

119TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

S. 1909

To encourage increased trade and investment between the United States
and the countries in the Western Balkans, and for other purposes.

IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

MAY 22, 2025

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself and Mr. WICKER) introduced the following bill;
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on Foreign Relations

A BILL

To encourage increased trade and investment between the
United States and the countries in the Western Balkans,
and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE; TABLE OF CONTENTS.**

4 (a) SHORT TITLE.—This Act may be cited as the
5 “Western Balkans Democracy and Prosperity Act”.

6 (b) TABLE OF CONTENTS.—The table of contents for
7 this Act is as follows:

Sec. 1. Short title; table of contents.

Sec. 2. Findings.

Sec. 3. Sense of Congress.

Sec. 4. Definitions.

Sec. 5. Codification of sanctions relating to the Western Balkans.

- Sec. 6. Democratic and economic development and prosperity initiatives.
- Sec. 7. Promoting cross-cultural and educational engagement.
- Sec. 8. Peace Corps in the Western Balkans.
- Sec. 9. Young Balkan Leaders Initiative.
- Sec. 10. Supporting cybersecurity and cyber resilience in the Western Balkans.
- Sec. 11. Sense of Congress regarding an interim agreement.
- Sec. 12. Reports on Russian and Chinese malign influence operations and campaigns in the Western Balkans.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) The Western Balkans countries (the Repub-
 4 lic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic
 5 of Croatia, the Republic of Kosovo, Montenegro, the
 6 Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of
 7 Serbia) form a pluralistic, multi-ethnic region in the
 8 heart of Europe that is critical to the peace, sta-
 9 bility, and prosperity of that continent.

10 (2) Continued peace, stability, and prosperity in
 11 the Western Balkans is directly tied to the opportu-
 12 nities for democratic and economic advancement
 13 available to the citizens and residents of those seven
 14 countries.

15 (3) It is in the mutual interest of the United
 16 States and the seven countries of the Western Bal-
 17 kans to promote stable and sustainable economic
 18 growth and development in the region.

19 (4) The reforms and integration with the Euro-
 20 pean Union pursued by countries in the Western

1 Balkans have led to significant democratic and eco-
2 nomic progress in the region.

3 (5) Despite economic progress, rates of poverty
4 and unemployment in the Western Balkans remain
5 higher than in neighboring European Union coun-
6 tries.

7 (6) Out-migration, particularly of youth, is af-
8 fecting demographics in each Western Balkans coun-
9 try, resulting in population decline in all seven coun-
10 tries.

11 (7) Implementing critical economic and govern-
12 ance reforms could help enable investment and em-
13 ployment opportunities in the Western Balkans, es-
14 pecially for youth, and can provide powerful tools for
15 economic development and for encouraging broader
16 participation in a political process that increases
17 trade and prosperity for all.

18 (8) Existing regional economic efforts, such as
19 the Common Regional Market, the Berlin Process,
20 and the Open Balkan Initiative, could have the po-
21 tential to improve the economic conditions in the
22 Western Balkans, while promoting inclusion and
23 transparency.

24 (9) The Department of Commerce, through its
25 Foreign Commercial Service, plays an important role

1 in promoting and facilitating opportunities for
2 United States trade and investment.

3 (10) Corruption, including among key political
4 leaders, continues to plague the Western Balkans
5 and represents one of the greatest impediments to
6 further economic and political development in the re-
7 gion.

8 (11) Disinformation campaigns targeting the
9 Western Balkans undermine the credibility of its
10 democratic institutions, including the integrity of its
11 elections.

12 (12) Vulnerability to cyberattacks or attacks on
13 information and communication technology infra-
14 structure increases risks to the functioning of gov-
15 ernment and the delivery of public services.

16 (13) United States Cyber Command, the De-
17 partment of State, and other Federal agencies play
18 a critical role in defending the national security in-
19 terests of the United States, including by deploying
20 cyber hunt forward teams at the request of partner
21 nations to reinforce their cyber defenses.

22 (14) Securing domestic and international cyber
23 networks and ICT infrastructure is a national secu-
24 rity priority for the United States, which is exempli-

1 fied by offices and programs across the Federal Gov-
2 ernment that support cybersecurity.

3 (15) Corruption and disinformation proliferate
4 in political environments marked by autocratic con-
5 trol or partisan conflict.

6 (16) Dependence on Russian sources of fossil
7 fuels and natural gas for the countries of the West-
8 ern Balkans ties their economies and politics to the
9 Russian Federation and inhibits their aspirations for
10 European integration.

11 (17) Reducing the reliance of the Western Bal-
12 kans on Russian natural gas supplies and fossil fuels
13 is in the national interest of the United States.

14 (18) The growing influence of China in the
15 Western Balkans could also have a deleterious im-
16 pact on strategic competition, democracy, and eco-
17 nomic integration with Europe.

18 (19) In March 2022, President Biden launched
19 the European Democratic Resilience Initiative to
20 bolster democratic resilience, advance anti-corruption
21 efforts, and defend human rights in Ukraine and its
22 neighbors in response to Russia's war of aggression.

23 (20) The parliamentary and local elections held
24 in Serbia on December 17, 2023, and their imme-
25 diate aftermath are cause for deep concern about the

1 state of Serbia’s democracy, including due to the
 2 final report of the Organization for Security and Co-
 3 operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institu-
 4 tions and Human Rights, which—

5 (A) found “unjust conditions” for the elec-
 6 tion;

7 (B) found “numerous procedural defi-
 8 ciencies, including inconsistent application of
 9 safeguards during voting and counting, fre-
 10 quent instances of overcrowding, breaches in se-
 11 crecy of the vote, and numerous instances of
 12 group voting”; and

13 (C) asserted that “voting must be re-
 14 peated” in certain polling stations.

15 (21) The Organization for Security and Co-op-
 16 eration in Europe also noted that Serbian officials
 17 accused primarily peaceful protestors, opposition
 18 parties, and civil society of “attempting to desta-
 19 bilize the government”, a concerning allegation that
 20 threatens the safety of important elements of Ser-
 21 bian society.

22 (22) Democratic countries whose values are in
 23 alignment with the United States make for stronger
 24 and more durable partnerships.

1 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

2 It is a sense of Congress that the United States
3 should—

4 (1) encourage increased trade and investment
5 between the United States and allies and partners in
6 the Western Balkans;

7 (2) expand United States assistance to regional
8 integration efforts in the Western Balkans;

9 (3) strengthen and expand regional economic
10 integration in the Western Balkans, especially enter-
11 prises owned by and employing women and youth;

12 (4) work with allies and partners committed to
13 improving the rule of law, energy resource diver-
14 sification, democratic and economic reform, and the
15 reduction of poverty in the Western Balkans;

16 (5) increase United States trade and investment
17 with the Western Balkans, particularly in ways that
18 support countries' efforts—

19 (A) to decrease dependence on Russian en-
20 ergy sources and fossil fuels;

21 (B) to increase energy diversification, effi-
22 ciency, and conservation; and

23 (C) to facilitate the transition to cleaner
24 and more reliable sources of energy, including
25 renewables, as appropriate;

1 (6) continue to assist in the development, with-
2 in the Western Balkans, of—

3 (A) strong civil societies;

4 (B) public-private partnerships;

5 (C) independent media;

6 (D) transparent, accountable, citizen-re-
7 sponsive governance, including equal represen-
8 tation for women and youth;

9 (E) political stability; and

10 (F) modern, free-market based economies;

11 (7) support the expeditious accession of those
12 Western Balkans countries that are not already
13 members to the European Union and to the North
14 Atlantic Treaty Organization (referred to in this sec-
15 tion as “NATO”) for countries that desire and are
16 eligible for such membership;

17 (8) support—

18 (A) maintaining the full European Union
19 Force (EUFOR) mandate in Bosnia and
20 Herzegovina as being in the national security
21 interests of the United States;

22 (B) encouraging NATO and the European
23 Union to review their mission mandates and
24 posture in Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure
25 they are playing a proactive role in establishing

1 a safe and secure environment, particularly in
2 the realm of defense;

3 (C) working within NATO to encourage
4 contingency planning for an international mili-
5 tary force to maintain a safe and secure envi-
6 ronment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially
7 if Russia blocks reauthorization of the mission
8 in the United Nations; and

9 (D) a strengthened NATO headquarters in
10 Sarajevo;

11 (9) continue to support the European Union
12 membership aspirations of Albania, Bosnia and
13 Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Monte-
14 negro, and Serbia by supporting meeting the bench-
15 marks required for their accession;

16 (10) continue to support the overarching mis-
17 sion of the Berlin Process and locally-driven initia-
18 tives that are inclusive of all Western Balkans coun-
19 tries and remains aligned with the objectives and
20 standards laid out by the European Union as re-
21 quirements for accession to the European Union;

22 (11) continue to support the cultural heritage,
23 and recognize the languages, of the Western Bal-
24 kans;

1 (12) coordinate closely with the European
2 Union, the United Kingdom, and other allies and
3 partners on sanctions designations in Western Bal-
4 kans countries and work to align efforts as much as
5 possible to demonstrate a clear commitment to up-
6 holding democratic values;

7 (13) expand bilateral security cooperation with
8 non-NATO member Western Balkans countries, par-
9 ticularly efforts focused on regional integration and
10 cooperation, including through the Adriatic Charter,
11 which was launched at Tirana on May 2, 2003;

12 (14) increase efforts to combat Russian malign
13 influence campaigns and any other destabilizing or
14 disruptive activities targeting the Western Balkans
15 through engagement with government institutions,
16 political stakeholders, journalists, civil society orga-
17 nizations, and industry leaders;

18 (15) develop a series of cyber resilience stand-
19 ards, consistent with the Enhanced Cyber Defence
20 Policy and Readiness Action Plan endorsed at the
21 2014 Wales Summit of the North Atlantic Treaty
22 Organization to expand cooperation with partners
23 and allies, including in the Western Balkans, on
24 cyber security and ICT infrastructure;

1 (16) articulate clearly and unambiguously the
2 United States commitment to supporting democratic
3 values and respect for international law as the sole
4 path forward for the countries of the Western Bal-
5 kans; and

6 (17) prioritize partnerships and programming
7 with Western Balkan countries that demonstrate
8 commitment toward strengthening their democracies
9 and show respect for human rights.

10 **SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.**

11 In this Act:

12 (1) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-
13 TEES.—The term “appropriate congressional com-
14 mittees” means—

15 (A) the Committee on Foreign Relations of
16 the Senate;

17 (B) the Committee on Appropriations of
18 the Senate;

19 (C) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of
20 the House of Representatives; and

21 (D) the Committee on Appropriations of
22 the House of Representatives.

23 (2) ICT.—The term “ICT” means information
24 and communication technology.

1 (3) WESTERN BALKANS.—The term “Western
2 Balkans” means the region comprised of the fol-
3 lowing countries:

4 (A) The Republic of Albania.

5 (B) Bosnia and Herzegovina.

6 (C) The Republic of Croatia.

7 (D) The Republic of Kosovo.

8 (E) Montenegro.

9 (F) The Republic of North Macedonia.

10 (G) The Republic of Serbia.

11 (4) WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRY.—The term
12 “Western Balkans country” means any country list-
13 ed in subparagraphs (A) through (G) of paragraph
14 (3).

15 **SEC. 5. CODIFICATION OF SANCTIONS RELATING TO THE**
16 **WESTERN BALKANS.**

17 (a) IN GENERAL.—Each person listed or designated
18 for the imposition of sanctions under an executive order
19 described in subsection (c) as of the date of the enactment
20 of this Act shall remain so designated, except as provided
21 in subsections (d) and (e).

22 (b) CONTINUATION OF SANCTIONS AUTHORITIES.—
23 Each authority to impose sanctions provided for under an
24 executive order described in subsection (c) shall remain
25 in effect.

1 (c) EXECUTIVE ORDERS SPECIFIED.—The executive
2 orders specified in this subsection are—

3 (1) Executive Order 13219, as amended by Ex-
4 ecutive Order 13304 (50 U.S.C. 1701 note; relating
5 to blocking property of persons who threaten inter-
6 national stabilization efforts in the Western Bal-
7 kans); and

8 (2) Executive Order 14033 (50 U.S.C. 1701
9 note; relating to blocking property and suspending
10 entry into the United States of certain persons con-
11 tributing to the destabilizing situation in the West-
12 ern Balkans), as in effect on such date of enact-
13 ment.

14 (d) TERMINATION OF SANCTIONS.—The President
15 may terminate the application of a sanction described in
16 subsection (a) with respect to a person if the President
17 certifies to the appropriate congressional committees that
18 such person—

19 (1) has not engaged in the activity that was the
20 basis for such sanctions, if applicable, during the
21 two-year period immediately preceding such termi-
22 nation date; or

23 (2) otherwise no longer meets the criteria that
24 was the basis for such sanctions.

25 (e) WAIVER.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—The President may waive
2 the application of sanctions under this section for re-
3 newable periods not to exceed 180 days if the Presi-
4 dent—

5 (A) determines that such a waiver is in the
6 national security interests of the United States;
7 and

8 (B) not less than 15 days before the grant-
9 ing of the waiver, submits to the appropriate
10 congressional committees a notice of and jus-
11 tification for the waiver.

12 (2) FORM.—The waiver described in paragraph
13 (1) may be transmitted in classified form.

14 (f) EXCEPTIONS.—

15 (1) HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE.—Sanctions
16 under this Act shall not apply to—

17 (A) the conduct or facilitation of a trans-
18 action for the provision of agricultural commod-
19 ities, food, medicine, medical devices, humani-
20 tarian assistance, or for humanitarian purposes;
21 or

22 (B) transactions that are necessary for, or
23 related to, the activities described in subpara-
24 graph (A).

1 (2) COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL OBLI-
2 GATIONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES.—
3 Sanctions under this Act shall not apply with respect
4 to an alien if admitting or paroling such alien is nec-
5 essary—

6 (A) to comply with United States obliga-
7 tions under—

8 (i) the Agreement between the United
9 Nations and the United States of America
10 regarding the Headquarters of the United
11 Nations, signed at Lake Success June 26,
12 1947, and entered into force November 21,
13 1947;

14 (ii) the Convention on Consular Rela-
15 tions, done at Vienna April 24, 1963, and
16 entered into force March 19, 1967; or

17 (iii) any other international agree-
18 ment; or

19 (B) to carry out or assist law enforcement
20 activity in the United States.

21 (3) EXCEPTION FOR INTELLIGENCE ACTIVI-
22 TIES.—Sanctions under this Act shall not apply to—

23 (A) any activity subject to the reporting
24 requirements under title V of the National Se-
25 curity Act of 1947 (50 U.S.C. 3091 et seq.); or

1 (B) any authorized intelligence activities of
2 the United States.

3 (4) EXCEPTION RELATING TO IMPORTATION OF
4 GOODS.—

5 (A) IN GENERAL.—The requirement to
6 block and prohibit all transactions in all prop-
7 erty and interests in property under this Act
8 shall not include the authority or a requirement
9 to impose sanctions on the importation of
10 goods.

11 (B) DEFINED TERM.—In this paragraph,
12 the term “good” means any article, natural or
13 manmade substance, material, supply or manu-
14 factured product, including inspection and test
15 equipment, and excluding technical data.

16 (g) RULEMAKING.—The President is authorized to
17 promulgate such rules and regulations as may be nec-
18 essary to carry out the provisions of this section (which
19 may include regulatory exceptions), including under sec-
20 tion 205 of the International Emergency Economic Pow-
21 ers Act (50 U.S.C. 1704).

22 (h) SUNSET.—This section shall cease to have force
23 or effect beginning on the date that is 8 years after the
24 date of the enactment of this Act.

1 **SEC. 6. DEMOCRATIC AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND**
2 **PROSPERITY INITIATIVES.**

3 (a) ANTI-CORRUPTION INITIATIVE.—The Secretary
4 of State, through ongoing and new programs, shall develop
5 an initiative that—

6 (1) seeks to expand technical assistance in each
7 Western Balkans country, taking into account local
8 conditions and contingent on the agreement of the
9 host country government to develop new national
10 anti-corruption strategies;

11 (2) seeks to share best practices with, and pro-
12 vide training to, civilian law enforcement agencies
13 and judicial institutions, and other relevant adminis-
14 trative bodies, of the Western Balkans countries, to
15 improve the efficiency, transparency, and account-
16 ability of such agencies and institutions;

17 (3) strengthens existing national anti-corruption
18 strategies—

19 (A) to combat political corruption, particu-
20 larly in the judiciary, independent election over-
21 sight bodies, and public procurement processes;
22 and

23 (B) to strengthen regulatory and legislative
24 oversight of critical governance areas, such as
25 freedom of information and public procurement,

1 including by strengthening cyber defenses and
2 ICT infrastructure networks;

3 (4) includes the Western Balkans countries in
4 the European Democratic Resilience Initiative of the
5 Department of State, or any equivalent successor
6 initiative, and considers the Western Balkans as a
7 recipient of anti-corruption funding for such initia-
8 tive; and

9 (5) seeks to promote the important role of an
10 independent media in countering corruption through
11 engagements with governments of Western Balkan
12 countries and providing training opportunities for
13 journalists on investigative reporting.

14 (b) PRIORITIZING CYBER RESILIENCE, REGIONAL
15 TRADE, AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS.—

16 (1) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
17 Congress that—

18 (A) promoting stronger economic, civic,
19 and political relationships among Western Bal-
20 kans countries will enable countries to better
21 utilize existing resources and maximize their
22 economic security and democratic resilience by
23 reinforcing cyber defenses and increasing trade
24 in goods and services among other countries in
25 the region; and

1 (B) United States investments in and as-
2 sistance toward creating a more integrated re-
3 gion ensures political stability and security for
4 the region.

5 (2) 5-YEAR STRATEGY FOR ECONOMIC DEVEL-
6 OPMENT AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN WESTERN
7 BALKANS.—Not later than 180 days after the date
8 of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State
9 and the Administrator of the United States Agency
10 for International Development, in coordination with
11 the heads of other relevant Federal departments and
12 agencies, shall submit to the appropriate congres-
13 sional committees a regional economic development
14 and democratic resilience strategy for the Western
15 Balkans that complements the efforts of the Euro-
16 pean Union, European nations, and other multilat-
17 eral financing institutions—

18 (A) to consider the full set of tools and re-
19 sources available from the relevant agencies;

20 (B) to include efforts to ensure coordina-
21 tion with multilateral and bilateral partners,
22 such as the European Union, the World Bank,
23 and other relevant assistance frameworks;

24 (C) to include an initial public assessment
25 of—

1 (i) economic opportunities for which
2 United States businesses, or those of other
3 like-minded partner countries, would be
4 competitive;

5 (ii) legal, economic, governance,
6 infrastructural, or other barriers limiting
7 United States trade and investment in the
8 Western Balkans;

9 (iii) the effectiveness of all existing re-
10 gional cooperation initiatives, such as the
11 Open Balkan initiative and the Western
12 Balkans Common Regional Market; and

13 (iv) ways to increase United States
14 trade and investment within the Western
15 Balkans;

16 (D) to develop human and institutional ca-
17 pacity and infrastructure across multiple sec-
18 tors of economies, including clean energy, en-
19 ergy efficiency, agriculture, small and medium-
20 sized enterprise development, health, and cyber-
21 security;

22 (E) to assist with the development and im-
23 plementation of regional and international trade
24 agreements;

25 (F) to support women-owned enterprises;

1 (G) to promote government and civil soci-
2 ety policies and programs that combat corrup-
3 tion and encourage transparency (including by
4 supporting independent media by promoting the
5 safety and security of journalists), free and fair
6 competition, sound governance, judicial reform,
7 environmental stewardship, and business envi-
8 ronments conducive to sustainable and inclusive
9 economic growth; and

10 (H) to include a public diplomacy strategy
11 that describes the actions that will be taken by
12 relevant agencies to increase support for the
13 United States relationship by citizens of West-
14 ern Balkans countries.

15 (3) BRIEFING.—Not later than 90 days after
16 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary
17 of State shall provide a briefing to the appropriate
18 congressional committees that describes the progress
19 made towards developing the strategy required
20 under paragraph (2).

21 (c) REGIONAL TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT INITIA-
22 TIVE.—

23 (1) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of State
24 and the Administrator of the United States Agency
25 for International Development, in coordination with

1 the heads of other relevant Federal departments and
2 agencies, may coordinate a regional trade and devel-
3 opment initiative for the region comprised of each
4 Western Balkans country and any European Union
5 member country that shares a border with a West-
6 ern Balkans country (referred to in this subsection
7 as the “Western Balkans region”) in accordance
8 with this subsection.

9 (2) INITIATIVE ELEMENTS.—The initiative au-
10 thorized under paragraph (1) shall—

11 (A) promote private sector growth and
12 competitiveness and increase the capacity of
13 businesses, particularly small and medium-sized
14 enterprises, in the Western Balkans region;

15 (B) aim to increase intraregional exports
16 to countries in the Balkans and European
17 Union member states;

18 (C) aim to increase United States exports
19 to, and investments in, countries in the Bal-
20 kans;

21 (D) support startup companies, including
22 companies led by youth or women, in the West-
23 ern Balkans region by—

24 (i) providing training in business
25 skills and leadership; and

1 (ii) providing opportunities to connect
2 to sources of capital;

3 (E) encourage and promote inward and
4 outward trade and investment through engage-
5 ment with the Western Balkans diaspora com-
6 munities in the United States and abroad;

7 (F) provide assistance to the governments
8 and civil society organizations of Western Bal-
9 kans countries to develop—

10 (i) regulations to ensure fair and ef-
11 fective investment; and

12 (ii) screening tools to identify and
13 deter malign investments and other coer-
14 cive economic practices;

15 (G) review existing assistance program-
16 ming relating to the Western Balkans across
17 Federal agencies—

18 (i) to eliminate duplication; and

19 (ii) to identify areas of potential co-
20 ordination within the Western Balkans re-
21 gion;

22 (H) identify areas where application of ad-
23 ditional resources could expand successful pro-
24 grams to 1 or more countries in the Western

1 Balkans region by building on the existing expe-
 2 rience and program architecture;

3 (I) compare existing single-country sector
 4 analyses to determine areas of focus that would
 5 benefit from a regional approach with respect to
 6 the Western Balkans region; and

7 (J) promote intraregional trade throughout
 8 the Western Balkans region through—

9 (i) programming, including grants, co-
 10 operative agreements, and other forms of
 11 assistance;

12 (ii) expanding awareness of the avail-
 13 ability of loans and other financial instru-
 14 ments from the United States Government;
 15 and

16 (iii) coordinating access to existing
 17 trade instruments available through allies
 18 and partners in the Western Balkans re-
 19 gion, including the European Union and
 20 international financial institutions.

21 (3) SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE
 22 PROJECTS.—The initiative authorized under para-
 23 graph (1) should facilitate and prioritize support for
 24 regional infrastructure projects, including—

1 (A) transportation projects that build
2 roads, bridges, railways and other physical in-
3 frastructure to facilitate travel of goods and
4 people throughout the Western Balkans region;

5 (B) technical support and investments
6 needed to meet United States and European
7 Union standards for air travel, including
8 screening and information sharing;

9 (C) the development of telecommunications
10 networks with trusted providers;

11 (D) infrastructure projects that connect
12 Western Balkans countries to each other and to
13 countries with which they share a border;

14 (E) the effective analysis of tenders and
15 transparent procurement processes;

16 (F) investment transparency programs
17 that will help countries in the Western Balkans
18 analyze gaps and establish institutional and
19 regulatory reforms necessary—

20 (i) to create an enabling environment
21 for trade and investment; and

22 (ii) to strengthen protections against
23 suspect investments through public pro-
24 curement and privatization and through
25 foreign direct investments;

1 (G) sharing best practices learned from the
 2 United States and other international partners
 3 to ensure that institutional and regulatory
 4 mechanisms for addressing these issues are fair,
 5 nonarbitrary, effective, and free from corrup-
 6 tion;

7 (H) projects that support regional energy
 8 security and reduce dependence on Russian en-
 9 ergy;

10 (I) technical assistance and generating pri-
 11 vate investment in projects that promote
 12 connectivity and energy-sharing in the Western
 13 Balkans region;

14 (J) technical assistance to support regional
 15 collaboration on environmental protection that
 16 includes governmental, political, civic, and busi-
 17 ness stakeholders; and

18 (K) technical assistance to develop financ-
 19 ing options and help create linkages with poten-
 20 tial financing institutions and investors.

21 (4) REQUIREMENTS.—All programming under
 22 the initiative authorized under paragraph (1) shall—

23 (A) be open to the participation of Albania,
 24 Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro,
 25 North Macedonia, and Serbia;

1 (B) be consistent with European Union ac-
 2 cession requirements;

3 (C) be focused on retaining talent within
 4 the Western Balkans;

5 (D) promote government policies in West-
 6 ern Balkans countries that encourage free and
 7 fair competition, sound governance, environ-
 8 mental protection, and business environments
 9 that are conducive to sustainable and inclusive
 10 economic growth; and

11 (E) include a public diplomacy strategy to
 12 inform local and regional audiences in the
 13 Western Balkans region about the initiative, in-
 14 cluding specific programs and projects.

15 (d) UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
 16 FINANCE CORPORATION.—

17 (1) APPOINTMENTS.—Not later than 1 year
 18 after the date of the enactment of this Act, subject
 19 to the availability of appropriations, the Chief Exec-
 20 utive Officer of the United States International De-
 21 velopment Finance Corporation, in collaboration
 22 with the Secretary of State, should consider includ-
 23 ing a regional office with responsibilities for the
 24 Western Balkans within the Corporation's plans to
 25 open new regional offices.

1 (2) JOINT REPORT.—Not later than 180 days
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
3 Chief Executive Officer of the United States Inter-
4 national Development Finance Corporation and the
5 Administrator of the United States Agency for
6 International Development shall submit a joint re-
7 port to the appropriate congressional committees
8 that includes—

9 (A) an assessment of the benefits of pro-
10 viding sovereign loan guarantees to countries in
11 the Western Balkans to support infrastructure
12 and energy diversification projects;

13 (B) an outline of additional resources, such
14 as tools, funding, and personnel, which may be
15 required to offer sovereign loan guarantees in
16 the Western Balkans; and

17 (C) an assessment of how the United
18 States International Development Finance Cor-
19 poration can deploy its insurance products in
20 support of bonds or other instruments issued to
21 raise capital through United States financial
22 markets in the Western Balkans.

1 **SEC. 7. PROMOTING CROSS-CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL**
2 **ENGAGEMENT.**

3 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
4 gress that—

5 (1) promoting partnerships between United
6 States universities and universities in the Western
7 Balkans, particularly universities in traditionally
8 under-served communities, advances United States
9 foreign policy goals and requires a whole-of-govern-
10 ment approach, including the utilization of public-
11 private partnerships;

12 (2) such university partnerships would provide
13 opportunities for exchanging academic ideas, tech-
14 nical expertise, research, and cultural understanding
15 for the benefit of the United States; and

16 (3) the seven countries in the Western Balkans
17 meet the requirements under section 105(c)(4) of
18 the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C.
19 2151c(c)(4)).

20 (b) UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS.—The President,
21 working through the Secretary of State, is authorized to
22 provide assistance, consistent with section 105 of the For-
23 eign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151c), to pro-
24 mote the establishment of partnerships between United
25 States universities and universities in the Western Bal-
26 kans, including—

1 (1) supporting research and analysis on foreign
2 policy, cyber resilience, and disinformation;

3 (2) working with partner governments to re-
4 form policies, improve curricula, strengthen data
5 systems, train teachers and students, including
6 English language teaching, and to provide quality,
7 inclusive learning materials;

8 (3) encouraging knowledge exchanges to help
9 provide individuals, particularly at-risk youth,
10 women, people with disabilities, and other vulner-
11 able, marginalized, or underserved communities,
12 with relevant education, training, and skills for
13 meaningful employment;

14 (4) promoting teaching and research exchanges
15 between institutions of higher education in the West-
16 ern Balkans and in the United States; and

17 (5) encouraging alliances and exchanges with
18 like-minded institutions of education within the
19 Western Balkans and the larger European continent.

20 **SEC. 8. PEACE CORPS IN THE WESTERN BALKANS.**

21 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
22 gress that the Peace Corps, whose mission is to promote
23 world peace and friendship, in part by helping the people
24 of interested countries in meeting their need for trained
25 men and women, provides an invaluable opportunity to

1 connect the people of the United States with the people
2 of the Western Balkans.

3 (b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date
4 of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Peace
5 Corps should submit a report to the appropriate congress-
6 sional committees that includes an analysis of current op-
7 portunities for Peace Corps expansion in the Western Bal-
8 kans region.

9 **SEC. 9. YOUNG BALKAN LEADERS INITIATIVE.**

10 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
11 gress that regular people-to-people exchange programs
12 that bring religious leaders, journalists, civil society mem-
13 bers, politicians, and other individuals from the Western
14 Balkans to the United States will strengthen existing rela-
15 tionships and advance United States interests and shared
16 values in the Western Balkans region.

17 (b) BOLD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR YOUNG BAL-
18 KANS LEADERS.—

19 (1) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—The Department of
20 State, through BOLD, a leadership program for
21 young leaders in certain Western Balkans countries,
22 plays an important role to develop young leaders in
23 improving civic engagement and economic develop-
24 ment in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, and Mon-
25 tenegro.

1 (2) EXPANSION.—BOLD should be expanded,
2 subject to the availability of appropriations, to the
3 entire Western Balkans region.

4 (c) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of State should
5 further develop and implement BOLD, which shall here-
6 after be known as the “Young Balkan Leaders Initiative”,
7 to promote educational and professional development for
8 young adult leaders and professionals in the Western Bal-
9 kans who have demonstrated a passion to contribute to
10 the continued development of the Western Balkans region.

11 (d) CONDUCT OF INITIATIVE.—The goals of the
12 Young Balkan Leaders Initiative shall be—

13 (1) to further build the capacity of young Bal-
14 kan leaders in the Western Balkans in the areas of
15 business and information technology, cyber security
16 and digitization, agriculture, civic engagement, and
17 public administration;

18 (2) to support young Balkan leaders by offering
19 professional development, training, and networking
20 opportunities, particularly in the areas of leadership,
21 innovation, civic engagement, elections, human
22 rights, entrepreneurship, good governance, public ad-
23 ministration, and journalism;

24 (3) to support young political, parliamentary,
25 and civic Balkan leaders in collaboration on regional

1 initiatives related to good governance, environmental
2 protection, government ethics, and minority inclu-
3 sion;

4 (4) to provide increased economic and technical
5 assistance to young Balkan leaders to promote eco-
6 nomic growth and strengthen ties between busi-
7 nesses, investors, and entrepreneurs in the United
8 States and in Western Balkans countries;

9 (5) to tailor such assistance to advance the par-
10 ticular objectives of each United States mission in
11 the Western Balkans within the framework outlined
12 in this subsection; and

13 (6) to secure funding for such assistance from
14 existing funds available to each United States Mis-
15 sion in the Western Balkans.

16 (e) FELLOWSHIPS.—Under the Young Balkan Lead-
17 ers Initiative, the Secretary of State shall award fellow-
18 ships to young leaders from the Western Balkans who—

19 (1) are between 18 and 35 years of age;

20 (2) have demonstrated strong capabilities in en-
21 trepreneurship, innovation, public service, and lead-
22 ership;

23 (3) have had a positive impact in their commu-
24 nities, organizations, or institutions, including by

1 promoting cross-regional and multiethnic coopera-
2 tion; and

3 (4) represent a cross-section of geographic, gen-
4 der, political, and cultural diversity.

5 (f) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP CEN-
6 TER.—Under the Young Balkan Leaders Initiative, the
7 Secretary of State shall take advantage of existing and
8 future public diplomacy facilities (commonly known as
9 “American Spaces”) to hire staff and develop program-
10 ming for the establishment of a flagship public engage-
11 ment and leadership center in the Western Balkans that
12 seeks—

13 (1) to counter disinformation and malign influ-
14 ence;

15 (2) to promote cross-cultural engagement;

16 (3) to provide training for young leaders from
17 Western Balkans countries described in subsection
18 (e);

19 (4) to harmonize the efforts of existing venues
20 throughout Western Balkans countries established
21 by the Office of American Spaces; and

22 (5) to annually bring together participants from
23 the Young Balkan Leaders Initiative to provide
24 platforms for regional networking.

25 (g) BRIEFING ON CERTAIN EXCHANGE PROGRAMS.—

1 (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-
3 retary of State shall provide a briefing to the appro-
4 priate congressional committees that describes the
5 status of exchange programs involving the Western
6 Balkans region.

7 (2) ELEMENTS.—The briefing required under
8 paragraph (1) shall—

9 (A) assess the factors constraining the
10 number and frequency of participants from
11 Western Balkans countries in the International
12 Visitor Leadership Program of the Department
13 of State;

14 (B) identify the resources that are nec-
15 essary to address the factors described in sub-
16 paragraph (A); and

17 (C) describe a strategy for connecting
18 alumni and participants of professional develop-
19 ment exchange programs of the Department of
20 State in the Western Balkans with alumni and
21 participants from other countries in Europe, to
22 enhance inter-region and intra-region people-to-
23 people ties.

1 **SEC. 10. SUPPORTING CYBERSECURITY AND CYBER RESIL-**
 2 **IENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS.**

3 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
 4 gress that—

5 (1) United States support for cybersecurity,
 6 cyber resilience, and secure ICT infrastructure in
 7 Western Balkans countries will strengthen the re-
 8 gion’s ability to defend itself from and respond to
 9 malicious cyber activity conducted by nonstate and
 10 foreign actors, including foreign governments, that
 11 seek to influence the region;

12 (2) insecure ICT networks that are vulnerable
 13 to manipulation can increase opportunities for—

14 (A) the compromise of cyber infrastruc-
 15 ture, including data networks, electronic infra-
 16 structure, and software systems; and

17 (B) the use of online information oper-
 18 ations by adversaries and malign actors to un-
 19 dermine United States allies and interests; and

20 (3) it is in the national security interest of the
 21 United States to support the cybersecurity and cyber
 22 resilience of Western Balkans countries.

23 (b) INTERAGENCY REPORT ON CYBERSECURITY AND
 24 THE DIGITAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT IN WESTERN
 25 BALKANS COUNTRIES.—Not later than 1 year after the
 26 date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State,

1 in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, the Sec-
2 retary of Homeland Security, and the heads of other rel-
3 evant Federal agencies, shall submit a report to the appro-
4 priate congressional committees that contains—

5 (1) an overview of interagency efforts to
6 strengthen cybersecurity and cyber resilience in
7 Western Balkans countries;

8 (2) a review of the information environment in
9 each Western Balkans country;

10 (3) a review of existing United States Govern-
11 ment cyber and digital initiatives that—

12 (A) counter influence operations and safe-
13 guard elections and democratic processes in
14 Western Balkans countries;

15 (B) strengthen ICT infrastructure and cy-
16 bersecurity capacity in the Western Balkans;

17 (C) support democracy and internet free-
18 dom in Western Balkans countries; and

19 (D) build cyber capacity of governments
20 who are allies or partners of the United States;

21 (4) an assessment of cyber threat information
22 sharing between the United States and Western Bal-
23 kans countries;

24 (5) an assessment of—

1 (A) options for the United States to better
 2 support cybersecurity and cyber resilience in
 3 Western Balkans countries through changes to
 4 current assistance authorities; and

5 (B) the advantages or limitations, such as
 6 funding or office space, of posting cyber profes-
 7 sionals from other Federal departments and
 8 agencies to United States diplomatic posts in
 9 Western Balkans countries and providing rel-
 10 evant training to Foreign Service Officers; and

11 (6) any additional support needed from the
 12 United States for the cybersecurity and cyber resil-
 13 ience of the following NATO Allies: Albania, Monte-
 14 negro, North Macedonia, and Croatia.

15 **SEC. 11. RELATIONS BETWEEN KOSOVO AND SERBIA.**

16 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
 17 gress that—

18 (1) the Agreement on the Path to Normaliza-
 19 tion of Relations, which was agreed to by Kosovo
 20 and Serbia on February 27, 2023, with the facilita-
 21 tion of the European Union, is a positive step for-
 22 ward in advancing normalization between the two
 23 countries;

1 (2) Serbia and Kosovo should seek to make im-
 2 mediate progress on the Implementation Annex to
 3 the agreement referred to in paragraph (1);

4 (3) once sufficient progress has been made on
 5 the Implementation Annex, the United States should
 6 consider advancing initiatives to strengthen bilateral
 7 relations with both countries, which could include—

8 (A) establishing bilateral strategic dia-
 9 logues with Kosovo and Serbia; and

10 (B) advancing concrete initiatives to deep-
 11 en trade and investment with both countries;
 12 and

13 (4) the United States should continue to sup-
 14 port a comprehensive final agreement between
 15 Kosovo and Serbia based on mutual recognition.

16 (b) STATEMENT OF POLICY.—It is the policy of the
 17 United States Government that—

18 (1) it shall not pursue any policy that advocates
 19 for land swaps, partition, or other forms of redraw-
 20 ing borders along ethnic lines in the Western Bal-
 21 kans as a means to arbitrate disputes between na-
 22 tion states in the region; and

23 (2) it should support pluralistic democracies in
 24 countries in the Western Balkans as a means to pre-

1 vent a return to the ethnic strife that once charac-
 2 terized the region.

3 **SEC. 12. REPORTS ON RUSSIAN AND CHINESE MALIGN IN-**
 4 **FLUENCE OPERATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS IN**
 5 **THE WESTERN BALKANS.**

6 (a) **REPORTS REQUIRED.**—Not later than 180 days
 7 after the date of the enactment of this Act, and every two
 8 years thereafter, the Secretary of State, in coordination
 9 with the Secretary of Defense, the Director of National
 10 Intelligence, and the heads of other Federal departments
 11 or agencies, as appropriate, shall submit a report to the
 12 appropriate congressional committees regarding Russian
 13 and Chinese malign influence operations and campaigns
 14 carried out with respect to Balkan countries that seek—

- 15 (1) to undermine democratic institutions;
- 16 (2) to promote political instability; and
- 17 (3) to harm the interests of the United States
- 18 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization member
- 19 and partner states in the Western Balkans.

20 (b) **ELEMENTS.**—Each report submitted pursuant to
 21 subsection (a) shall include—

- 22 (1) an assessment of the objectives of the Rus-
- 23 sian Federation and the People’s Republic of China
- 24 regarding malign influence operations and cam-

1 paigns carried out with respect to Western Balkans
2 countries—

3 (A) to undermine democratic institutions,
4 including the planning and execution of demo-
5 cratic elections;

6 (B) to promote political instability; and

7 (C) to manipulate the information environ-
8 ment;

9 (2) the activities and roles of the Department
10 of State and other relevant Federal agencies in
11 countering Russian and Chinese malign influence
12 operations and campaigns;

13 (3) a comprehensive list identifying—

14 (A) each network, entity and individual, to
15 the extent such information is available, of Rus-
16 sia, China, or any other country with which
17 Russia or China may cooperate, that is sup-
18 porting such Russian or Chinese malign influ-
19 ence operations or campaigns, including the
20 provision of financial or operational support to
21 activities in a Western Balkans country that
22 may limit freedom of speech or create barriers
23 of access to democratic processes, including ex-
24 ercising the right to vote in a free and fair elec-
25 tion; and

1 (B) the role of each such entity in pro-
2 viding such support;

3 (4) the identification of the tactics, techniques,
4 and procedures used in Russian or Chinese malign
5 influence operations and campaigns in Western Bal-
6 kans countries;

7 (5) an assessment of the effect of previous Rus-
8 sian or Chinese malign influence operations and
9 campaigns that targeted alliances and partnerships
10 of the United States Armed Forces in the Western
11 Balkans, including the effectiveness of such oper-
12 ations and campaigns in achieving the objectives of
13 Russia and China, respectively;

14 (6) the identification of each Western Balkans
15 country with respect to which Russia or China has
16 conducted or attempted to conduct a malign influ-
17 ence operation or campaign;

18 (7) an assessment of the capacity and efforts of
19 NATO and of each individual Western Balkans
20 country to counter Russian or Chinese malign influ-
21 ence operations and campaigns carried out with re-
22 spect to Western Balkans countries;

23 (8) the efforts by the United States to combat
24 such malign influence operations in the Western
25 Balkans, including through the Countering Russian

1 Influence Fund and the Countering People's Repub-
2 lic of China Malign Influence Fund;

3 (9) an assessment of the tactics, techniques,
4 and procedures that the Secretary of State, in con-
5 sultation with the Director of National Intelligence
6 and the Secretary of Defense, determines are likely
7 to be used in future Russian or Chinese malign in-
8 fluence operations and campaigns carried out with
9 respect to Western Balkans countries; and

10 (10) recommended authorities or activities that
11 the Department of State and other relevant Federal
12 agencies could enact to increase the United States
13 Government's capacity to counter Russian and Chi-
14 nese malign influence operations and campaigns in
15 Western Balkans countries.

16 (c) FORM.—Each report required under subsection
17 (a) shall be submitted in unclassified form, but may in-
18 clude a classified annex.

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