

Meeting on Western Balkans: Investments and new model of growth

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BRUSSELS – A conference on harmonization of the development and economic recovery of the Western Balkans with the EU 2020 Strategy, which aims at a sustainable economic growth, preserving the environment, global competitiveness and, in particular, creating millions of new jobs was opened last night in Brussels.

The above will be achieved in the Western Balkans by engaging European and world financial organizations in financing, especially infrastructural projects in the Western Balkans region, with new ideas and reorganization of the existing EU funds supporting the reforms leading the region towards the EU membership.

These are the main messages conveyed by the officials of the European Parliament (EP), European Commission (EC) and the organizer, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) at the Western Balkans, at the opening of the "Western Balkans and Europe 2020 – Towards Convergence and Growth " conference at the European Parliament.

Opening the conference, at which the European and world bankers will also give their estimates of the development in the region and the expected project proposals offered by the governments of the states of the Western Balkans, the RCC Secretary General, Hido Biscevic pointed out severe difficulties plaguing the region due to the global economic crisis, that impede its advancement towards the EU.

Bišćević told Beta agency that institutionally, the countries of the region more or less advanced towards the EU membership, but also that political developments in the region were burdened by unresolved mutual issues, which abets those circles within the EU that prefer slower EU enlargement.

Two to three years since the onset of the global economic crisis, particularly the Western Balkans now experiences severe consequences, with strong economic and social turmoil, which slows down the political readiness for reforms and poses a threat from populism and renewed nationalist flares.

For this reason, it is necessary to seriously consider a further strategy, along with resolving pending mutual issues that are sometimes of strategic importance, a quick completion of the transition processes in the countries of the Western Balkans and gathering them around regional development projects, since they share similar problems of underdeveloped infrastructure, traffic and energy transfer.

The Head of RCC pointed out that Michael Leigh, Director General of the European Commission's Enlargement Directorate informed the meeting that the EU was considering a transformation of the existing program of EU IPA funds assisting reorganization and reforms in

the countries of the Western Balkans engaged in the EU accession process and harmonization with the EU 2020 Strategy.

Michael Leigh indirectly confirmed to the media that in this context they were also having in mind a proposal of the Serbian Deputy Prime Minister, Bozidar Djelic, to allocate money from the IPA funds at an earlier stage, in order to allow for its timely utilization for a more thorough and expedited preparation of the Western Balkans countries for the EU membership.