

Annual meeting

of the Initiative for coal regions in transition
in the Western Balkans and Ukraine

November
2022

MEETING REPORT



Annual meeting of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine (November 2022)

Meeting report

Imprint / Legal notice

The [Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine](#) aims to help countries and regions to move away from coal towards a carbon-neutral economy, while ensuring that this transition is just. It fosters dialogue across regions and between stakeholders through knowledge-sharing, capacity building, and exchange between coal regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine and in the EU. The initiative is led by the [European Commission](#) and six collaborating international partners: the [World Bank](#), the [Energy Community Secretariat](#), the [European Bank for Reconstruction and Development](#), the [European Investment Bank](#), Poland's [National Fund for Environment Protection and Water Management](#), and the [College of Europe in Natolin](#).

Learn more about the initiative:

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 [DG ENERGY](#)

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Executive summary

The second [annual meeting](#) of the [Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine](#) took place on 22-23 November 2022, gathering around 139 in-person attendees and a constant 45 online attendees. Live streaming and interpretation were available in Albanian, Bosnian, Croatian, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serbian, and Ukrainian. The event gathered representatives of policy-makers and public authorities, international organisations, industry and the energy sector, and civil society. It also provided stakeholders a forum for direct exchange on the current landscape, challenges and ways forward for just transition in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine.*

The first day of the annual meeting started with a keynote speech from the European Commission and an update from other principal international partners of the initiative: ([World Bank](#), [European Bank of Reconstruction and Development](#), [Energy Community Secretariat](#), Poland's [National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management](#), and [European Investment Bank](#)¹).

There were three panel discussions focused on:

1. Strategic approach to coal phase-out: has the energy crisis become a game-changer?
2. Stakeholder engagement and just transition in Western Balkan and Ukrainian coal regions
3. Good practices on repurposing land and assets, and environmental remediation

The second day of the annual meeting included two panel discussions focused on:

1. Human capital development in coal regions
2. Financing the just transition in Western Balkan and Ukrainian coal regions

The annual meeting of the initiative was closed by Xiaoqing Yu (World Bank) and Elodie Salle (the initiative's Secretariat), highlighting the acute challenges ahead and congratulating the readiness for support.

Meeting recordings and presentations shown during the event are [available here](#).

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

¹ The [College of Europe in Natolin](#) is also a principal partner but was not represented in the opening session. Activities of the College of Europe were outlined by the World Bank.

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Setting the scene: Welcome and the keynote speech from the European Commission

Keynote speech from the European Commission:

- **Matthew Baldwin**, Deputy Director General, [DG ENER](#), European Commission

Presentation of the agenda and objectives of the meeting by the Master of Ceremony:

- **Robert Pollock**, Senior expert, [Secretariat for the Initiative for coal regions in transition](#)

The second annual meeting of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine was started by the Master of Ceremony, **Robert Pollock**, who welcomed the in-person participants and attendees online. **Matthew Baldwin** (DG ENER) opened the event by mentioning what a pleasure it was to see so many representatives from target areas of the Initiative, and in particular welcomed the large delegation from Ukraine despite Russia's ongoing invasion. Matthew Baldwin reiterated the EU's commitment to a just transition and the need to reshape the energy system even faster and in a more cohesive way for a greener and more sustainable future. He stressed the importance of this initiative in bringing together the expertise and experience from the coal regions in the EU with those of the Western Balkans and Ukraine and outlined this meeting as one part of a long line of collaboration efforts. Robert Pollock introduced the agenda for the event, co-designed by the Secretariat and the seven principal partners of the initiative. He expressed his hope that this event would be an opportunity to learn more about the initiative's support and for country delegates to detail their current and future support needs towards a just transition away from coal.

Update from the international partners of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine

Moderated by the Master of Ceremony:

- **Robert Pollock**, Senior expert, [Secretariat for the Initiative for coal regions in transition](#)

Presentations by:

- **Véronique Marx**, Team Leader for just transition and energy poverty, [DG ENER](#), European Commission
- **Hoa-Binh Adjemian**, Deputy Head of Unit, Thematic Support – An economy that works for people, green, digital and connected, [DG NEAR](#), European Commission
- **Alexander Huurdeman**, Senior Gas Specialist, Energy & Extractives Global Practice, [World Bank](#)
- **Artur Lorkowski**, Director, [Energy Community Secretariat](#);
- **Anna Vasylieva**, Energy Transition, Climate Strategy and Delivery, [EBRD](#)
- **Matteo Rivellini**, Head of Enlargement Division, [EIB](#)
- **Marta Babicz**, Director of the External Funds Department, Poland's [National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management \(NFOSiGW\)](#)

The first session, moderated by Robert Pollock (Master of Ceremony), was an opportunity for the principal partners to update stakeholders on their activities, policies and support programmes contributing to the coal phase out and the just transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. **Véronique Marx** (DG ENER) commenced by outlining the initiative's past, present and future work, including the [exchange programme](#), the upcoming local just transition workshops and the [webinars](#). **Alexander Huurdeman** (World Bank) followed by highlighting the contribution of the World Bank initiative, including the support of region-to-region exchanges between Bosnia and Herzegovina and Appalachia (USA), the

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establishment of the [Coal Regions Learning Academy](#) in collaboration with the College of Europe and the creation of a just transition roadmap for Bosnia and Herzegovina. **Artur Lorkowski** (Energy Community Secretariat) explained the Energy Community's work in supplying necessary equipment for early energy sector reconstruction in Ukraine, the implementation of the [Decarbonisation Roadmap](#) in the Western Balkan countries as well as its contribution to three other related initiatives: the [Clean Air Regions initiative](#), the [Gender and Energy Compact](#) and the [Centre for Alleviating Energy Poverty](#). **Hoa-Binh Adjemian** (DG NEAR) highlighted the overarching activities of DG NEAR in the Western Balkans, supporting energy efficiency, renewable energy development and energy connectivity. The local dimensions of their efforts are specified through the [Covenant of Mayors](#) and the [Mayors for Economic Growth](#) programmes as well as their aim to support the green reconstruction of Ukraine. **Anna Vasylieva** (EBRD) outlined the three pillars of the EBRD's approach, including (1) green economy transition, (2) human capital development (incl. worker reskilling) and (3) regional economic diversification. She also highlighted the EBRD's policy support, notably the country-wide [Just Transition Diagnostic and Action plans](#) and [corporate climate governance plans](#). **Matteo Rivellini** (EIB) shared that the EIB aims to scale up their renewable energy investments to unlock €1 trillion investments to fight climate change and announced the newly established [EIB Global](#) branch dedicated to the EIB's activities outside of the EU. Finally, **Marta Babicz** (NFOSiGW) intervened

highlighting the important efforts of the NFOSiGW in collaboration with the World Bank in organising several online site visits as part of a knowledge exchange between Polish and Ukrainian partners, as well as their continued willingness to share the 30 years of experience from Polish coal regions along the transition.

In the Q&A, several points were raised by the audience. First, one participant from Ukraine reflected that although the just transition may not be the priority for Ukraine given the current war, the just transition should be a key component within the green reconstruction of the country. This was reiterated by the principal partners **Marta Babicz** underlining the need to act now and **Anna Vasylieva** highlighting the importance of building back better and not reinvesting in polluting assets. Second, the importance of academia in the just energy transition was discussed. On this, **Matteo Rivellini** outlined the potential for universities to act as centres of excellence while **Hoa-Binh Adjemian** highlighted the role of education in mindset building for innovation to prepare young people for the vast proportion of future jobs that do not exist today. Finally, panellists discussed the importance of developing sub-regional capacity and wondered what efforts are in place to establish this within the Western Balkans and Ukraine. **Alexander Huurdeman** responded by highlighting the importance of the twinning activities and the [Coal Regions Learning Academy](#). **Artur Lorkowski** referenced the Energy Community's [Clean Air Regions Initiative](#), in which programs are drafted in close collaboration with local administrations helping to develop sub-regional capacity.



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Panel discussion 1: Strategic approach to coal phase-out: has the energy crisis become a game-changer?

Moderated by:

- **Adam Cwetsch**, Head of European Green Deal Unit, Energy Community Secretariat, with opening remarks from Artur Lorkowski, Director, [Energy Community Secretariat](#)

Round table and Q&A with the audience with:

- **Aleksandra Tomczak**, [Cabinet Member of the Executive VP of the European Commissioner Frans Timmermans](#), European Commission
- **Naser Nuredini**, [Minister of Environment and Physical Planning](#), North Macedonia
- **Victoria Gryb**, Chair of Energy Security subcommittee and Chair of Just Transition inter-fractional group, [Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine](#)

Artur Lorkowski (Energy Community Secretariat) opened the first panel discussion by outlining the current challenges faced by the Western Balkans and Ukraine in the coal phase-out: the dependence on coal within existing energy systems with the share of coal power generation ranging from 30% in Ukraine to 95% in Kosovo, and the current invasion of Ukraine which has triggered crises both in energy availability and energy affordability. **Aleksandra Tomczak** (European Commission) commenced the panel by explaining that the awareness of the need for a just transition within the most affected coal regions has never been higher. She highlighted the role of both economic and political factors driving the uptake of renewable energy and the need to change the narrative from the challenges of ‘phasing-out’ of coal to the opportunities of ‘phasing-in’ renewable energies. **Naser Nuredini** (North Macedonia) followed-up by referencing the ambition of the Western Balkans despite the costly transition and highlighted the need for a regional energy strategy to address differing energy supply needs. **Victoria Gryb**

(Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine) finished by outlining the current situation in Ukraine, in which the war has damaged 50% of the energy infrastructure, and that immediate technical support is needed for Ukraine to survive this winter.

In the Q&A, questions related to (1) the potential need for additional instruments, such as the Just Transition Mechanism for the Western Balkans and Ukraine, (2) the role of the private sector in the transition and (3) the potential energy source lock-in associated with exchanging coal for gas in North Macedonia and Ukraine. In relation to the additional instruments, **Aleksandra Tomczak** responded by highlighting the positive effects of the [EU Just Transition Mechanism](#) in improving stakeholder engagement and increasing the momentum of the transition both within the EU and outside. **Naser Nuredini** emphasised the need for technical support in project design and implementation to accompany the available green funding. He also addressed the role of the private sector, highlighting the need for a business-friendly environment in Western Balkan countries to attract private investment. Regarding transitioning from coal to gas, **Aleksandra Tomczak** highlighted how stranded assets could be avoided while addressing the short-term demand for gas, including floating gas terminals and green hydrogen-compatible gas infrastructure. **Victoria Gryb** highlighted the importance of balancing renewable energy goals with the energy demands of the Ukrainian people.

Panel discussion 2: Stakeholder engagement and just transition in Western Balkan and Ukrainian coal regions

Opening remarks and moderation by:

- **Christopher Sheldon**, Country Manager for Bosnia and Herzegovina, [World Bank](#)

Presentation of the Public Perceptions Survey and poll:

- **Justine Morven Sylvester**, Sustainable Land Use Specialist, [World Bank](#)

Panel discussion and Q&A from the audience with:

- **Rajko Kovačević**, Mayor, [Municipality of Pljevlja](#), Montenegro
- **Nevena Smilevska**, Just Transition Coordinator for the Western Balkans, [Bankwatch](#)

Christopher Sheldon (World Bank) opened the second panel discussion by remarking that stakeholder engagement is critical for the just transition. People, especially those most impacted, should be at the centre of coal phase-out transition plans. Building on this, **Justine Morven Sylvester**



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(World Bank) presented key findings of the World Bank's [Public Perception Survey](#) in the Western Balkans. Key takeaways included: (1) A large majority of respondents are not familiar with the concept of just transition, (2) Job losses or unemployment and increase in prices are the top two main concerns, (3) Only in Kosovo are most respondents expecting that the energy transition will succeed, and (4) A large majority of respondents believe that citizens should be involved in the process of the energy transition. **Rajko Kovačević** (Municipality of Pljevlja) highlighted that overcoming psychological barriers regarding the green transition is a significant challenge. To make the transition less painful, it is essential to (1) involve all actors from the beginning of the process and build capacities and (2) define and inform stakeholders about the objectives. **Nevena Smilevska** (Bankwatch) shared, based on good practices in Greece and North Macedonia, that broad public engagement should be planned and commenced early.

In the Q&A, several audience members raised discussion points for the panellists. On the topic of involving young people in the just transition, both panellists shared that more creative approaches are helpful in engaging youth (including setting up a creative hub, using comic books, etc.). On the issue raised whether a phase-out date would be a helpful tool to change people's minds, **Rajko Kovačević** shared that a realistic roadmap and a plan would need to be set up before communicating a phase-out date. Thirdly, the World Bank's opinion on solutions for economic and energy transitions in coal regions was discussed. **Christopher Sheldon** emphasised that solutions need to be site-specific. It is essential (1) to keep the energy character of the region when transitioning to renewable energies, (2) to look for alternative economic opportunities which fit considering the proximity and strengths of the area, and (3) to consult stakeholders on the kind of future they would like to see.



Panel discussion 3: Good practices on repurposing land and assets, and environmental remediation

Introduction and moderation:

- **Olaf Osica**, Senior Advisor and visiting professor, [College of Europe in Natolin](#)

Presentations by:

- **Piotr Cofałka**, Deputy Director for Research and Development, [Institute for Ecology of Industrial Areas](#), Poland
- **Iryna Kostetska**, Post-PhD researcher, [National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine](#)
- **Samir Kamenjaković**, Mayor, [Municipality of Živinice](#), Bosnia and Herzegovina
- **Wolfgang Pohl**, Lead Specialist for Environment and Geosciences, [World Bank](#)

Olaf Osica (College of Europe in Natolin) opened the panel discussion by sharing how repurposing land and assets are rewarding aspects of the energy transition because citizens can see and experience the change. **Piotr Cofałka** (Institute for Ecology of Industrial Areas) shared several examples of multi-solving in the Silesian coal region, which allowed for the improvement of climate adaptation, quality of life and the environment. Examples included the [Silesian Park](#), the [Zabrze Guido Coal Mine](#) (which is repurposed into a coal mine museum) and the [Katowice Coal Mine](#) (which is repurposed into a Culture Zone). **Samir Kamenjaković** (Municipality of Živinice) highlighted the process of repurposing land in the Municipality of Živinice, specifically regarding the project implementation of the [landfill Eko-Sep](#). **Iryna Kostetska** (National University of Life and Environmental Sciences of Ukraine) communicated the potential and activities of three local communities in coal regions in Ukraine. These activities were fostered by a virtual study visit within the Poland-Ukraine Knowledge Exchange for Coal Regions in Transition Programme. Lastly, **Wolfgang Pohl** (World Bank) shared how post-mining lands can be differentiated based on geotechnical properties, topography, hydrography, environmental risks, location and cost sensitivity/added value. He also highlighted the [Land Repurposing App \(LURA\)](#), which can assist in deciding how to repurpose post-mining lands. **Wolfgang Pohl** shared that the World Bank can apply its work to other regions, but there needs to be a request and a project framework. They are also aiming to disseminate the LURA tool to a broader public.

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In the Q&A, several audience members raised discussion points for the panellists. On the topic of land tenure arrangements, **Samir Kamenjaković** shared that land tenure arrangements in the Municipality of Živinice took place based upon the regulation and spatial plans and through a mix of public and private partnerships. Secondly, on the topic of citizen engagement in repurposing land, **Piotr Cofałka** emphasised the importance of stakeholder engagement from early on and shared how young people in Katowice gave input to creating a gaming hub. **Wolfhart Pohl** complemented that the LURA tool can be a valuable tool in public engagement processes. Thirdly, an audience member asked about the non-financial challenges when repurposing land and assets. **Piotr Cofałka** highlighted the difficulties of having a diversity of landowners and various ideas on how to repurpose the area. Lastly, on the question of whether the war in Ukraine might boost the energy transition in Ukraine, **Iryna Kostetska** highlighted that despite the current challenges, strategic plans need to be prepared. Cooperation with experts from other countries will be essential herein.

Conclusion and closing remarks from day 1

Insights from:

- **Valentyna Moskalenko**, Advisor to the Prime Minister of Ukraine

Robert Pollock (Master of Ceremony) thanked all the panellists for their contribution on the first day of the Annual Meeting. He highlighted that while the endpoint might be similar, the starting points for all the countries in the Western Balkans and Ukraine are very diverse. **Valentyna Moskalenko** (Advisor to the Prime Minister of Ukraine) emphasised that Ukraine needs to start from scratch and needs enormous amounts of technical and financial support. She stated that the questions of a just transition and decarbonisation are high on the agenda in Ukraine. There is however a diversity of energy challenges on the national and regional level and many unknown factors they need to deal with, including how big the environmental problems will be and how many people will stay in or leave Ukraine. Valentyna Moskalenko thanked everyone for supporting Ukraine.



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Welcome to the event and recap from day 1

Insights from:

- **Robert Pollock**, Senior expert, [Secretariat for the Initiative for coal regions in transition](#)

Robert Pollock (Master of Ceremony) recapitulated that re-occurring words on the first day of the event were paradox, dilemma, conundrum and tensions. Not only in Ukraine but in the Western Balkans too, we stand at a fork in the road; we need to decide whether we do (a repackaging of) the same old or make the transition to a green, sustainable, just decarbonised future. Herein short-term decisions will determine the medium to long-term future. During day two of the event, but also in the coming weeks and months, the desire for change should continue to be strengthened.

Panel discussion 1: Human capital development in coal regions

Insights from:

- **Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay**, Associate Director for Skills and Employment, Gender and Economic Inclusion, [EBRD](#)

Panellists:

- **Margherita Calderone**, Principal Economist, Gender and Economic Inclusion, [EBRD](#)
- **Camilla Roman**, Green Jobs Policy Specialist, [International Labour Organisation](#)
- **Andriy Zalivskyy**, Mayor, [Chervonohrad City](#), Ukraine
- **Jovan Rajić**, Chairman of the Board, [Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute](#), Serbia

Biljana Radonjic Ker-Lindsay (EBRD) opened the first panel discussion of the day by restating that across the Western Balkans 180 000 people rely directly on coal mines and

130 000 rely on related jobs. **Margherita Calderone** (EBRD) commenced the panel by highlighting that the transition should not exacerbate inequalities, that there is a need to forecast the skills needed in the future and to mainstream a feminist approach within the just transition. **Camilla Roman** (International Labour Organisation) emphasised the necessity to analyse current and future skills needed and to create a better connection between these. In addition, she argued that the lack of policy coherence between energy, social and skills policies needs to be addressed. **Andriy Zalivskyy** (Chervonohrad City) elaborated on challenges in the context of Ukraine, including the absence of investments, the changing demographics and the energy blackouts. They have however successfully established a training on solar panels for electricians and want to expand their training offer. **Jovan Rajić** (Renewables and Environmental Regulatory Institute) highlighted two pre-conditions to start and accelerate the transition. He argued that, firstly, political will is needed, and secondly, there is a need for strategic and structural support of the European Union to the Western Balkans.

In the Q&A, several topics were discussed based on questions from the audience. On the subject of gender and families in the just transition, a representative of the World Bank shared that forthcoming research proved that women are affected as much as men by the just transition. On the other hand, **Jovan Rajić** shared that gender has not yet been seen by stakeholders as an issue in the transition. **Camilla Roman** shared that the problems include that (1) women are not well-represented in decision-making and (2) that there is a need for deeper analysis since not all problems might be directly visible. She argued that both gender mainstreaming and targeted approaches to activating women are necessary. **Andriy Zalivskyy** shared that the municipality of Chervonohrad has prepared a plan for integrating women and their skills development in the just transition. **Margherita Calderone** shared that the EBRD offers several training programmes, career services and just transition diagnostics, which are gender-responsive, and might help regions make a gender-responsive just transition.

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Panel discussion 2: Financing just transitions in Western Balkan and Ukrainian coal regions

Introduction and moderation by:

- **Marialena Petrakou**, Loan Officer, Lending Operations, Enlargement Region, [EIB](#)

Panellists:

- **Paul Hickey**, Urban and Regional Development Specialist, [EIB](#)
- **Hoa-Binh Adjemian**, Deputy Head of Unit, Thematic Support – An economy that works for people, green, digital and connected, [DG NEAR](#), European Commission
- **Rina Kryeziu-Rogova**, Senior Officer of Heating Systems and Natural Gas, Energy Department, [Ministry of Economy](#), Kosovo
- **Viktor Berishaj**, Western Balkans Climate and Energy Policy Coordinator, [CAN Europe](#)
- **Stefan Kostovski**, Regional Banker, [EBRD](#)

The last session of the annual meeting was introduced by **Marialena Petrakou** (EIB) and focused on the opportunities and challenges related to financing the just transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. **Paul Hickey** (EIB) opened the discussion by outlining the four themes within the eligibility criteria of EIB funding, including (1) decarbonisation of energy production, (2) enabling infrastructure, (3) energy efficiency and innovation and (4) development of new technologies. **Stefan Kostovski** (EBRD) highlighted the importance of strategic planning and political commitment to attract funding, and the need for tailor-made funding on a project-by-project basis. **Hoa Binh Adjemian** (DG NEAR)

continued by highlighting the need to maximise the limited public sector funding through different categories of projects using a combination of grants and guarantee schemes to crowd in private finance. **Rina Kryeziu-Rogova** (Ministry of Economy, Kosovo) followed by highlighting a range of specific renewable energy projects in Kosovo, including [Solar4Kosovo](#) and Solar4Kosovo II. They are contributing to Kosovo's 2031 target of installing 1400 MW of renewable energy generation mostly in the form of solar and wind. **Viktor Berishaj** (CAN Europe) concluded by reiterating the need for concrete plans and specific targets that can be worked towards in the Western Balkans, referencing the Energy Community's existing Decarbonisation Roadmap and the potential benefits of an expansion of the Just Transition Mechanism to the region.

In the Q&A, multiple questions were raised covering the topics of project development capacity, the ability to attract private finance and the benefits of EU schemes such as the EU taxonomy in the Western Balkans. **Paul Hickey** stressed that capacity is frequent bottleneck for project design and implementation and outlined the technical assistance provided by the EIB at all stages of the project pathway to overcome this. **Stefan Kostovski** also highlighted the EU and EBRD-funded [solar PV project](#) with the state-owned electricity company ESM in North Macedonia, as an example of capacity development to support project implementation. On attracting private finance, **Hoa-Binh Adjemian** commented that although local finances are available, the structuring of these finances needs to be improved, outlining [JASPERS](#) as a useful tool to support this. He also stressed the critical importance of the [EU taxonomy](#) to classify sustainable investments and avoid greenwashing activities within the EU and in Energy Community and Neighbourhood countries.



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Closing session

Insights from:

- **Xiaoqing Yu**, Country Director for the Western Balkans, [World Bank](#)
- **Elodie Salle**, Project Manager, Secretariat of the [Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine](#)

The annual meeting was concluded by **Xiaoqing Yu** (World Bank) and **Elodie Salle** (Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine). **Xiaoqing Yu** shared three reflections on the topics covered during the meeting. First, she highlighted that despite the acute challenges being felt by around the world currently, countries must embark on the transition now. Second, she outlined that people and the environment must be at the heart of the transition and economic opportunity at the core

of the solution. Third, she expressed her delight at seeing the readiness of the various international finance institutions to support the coal transition in these regions. **Elodie Salle** concluded the event by thanking all the speakers and delegates for their valuable contributions that will help with shaping the future agenda of the Initiative.

Authors:

Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

This report is not exhaustive in content; the full content can be obtained from the streaming records of sessions, which are available [online here](#).





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