

117TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

S. 4741

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

AUGUST 2, 2022

Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. WICKER, Mr. TILLIS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. CARDIN, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN) 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. Defined term.

- Sec. 5. Codification of sanctions relating to the Western Balkans.
- Sec. 6. Democratic and economic development and prosperity initiatives.
- Sec. 7. Countering malign influence and promoting cross-cultural engagement.
- Sec. 8. Peace Corps in the Western Balkans.
- Sec. 9. Balkans Youth Leadership Initiative.

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

3 (1) The six countries of the Western Balkans
 4 (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Monte-
 5 negro, North Macedonia, and Serbia) form a plural-
 6 istic, multi-ethnic region in the heart of Europe that
 7 is critical to Europe's peace, stability, and pros-
 8 perity.

9 (2) Continued peace, stability, and prosperity in
 10 the Western Balkans is directly tied to opportunities
 11 for democratic and economic advancement available
 12 to the citizens and residents of those six countries.

13 (3) It is in the mutual interest of the United
 14 States and the six countries of the Western Balkans
 15 to promote stable and sustainable economic growth
 16 and development in the region.

17 (4) The reforms and integration with the Euro-
 18 pean Union pursued by countries in the Western
 19 Balkans have led to significant democratic and eco-
 20 nomic progress in the region.

21 (5) Despite economic progress, rates of poverty
 22 and unemployment in the Western Balkans remain

1 higher than in neighboring European Union coun-
2 tries.

3 (6) Out-migration, particularly of youth, is af-
4 fecting demographics in every country in the West-
5 ern Balkans, resulting in negative population growth
6 in all six countries.

7 (7) Creating a welcoming environment for in-
8 vestment and creating employment opportunities in
9 the Western Balkans, especially for youth, can pro-
10 vide powerful tools for economic development and for
11 encouraging broader participation in a political proc-
12 ess that increases prosperity for all.

13 (8) Offering opportunities for inclusive, trans-
14 parent economic growth and merit-based employ-
15 ment to people living in the Western Balkans will
16 encourage higher levels of trade and direct invest-
17 ment and support positive economic and political de-
18 velopments occurring throughout the region.

19 (9) Existing regional economic efforts, such as
20 the Common Regional Market and the Open Bal-
21 kans initiative, have great potential to improve the
22 economic conditions in the Western Balkans, while
23 promoting inclusion and transparency.

24 (10) 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 (11) Corruption continues to plague the West-
4 ern Balkans and represents one of the greatest im-
5 pediments to further economic and political develop-
6 ment in the region.

7 (12) Disinformation campaigns targeting the
8 Western Balkans threaten the credibility of Western
9 democratic institutions, the integrity of national
10 elections, and the response to COVID–19.

11 (13) Corruption and disinformation proliferate
12 in political environments marked by autocratic con-
13 trol or partisan conflict.

14 (14) Dependence on Russian sources of natural
15 gas for the countries of the Western Balkans ties
16 their economies and politics to the Russian Federa-
17 tion and inhibits their aspirations for European inte-
18 gration.

19 (15) The Western Balkans reliance on fossil
20 fuels for energy sources causes damage to the envi-
21 ronment and to human health, while inhibiting eco-
22 nomic development in the region.

23 (16) Reducing the Western Balkans' reliance on
24 Russian natural gas supplies and fossil fuels is in
25 the national interest of the United States.

1 (17) China’s growing influence in the Western
2 Balkans could also have a deleterious impact on
3 strategic competition, democracy, and economic inte-
4 gration with Europe.

5 (18) The United States International Develop-
6 ment Finance Corporation plays an important role
7 in the pursuit of United States policy goals focused
8 on economic development.

9 (19) In March 2022, the President launched
10 the European Democratic Resilience Initiative to
11 bolster democratic resilience, advance anti-corruption
12 efforts, and defend human rights in Ukraine and its
13 neighbors in response Russia’s war of aggression.

14 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

15 It is the sense of Congress that the United States
16 should—

17 (1) encourage increased trade and investment
18 between the United States and allies and partners in
19 the Western Balkans;

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

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

1 (4) work with allies and partners committed to
2 improving the rule of law, energy resource diver-
3 sification, democratic and economic reform, and the
4 eradication of poverty in the Western Balkans;

5 (5) increase United States trade and investment
6 with the Western Balkans, particularly in ways
7 that—

8 (A) decrease dependence on Russian en-
9 ergy sources and fossil fuels;

10 (B) increase energy diversification, effi-
11 ciency, and conservation; and

12 (C) facilitate the transition to cleaner and
13 more reliable sources of energy, including re-
14 newables;

15 (6) facilitate the development of strong civil so-
16 cieties, independent media, transparent, accountable,
17 citizen-responsive governance, and political stability
18 in the Western Balkans;

19 (7) support the expeditious accession of the
20 countries in the Western Balkans to the European
21 Union and to the North Atlantic Treaty Organiza-
22 tion (NATO) for those that desire membership;

23 (8) support—

24 (A) maintaining the full European Union
25 Force (EUFOR) mandate in Bosnia and

1 Herzegovina as being in the national security
2 interests of the United States;

3 (B) encouraging NATO and the European
4 Union to review their mission mandates and
5 posture in Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure
6 they are playing a proactive role in establishing
7 a safe and secure environment, particularly the
8 defense environment;

9 (C) using the voice of the United States in
10 NATO to encourage alliance planning and sup-
11 port of an international military force to main-
12 tain a safe and secure environment in Bosnia
13 and Herzegovina, especially if Russia blocks re-
14 authorization of the mission in the United Na-
15 tions; and

16 (D) a strengthened NATO headquarters in
17 Sarajevo;

18 (9) continue security cooperation with Albania,
19 Montenegro, and North Macedonia through the aus-
20 pices of NATO and through continued bilateral co-
21 operation;

22 (10) continue to support Montenegro's ongoing
23 accession negotiations with the European Union, in-
24 cluding by providing assistance to Montenegro to

1 help the country promptly meet European Union
2 membership criteria;

3 (11) continue to support North Macedonia's
4 and Albania's applications for European Union
5 membership by supporting improvement of their re-
6 spective abilities to meet democracy benchmarks re-
7 quired for accession;

8 (12) continue to support Bosnia and
9 Herzegovina's pursuit of European Union candidate
10 status by encouraging meaningful advancement of
11 its reform agenda;

12 (13) continue to support the cultural heritage,
13 and recognize the languages of the Western Balkans;

14 (14) coordinate closely with the European
15 Union, the United Kingdom, and other allies and
16 partners on sanctions designations and work to align
17 efforts as much as possible to demonstrate a clear
18 commitment to upholding democratic values;

19 (15) expand bilateral security cooperation with
20 non-NATO member Balkan countries, particularly
21 efforts focused on regional integration and coopera-
22 tion, including through the Adriatic Charter, done at
23 Tirana May 2, 2003;

24 (16) increase efforts to combat Russian
25 disinformation campaigns and any other malign, de-

1 stabilizing, or disruptive activities targeting the
2 Western Balkans through engagement with govern-
3 ment institutions, political stakeholders, journalists,
4 civil society organizations, and industry leaders;

5 (17) articulate clearly and unambiguously the
6 United States commitment to supporting democratic
7 values and respect for international law as the sole
8 path forward for the countries of the Western Bal-
9 kans; and

10 (18) support the mission of the Peace Corps to
11 promote world peace and friendship by helping the
12 people of interested countries to meet their need for
13 trained men and women, which provides an inval-
14 uable opportunity to connect the American people
15 with the people of the Western Balkans.

16 **SEC. 4. DEFINED TERM.**

17 In this Act, the term “appropriate congressional com-
18 mittees” means—

19 (1) the Committee on Foreign Relations of the
20 Senate;

21 (2) the Committee on Appropriations of the
22 Senate;

23 (3) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the
24 House of Representatives; and

1 (4) the Committee on Appropriations of the
2 House of Representatives.

3 **SEC. 5. CODIFICATION OF SANCTIONS RELATING TO THE**
4 **WESTERN BALKANS.**

5 (a) IN GENERAL.—The United States sanctions im-
6 posed through the Executive orders specified in subsection
7 (b) relating to obstructing the Dayton Accords and cor-
8 ruption, including all sanctions imposed with respect to
9 persons under such Executive orders as of the date of the
10 enactment of this Act, shall remain in effect, except as
11 provided in subsection (c).

12 (b) EXECUTIVE ORDERS SPECIFIED.—The Executive
13 orders specified in this subsection are—

14 (1) Executive Order 13219 (50 U.S.C. 1701
15 note; relating to blocking property of persons who
16 threaten international stabilization efforts in the
17 Western Balkans), as amended before and in effect
18 on the date of the enactment of this Act; and

19 (2) Executive Order 14033 (50 U.S.C. 1701
20 note; relating to blocking property and suspending
21 entry into the United States of certain persons con-
22 tributing to the destabilizing situation in the West-
23 ern Balkans), as in effect on such date of enact-
24 ment.

1 (c) TERMINATION OF SANCTIONS.—The President
2 may terminate the application of sanctions described in
3 subsection (a) with respect to a person if the President
4 certifies to the appropriate congressional committees
5 that—

6 (1) such person—

7 (A) is not engaging in the activity that was
8 the basis for such sanctions; or

9 (B) has taken significant verifiable steps
10 toward stopping such activity; and

11 (2) the President has received reliable assur-
12 ances that such person will not knowingly engage in
13 activity subject to such sanctions in the future.

14 **SEC. 6. DEMOCRATIC AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND**
15 **PROSPERITY INITIATIVES.**

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

19 (1) seeks to expand technical assistance for the
20 development of national anti-corruption strategies to
21 each country of the Western Balkans, or for the sup-
22 port of national anti-corruption strategies already
23 created, taking into account local conditions and
24 contingent on the agreement of the host country
25 government;

1 (2) seeks to share best practices with, and pro-
2 vide training to, law enforcement agencies and judi-
3 cial institutions, and other relevant administrative
4 bodies, in countries in the region to improve the effi-
5 ciency, transparency, and accountability of such
6 agencies and institutions;

7 (3) provides support to combat political corrup-
8 tion, particularly in campaign finance, and to
9 strengthen regulatory and legislative oversight of
10 critical governance areas, such as freedom of infor-
11 mation and public procurement; and

12 (4) includes the Western Balkans in the Euro-
13 pean Democratic Resilience Initiative, and considers
14 the region as a recipient of anti-corruption funding
15 for such initiative.

16 (b) PRIORITIZING REGIONAL TRADE AND ECONOMIC
17 COMPETITIVENESS.—

18 (1) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
19 Congress that—

20 (A) promoting stronger economic, civic,
21 and political relationships among the countries
22 in the Western Balkans will enable such coun-
23 tries to better utilize existing resources and
24 maximize their economic security and resilience

1 by increasing trade in goods and services
2 among other countries in the region; and

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

7 (2) COMPREHENSIVE, 5-YEAR STRATEGY FOR
8 ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRATIC RESIL-
9 IENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS.—Not later than
10 180 days after the date of the enactment of this Act,
11 the Secretary of State and the Administrator of the
12 United States Agency for International Develop-
13 ment, in coordination with the Secretary of the
14 Treasury, the Secretary of Commerce, and the Chief
15 Executive Officer of the United States International
16 Development Finance Corporation, shall submit to
17 the appropriate congressional committees a regional
18 economic development and democratic resilience
19 strategy for the Western Balkans that—

20 (A) considers the full set of tools and re-
21 sources available from the agencies overseen by
22 such Federal officials;

23 (B) includes efforts to ensure coordination
24 with multilateral and bilateral partners, such as

1 the European Union, the World Bank, and
2 other relevant assistance frameworks;

3 (C) includes an initial public assessment
4 of—

5 (i) economic opportunities for which
6 United States businesses, or those of other
7 like-minded partners, would be competitive;

8 (ii) legal, economic, governance,
9 infrastructural, or other barriers limiting
10 United States investment in the Western
11 Balkans;

12 (iii) the effectiveness of existing re-
13 gional cooperation initiatives, such as the
14 Open Balkan initiative and the Western
15 Balkans Common Regional Market; and

16 (iv) ways to increase United States
17 trade in the Western Balkans;

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

1 (E) assists with the development and im-
2 plementation of regional and international trade
3 agreements;

4 (F) supports women-owned enterprises and
5 gender equality;

6 (G) promotes government policies that
7 combat corruption and encourage transparency,
8 free and fair competition, sound governance, ju-
9 dicial reform, environmental protection, and
10 business environments conducive to sustainable
11 and inclusive economic growth; and

12 (H) includes a public diplomacy strategy
13 that describes the actions that will be taken by
14 relevant agencies to ensure that populations in
15 the Western Balkans are aware of the develop-
16 ment activities of the United States Govern-
17 ment.

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

24 (c) REGIONAL TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT INITIA-
25 TIVE.—

1 (1) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of State
2 and the Administrator of the United States Agency
3 for International Development, in coordination with
4 the Chief Executive Officer of the United States
5 International Development Finance Corporation and
6 the Secretary of Commerce, is authorized to coordi-
7 nate a regional trade and development initiative in
8 accordance 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;

15 (B) aim to increase interregional exports
16 to other countries in the Balkans and neigh-
17 boring countries and European Union member
18 states;

19 (C) aim to increase United States exports
20 to and investments in countries in the Balkans;

21 (D) support startup companies by pro-
22 viding training in business skills and leadership,
23 providing opportunities to connect to sources of
24 capital, and by encouraging startup companies
25 that are led by youth or women;

1 (E) encourage and promote inward and
2 outward investment through engagement with
3 the Western Balkans diaspora community in
4 the United States and abroad;

5 (F) assist governments to develop—

6 (i) regulations to ensure fair and ef-
7 fective investment; and

8 (ii) screening tools to identify and
9 deter malign investments and other coer-
10 cive economic practices;

11 (G) review existing assistance program-
12 ming across Federal agencies—

13 (i) to eliminate duplication; and

14 (ii) to identify areas of coordination
15 within the Balkans region, which shall in-
16 clude the 6 Western Balkans countries and
17 any country that shares a border with any
18 of such countries;

19 (H) identify areas where application of ad-
20 ditional resources could expand successful pro-
21 grams to 1 or more countries in the region by
22 building on the existing experience and program
23 architecture;

(I) compare existing single-country sector analyses to determine areas of focus that would benefit from a regional approach; and

(J) promote intraregional trade through—

(i) programming, including grants, cooperative agreements, and other forms of assistance;

(ii) expanding awareness of the availability of loans and other financial instruments from the United States Government, including from the United States International Development Finance Corporation and the Export-Import Bank of the United States; and

(iii) coordinating access to existing trade instruments available through allies and partners in the region, including the European Union and international financial institutions.

(3) SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS.—The initiative authorized under paragraph (1), consistent with the BUILD Act of 2018 (division F of Public Law 115–254) and the European Energy Security and Diversification Act of 2019 (title XX of division P of Public Law 116–94),

1 should facilitate and prioritize support for regional
2 infrastructure projects, including—

3 (A) transportation projects that build
4 roads, bridges, railways and other physical in-
5 frastructure to facilitate travel of goods and
6 people throughout the Balkans region, particu-
7 larly interstate travel;

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

12 (C) the development of telecommunications
13 networks from trusted providers;

14 (D) infrastructure projects that connect
15 Western Balkan countries to each other and to
16 countries with which they share a border;

17 (E) the effective analysis of tenders and
18 transparent procurement processes;

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

23 (i) to create an enabling environment
24 for trade and investment; and

1 (ii) to strengthen protections against
2 suspect investments through public pro-
3 curement and privatization and through
4 foreign direct investments;

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

11 (H) projects that reduce reliance on fossil
12 fuels and facilitate the transition to clean
13 sources of energy;

14 (I) technical assistance and generating pri-
15 vate investment in projects that promote
16 connectivity and energy-sharing in the Western
17 Balkans region;

18 (J) technical assistance to support regional
19 collaboration on environmental protection that
20 includes governmental, political, civic, and busi-
21 ness stakeholders; and

22 (K) technical assistance to develop financ-
23 ing options and help create linkages with poten-
24 tial financing institutions and investors.

25 (4) LOANS.—

1 (A) IN GENERAL.—Amounts appropriated
2 under the headings “Economic Support Fund”
3 and “Assistance for Europe, Eurasia and Cen-
4 tral Asia” in any Act making appropriations for
5 the Department of State, foreign operations,
6 and related programs may be made available
7 for the costs (as defined in section 502 of the
8 Congressional Budget Act of 1974 (2 U.S.C.
9 661a)), of loan guarantees, including the cost of
10 modifying loans and loan guarantees, for pro-
11 grams, projects, or activities in Albania, Bosnia
12 and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North
13 Macedonia, or Serbia, which are authorized to
14 be provided.

15 (B) CLASSIFICATION OF LOANS AND LOAN
16 GUARANTEES.—Amounts made available under
17 subparagraph (A) for the costs of loans and
18 loan guarantees, including the cost of modifying
19 loans and loan guarantees, shall not be consid-
20 ered assistance for the purposes of any provi-
21 sions of law limiting assistance to a country.

22 (C) CONSULTATION AND NOTIFICATION.—
23 Amounts made available under this subsection
24 shall be subject to—

1 (i) prior consultation with the appro-
2 priate congressional committees; and

3 (ii) the regular notification procedures
4 of the Committee on Appropriations of the
5 Senate and the Committee on Appropria-
6 tions of the House of Representatives.

7 (5) REQUIREMENTS.—All programming under
8 the initiative authorized under paragraph (1) shall—

9 (A) be open to the participation of all 6
10 Western Balkan countries;

11 (B) be consistent with European Union ac-
12 cession requirements;

13 (C) be focused on retaining talent within
14 the Western Balkans;

15 (D) promote government policies in West-
16 ern Balkan countries that encourage free and
17 fair competition, sound governance, environ-
18 mental protection, and business environments
19 that are conducive to sustainable and inclusive
20 economic growth;

21 (E) include gender analysis and efforts to
22 promote gender equity; and

23 (F) include a public diplomacy strategy to
24 inform local and regional audiences in the Bal-

1 kan region about the initiative, including spe-
2 cific programs and projects.

3 (d) UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT
4 FINANCE CORPORATION.—

5 (1) APPOINTMENTS.—Not later than 1 year
6 after the date of the enactment of this Act, subject
7 to the availability of appropriations, the Chief Exec-
8 utive Officer of the United States International De-
9 velopment Finance Corporation (referred to in this
10 subsection as the “DFC”), in collaboration with the
11 Secretary of State, should take steps to ensure
12 that—

13 (A) a regional DFC office with responsibil-
14 ities for the Western Balkans is established in
15 the region and is operational; and

16 (B) sufficient full-time DFC employees, in-
17 cluding at least one permanent hire from the
18 United States, are stationed in the office to
19 serve United States interests in the Western
20 Balkans.

21 (2) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after
22 the date of the enactment of this Act, the Chief Ex-
23 ecutive Officer of the DFC shall submit a report to
24 the appropriate congressional committees that in-
25 cludes—

1 (A) a summary of the steps that have been
2 taken to fulfill the requirements under para-
3 graph (1);

4 (B) an account of any additional resources
5 and authorities needed to complete the require-
6 ments under paragraph (1); and

7 (C) a description of the initial outreach
8 plan for the new regional DFC office.

9 (3) JOINT REPORT.—Not later than 180 days
10 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the
11 Chief Executive Officer of the DFC and the Admin-
12 istrator of the United States Agency for Inter-
13 national Development shall submit a joint report to
14 the appropriate congressional committees that in-
15 cludes—

16 (A) an assessment of the benefits of pro-
17 viding sovereign loan guarantees to countries in
18 the Western Balkans to support infrastructure
19 and energy diversification projects;

20 (B) an outline of additional resources, such
21 as tools, funding, and personnel, which may be
22 required to offer sovereign loan guarantees; and

23 (C) an assessment of how the DFC can de-
24 ploy its insurance products in support of bonds

1 or other instruments issued to raise capital
2 through United States financial markets.

3 **SEC. 7. COUNTERING MALIGN INFLUENCE AND PRO-**
4 **MOTING CROSS-CULTURAL ENGAGEMENT.**

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

7 (1) promoting university partnerships in the
8 Western Balkans, particularly in traditionally under-
9 served communities, advances United States foreign
10 policy goals and requires a whole of government ap-
11 proach, including the utilization of public-private
12 partnerships;

13 (2) such university partnerships will provide op-
14 portunities for exchanging academic ideas, technical
15 expertise, research, and cultural understanding for
16 the benefit of the United States; and

17 (3) the six countries in the Western Balkans
18 meet the requirements under section 105(c)(4) of
19 the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C.
20 2151c(c)(4)).

21 (b) UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS.—The President,
22 working through the Secretary of State, is authorized to
23 provide assistance, consistent with section 105 of the For-
24 eign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151c), to pro-

1 mote the establishment of university partnerships between
2 the United States and the Western Balkans, including—

3 (1) supporting research and analysis on foreign
4 policy and disinformation;

5 (2) working with partner governments to re-
6 form policies, improve curricula, strengthen data
7 systems, train teachers, and provide quality, inclu-
8 sive learning materials;

9 (3) providing individuals, particularly at-risk
10 youth, women, people with disabilities, and other
11 vulnerable, marginalized, or underserved commu-
12 nities, with relevant education, training, and skills
13 for meaningful employment;

14 (4) removing barriers to entering formal edu-
15 cation for out-of-school individuals, assisting such
16 individuals to stay in school, and providing an op-
17 portunity for any individuals left behind to catch up
18 on schooling;

19 (5) promoting teaching and research exchanges
20 between institutions of higher education in the West-
21 ern Balkans and in the United States; and

22 (6) encouraging alliances and exchanges with
23 like-minded institutions of education within the
24 Western Balkans and the larger Europe continent.

1 (c) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
2 are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be
3 necessary for each of the fiscal years 2023 through 2027
4 to carry out this section.

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

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

8 (1) the Peace Corps should be reinstated in the
9 Western Balkans by reopening Peace Corps pro-
10 grams in as many Western Balkans countries as
11 safely possible, including where the Peace Corps had
12 previously operated, or has suspended operations due
13 to the COVID–19 pandemic;

14 (2) the Peace Corps should reopen its programs
15 in as many of the Western Balkans countries as pos-
16 sible, including where the Peace Corps operated pre-
17 viously, but later suspended operations; and

18 (3) the Peace Corps, whose mission is to pro-
19 mote world peace and friendship, in part by helping
20 the people of interested countries in meeting their
21 need for trained men and women, provides an in-
22 valuable opportunity to connect the people of the
23 United States with the people of the Western Bal-
24 kans.

1 (b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date
2 of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Peace
3 Corps shall submit a report to the appropriate congress-
4 sional committees that includes—

5 (1) an analysis of current opportunities for
6 Peace Corps expansion in the Western Balkans re-
7 gion; and

8 (2) a plan and timeline for implementing the
9 outcomes described in subsection (a) to facilitate ex-
10 pansion of Peace Corps presence in the Western
11 Balkans region, as appropriate.

12 **SEC. 9. BALKANS YOUTH LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE.**

13 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-
14 gress that regular people-to-people exchange programs
15 that bring religious leaders, journalists, civil society mem-
16 bers, politicians, and other people from the Western Bal-
17 kans to the United States will strengthen existing relation-
18 ships and advance United States interests and shared val-
19 ues in the Western Balkans region.

20 (b) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of State shall
21 further develop and implement a program, to be known
22 as the “Balkans Youth Leadership Initiative” (referred to
23 in this section as “BOLD”) that promotes educational and
24 professional development for young adult leaders and pro-
25 fessionals in the Western Balkans who have demonstrated

1 a passion to contribute to the continued development of
2 the region.

3 (c) CONDUCT OF INITIATIVE.—BOLD shall seek—

4 (1) to build the capacity of young Balkan lead-
5 ers in the Western Balkans in the areas of business
6 and information technology, cyber security and
7 digitization, agriculture, civic engagement, and pub-
8 lic administration;

9 (2) to support young Balkan leaders by offering
10 professional development, training, and networking
11 opportunities, particularly in the areas of leadership,
12 innovation, civic engagement, elections, human
13 rights, entrepreneurship, good governance, and pub-
14 lic administration;

15 (3) to support young political, parliamentary,
16 and civic leaders in collaboration on regional initia-
17 tives related to good governance, environmental pro-
18 tection, government ethics, and minority inclusion;
19 and

20 (4) to provide increased economic and technical
21 assistance to young Balkan leaders to promote eco-
22 nomic growth and strengthen ties between United
23 States and Balkan businesses.

24 (d) FELLOWSHIPS.—BOLD should award fellowships
25 to young Balkans leaders who—

1 (1) are between 25 and 35 years of age;

2 (2) have demonstrated strong capabilities in en-
3 trepreneurship, innovation, public service, and lead-
4 ership;

5 (3) have had a positive impact in their commu-
6 nities, organizations, or institutions, including by
7 promoting cross-regional and multiethnic coopera-
8 tion; and

9 (4) represent a cross-section of gender, re-
10 gional, and ethnic diversity.

11 (e) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT CENTER.—BOLD should
12 seek to procure space, hire staff, and develop program-
13 ming for the establishment of a flagship public engage-
14 ment and leadership center in the Western Balkans that
15 seeks—

16 (1) to counter disinformation and malign influ-
17 ence;

18 (2) to promote cross-cultural engagement;

19 (3) to provide training for young Balkan lead-
20 ers described in subsection (d); and

21 (4) to harmonize the efforts of existing venues
22 throughout the Western Balkans established by the
23 Office of American Spaces.

24 (f) BRIEFING.—

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, acting through the Assistant Sec-
4 retary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs,
5 shall provide a briefing to the appropriate congres-
6 sional committees that describes the status of ex-
7 change programs involving the Western Balkans re-
8 gion.

9 (2) ELEMENTS.—The briefing required under
10 paragraph (1) shall—

11 (A) assess the factors constraining the
12 number and frequency of International Visitor
13 Leadership Program participants from the 6
14 countries of the Western Balkans;

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

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

1 (g) AUTHORIZATION OF APPROPRIATIONS.—There
2 are authorized to be appropriated such sums as may be
3 necessary for each of the fiscal years 2023 through 2027
4 to carry out this section.

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