



EU-Western Balkans Investment Forum

A New Investment Frontier – The Western Balkans

Tirana, Albania

October 13-14, 2025

Introduction

The EU-Western Balkans Investment Summit seeks to strengthen economic cooperation and investment opportunities between the Western Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) and European Union (EU) member states. Supported by the European Commission, this summit is part of the broader EU strategy to promote regional integration and socio-economic convergence, fostering sustainable economic development across the region.

The European Union (EU) and the Western Balkans Six (WB6) stand at a pivotal moment in their shared economic and political journey. As the EU seeks to reinvigorate its economic dynamism and secure its global competitiveness, the Western Balkans emerge as a promising new investment frontier. This investment summit serves as a strategic platform to strengthen economic cooperation, attract foreign direct investment (FDI), and accelerate the integration of WB6 economies into the European single market, benefiting both WB6 countries, EU member states and European companies.

The EU has historically demonstrated that strategic enlargement and investment in emerging markets yield substantial economic benefits. The 2004 enlargement wave stands as a testament to this success, driving GDP per capita growth by over 30% in new member states and 10% in existing members through increased trade, investment flows, and institutional reforms. Notably, this growth was supported by comprehensive economic reforms in accession countries, increased capital accumulation through FDI, and productivity gains driven by technology transfers and enhanced education levels. Poland, for instance, leveraged EU accession to become the sixth-largest economy in the bloc, significantly increasing its industrial output and living standards. The Western Balkans now present a similar opportunity - one that can generate economic convergence, enhance regional stability, and create long-term prosperity for both the EU and WB6 nations.

By fostering dialogue between investors, policymakers, and business leaders, this summit in Tirana will highlight how key investment opportunities can catalyse growth, deepen market integration, and secure Europe's future as a competitive, resilient, and united bloc. It will also address critical challenges such as regulatory barriers, financing constraints, and geopolitical uncertainties that could impact regional economic development. Now is the time to capitalize on the momentum, leveraging past successes to build a resilient and integrated European economic future.

Rationale for the Investment Summit

A New Investment Frontier: Benefits for EU Companies and Markets

Europe's productivity gap with the global frontier can be traced back to a more limited market size, capital market constraints, skilled labour shortages, and stalled structural reforms.

There is widespread agreement on the sources of Europe's growth weakness. Recently released expert studies (Letta 2024; Draghi 2024) come to a similar conclusion that Europe's low productivity is related to lack of market depth and scale. Both reports link Europe's lack of competitiveness to Europe's incomplete single market in the trade of goods, services, and factors of production (capital, labour).

In an era marked by economic shifts, technological transformation, and geopolitical realignments, the Western Balkans offer a unique and timely opportunity for investment. The benefits extend beyond WB6 nations - EU businesses stand to gain significantly by expanding their market reach, reducing production costs, and strengthening supply chain resilience.

This investment summit seeks to bridge these gaps by:

- ▶ Expanding Market Opportunities for EU Firms - The WB6 region represents a growing consumer base with increasing purchasing power. European companies can capitalize on these emerging markets, securing first-mover advantages in key sectors.
- ▶ Boosting Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Returns - Investors require a clear, structured landscape to navigate opportunities in the Western Balkans. The summit will showcase high-potential sectors such as energy, digital transformation, tourism, industrial manufacturing and more.
- ▶ Enhancing Supply Chain Resilience - Recent global disruptions have highlighted the need for more geographically diverse supply chains. By deepening economic ties with WB6 nations, EU companies can benefit from nearshoring, reducing dependency on distant suppliers and lowering logistical risks and costs.
- ▶ Strengthening EU's Competitive Edge in Key Industries - Europe lags in digital innovation and emerging technologies. By investing in WB6 nations, EU firms can access lower-cost production hubs while fostering regional tech development, ensuring a stronger competitive stance against global rivals. Estonia's emergence as a digital hub post-accession serves as a model for how smaller economies can transform into tech powerhouses with the right investments.

Learning from the Past: EU Enlargement as a Success Model

The economic history of EU enlargement reveals that integrating emerging economies leads to widespread benefits. The 2004 EU expansion demonstrated that:

- ▶ Trade expansion and investment attraction were instrumental in raising productivity and economic growth. Market access led to an increase in firm size and efficiency.
- ▶ Financial support mechanisms, such as EU structural and cohesion funds, facilitated rapid infrastructure and institutional development. New member states benefited from foreign capital influx, helping boost productivity.
- ▶ Technology transfers and skill development enhanced labour market efficiency, positioning new member states for sustained economic progress. Regions with firms that had easier access to long-term financing saw GDP growth nearly 15 percentage points higher than those without.

By applying these lessons to the Western Balkans, the EU can ensure long-term economic gains for both parties. The experience of past EU enlargements suggests that a further EU expansion could lead to economic gains for both the next generation of accession countries and the current EU-27. Based on the assumption that the accession returns to new and old member states would be similar to estimates for the 2004 accession round, full EU membership for all current accession countries, could lift the combined new EU GDP per capita by up to 14 percent after 15 years.

With the EU currently reassessing its enlargement strategy, this summit serves as a timely forum to solidify commitments and fast-track economic integration.

Target Participants

- ▶ Government Representatives
- ▶ Business Leaders and Investors
- ▶ Chambers of Commerce & Industry

- ▶ Investment Banks and Financial Institutions
- ▶ International Financial Advisors
- ▶ Major Economic Forums
- ▶ International Economic Publishers

Key Features

1. High-Level Participation

- ▶ Attendance by Prime Ministers from Western Balkan countries alongside senior EU officials and key policymakers.

2. Thematic Sectoral Panels

- ▶ Bioeconomy Panel
- ▶ Energy Panel
- ▶ Digital Panel
- ▶ Manufacturing & Critical Raw Materials Panel
- ▶ Circular Economy Panel

3. Networking and Business Engagement

- ▶ Investment Showcase and Case Studies: Presentation of successful investment projects in the Western Balkans, demonstrating best practices and high-return opportunities for prospective investors.
- ▶ Investor Matchmaking and B2B/B2G Engagements: Structured B2B and B2G meetings, enabling direct engagement between investors, policymakers, and industry leaders.

- ▶ Roundtable Discussions: Accessing financing through instruments like the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) guarantee facilities (TBC).

4. Deliverables

- ▶ International Media and Public Engagement – Broad media coverage, including an international press conference featuring key speakers, to promote the summit's outcomes and reinforce investor confidence in the Western Balkans.
- ▶ Investment Commitments and MoUs: Signing of investment agreements, memoranda of understanding (MoUs), and public-private partnership (PPP) commitments between EU investors, WB6 governments, and businesses.
- ▶ Comprehensive post-Summit Report: Release of an in-depth report summarizing key insights, investment commitments, policy recommendations, and the roadmap for future economic collaboration between the EU and WB6.

Conclusion

The first EU-WB6 Investment Summit in Tirana is a strategic milestone in the economic integration of the region with the European Union. It represents an opportunity to drive FDI, foster innovation, and accelerate economic convergence.

The experience of Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries - which saw GDP growth surge, trade quadruple, and industrial output soar post-accession - proves that strategic investment fuels economic transformation. Poland, the Czech Republic, and Estonia have emerged as industrial and tech powerhouses, significantly contributing to EU-wide GDP and trade expansion. This success story can be replicated with WB6, positioning the region as a new dynamic hub for investments.

Investment in WB6 is not just about regional development, it is about enhancing Europe's global standing. With a young workforce, competitive production costs, and strategic geographic positioning, WB6 presents a unique opportunity to reinforce EU industrial value chains, improve supply chain resilience, and foster technological innovation.

For WB6 nations, this is the time to demonstrate commitment to reform, strengthen investor confidence, and align their economies with the European growth model. For the EU, this is the chance to extend its economic influence, reinforce stability, and unlock new avenues for sustainable growth.

The benefits for European companies and economies are clear: a strengthened supply chain, increased market access, enhanced industrial competitiveness, and higher returns on investment.

The time for investment is now. The place to start is Tirana.