Bilateral Donor.²

END OF THE MEETING

² Annex 2 of the WBIF Rules of Procedure shall be amended accordingly and Croatia shall be deemed included forthwith.

3RD MEETING OF THE WBIF STRATEGIC BOARD OPERATIONAL CONCLUSIONS, SUMMARY

5 December 2022

1. Adoption of the Agenda for the meeting and of the Minutes of the 3rd Strategic Board meeting of 5 December 2022, by consensus.
2. Adoption of the first WBIF Annual Progress Report 2021, by consensus.
3. Welcome of Croatia as new Bilateral Donor, by consensus.

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Adopted Agenda

3rd MEETING OF THE WBIF STRATEGIC BOARD

AGENDA (final draft)

5 December 2022, 8h30 – 10h30

hnow Brussels Bloom Hotel: Rue Royale 250, 1210 Brussels, Belgium

- 08:00 - 08:30 Registration**
Please see instructions
- 08:30 - 09:00 Introductory remarks by the WBIF Co-chairs**
- Katarína Matherňová, Deputy Director-General EC-NEAR, European Commission
- Francesca Utili, Director-General, International Financial Relations Directorate, Department of the Treasury, Ministry of Economy and Finance, Italy in representation of the WBIF bilateral donors.
- 09:00 - 09:05 Adoption of the Agenda**
Adoption of the minutes 2nd Strategic Board meeting (21 June 2022)
- 09:05 - 09:45 Opening interventions of WBIF stakeholders (3 mins each)**
- EU Presidency
- European Parliament
- Western Balkan Partners
- Bilateral Donors statement
- IFIs statement and EIB
- 09:45 - 10:15 The Energy Support Package for the Western Balkans**
- Holger Schröder, Head of Unit, European Commission, EC-NEAR
Q&A with IFIs and Beneficiary Economies Representatives
- 10:15 - 10:20 Annual WBIF Progress Report 2021**
Approval of publication
- 10:20 - 10:30 AoB & concluding remarks**
- Confirmation of Co-chair for the Bilateral Donors
- Bilateral donors

End of Strategic Board meeting at 10:30

Coffee break 10:30 – 11:00