

Sarajevo, 6 June 2024

Conclusions of the 5th Social Forum

Engaging Social Partners and Civil Society for a Green Mobility Transition

Article 5 of the Transport Community Treaty¹ calls: *“The South East European Parties shall implement the relevant social acquis with regard to transport as set out in Annex I. The Transport Community shall reinforce and promote the social dialogue and the social dimension through the reference to the acquis in social matters, the workers’ fundamental rights and the involvement of the European Economic and Social Committee and the national and European social partners acting in the transport sector, at the appropriate level.”* For that purpose, in 2020 the Social Forum of the Transport Community has been established. It is a platform for a dialogue between key transport social partners of the European Union and the South East European Parties.

On 6 June 2024 in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 5th Social Forum focused on the role of the social partners and civil society for a green mobility transition.

Building upon the conclusions² of the 4th Social Forum, where we actively engaged with social partners and civil society to make the transport sector in the Western Balkans more inclusive and accessible, the 5th Social Forum marks a significant step forward in recognising the vital contribution of social partners and civil society to policymaking in the transport sector. Their involvement not only ensures the representation of diverse perspectives but also enhances the social legitimacy and sustainability of large-scale transport projects and the transition to green mobility.

Civil society organisations (CSOs) naturally play a vital role as advocates, and agents of change, amplifying citizens’ voice, and catalysing participatory decision-making processes. Recognising the importance of harnessing this collective regional expertise knowledge and of its use for an inclusive policy-making and impactful infrastructure projects, the Transport Community Permanent Secretariat, in collaboration with the Cooperation and Development Institute, embarked on a series of workshops (6 February 2024 in Tirana, 15 April 2024 in Skopje, 16 April 2024 in Pristina and 5 June 2024 in Sarajevo) across the Western Balkans region leading up to the 5th Social Forum. Built upon a continuous regional cooperation between CSOs and engagement in the framework of the Berlin Process, these workshops served as platforms for outreach and dialogue enabling specialised CSOs and infrastructure actors to delve into the complexities of the region’s transport sector and explore avenues for enhanced collaboration.

With over three decades of experience, Western Balkan CSOs and think tanks possess significant knowledge and expertise applicable across various policy-making fora and Project Cycle Management phases. Despite

¹ <https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/treaty-en.pdf>

² <https://www.transport-community.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/Conclusions-4th-Social-Final-Version.pdf>

limited resources, these entities contribute the voices of Western Balkans citizens to project dynamics, serving as valuable partners to national institutions, the EU, International Finance Institutions, International organizations and other project actors and stakeholders involved in WB6 infrastructure investments.

Throughout the workshops, discussions underscored the uneven levels of CSO involvement across the region, highlighting disparities in resources, capacity, access to policy-making, project cycle management steps and respective decision-making processes. While some CSOs have actively engaged in advocacy and oversight roles, others face significant barriers, including limited resources, institutional constraints, and political pressures. Addressing these disparities requires concerted efforts to foster an enabling environment for civil society, characterised by transparency, inclusivity, and respect for fundamental rights.

Furthermore, the workshops facilitated honest conversations on the challenges and opportunities associated with the green mobility transition, emphasising the need for a holistic approach that balance economic, social, and environmental considerations. Participants explored innovative solutions to pressing issues such as climate change, air pollution, and infrastructure development, recognising the interconnected nature of these challenges and the imperative for collective action.

The 5th Social Forum emerges as a pivotal moment for collective reflection and action, as stakeholders come together to chart a course toward a more sustainable, inclusive and equitable transport sector. By harnessing the expertise, insights, and passion of social partners and civil society organisations, we aspire to forge a path forward that prioritises the well-being of our communities, preserves our natural heritage, and lays the foundation for a prosperous and resilient future.

THE SOCIAL FORUM OF THE TRANSPORT COMMUNITY

- 1. Commits to inclusive dialogue.** The 5th Social Forum reaffirms our commitment to inclusive dialogue and multi-stakeholder engagement. We welcome the active participation of social partners and civil society organisations in shaping policies and initiatives aimed at advancing reforms in transport, in efficient and impactful projects and on the green mobility transition in the region.
- 2. Welcomes the ministerial dialogue** that focused on fostering dialogue between CSOs and Ministers regarding green mobility transition, with a special emphasis on Economic and Investment Plan (EIP) transport projects. The dialogue gave the opportunity to the CSOs to present their findings and perspectives on the implementation of selected EIP projects and their impact on green transition efforts.
- 3. Encourages the Regional Partners to support transparency and accountability.** Transparency and accountability are fundamental principles underpinning effective governance. We support efforts to enhance transparency in decision-making processes and ensure accountability in the prioritisation, preparation and implementation of transport projects, thereby fostering public trust and confidence. To that end, the coming online of TODIS platform is a very welcome development.

- 4. Encourages the Regional Partners to support capacity building and empowerment.** Capacity building and empowerment of CSOs are essential for fostering active citizenship and democratic governance. We encourage initiatives aimed at strengthening CSOs' capacities and facilitating their meaningful participation in policy dialogue and programme/project implementation phases. Innovative mechanisms of supporting and engaging specialised CSOs in every policy-making phase and project management cycle step must be explored, designed and implemented, in all projects supported with public financing (national and EU's taxpayers funds).
- 5. Calls the Ministers to advocate regional cooperation.** Regional cooperation is indispensable for addressing common challenges and seizing shared opportunities. We advocate for continued collaboration among Western Balkan countries, European Union Member States, and international partners to promote cross-border connectivity, facilitate knowledge exchange, and support regional cooperation and development initiatives.
- 6. Encourages the Ministers to engage in a continuous and constructive** social dialogue with social partners from transport, with the view to foster a just transition path for workers and business alike, in these times of digital and green transformation. This will ensure resilience of transport, sustainability of business models, quality jobs and attractiveness, and will create opportunities for workforce reskilling and upskilling.
- 7. Calls on all Regional Partners to support a regional twinning initiative.** We call on all regional partners to support a regional twinning initiative aimed at connecting EU NGOs with regional NGOs to facilitate knowledge exchange on engaging in transport projects. This is essential for investing in regional capacities, addressing the critical lack of knowledge and technical expertise regarding transport projects in the region. By fostering these connections, we can enhance the capabilities of regional NGOs, ensuring they are better equipped to participate effectively in transport initiatives and contribute to sustainable mobility solutions.
- 8. Invites all Regional Partners to commit to social inclusion and equity.** Social inclusion and equity must remain central tenets of our efforts to build a more sustainable and resilient transport sector. We commit to ensuring that transport policies and projects prioritise the needs of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, promote accessibility for all, and foster equitable distribution of benefits and burdens.
- 9. Invites all Regional Participants to recognise** the Transport Community Action Plan for the Implementation of the EU Acquis in the area of Social Issues and Passenger Rights in Transport as a crucial document for the region to improve social standards, job security, attractive and fair working conditions, and passenger rights.
- 10. Calls all relevant authorities to meaningfully include and actively engage with civil society** and other relevant institutions/actors, like social partners when planning and implementing sustainable, smart and inclusive mobility measures in the Western Balkans outlined in the Transport Community Treaty Permanent Secretariat Strategy for Sustainable and Smart Mobility in the Western Balkans.

- 11. Encourages the Regional Partners to reflect** on the Report on Passenger Rights – Making Transport Accessible and Inclusive in the Western Balkans and to implement relevant measures (short term, mid-term, and long term) to make transport services accessible to everyone.
- 12. Reminds all Regional Partners to embrace and support innovation and inclusive technological advances, AI included**, as key to unlocking the full potential of the green mobility transition. We encourage stakeholders to leverage digital solutions, smart infrastructure, AI and data-driven approaches to enhance the inclusiveness, efficiency, safety, and sustainability of transport systems in the region.
- 13. Calls on all Regional Partners to actively involve Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) in the Sector Working Groups, National Investment Committees, and/or relevant country platforms during the formulation** of transport policy and in project prioritisation and preparation. At the same time, we urge them to strive for accessible mobility as an enabler of everyone's right to participate in social, cultural, and economic activities.
- 14. Calls Regional Partners to support education and training** in line with the main common objective of achieving a sustainable, smart, inclusive and safe transport system, by making the best use of opportunities offered by technological innovation to attract young people and women to the transport sector.
- 15. Calls all Regional Steering Committee members** to take note of the Conclusions of the 5th Social Forum at the next Regional Steering Committee meeting in June.
- 16. Calls the Ministers** in charge of transport of the Western Balkan region to confirm and commit at the next Ministerial Council in Belgrade in December 2024 to the importance of implementing the 5th Social Forum Conclusions.