



Civil society, if empowered, can help deliver the Western Balkans strategy

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Statement by

The European Union and the Western Balkans have a shared interest in working more closely together to guarantee all our citizens economic and social development, as well as security. The future of the region is a European future. The EU and the Western Balkans economies have benefited from closer integration as trade doubled in the last 10 years. The EU is today the first trading partner of the region, the biggest investor and the most credible and reliable political and geostrategic partner.

All Western Balkans have the chance to move forward on their respective European paths. To make sure the process is fully owned by all citizens, civil society organizations must be fully involved in the action plan of the recently adopted Strategy for the Western Balkans.

The [High Level Conference on Economic and social cohesion in the Western Balkans](#) in Sofia tomorrow will deliver clear recommendations to the EU heads of state and government meeting this week. I am convinced that there is no other alternative for both the EU and the Western Balkan countries than make steady, transformative and sustainable steps towards full membership.