The 6th Berlin Process Joint Science Conference discussed lessons learned so far from COVID-19, options to control the SARS-CoV-2 virus as well as priorities for post-pandemic recovery. Scientists and stakeholders recommend the following:

10 POINT PLAN TO CONTROL COVID-19 IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

A new resurgence of infections is to be expected at any time. The Western Balkans went through a particularly dramatic pandemic course, with inter alia high excess mortality, low vaccination rates and weak public healthcare systems. Consequently, the next waves are likely to hit the region even harder than so far. Not only is there an intense circulation of people and goods between the EU27 and the Western Balkans, but also a circulation of the virus. Therefore, the European continent must be treated as a single epidemiological area.

**Short-term (next three months):** Control the virus by thinking globally and acting locally.

1. Vaccination: Increase promptly and altruistically the transfer of vaccines to the Western Balkans and thus raise the vaccination rate there;
2. Travel: Regulate travel within Europe under unitary minimal conditions: full vaccination, RT-PCR or Rapid Antigen Tests, forgery-proof EU Digital COVID Certificate used also in the EU Neighbourhood countries;
3. Information: Inform citizens more intensely and repeatedly with evidence and consistent scientific messages;
4. Stay alert: Maintain epidemiological surveillance and prevention measures, at least: protection masks, physical distancing, hygiene, fresh air and sunlight;

**Mid-term (next ten months):** Help the Western Balkans build resilience.

5. Do not leave the field of humanitarian aid for the Western Balkans open to third countries;
6. Install capacities for diagnostics (testing) and surveillance (tracing and isolating), especially at airports and border crossings; avoid public gatherings and similar events with more than 50 people;
7. Introduce rigorous phased containment procedures, such as “traffic light” systems;

**Long-term (next 24 months):** Help the Western Balkans secure pandemic preparedness.

8. Invest in the public healthcare system and qualified personnel, including from EU funds;
9. Strengthen and reorganise national civil protection systems to increase their immediate reactive capacity;
10. Invest in pandemic preparedness through an evidence-based, strong public health system.
Every crisis is an opportunity. The COVID-19 crisis has triggered a momentum to build back better, focusing on following priorities:

1. A decent healthcare system;
2. A climate neutral economy and society, particularly with significantly reduced air pollution;
3. A digitalised education, public administration, health system and economy;
4. A cohesive society with less inequalities, care for vulnerable groups, meritocracy and resilient democracy.

Both the EU Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans and the IPA III should be used primarily for these priorities. Similar to EU Member States, Western Balkans governments should develop national recovery and resilience plans as well.

In recovery, the education, research and innovation sector must have a firm place: investments in this area are investments in the future. Matching supply and demand of skills is also essential.

Participants reinforce the commitment to the Western Balkans Research Fund and ask the European Commission and the European Council to fund it as a new instrument in the Widening Component of Horizon Europe. This fund is an essential instrument to reduce the brain drain from the Western Balkans and enhance research and innovation excellence in the region. Participants commend the Western Balkans Agenda on Innovation, Research, Education, Culture, Youth and Sport and expect its timely signing after the 8th Western Balkans Summit of Heads of State and Government of 5 July 2021 in Berlin.

GLOSSARY
EU = European Union
IPA = Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance

Western Balkans Process / Berlin Process [Albania, Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia and the United Kingdom as well as the European Commission (*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSC 1244 resolution and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.]]

The term “science” (and related expressions) refers to the entire spectrum of scientific branches: natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, formal sciences, life sciences, applied sciences etc.

PARTICIPANTS

NATIONAL ACADEMIES OF SCIENCES (AND ARTS)

Academy of Sciences of Albania (Genc Sulçebe, Alban Ylli) | Austrian Academy of Sciences (Anton Zeilinger) | Academy of Sciences and Arts of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Muris Ćićić, Mirsada Hukić, Milos Trifković) | Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (Nina Atanassova, Stefan Hadjitodorov, Alexandre Kostov, Evdokia Pasheva) | French Académie des sciences – Institut de France (Francis-André Wollman) | German National Academy of Sciences Leopoldina (Gerald H. Haug) | Academy of Athens (Loucas G. Christophorou) | Italian Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei (Cesare Montecucco) | Italian National Research Council (Francesca Tolve) | Academy of Sciences and Arts of Kosovo (Fetah Podvorica) | Montenegrin Academy of Sciences and Arts (Goran Nikolić, Ljubiša Stanković) | Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Ljupco Kocarev) | Polish Academy of Sciences (Jerzy Duszyński) | Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Vladimir Kostić, Nebojša Lalćić) | Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Roman Jerala, Peter Štih) | The Royal Society (Richard A. Catlow, Julie Maxton)

NATIONAL RECTORS’ CONFERENCES, UNIVERSITIES AND RESEARCH ORGANISATIONS

University of Tirana (Bernard Dosti, Mimoza Kasimati, Pranvera Lazo) | Polytechnic University of Tirana (Andreja Malipari) | University of Sarajevo (Ibenana Husremović, Enita Nakaj) | University of Banja Luka (Biljana Antunović) | University of Mostar (Zoran Tomić) | University of Rijeka (Snježana Prijč-Samaržija) | University of Zagreb (Damir Boras) | Hasan-Prishtina-University of Prishtina (Lal Raka, Naser Sahiti) | University of Montenegro (Vladimir Božović) | Saints-Cyril-and-Methodius-University of Skopje (Nikola Jankulovski) | South East European University Tetovo (Abdyymenal Bexheti) | Conference of Rectors of Academic Schools in Poland / Silesian University of Technology (Arkadiusz Mężyk) | Conference of Serbia’s Universities / University of Belgrade (Ivanka Popović) | University of Novi Sad (Dejan Jakšić) | Rectors’ Conference of the Republic of Slovenia / University of Maribor (Zdravko Kačič)

DISTINGUISHED SCIENTISTS AND EXPERTS AD PERSONAM

Ivan Đikić (Goethe-University of Frankfurt and Max Planck Institute of Biophysics Frankfurt) | Vladimir Đurđević (University of Belgrade) | Andreas Jansen (Robert Koch Institute) | Marzena Kisielewska (OECD) | Carole Mundell (University of Bath / UK Chief International Science Envoy) | Magdalena Rosińska (Polish National Institute of Public Health – National Institute of Hygiene)

This statement reflects the position of the participating parties / participants listed above and not necessarily that of the experts invited ad personam or of their organisations of affiliation.