**(Joint statement from the leaders of the Western Balkans Six (WB6)**

***“One Region, Common Vision”***

1. Acknowledging the persistent and serious security challenges posed by current geopolitical circumstances and in particular Russian aggression against Ukraine, we, the leaders of the WB6 reemphasize our commitment to further the cooperation in our region and use a renewed momentum in the EU’s enlargement policy.

2. Welcoming the adoption by the European Parliament and the Council of the EU of the Reform and Growth Facility, which will further incentivize the EU accession path of the Western Balkans, by providing additional financial assistance upon the implementation of fundamental reforms.

3. Accordingly, in synergy and cooperation with our EU partners, preparation of the respective Reform Agendas of each of the Western Balkan 6 is well on its way with the aim to achieve crucial socio-economic reforms while fostering democracy, fundamental values and rule of law as a precondition for stability and prosperity of the Western Balkan Region.

4. With the prospect of the New Growth Plan for the Western Balkan 6, we are committed to embracing the opportunities presented by this initiative for the region; our aim is to facilitate the economic and social transformation of our societies, paving the way for full membership in the European Union, while remaining dedicated to upholding the merit-based principle of accession throughout this process.

5. Appreciating that the tangible results produced by the Common Regional Market (CRM) as the driver of intra-regional trade and the booster of economic integration in the Western Balkan Region. We, the Leaders of Western Balkan 6, remain committed to the completion of the first iteration of the CRM Action Plan ending in 2024 and call for full implementation of the past agreements reached in its context. We commit to endorse the new Action Plan for Common Regional Market 2025-2028 at the Berlin Process Leaders’ Summit 2024. This new phase of the CRM acts as a stepping-stone towards the EU’s Single Market in many sectors, unlocking the economic potential of the region, creating opportunities for our private sector and (SMEs) as well as for workers.

6. The second iteration of the Common Regional Market Action Plan will build on the existing priority areas of the CRM, but not limited to, such as free movement of goods, free movement of services, horizontal trade measures, human capital development, business enabling environment and competitiveness and digital transformation. We invite the Regional Cooperation Council and CEFTA to coordinate, in close cooperation with regional organisations, EU institutions, the regional civil societies and international financial institutions, as well as the relevant authorities of the WB6, to prepare the action plan for the new phase of Common Regional Market, including a timeline for implementation and measurable results. We invite the Regional Cooperation Council and other regional actors to continue the support and facilitate the involvement of the Parliaments in the Berlin Process and other regional integration agenda.

7. Aware of its importance for the accelerated convergence, we are committed to fulfilling all preconditions for joining the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA), as stated in the Tirana Declaration of 29th of February. In this effort, the European Commission will provide necessary and prompt assistance in order to accomplish the first accession to SEPA from the region, already by the end of 2024.

8. Recognizing the need for improving free movement of goods, the WB6, the CEFTA Secretariat and the Transport Community will finalise and implement a Green Lanes roadmap, including through enhanced intra-regional trade within the Western Balkans, improved customs cooperation between the Western Balkans and the EU and modernisation of border/common crossing points (BCP).

9. Considering the importance of an efficient mechanism for resolving the trade disputes, we recognize importance of completing negotiations of the CEFTA Additional Protocol 7 on Dispute Settlement with the aim of presenting the agreement at the upcoming Berlin Process Summit. To this end CEFTA will ensure equal treatment of all parties.

10. Furthermore, following the Comprehensive roadmap, targeted fiches will be prepared in order to address previously selected priority BCP. Alongside and building upon the Roadmap, the Leaders expressed full support to establish a Regional Program for Trade and Transport Facilitation, to enable convergence of the region to the EU Single Market by reducing trade barriers and costs and improving transport efficiency between the WB6 and the EU. The program will be implemented by the World Bank in close collaboration with the Transport Community, CEFTA and the European Commission,in tandem with the Safe and Sustainable Transport Program of the EU.

11. Following our priority to gradually join the EU Single Market, WB6 and EC will work together to prepare Agreements on Conformity Assessment and Acceptance (ACAAs) and for establishing the Single Market Academy, which will ensure that each of the WB6 individual systems fully align with those of the EU.

12. In order to contribute to the industrial competitiveness and strengthen the open strategic autonomy of the EU, stakeholders from the WB6 have joined the Critical Medicines Alliance. As members of the Alliance, the WB6 aspire to play an active role in strengthening and diversifying the supply chains of critical medicines in the EU, ultimately enhancing efforts to prevent and address shortages effectively.

13. Affirming our commitment to the continuity of this fruitful cooperation, we are pleased to announce that the next meeting of the leaders of the Western Balkans 6 on the Growth Plan will take place in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Being aware that a successful implementation of the Growth Plan and our economic progress are only obtainable through our good cooperation, democratic advancement, alignment with the EU policies, values and standards, we are ready for the next phase of our collaboration, which will gradually lead us to an efficient Common Regional Market that is well integrated into the EU Single Market.

14. With the aim of improving digital connectivity, WB6 and EC will work together to integrate the region into EU trusted services once domestic legislation is compliant with electronic identification, authentication, and trust services (eIDAS), domestic digital identity wallets are developed individual digital identity wallets and make them interoperable at regional level. This would allow the Western Balkans to be part of the EU Digital Identity Wallet.

15. WB6 are committed to intensifying efforts to follow up on past commitments and undertakings under the Berlin Process, including full implementation of the Agreements on mobility. Individually, we need to diligently address and eliminate obstacles to common interests arising from this agenda, which we acknowledge as ultimately beneficial for our citizens, economic prosperity, and the European integration of our region. To this end, we commit to ensuring fully functioning regional institutions to drive forward our Common Regional Market and prepare for our closer integration into the EU’s Single Market.

16. Led by the desire to bolster regional security, enhance financial integrity, and strengthen cooperation in combating financial crime, the leaders of the Western Balkan 6 express their interest to explore possibilities to cooperate with the new Anti-Money Laundering Authority of the European Union (AMLA).

*\*Bosnia and Herzegovina will consider the proposed activities in accordance with the constitutional part of the competences of BiH institutions, entities and cantons, that is, the cooperation of all relevant institutions in BiH through the coordination mechanism.*

*\*Republic of North Macedonia while endorsing the statement is expressing reservations regarding the further activity timeline preparation within the proposed building blocks of CRM2 while facing the imminent election of a new Government.*