

# 6<sup>th</sup> TIRANA CONNECTIVITY FORUM

1 - 2 OCTOBER 2020



## Background Note

World connectivity has suffered the most from Covid19 pandemic. Infrastructure projects, p2p exchanges, supply and value chains, and institutional cooperation have all been halted in their progress, and in some cases even retracted.

In the South East Europe Six (SEE6) the lockdown of cities and countries has severed the supply lines; the social distancing stopped the social contact; the quarantine drastically slowed the work of public institutions and of private businesses; the emergency situations have altered the democratic processes and slowed the pace of reforms.

The public management of the health crisis and of recovery measures have exposed the structural weaknesses proper to the Western Balkans states. At the same time, in this time of adversity SEE6 regional cooperation has come up with success stories such as the successful establishment of “Green Corridors”.

In case of a 2nd wave this Fall, a widespread quarantine will hardly be applicable. The SEE6 economy will not be able to support it and citizen may revolt – as the Serbian July riots show. We will need to be accustomed to live with this virus, and adapt. But if this de-connection trend becomes a permanent fixture, how the SEE6 development model can cope with it? How the Reforms and Enlargement will be affected?

This natural disaster has demonstrated that everything is connected. Infrastructure, political, economic, social, ecological systems are changing, and impacting each other in the process. Disasters as this, constitute a litmus test of what matters and what doesn't, what's corrupt and what's healthy, what's strong and what's weak. They take of the veil of interpretation from what's around us.

Our Balkan countries have weathered relatively well the first pandemic shock, and have continued their institutional reforms and progress towards EU membership. Albania and North Macedonia are expecting their 1st Intergovernmental Conference to be organised during the German Presidency of the EU. Meanwhile, the EU Commission is wrapping up the Economic and Investment Plan where connectivity - in transport, energy, digital, and in value chains - is the keyword.

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Yet, throughout history disasters and cataclysmic moments have also offered opportunities of systemic change. Being in a crossroad, our task now is to understand de-connection consequences, identify new possible scenarios, and what is required from us to cope, resist and develop.

Enriched with this sense of knowing what's important, we need to reassess the criticality of our relations, and the resilience of our connections.

In this regard, we at CDI believe that TCF2020 will be the opportunity to carry such an exercise.

Under the theme "Connectivity in Pandemic Times: Threats and Opportunities", this edition will be composed by two blocks: i) stock-taking of Covid19 pandemic on the implementation of EU Connectivity Agenda in SEE6, and on its winners and losers; and, ii) how SEE6 space and socio-economic fabric should develop to face and also profit from this situation, and how local institutions would need to be reformed towards EU set of standards and values.

TCF 2020 is part of the official calendar of activities of the German Presidency of the European Union. The forum will gather experts, researchers, academicians, CSO, Western Balkans Summit coordinators and other policy-makers involved in EU Enlargement in SEE6, in Regional Cooperation, and in Connectivity dynamics.

Due to the challenges presented by the global pandemic Covid19 and its restrictions, this year, TCF will take place online, in partnership with Euronews Albania. The event will be livestreamed and more information on how to connect will be available on our Social media channels and official website.

This edition will continue to be organized in partnership with our long-term partners: Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Hanns Seidel Stiftung. Since 2015, these three German political foundations remain the key supporting institutions of Tirana Connectivity Forum, the only such event covering connectivity, reforms and enlargement in the South Eastern Europe region.