



Annual meeting

of the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition
in the Western Balkans and Ukraine

June 2021

MEETING REPORT



Annual meeting of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine (June 2021)

Meeting report

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 Annual Meeting of the [Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine](#) took place on 23 and 24 June 2021 gathering around 200 participants. Its purpose was to give representatives of national and regional public authorities, international organisations, energy sector, NGOs, academia and businesses an opportunity to engage in a multi-stakeholder dialogue and to exchange on the prevalent policy frameworks and practices, on the priorities and key challenges, as well as on financing possibilities in the context of a clean and just energy transition. The meeting promoted political dialogue, visibility and momentum of the transition agenda in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Ukraine.*

Following the keynote speeches from representatives of the European Commission and the World Bank, the first day of the event gave voice to the affected regions of the Western Balkans and Ukraine through three panel discussions focussing (i) on the socio-economic challenges encountered in coal regions, (ii) on the challenges in terms of environmental impacts and repurposing of mining infrastructure, and (iii) on clean energy alternatives.

The second day of the event featured presentations from the Secretariat and the international organisations leading the initiative ([World Bank](#), [European Bank of Reconstruction and Development](#), [Energy Community Secretariat](#), [College of Europe in Natolin, Poland's National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management](#), and [European Investment Bank](#)). The newly launched [Coal Regions Exchange Programme](#) was introduced and welcomed by the audience. Jerzy Buzek, Member of the European Parliament, closed the two-day event emphasising the pivotal role of the [Initiative](#) and the importance of working together with the Western Balkans and Ukraine in the energy transition process.

* 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.

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Welcome and keynote from the European Commission and the World Bank

The Annual meeting of the [Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine](#) was opened by Elodie Salle ([Secretariat](#)) asking the audience about their origins and the type of stakeholders they represented. The answer showed that many countries and a wide range of stakeholders were present at the meeting. Then, she introduced the three keynote speakers of the event, namely:

- **Paula Pinho**, Director for Just Transition, Consumers, Energy Efficiency and Innovation, European Commission ([DG ENER](#));
- **Katarína Mathernová**, Deputy Director-General in charge of Eastern Neighbourhood, Economic Transformation and Relations with IFIs, Acting Director for Support Group for Ukraine, European Commission ([DG NEAR](#));
- **Sameer Shukla**, Acting Infrastructure Director for Europe and Central Asia, [World Bank](#).

Paula Pinho (DG ENER) gave a warm welcome to the participants on behalf of the European Commission and stated the main goal of the Initiative: to create a space for all stakeholders to meet and engage in concrete discussions on just transition towards a climate-friendly energy system. She underlined that the EU was strongly committed to working with all partners on the European continent and to support the Western Balkans and Ukraine on their path of decarbonisation. She noted that the [EU Initiative](#), launched in 2017, has confirmed the importance of engaging local actors and has led to sustainable projects in many countries, including Romania, Greece, Slovakia and Poland. In the Western Balkans and Ukraine, the journey is only starting, and the EU and the principal partners of the Initiative will give support to these regions to achieve a just transition, for example through the discussions at this very meeting and through the Coal regions exchange programme.

Katarína Mathernová (DG NEAR) echoed Ms. Pinho's words, emphasising that the green transition needs to stretch beyond the borders of the EU. She acknowledged the fact

that countries would be affected differently by the transition and offered Western Balkans and Ukrainian counterparts a helping hand to overcome challenges. Ms. Mathernová also noted that the Economic and Investment plan for the Western Balkans, adopted in 2020, will make considerable contributions to the climate goals and that a similar plan for Ukraine was about to be unveiled.

Finally, **Sameer Shukla** (World Bank) acknowledged the wide participation of countries and stakeholders at this annual event and pointed to the need to manage the energy transition consciously to make it less disruptive. Western Balkans and Ukrainian regions are invited to learn from the valuable experiences of other countries, which are further down the path in their energy transitions, e.g. through the many activities under the Initiative. Mr. Shukla emphasised that people and communities needed to be at the centre of the discussion in order to achieve a just and inclusive transition for all. Finally, he pointed to the recently announced [Climate Change Action Plan](#) of the World Bank in which just transition is one of the main pillars.

Panel discussion 1: Voices from the coal regions on socio-economic challenges

Moderated by Selma Šehović, [Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung](#) (FES), Climate change and Just energy transition, Dialogue Southeast Europe.

Panellists:

- **Bego Gutić**, Mayor of [Banovići](#), Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- **Blagoja Ralpovski**, President, [Confederation of Free Trade Unions, North Macedonia](#);
- **Aleksandar Macura**, Co-founder, Programme Director, [RES Foundation](#);
- **Victoria Shevchuk**, Coordinator for Just Transition in the Western Balkans, [Bankwatch](#).

The first panel discussion was moderated by Selma Šehović (Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung – FES) and showcased voices from the ground from those grappling with the challenges of coal phase-out in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

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First, **Mayor Gutić** presented the local perspective, shedding light on why local leaders are relevant to regional coal transitions. Mayors are obliged to take care of their inhabitants, many of whom are at a real risk of losing their jobs and ways of life in times of transition. It is the local government that implements action on the ground, at the community level, and thus must be included in transition conversations. Furthermore, they should be given adequate support to ensure they can effectively care for their inhabitants.

Next, **Blagoja Ralpovski** (Confederation of Free Trade Unions, North Macedonia) spoke from the perspective of trade unions, with a focus on North Macedonia. He explained that the very concept of “just transition” was coined by trade unions, and thus they are critical to transition processes. However, they are not included in transition dialogues in North Macedonia. Furthermore, trust in institutions is very low in North Macedonia, which is a major challenge that speaks to the need to engage local unions. Representation of those working in the coal industry, on-the-ground, coupled with much more transparency and support from institutions, is the only way to ensure a successful transition.

Aleksandar Macura (RES Foundation) began by echoing this sentiment, saying that representation is key to transition. He outlined how critical transitioning away from coal really is, both for the climate, and because lignite is less and less productive and competitive. He stated that the transition must meaningfully consider and involve the people at its heart. People have deep fears that transition invariably means losing their jobs and are concerned that they are not represented in transition discussions, or even in reports, which are too often produced by outsiders. Mr. Macura thus emphasised that ownership of the transition is important and that local communities have to be involved from the very beginning in the dialogue. Mr. Macura concluded by saying that *“We need a just transition by the Western Balkans and for the Western Balkans.”*

The last panellist, **Victoria Shevchuk** (Bankwatch), laid out three concrete actions that are needed to accelerate the just transition. First, establish a Just Transition fund specifically for the Western Balkans and Ukraine, as this is currently covered only by various smaller loans and funds. Second, set up an environment of cooperation that gives voice to affected communities; in other words, governments must establish processes for public participation, consultation, and public awareness. Last, adopt clear coal phase-out dates. In sum, at the national level, Ms. Shevchuk recommended adopting phase-out dates; making debates transparent; developing transition scenarios and unlocking investments in renewables.

The session closed with a moderated discussion among panellists. In this context, Ms. Shevchuk elaborated that a few funds currently exist, and the Western Balkans countries

can access the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), the EBRD loan programmes, the EIB support, and the Western Balkans Investment Framework. As a last comment, Mr. Macura noted that this discussion has focused only on the sectors that will be most impacted and directly made redundant. However, there is also energy poverty in the regions – while rising energy prices may be good for tackling the climate crisis, we must ensure that these vulnerable people are protected. He also added that energy efficiency should be made an integral part of the discussions.

Panel discussion 2: Voices from the coal regions on environmental/repurposing challenges

Moderated by Peter Vajda, Senior Environmental Expert, Energy Community Secretariat.

Panellists:

- **Mirza Kušljugić**, Country expert, Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- **Oleksander Brykalov**, Mayor of Myrnohrad, Council member of [Platform for Sustainable Development of Coal Towns](#) (Donetsk region);
- **Ildar Salieiev**, CEO, [DTEK Energy](#), Ukraine;
- **Tadeusz Pogonowski**, Deputy Director of the [ARP SA Branch in Katowice](#), replacing Mr Miroslaw Skibski, Director, Katowice Branch of Industrial Development Agency.

The second panel was moderated by Peter Vajda (Energy Community Secretariat) who introduced **Mirza Kušljugić** (country expert for Bosnia and Herzegovina) as the first panellist. Mr. Kušljugić gave a presentation of the possible options for utilising the physical infrastructure of former coal mines. He drew on past experiences from Bosnia and Herzegovina where coal mines have been repurposed for recreational, agricultural and industrial purposes. Examples showed the potential of reusing mines for photovoltaic installations, biomass plants and technological parks. Furthermore, he explained different challenges experienced in mining areas related to re-skilling coal and stressed the importance of recognizing local ownership and including trade unions and local community representatives from the outset of developing repurposing ideas.

The second panellist, **Oleksander Brykalov**, mayor of the town of Myrnohrad (Ukraine), outlined the prevailing environmental issues and challenges of transition in his region. He gave the participants detailed insights into the array of photovoltaic installation and heating projects that were planned in the area, some of them using coal mine residuals. Furthermore, he showed the three programmes for energy transition funded in his region and outlined their transformation strategy to reach the strategic renewable energy goals.

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Next, **Ildar Salieiev** shared his experiences as a representative of the DTEK Energy company which is supporting Ukrainian mines in their closure. He gave an overview of the measures the company is undertaking to become an environmentally friendly, high-tech, and climate neutral company by 2040. He pointed to the fact that the coal industry in Ukraine still employs over 100,000 people; and emphasised the economic dependency of 60 towns in particular. To avoid adverse socio-economic impacts, DTEK is supporting local authorities in the development of transition roadmaps and has contributed to the implementation of 40 job creation projects, stressing the importance of economic diversification in this context. Mr. Salieiev also mentioned that DTEK analysed more than 400 projects and examples from other coal regions, which informed its selection of feasible projects for Ukrainian coal regions. Mr. Salieiev noted that more and more coal mining communities in Ukraine are following similar paths of developing a just transition strategy through working groups, to which DTEK is ready to provide assistance.

In his reply to a question from the audience, Mr. Salieiev spoke of DTEK's efforts to reduce the company's impact on the environment through industrial emissions/dust emissions.

Finally, **Tadeusz Pogonowski** (Industrial Development Agency) gave his perspective as an industry representative. He noted that the transition that commenced in Poland already several decades ago has led to drastic changes in his country's economy and landscape. With only 80,000 people directly employed in mines today (around 500,000 involved indirectly), he pointed to the need to take a holistic approach to transition, involving stakeholders from all governmental levels. To meet the goal of phasing-out all coal mines by 2049, and overcoming the challenges of transition, Poland has developed a Social Agreement together with many stakeholders, outlining protective actions for closure and post-closure support.

With regard to the participants in the conflict around the Turów mine which was raised in the Q&A session, Mr. Pogonowski admitted that the perception of coal mining in Poland is changing and that the dispute between Poland and Czechia needs to be settled for a just transition to succeed.

Panel discussion 3: Voices from the coal regions on clean energy transition

Moderated by Irina Lazzerini, Sustainable Energy Expert, Energy Community Secretariat.

Panellists:

- **Igor Golubović**, Major of [Pljevlja](#), Montenegro;
- **Sonja Risteska**, Project Manager Southeast Europe, [Agora Energiewende](#);

- **Viktor Berishaj**, Energy and Climate Policy Coordinator for Southeast Europe, [Climate Action Network](#);
- **Rinora Gojani**, Programmes and Operations Manager, [Balkan Green Foundation](#).

Irina Lazzerini (Energy Community Secretariat) opened the panel by remarking that the clean energy transition cannot be anything other than just and inclusive, which is why it is crucial to involve workers, local communities, citizens, and other stakeholders through active dialogue.

After providing some background information on the coal situation in Montenegro, and Pljevlja specifically, **Igor Golubović** (Major of Pljevlja) outlined the main challenges in transition. Above all, he highlighted the lack of information and awareness about the transition among the impacted communities and the population at large. Secondly, he pointed to the lack of coordination between the activities of local and national-level actors. Thirdly, he pointed to the lack of a concrete timeline for the phase-out and consequentially the lack of actions that need to be taken to achieve such a deadline. Mr. Golubović stressed the need for a high-quality information campaign for the local population, as well as the need for a common agreement on the transition and on solving the challenges around it (e.g. water contamination, unemployment, loss of revenue streams). Transition action plan is required, along with the identification of potential funding sources. Mr. Golubović concluded by remarking on the opportunities that the transition can bring in areas such as tourism and manufacturing.

Jovanka Bogavac, a Member of Parliament in Montenegro, intervened to praise the event and encourage further activities that promote the exchange of experiences. She then proceeded to outline the status of, and challenges related to, the closure of the Pljevlja thermal power plant (TPP) which has a major role in the local economy and for the energy security of the country. Approximately 1,500 people are employed directly by the plant. A major renovation is planned, which would allow the plant to continue operating in line with the relevant EU rules.

Next, **Sonja Risteska** (Agora Energiewende) shared the main conclusions of an event on lignite phase-out in the Western Balkans, which showed that switching off the lignite units in the next 20 years is possible both from an economic perspective and without jeopardising the security of supply. She highlighted that most emissions in the region come from the energy sector and that almost all coal infrastructure is more than 30 years old. Switching off the coal-fired power plants could happen by ramping up solar and wind capacities, and potentially relying on small natural gas capacities to meet peak demand. Ms. Risteska gave the example of North Macedonia, where there are indications of coal phase-out by 2030 based on their latest NDC (nationally determined contributions). Countries are facing an important question

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regarding what technology to switch to, and to what end, as natural gas should not be the main answer in order to avoid gas lock-in and the risk of stranded assets.

Next, **Viktor Berishaj** (Climate Action Network) brought up the policy agenda and mentioned the role of the Sofia Declaration, which commits countries from the Western Balkans to a 2050 decarbonisation goal. To ensure that this happens, he recommends that legally binding targets should be enshrined into national laws. Concrete plans with milestones and a timeline would then need to be developed. Mr. Berishaj further shared that likely none of the Western Balkan countries would meet their 2020 targets for the share of renewable energy sources in final energy consumption. In addition to the deployment of renewables, countries should also focus on energy storage and energy efficiency improvements, considering the high reduction potential in this area. Mr. Berishaj concluded by emphasising that the transition should be owned by the affected citizens and the wider community.

Next, **Rinora Gojani** (Balkan Green Foundation) shared the challenges that Kosovo is facing, due to its high coal-dependency and a high number of (mostly male) employees in the sector. Kosovo gave up on its plans of building a second coal-fired power plant, instead re-orienting toward green options. Ms. Gojani stressed that there is no one-size-fits-all energy transition. To that end, the transition should be in line with Kosovo's decarbonisation targets and existing infrastructure. Ms. Gojani noted that the countries of the Western Balkans are seeking to exploit natural gas opportunities to diversify their energy mix and question whether the transition would be just. Like the other countries in the region, Kosovo is currently developing its National Energy and Climate Plan (NECP) for the period up to 2030, which is an opportunity to step up ambition and update its

coal phase-out date. It is crucial countries that devise their plans in a transparent and inclusive manner that considers the views of civil society. Finally, Ms. Gojani stressed the need to empower women and the important role they can play in shaping the narrative of the clean energy transition.

In response to a question about the obstacles to solar and wind investments, Sonja Risteska pointed out that these are mostly regulatory and administrative, such as not having a one-stop shop for the permitting processes. The lack of an integrated market is another major barrier, along with the lack of targets and a coal phase-out date, which can send a signal to investors in renewable energy technologies. Building on this, Viktor Berishaj highlighted the room for improvement in renewable energy policies, including the introduction of an auction-based system that can guarantee more transparency and the lowest possible cost for deployment. Rinora Gojani echoed the previously mentioned barriers and brought up the need to create better conditions for investment in renewables by households and the industry. By promoting small-scale installations, including through subsidies, governments can bring more people on board.

Conclusion and closing remarks

Speaker: Elodie Salle, Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

Elodie Salle (Secretariat) concluded the meeting by thanking the panellists, the keynote speakers, the moderators and the participants for the rich exchanges. She then briefly presented the scheduled agenda for the upcoming day, which included presentations from the Secretariat, international partners leading the Initiative, and of the Coal regions exchange programme, followed by some questions and answers.

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Welcome

Speaker: Elodie Salle, Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

Elodie Salle (Secretariat) opened the meeting by giving a warm welcome to the participants and asking them to take part in a poll about their location. Most participants were joining from Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Belgium, Poland, Ukraine, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Kosovo, Germany, Austria, Greece, but also from the USA, the UK, Canada and Japan.

Presentation from the Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, and lessons learned and synergies with the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the European Union

Presenters:

- **Iryna Novak**, [Secretariat](#) of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine;
- **Carlo Della Libera**, [Secretariat](#) of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the European Union.

Iryna Novak (Secretariat) presented the work of the Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, which was launched in February 2021. The Secretariat, which is made up of a consortium of different organisations, represents the main contact point for coal regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, and relevant stakeholders. Its main objective is to facilitate a multi-stakeholder dialogue on the policy framework, practices, and financing for a successful energy transition, as well as on the development of strategies and projects in coal regions through peer learning, knowledge sharing, and exchange of best practices. It also aims to promote political dialogue, visibility, and momentum around the transition agenda. Preliminarily, 17 regions were identified to take part; however, other regions are welcome to join the Initiative.

The work of the Secretariat consists of three main tasks, which were presented by Ms. Novak. The first is stakeholder identification, management, and engagement, which consists of building a comprehensive database of stakeholders, implementing communication activities, and having local thematic and communication experts for preparing information adapted to local contexts. The second task consists of event organisation and logistical support. The Secretariat will organise annual initiative events, as well as local workshops in the Western Balkans and Ukraine in virtual or hybrid formats. It also provides support to the Coal Academy, organised by the College of Europe in Natolin. The implementation of the [Coal Region Exchange Programme](#) is the third main task of the Secretariat. Its goal is to foster the exchange of knowledge, experience, and good practices between coal regions in the Western Balkans, and EU coal regions.

Next, **Carlo Della Libera** presented the work of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the European Union (EU CRiT Initiative). The initiative, which was launched in December 2017 in the context of the Just Transition Platform, represents an open forum for dialogue with wide communities. The EU CRiT Secretariat has been providing support to the European Commission with the implementation of the Initiative since early 2019, and has been a single point of contact convening stakeholders. So far, nine Working Group meetings have been organised, along with three virtual meetings held in 2020 and 2021. Two annual political dialogue meetings have also taken place since 2018.

Mr. Della Libera shared that the EU CRiT Secretariat also conducts communication activities and provides support materials, such as toolkits and case studies, and has been providing technical assistance support to several regions in the EU. He then shared some of their key lessons learned, such as the importance of engaging with stakeholders and gathering their feedback to shape the work of the Initiative, providing creative solutions for challenges that cannot be foreseen, as well as providing tailored support to regions and networking opportunities. He concluded by highlighting the opportunity for synergies between the two secretariats. To generate synergies, the secretariats will hold regular

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meetings, exchanging lessons learned, updating each other on regional policies and experiences, and coordinating on communication activities. In sum, the secretariats intend to work closely together.

Presentation from international partners leading the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine – Q&A

Moderated by Elodie Salle, Secretariat of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

Presentation by Directorate-General for Energy, European Commission

Presenter:

- **Brieuc Posnic**, Policy Coordinator, European Commission ([DG ENER](#)).

Brieuc Posnic (DG ENER) started his presentation by highlighting the role of the European Green Deal, as part of which the EU will cut its emissions by 55 percent by 2030 and will reach carbon neutrality by 2050. While this will come with its challenges, it will also create enormous opportunities and will result in improved life of EU citizens without sacrificing energy security as the EU moves towards greater use of renewable energy. Mr. Posnic further remarked that it's important to share the EU's transition experience with the rest of the world and with its neighbours in particular, as the EU aims to move towards closer integration including energy system integration. With respect to coal phase-out, Mr. Posnic stressed the EU's objective to phase-out coal in a just and fair way both in the EU and beyond. With respect to the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine, Mr. Posnic highlighted the great partnership between the seven implementing institutions that bring various expertise to the table. Furthermore, the European Commission has the experience of implementing the EU Initiative on Coal Regions in Transition and hence the objective to do the same here.

The activities of the Initiative in the Western Balkans and Ukraine will revolve around three main activities:

- Annual events, which will bring together stakeholders from all regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine to promote discussion, and take stock of the progress achieved over the previous year. Stakeholders from the regions will inform which topics are discussed during events.
- Starting at the end of 2021, local workshops will bring all stakeholders from a given region together to reflect on the future of the region. The workshops would include local authorities, NGOs, industry actors.

- Starting in mid-2021, an exchange programme between regions in the EU and the Western Balkans and Ukraine will promote the exchange of experiences, challenges and solutions.

All the above-listed activities will be supported by the dedicated Secretariat of the Initiative, which serves as the main contact point for any questions that stakeholders may have.

Presentation by the World Bank

Presenter:

- **Michael Stanley**, Extractives Lead, Energy & Extractives, [World Bank](#).

Michael Stanley (World Bank) described the organisation's main activities in the area of just transition, most recently including the publication of the World Bank's [Climate Change Action Plan](#), which sets out the aim to assist countries in their energy transitions and transitions away from coal. Mr. Stanley stressed that now is the time to plan and prepare for the energy transition. The downward pressure on coal will continue, as low-cost renewables penetrate markets.

The World Bank has been providing assistance to coal regions and has over five decades of experience in mining and energy topics. In their experience, communities and workers are at the centre of energy transition, and should be the focus of efforts. Next, SMEs should be targeted as part of the supply chain, providing goods and services for coal activities. Third, broader community members must be addressed, as coal often impacts local shops, services, etc.

Mr. Stanley highlighted the importance of having a locally tailored transition plan. The World Bank can support creating such a plan by promoting inclusive dialogue, bringing various stakeholders to the table. Furthermore, the World Bank works on strengthening the capacity of relevant institutions. Mr. Stanley explained the [methodology](#) that the World Bank uses, which considers three time periods: pre-closure, closure, and regional transition.

Finally, Mr. Stanley outlined the Initiative's activities and shared that, in the long-term, the World Bank may provide lending options related to closure activities.

Presentation by the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD)

Presenter:

- **Andi Aranitasi**, Head of North Macedonia, [European Bank of Reconstruction and Development](#).

Andi Aranitasi (EBRD) started his presentation by outlining the EBRD's goal to provide over 50 percent of its

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annual investments to the green economy by 2025, under its Green Economy Transition approach. In 2020, the EBRD launched its own just transition initiative that focuses on the private sector.

North Macedonia is one of the countries where the EBRD is actively supporting the just transition, having [provided](#) lending to the public utility company to construct a solar PV plant on a former coal mine. Another focus of the EBRD is mitigating the impact on the workers in transition. Together with the utility and the government of North Macedonia, the EBRD is working on defining and deploying reskilling options for coal workers.

The EBRD also supports efforts for economic diversification and job creation. One such example is in Wrocław (Poland), where they [provided](#) financing for the construction of a battery factory.

Finally, through its policy dialogue initiative, the EBRD is financing the preparation of just transition diagnostic documents in the Western Balkans, which serves as a pre-step to the development and implementation of a just transition plan (modelled after the EU territorial just transition plans).

In response to a question on the engagement of local stakeholders in the preparation of the just transition diagnostics in North Macedonia, Mr. Aranitasi shared that, with the support of a consultancy firm, the EBRD is currently preparing a stakeholder engagement plan, which envisions interviews and workshops in Kičevo and Bitola.

Presentation by the Energy Community Secretariat (ECS)

Presenter:

- [Dirk Buschle](#), Deputy Director and Legal Counsel, [Energy Community Secretariat](#).

[Dirk Buschle](#) (ECS) explained that the starting point of the just transition should be acknowledging that the transition is here, rather than denying it, and embracing just transition as a way to shape the future fairly and equitably. Mr. Buschle outlined three important lessons learned from the experience of the European Union: setting ambitious enough targets; launching honest and transparent plans; and respecting the rule of law, including living up to commitments.

Next, Mr. Buschle remarked that the deployment of renewables in ECS contracting parties is picking up. However, regulatory tools that can help propel the transition are currently not utilised, including carbon pricing mechanisms and smart support schemes, such as auctioning of renewable capacity. Mr. Buschle observed that many of the ECS contracting parties are concerned with regulating the prices

of electricity for end users, which hampers the transition. Finally, he noted that, while there is no Just Transition Fund for ECS contracting parties, the ECS plans to support the just transition process in areas related to preparing policy proposals, enhancing gender equality, fighting energy poverty, and reducing air pollution.

Presentation of the training needs assessment of the Coal Learning Academy

Presenter:

- [Dr. Olaf Osica](#), [College of Europe in Natolin](#).

[Dr. Osica](#) started his presentation by highlighting that the College of Europe in Natolin is developing the Initiative's [Coal Regions Learning Academy](#), which aims to provide knowledge to everyone interested in the energy transition with a focus on the Western Balkans and Ukraine. Its e-learning materials will be open to everyone, and will include audio and video materials, as well as documents. All materials will be uploaded to the World Bank's [Goxi platform](#). The e-learning materials follow World Bank's 3x3 matrix [approach](#), which includes the pre-closure, closure, and regional transition processes. In total, the Academy will provide six e-learning courses, starting with more high-level topics, such as the key transition phases, followed by specialised courses, such as on preparing bankable transition projects.

Lessons learned from pilot twinning with Ukrainian regions

Presenter:

- [Artur Lorkowski](#), Deputy-President of the Management Board, [Poland's National Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management](#) (NFOSiGW).

[Artur Lorkowski](#) (NFOSiGW) started his presentation on the Polish-Ukrainian twinning of coal regions by sharing his experience working at the National Fund, in close cooperation with the World Bank, to finance transition in Poland. The institution chose to join the Initiative after the COP24, held in Katowice, to share its experience with partners from outside the EU.

The Polish-Ukrainian Twinning is a pilot to test conceptual approaches, developed with the European Commission and the World Bank. So far, two online study visits to Poland have been organised, with a third visit taking place on 25 June, focusing on lignite. In total, five study visits for Ukrainian stakeholders are being organised by the Institute for Ecology of Industrial Areas in Poland, in cooperation with Central Mining Institute GIG.

The National Fund has invited colleagues from Ukraine to look at and learn from the experience of transforming lignite

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regions in Poland. Mr. Lorkowski emphasised that activities are tailor-made to reflect the expectations of the Ukrainian regions, with another on-site study visit scheduled for this autumn. The National Fund is now moving forward with working to scale up the project to Western Balkans regions.

In response to audience questions, Mr. Lorkowski shared that as materials from the Polish-Ukrainian Twinning become available, the National Fund is opened to sharing them with those interested. Next, a question was addressed to the Energy Community Secretariat regarding how participating countries are using the process of developing their updated Nationally Determined Contributions, and their preparation of NECPs, to address transition. Mr. Buschle shared that the ECS's role is to work together with everyone who is part of the Initiative to draft National Energy and Climate Plans, and to provide recommendations to highlight the importance of just transition. The ECS also reviews NDC tools.

Presentation by the European Investment Bank (EIB)

Presenters:

- **Matteo Rivellini**, Head of Division in charge of lending operations in Slovenia, Croatia and the Western Balkans, [European Investment Bank](#).
- **Rafal Rybacki**, Head of Division – Eastern Neighbourhood, European Investment Bank.

Matteo Rivellini (EIB) started his presentation on the activities of the EIB in the Western Balkans and Ukraine by sharing the EIB's ambition and key messages on how they can contribute to the Initiative. The EIB offers financial products, technical assistance, blended finance, competitive pricing, long periods of return on investment, and expertise via in-house engineers and specialists. Mr. Rivellini shared the EIB's extensive history accompanying regions in their transition.

The EIB has contributed to the development of the Western Balkans, and to the closing of the infrastructure gap between these regions and those in the EU. The EIB is also involved in the implementation of the economic plan of the EU in the Western Balkans, offers technical assistance and advice, and combines financial resources with other grant resources such as the Economic Resilience Initiative, and the Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF). Mr. Rivellini noted that priority is given to areas that are sensitive and for which investments will mitigate the negative consequences of transition.

Rafal Rybacki, Head of Division – Eastern Neighbourhood followed up by presenting the work of the EIB in Ukraine. He acknowledged that Just Transition is a comprehensive programme of various investments which comprises many sectors, affects millions of people and has a long-term impact. To be successful, a partner that can promote best

practices and has a lot of experience across many countries is necessary. The EIB is one of these partners. Mr. Rybacki gave examples of their work, including in Katowice, where a coal mine was closed after 176 years of operation, and today is a museum, conference hall and philharmonic financed by the EIB.

Presentation of the Coal Regions Exchange Programme – Q&A

Presenters:

- **Carsten Rothballe**, [Secretariat](#) of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.
- **George Stiff**, [Secretariat](#) of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.
- **Dariusz Stankiewicz**, Head of the Transformation Unit, Marshall Office, [Region of Silesia](#), Poland.
- **Ruta Baltausė**, Support Group for Ukraine, European Commission ([DG NEAR](#)).

Carsten Rothballe of the Initiative's Secretariat opened the session by presenting the Initiative's [Exchange programme](#) including its structure, flexible and needs-based approach, and benefits for participants. The Exchange programme will use peer-to-peer dialogue, expert inputs, tailored support, and guidance from a facilitator to build capacity among political and technical leaders. Delegations from participating coal regions will join learning activities, which will vary based on whether participating regions choose to pursue short-, medium- or long-term exchange. Mr. Rothballe outlined the application process, which involves regions choosing a contact person, proposing a delegation, selecting indicative topics of interest, and filling out an application form. Mr. Rothballe closed with answering questions from the participants, which enabled him to provide more details on the application process, and on what can be expected at each stage of the exchange.

Next, **George Stiff** of the Initiative's Secretariat led a discussion with **Dariusz Stankiewicz**, who has participated in a number of peer-exchange programmes on the topic of coal phase-out and just transition in his role working for the Region of Silesia (Poland). Mr. Stankiewicz expressed unequivocal support for such programmes, stating that benefits for Silesia have included gaining fresh perspectives that spark creative solutions to transition challenges; gaining prestige and attracting visitors, as well as investors; professional development; and forming long-term partnerships with peer regions that last even beyond the programme's official end date. He expressed the benefits of participating either as a leading region, or as the learning region, and closed by expressing: *"My vast experience from exchange programmes have always been positive. You come back changed."*

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Next, **Ruta Baltause** (DG NEAR) presented the European Commission's Twinning programme, as a potential next step for regions who join the Initiative's Exchange programme and wish to continue to formalise and develop their partnership once the programme has come to an end. Through Twinning, an EU project leader is placed permanently in a partner country, to facilitate constant, day-to-day cooperation over a period of 1 to 3 years. This is facilitated through national bodies (unlike the Initiative's Exchange programme, which is through sub-national bodies), and convenes all institutions together through this central authority. This can be an excellent continuation of the Initiative's programme.

In closing, Mr. Rothbaler announced that [applications](#) are now open and can be submitted until 15 September 2021.

Conclusion and closing remarks

Presenters:

- **Jerzy Buzek**, Member of the [European Parliament](#).
- **Elodie Salle**, [Secretariat](#) of the Initiative for coal regions in transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine.

Jerzy Buzek started by remarking that it took two years to prepare and launch the Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine. The efforts started with the proposal in the European Parliament for a preparatory action; supported by the Members of the European Parliament, the action got approved and the corresponding budget was also passed. The European Commission is now

in charge of implementing the Initiative, along with six other international principals.

Next, Mr Buzek highlighted that this day is special since the European Parliament had just [approved](#) the EU's climate law, which legally enshrines the EU's commitment to becoming climate neutral by 2050. Mr. Buzek stressed that, for Europe as a whole to become climate neutral, it is essential to have the Western Balkans and Ukraine on board. The Initiative for Coal Regions in Transition in the Western Balkans and Ukraine is a good starting point, but the EU should do more. This includes providing political support, as well as financial support through the [Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans](#) and the [Energy Efficiency Fund](#).

Mr. Buzek shared the experience of his native Poland, which started thinking about the energy transition not too long ago. He then stressed the opportunities the Initiative offers, including learning from the experience of EU countries that are more advanced in their transition. Mr. Buzek encouraged all regions in the Western Balkans and Ukraine to take part in the Initiative, learn good practices from other countries, and build their own approaches and reforms. He concluded by remarking that all sectors should transition to a new era without CO₂ emissions in order to build more resilient economies while considering the stakes of future generations.

Elodie Salle concluded the two-day event by thanking all for their active participation, including the panellists, speakers and interpreters who provided translation in 10 languages, as well as the Secretariat team.

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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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