

AMENDMENT NO. \_\_\_\_\_ Calendar No. \_\_\_\_\_

Purpose: In the nature of a substitute.

**IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES—118th Cong., 2d Sess.**

**S. 1651**

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

Referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_ and ordered to be printed

Ordered to lie on the table and to be printed

AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE intended to be proposed by Mrs. SHAHEEN

Viz:

1 Strike all after the enacting clause and insert the fol-

2 lowing:

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. Relations between Kosovo and Serbia.  
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 Republic  
4 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  
21 Balkans have led to significant democratic and eco-  
22 nomic progress in the region.

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

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

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

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

22          (9) The Department of Commerce, through its  
23          Foreign Commercial Service, plays an important role  
24          in promoting and facilitating opportunities for  
25          United States trade and investment.

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

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

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

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

20          (14) Securing domestic and international cyber  
21 networks and ICT infrastructure is a national secu-  
22 rity priority for the United States, which is exempli-  
23 fied by offices and programs across the Federal Gov-  
24 ernment that support cybersecurity.

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

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

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

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

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

21          (20) The parliamentary and local elections held  
22          in Serbia on December 17, 2023, and their imme-  
23          diate aftermath are cause for deep concern about the  
24          state of Serbia's democracy, including due to the  
25          final report of the Organization for Security and Co-

1 operation in Europe’s Office for Democratic Institu-  
2 tions and Human Rights, which—

3 (A) found “unjust conditions” for the elec-  
4 tion;

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

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

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

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

23 **SEC. 3. SENSE OF CONGRESS.**

24 It is a sense of Congress that the United States  
25 should—

1           (1) encourage increased trade and investment  
2           between the United States and allies and partners in  
3           the Western Balkans;

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

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

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

13          (5) increase United States trade and investment  
14          with the Western Balkans, particularly in ways that  
15          support countries' efforts—

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

18                (B) to increase energy diversification, effi-  
19                ciency, and conservation; and

20                (C) to facilitate the transition to cleaner  
21                and more reliable sources of energy, including  
22                renewables, as appropriate;

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

25                (A) strong civil societies;

1 (B) public-private partnerships;

2 (C) independent media;

3 (D) transparent, accountable, citizen-re-  
4 sponsive governance, including equal represen-  
5 tation for women and youth;

6 (E) political stability; and

7 (F) modern, free-market based economies.

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

14 (8) support—

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

19 (B) encouraging NATO and the European  
20 Union to review their mission mandates and  
21 posture in Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure  
22 they are playing a proactive role in establishing  
23 a safe and secure environment, particularly in  
24 the realm of defense;



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

7           (D) a strengthened NATO headquarters in  
8           Sarajevo;

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

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

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

23          (12) coordinate closely with the European  
24          Union, the United Kingdom, and other allies and  
25          partners on sanctions designations in Western Bal-

1       kans countries and work to align efforts as much as  
2       possible to demonstrate a clear commitment to up-  
3       holding democratic values;

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

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

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

22          (16) articulate clearly and unambiguously the  
23       United States commitment to supporting democratic  
24       values and respect for international law as the sole

1 path forward for the countries of the Western Bal-  
2 kans; and

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

7 **SEC. 4. DEFINITIONS.**

8 In this Act:

9 (1) **APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-**  
10 **TEES.**—The term “appropriate congressional com-  
11 mittees” means—

12 (A) the Committee on Foreign Relations of  
13 the Senate;

14 (B) the Committee on Appropriations of  
15 the Senate;

16 (C) the Committee on Foreign Affairs of  
17 the House of Representatives; and

18 (D) the Committee on Appropriations of  
19 the House of Representatives.

20 (2) **ICT.**—The term “ICT” means information  
21 and communication technology.

22 (3) **WESTERN BALKANS.**—The term “Western  
23 Balkans” means the region comprised of the fol-  
24 lowing countries:

25 (A) The Republic of Albania.

1 (B) Bosnia and Herzegovina.

2 (C) The Republic of Croatia.

3 (D) The Republic of Kosovo.

4 (E) Montenegro.

5 (F) The Republic of North Macedonia.

6 (G) The Republic of Serbia.

7 (4) WESTERN BALKANS COUNTRY.—The term  
8 “Western Balkans country” means any country list-  
9 ed in subparagraphs (A) through (G) of paragraph  
10 (3).

11 **SEC. 5. CODIFICATION OF SANCTIONS RELATING TO THE**  
12 **WESTERN BALKANS.**

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

18 (b) CONTINUATION OF SANCTIONS AUTHORITIES.—  
19 Each authority to impose sanctions provided for under an  
20 executive order described in subsection (c) shall remain  
21 in effect.

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

24 (1) Executive Order 13219, as amended by Ex-  
25 ecutive Order 13304 (50 U.S.C. 1701 note; relating

1 to blocking property of persons who threaten inter-  
2 national stabilization efforts in the Western Bal-  
3 kans); and

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

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

15 (1) has not engaged in the activity that was the  
16 basis for such sanctions, if applicable, during the  
17 two-year period immediately preceding such termi-  
18 nation date; or

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

21 (e) WAIVER.—

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

1 (A) determines that such a waiver is in the  
2 national security interests of the United States;  
3 and

4 (B) not less than 15 days before the grant-  
5 ing of the waiver, submits to the appropriate  
6 congressional committees a notice of and jus-  
7 tification for the waiver.

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

10 (f) EXCEPTIONS.—

11 (1) HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE.—Sanctions  
12 under this Act shall not apply to—

13 (A) the conduct or facilitation of a trans-  
14 action for the provision of agricultural commod-  
15 ities, food, medicine, medical devices, humani-  
16 tarian assistance, or for humanitarian purposes;  
17 or

18 (B) transactions that are necessary for, or  
19 related to, the activities described in subpara-  
20 graph (A).

21 (2) COMPLIANCE WITH INTERNATIONAL OBLI-  
22 GATIONS AND LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTIVITIES.—  
23 Sanctions under this Act shall not apply with respect  
24 to an alien if admitting or paroling such alien is nec-  
25 essary—

1 (A) to comply with United States obliga-  
2 tions under—

3 (i) the Agreement between the United  
4 Nations and the United States of America  
5 regarding the Headquarters of the United  
6 Nations, signed at Lake Success June 26,  
7 1947, and entered into force November 21,  
8 1947;

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

12 (iii) any other international agree-  
13 ment; or

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

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

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

21 (B) any authorized intelligence activities of  
22 the United States.

23 (4) EXCEPTION RELATING TO IMPORTATION OF  
24 GOODS.—

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

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

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

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

21 **SEC. 6. DEMOCRATIC AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND**  
22 **PROSPERITY INITIATIVES.**

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



1           (1) seeks to expand technical assistance in each  
2           Western Balkans country, taking into account local  
3           conditions and contingent on the agreement of the  
4           host country government to develop new national  
5           anti-corruption strategies;

6           (2) seeks to share best practices with, and pro-  
7           vide training to, civilian law enforcement agencies  
8           and judicial institutions, and other relevant adminis-  
9           trative bodies, of the Western Balkans countries, to  
10          improve the efficiency, transparency, and account-  
11          ability of such agencies and institutions;

12          (3) strengthens existing national anti-corruption  
13          strategies—

14                (A) to combat political corruption, particu-  
15                larly in the judiciary, independent election over-  
16                sight bodies, and public procurement processes;  
17                and

18                (B) to strengthen regulatory and legislative  
19                oversight of critical governance areas, such as  
20                freedom of information and public procurement,  
21                including by strengthening cyber defenses and  
22                ICT infrastructure networks;

23          (4) includes the Western Balkans countries in  
24          the European Democratic Resilience Initiative of the  
25          Department of State, or any equivalent successor

1 initiative, and considers the Western Balkans as a  
2 recipient of anti-corruption funding for such initia-  
3 tive; and

4 (5) seeks to promote the important role of an  
5 independent media in countering corruption through  
6 engagements with governments of Western Balkan  
7 countries and providing training opportunities for  
8 journalists on investigative reporting.

9 (b) PRIORITIZING CYBER RESILIENCE, REGIONAL  
10 TRADE, AND ECONOMIC COMPETITIVENESS.—

11 (1) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of  
12 Congress that—

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

21 (B) United States investments in and as-  
22 sistance toward creating a more integrated re-  
23 gion ensures political stability and security for  
24 the region.

1           (2) 5-YEAR STRATEGY FOR ECONOMIC DEVEL-  
2           OPMENT AND DEMOCRATIC RESILIENCE IN WESTERN  
3           BALKANS.—Not later than 180 days after the date  
4           of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State  
5           and the Administrator of the United States Agency  
6           for International Development, in coordination with  
7           the heads of other relevant Federal departments and  
8           agencies, shall submit to the appropriate congres-  
9           sional committees a regional economic development  
10          and democratic resilience strategy for the Western  
11          Balkans that complements the efforts of the Euro-  
12          pean Union, European nations, and other multilat-  
13          eral financing institutions—

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

16                 (B) to include efforts to ensure coordina-  
17                 tion with multilateral and bilateral partners,  
18                 such as the European Union, the World Bank,  
19                 and other relevant assistance frameworks;

20                 (C) to include an initial public assessment  
21                 of—

22                         (i) economic opportunities for which  
23                         United States businesses, or those of other  
24                         like-minded partner countries, would be  
25                         competitive;

1                   (ii) legal, economic, governance,  
2                   infrastructural, or other barriers limiting  
3                   United States trade and investment in the  
4                   Western Balkans;

5                   (iii) the effectiveness of all existing re-  
6                   gional cooperation initiatives, such as the  
7                   Open Balkan initiative and the Western  
8                   Balkans Common Regional Market; and

9                   (iv) ways to increase United States  
10                  trade and investment within the Western  
11                  Balkans;

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

18                 (E) to assist with the development and im-  
19                 plementation of regional and international trade  
20                 agreements;

21                 (F) to support women-owned enterprises;

22                 (G) to promote government and civil soci-  
23                 ety policies and programs that combat corrup-  
24                 tion and encourage transparency (including by  
25                 supporting independent media by promoting the

1 safety and security of journalists), free and fair  
2 competition, sound governance, judicial reform,  
3 environmental stewardship, and business envi-  
4 ronments conducive to sustainable and inclusive  
5 economic growth; and

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

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

17 (c) REGIONAL TRADE AND DEVELOPMENT INITIA-  
18 TIVE.—

19 (1) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of State  
20 and the Administrator of the United States Agency  
21 for International Development, in coordination with  
22 the heads of other relevant Federal departments and  
23 agencies, may coordinate a regional trade and devel-  
24 opment initiative for the region comprised of each  
25 Western Balkans country and any European Union

1 member country that shares a border with a West-  
2 ern Balkans country (referred to in this subsection  
3 as the “Western Balkans region”) in accordance  
4 with this subsection.

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

7 (A) promote private sector growth and  
8 competitiveness and increase the capacity of  
9 businesses, particularly small and medium-sized  
10 enterprises, in the Western Balkans region;

11 (B) aim to increase intraregional exports  
12 to countries in the Balkans and European  
13 Union member states;

14 (C) aim to increase United States exports  
15 to, and investments in, countries in the Bal-  
16 kans;

17 (D) support startup companies, including  
18 companies led by youth or women, in the West-  
19 ern Balkans region by—

20 (i) providing training in business  
21 skills and leadership; and

22 (ii) providing opportunities to connect  
23 to sources of capital;

24 (E) encourage and promote inward and  
25 outward trade and investment through engage-

1           ment with the Western Balkans diaspora com-  
2           munities in the United States and abroad;

3           (F) provide assistance to the governments  
4           and civil society organizations of Western Bal-  
5           kans countries 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 relating to the Western Balkans across  
13          Federal agencies—

14          (i) to eliminate duplication; and

15          (ii) to identify areas of potential co-  
16          ordination within the Western Balkans re-  
17          gion;

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

23          (I) compare existing single-country sector  
24          analyses to determine areas of focus that would

1 benefit from a regional approach with respect to  
2 the Western Balkans region; and

3 (J) promote intraregional trade throughout  
4 the Western Balkans region through—

5 (i) programming, including grants, co-  
6 operative agreements, and other forms of  
7 assistance;

8 (ii) expanding awareness of the avail-  
9 ability of loans and other financial instru-  
10 ments from the United States Government;  
11 and

12 (iii) coordinating access to existing  
13 trade instruments available through allies  
14 and partners in the Western Balkans re-  
15 gion, including the European Union and  
16 international financial institutions.

17 (3) SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE  
18 PROJECTS.—The initiative authorized under para-  
19 graph (1) should facilitate and prioritize support for  
20 regional infrastructure projects, including—

21 (A) transportation projects that build  
22 roads, bridges, railways and other physical in-  
23 frastructure to facilitate travel of goods and  
24 people throughout the Western Balkans region;



1 (B) technical support and investments  
2 needed to meet United States and European  
3 Union standards for air travel, including  
4 screening and information sharing;

5 (C) the development of telecommunications  
6 networks with trusted providers;

7 (D) infrastructure projects that connect  
8 Western Balkans countries to each other and to  
9 countries with which they share a border;

10 (E) the effective analysis of tenders and  
11 transparent procurement processes;

12 (F) investment transparency programs  
13 that will help countries in the Western Balkans  
14 analyze gaps and establish institutional and  
15 regulatory reforms necessary—

16 (i) to create an enabling environment  
17 for trade and investment; and

18 (ii) to strengthen protections against  
19 suspect investments through public pro-  
20 curement and privatization and through  
21 foreign direct investments;

22 (G) sharing best practices learned from the  
23 United States and other international partners  
24 to ensure that institutional and regulatory  
25 mechanisms for addressing these issues are fair,

1 nonarbitrary, effective, and free from corrup-  
2 tion;

3 (H) projects that support regional energy  
4 security and reduce dependence on Russian en-  
5 ergy;

6 (I) technical assistance and generating pri-  
7 vate investment in projects that promote  
8 connectivity and energy-sharing in the Western  
9 Balkans region;

10 (J) technical assistance to support regional  
11 collaboration on environmental protection that  
12 includes governmental, political, civic, and busi-  
13 ness stakeholders; and

14 (K) technical assistance to develop financ-  
15 ing options and help create linkages with poten-  
16 tial financing institutions and investors.

17 (4) REQUIREMENTS.—All programming under  
18 the initiative authorized under paragraph (1) shall—

19 (A) be open to the participation of Albania,  
20 Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro,  
21 North Macedonia, and Serbia;

22 (B) be consistent with European Union ac-  
23 cession requirements;

24 (C) be focused on retaining talent within  
25 the Western Balkans;

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

7 (E) include a public diplomacy strategy to  
8 inform local and regional audiences in the  
9 Western Balkans region about the initiative, in-  
10 cluding specific programs and projects.

11 (d) UNITED STATES INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
12 FINANCE CORPORATION.—

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

22 (2) JOINT REPORT.—Not later than 180 days  
23 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the  
24 Chief Executive Officer of the United States Inter-  
25 national Development Finance Corporation and the

1 Administrator of the United States Agency for  
2 International Development shall submit a joint re-  
3 port to the appropriate congressional committees  
4 that includes—

5 (A) an assessment of the benefits of pro-  
6 viding sovereign loan guarantees to countries in  
7 the Western Balkans to support infrastructure  
8 and energy diversification projects;

9 (B) an outline of additional resources, such  
10 as tools, funding, and personnel, which may be  
11 required to offer sovereign loan guarantees in  
12 the Western Balkans; and

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

19 **SEC. 7. PROMOTING CROSS-CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL**  
20 **ENGAGEMENT.**

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

23 (1) promoting partnerships between United  
24 States universities and universities in the Western  
25 Balkans, particularly universities in traditionally

1 under-served communities, advances United States  
2 foreign policy goals and requires a whole-of-govern-  
3 ment approach, including the utilization of public-  
4 private partnerships;

5 (2) such university partnerships would provide  
6 opportunities for exchanging academic ideas, tech-  
7 nical expertise, research, and cultural understanding  
8 for the benefit of the United States; and

9 (3) the seven countries in the Western Balkans  
10 meet the requirements under section 105(c)(4) of  
11 the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C.  
12 2151c(c)(4)).

13 (b) UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIPS.—The President,  
14 working through the Secretary of State, is authorized to  
15 provide assistance, consistent with section 105 of the For-  
16 eign Assistance Act of 1961 (22 U.S.C. 2151c), to pro-  
17 mote the establishment of partnerships between United  
18 States universities and universities in the Western Bal-  
19 kans, including—

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

22 (2) working with partner governments to re-  
23 form policies, improve curricula, strengthen data  
24 systems, train teachers and students, including

1 English language teaching, and to provide quality,  
2 inclusive learning materials;

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

9 (4) promoting teaching and research exchanges  
10 between institutions of higher education in the West-  
11 ern Balkans and in the United States; and

12 (5) encouraging alliances and exchanges with  
13 like-minded institutions of education within the  
14 Western Balkans and the larger European continent.

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

16 (a) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of Con-  
17 gress that the Peace Corps, whose mission is to promote  
18 world peace and friendship, in part by helping the people  
19 of interested countries in meeting their need for trained  
20 men and women, provides an invaluable opportunity to  
21 connect the people of the United States with the people  
22 of the Western Balkans.

23 (b) REPORT.—Not later than 180 days after the date  
24 of the enactment of this Act, the Director of the Peace  
25 Corps should submit a report to the appropriate congres-

1 sional committees that includes an analysis of current op-  
2 portunities for Peace Corps expansion in the Western Bal-  
3 kans region.

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

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

12 (b) BOLD LEADERSHIP PROGRAM FOR YOUNG BAL-  
13 KANS LEADERS.—

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

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

24 (c) AUTHORIZATION.—The Secretary of State should  
25 further develop and implement BOLD, which shall here-

1 after be known as the “Young Balkan Leaders Initiative”,  
2 to promote educational and professional development for  
3 young adult leaders and professionals in the Western Bal-  
4 kans who have demonstrated a passion to contribute to  
5 the continued development of the Western Balkans region.

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

8 (1) to further build the capacity of young Bal-  
9 kan leaders in the Western Balkans in the areas of  
10 business and information technology, cyber security  
11 and digitization, agriculture, civic engagement, and  
12 public administration;

13 (2) to support young Balkan leaders by offering  
14 professional development, training, and networking  
15 opportunities, particularly in the areas of leadership,  
16 innovation, civic engagement, elections, human  
17 rights, entrepreneurship, good governance, public ad-  
18 ministration, and journalism;

19 (3) to support young political, parliamentary,  
20 and civic Balkan leaders in collaboration on regional  
21 initiatives related to good governance, environmental  
22 protection, government ethics, and minority inclu-  
23 sion;

24 (4) to provide increased economic and technical  
25 assistance to young Balkan leaders to promote eco-



1        nomic growth and strengthen ties between busi-  
2        nesses, investors, and entrepreneurs in the United  
3        States and in Western Balkans countries;

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

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

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

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

15            (2) have demonstrated strong capabilities in en-  
16        trepreneurship, innovation, public service, and lead-  
17        ership;

18            (3) have had a positive impact in their commu-  
19        nities, organizations, or institutions, including by  
20        promoting cross-regional and multiethnic coopera-  
21        tion; and

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

24        (f) PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT AND LEADERSHIP CEN-  
25       TER.—Under the Young Balkan Leaders Initiative, the

1 Secretary of State shall take advantage of existing and  
2 future public diplomacy facilities (commonly known as  
3 “American Spaces”) to hire staff and develop program-  
4 ming for the establishment of a flagship public engage-  
5 ment and leadership center in the Western Balkans that  
6 seeks—

7           (1) to counter disinformation and malign influ-  
8           ence;

9           (2) to promote cross-cultural engagement;

10           (3) to provide training for young leaders from  
11           Western Balkans countries described in subsection  
12           (e);

13           (4) to harmonize the efforts of existing venues  
14           throughout Western Balkans countries established  
15           by the Office of American Spaces; and

16           (5) to annually bring together participants from  
17           the Young Balkans Leaders Initiative to provide  
18           platforms for regional networking.

19           (g) BRIEFING ON CERTAIN EXCHANGE PROGRAMS.—

20           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
21           after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
22           retary of State shall provide a briefing to the appro-  
23           priate congressional committees that describes the  
24           status of exchange programs involving the Western  
25           Balkans region.

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

3           (A) assess the factors constraining the  
4 number and frequency of participants from  
5 Western Balkans countries in the International  
6 Visitor Leadership Program of the Department  
7 of State;

8           (B) identify the resources that are nec-  
9 essary to address the factors described in sub-  
10 paragraph (A); and

11           (C) describe a strategy for connecting  
12 alumni and participants of professional develop-  
13 ment exchange programs of the Department of  
14 State in the Western Balkans with alumni and  
15 participants from other countries in Europe, to  
16 enhance inter-region and intra-region people-to-  
17 people ties.

18 **SEC. 10. SUPPORTING CYBERSECURITY AND CYBER RESIL-**

19 **IENCE IN THE WESTERN BALKANS.**

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

22           (1) United States support for cybersecurity,  
23 cyber resilience, and secure ICT infrastructure in  
24 Western Balkans countries will strengthen the re-  
25 gion’s ability to defend itself from and respond to

1       malicious cyber activity conducted by nonstate and  
2       foreign actors, including foreign governments, that  
3       seek to influence the region;

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

6                       (A) the compromise of cyber infrastruc-  
7                       ture, including data networks, electronic infra-  
8                       structure, and software systems; and

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

12               (3) it is in the national security interest of the  
13       United States to support the cybersecurity and cyber  
14       resilience of Western Balkans countries.

15       (b) INTERAGENCY REPORT ON CYBERSECURITY AND  
16       THE DIGITAL INFORMATION ENVIRONMENT IN WESTERN  
17       BALKANS COUNTRIES.—Not later than 1 year after the  
18       date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of State,  
19       in coordination with the Secretary of Defense, the Sec-  
20       retary of Homeland Security, and the heads of other rel-  
21       evant Federal agencies, shall submit a report to the appro-  
22       priate congressional committees that contains—

23                       (1) an overview of interagency efforts to  
24                       strengthen cybersecurity and cyber resilience in  
25                       Western Balkans countries;

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

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

5                 (A) counter influence operations and safe-  
6 guard elections and democratic processes in  
7 Western Balkans countries;

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

10                (C) support democracy and internet free-  
11 dom in Western Balkans countries; and

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

14           (4) an assessment of cyber threat information  
15 sharing between the United States and Western Bal-  
16 kans countries;

17           (5) an assessment of—

18                 (A) options for the United States to better  
19 support cybersecurity and cyber resilience in  
20 Western Balkans countries through changes to  
21 current assistance authorities; and

22                 (B) the advantages or limitations, such as  
23 funding or office space, of posting cyber profes-  
24 sionals from other Federal departments and  
25 agencies to United States diplomatic posts in

1 Western Balkans countries and providing rel-  
2 evant training to Foreign Service Officers; and  
3 (6) any additional support needed from the  
4 United States for the cybersecurity and cyber resil-  
5 ience of the following NATO Allies: Albania, Monte-  
6 negro, North Macedonia, and Croatia.

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

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

10 (1) the Agreement on the Path to Normaliza-  
11 tion of Relations, which was agreed to by Kosovo  
12 and Serbia on February 27, 2023, with the facilita-  
13 tion of the European Union, is a positive step for-  
14 ward in advancing normalization between the two  
15 countries;

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

19 (3) once sufficient progress has been made on  
20 the Implementation Annex, the United States should  
21 consider advancing initiatives to strengthen bilateral  
22 relations with both countries, which could include—

23 (A) establishing bilateral strategic dia-  
24 logues with Kosovo and Serbia; and

1 (B) advancing concrete initiatives to deep-  
2 en trade and investment with both countries;  
3 and

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

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

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

14 (2) it should support pluralistic democracies in  
15 countries in the Western Balkans as a means to pre-  
16 vent a return to the ethnic strife that once charac-  
17 terized the region.

18 **SEC. 12. REPORTS ON RUSSIAN AND CHINESE MALIGN IN-**  
19 **FLUENCE OPERATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS IN**  
20 **THE WESTERN BALKANS.**

21 (a) REPORTS REQUIRED.—Not later than 180 days  
22 after the date of the enactment of this Act, and every two  
23 years thereafter, the Secretary of State, in coordination  
24 with the Secretary of Defense, the Director of National  
25 Intelligence, and the heads of other Federal departments

1 or agencies, as appropriate, shall submit a report to the  
2 appropriate congressional committees regarding Russian  
3 and Chinese malign influence operations and campaigns  
4 carried out with respect to Balkan countries that seek—

- 5 (1) to undermine democratic institutions;
- 6 (2) to promote political instability; and
- 7 (3) to harm the interests of the United States  
8 and North Atlantic Treaty Organization member  
9 and partner states in the Western Balkans.

10 (b) ELEMENTS.—Each report submitted pursuant to  
11 subsection (a) shall include—

- 12 (1) an assessment of the objectives of the Rus-  
13 sian Federation and the People’s Republic of China  
14 regarding malign influence operations and cam-  
15 paigns carried out with respect to Western Balkans  
16 countries—

- 17 (A) to undermine democratic institutions,  
18 including the planning and execution of demo-  
19 cratic elections;

- 20 (B) to promote political instability; and

- 21 (C) to manipulate the information environ-  
22 ment;

- 23 (2) the activities and roles of the Department  
24 of State and other relevant Federal agencies in



1       countering Russian and Chinese malign influence  
2       operations and campaigns;

3           (3) a comprehensive list identifying—

4               (A) each network, entity and individual, to  
5               the extent such information is available, of Rus-  
6               sia, China, or any other country with which  
7               Russia or China may cooperate, that is sup-  
8               porting such Russian or Chinese malign influ-  
9               ence operations or campaigns, including the  
10              provision of financial or operational support to  
11              activities in a Western Balkans country that  
12              may limit freedom of speech or create barriers  
13              of access to democratic processes, including ex-  
14              ercising the right to vote in a free and fair elec-  
15              tion; and

16              (B) the role of each such entity in pro-  
17              viding such support;

18           (4) the identification of the tactics, techniques,  
19           and procedures used in Russian or Chinese malign  
20           influence operations and campaigns in Western Bal-  
21           kans countries;

22           (5) an assessment of the effect of previous Rus-  
23           sian or Chinese malign influence operations and  
24           campaigns that targeted alliances and partnerships  
25           of the United States Armed Forces in the Western

1 Balkans, including the effectiveness of such oper-  
2 ations and campaigns in achieving the objectives of  
3 Russia and China, respectively;

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

8 (7) an assessment of the capacity and efforts of  
9 NATO and of each individual Western Balkans  
10 country to counter Russian or Chinese malign influ-  
11 ence operations and campaigns carried out with re-  
12 spect to Western Balkans countries;

13 (8) the efforts by the United States to combat  
14 such malign influence operations in the Western  
15 Balkans, including through the Countering Russian  
16 Influence Fund and the Countering People's Repub-  
17 lic of China Malign Influence Fund;

18 (9) an assessment of the tactics, techniques,  
19 and procedures that the Secretary of State, in con-  
20 sultation with the Director of National Intelligence  
21 and the Secretary of Defense, determines are likely  
22 to be used in future Russian or Chinese malign in-  
23 fluence operations and campaigns carried out with  
24 respect to Western Balkans countries; and

1           (10) recommended authorities or activities that  
2           the Department of State and other relevant Federal  
3           agencies could enact to increase the United States  
4           Government's capacity to counter Russian and Chi-  
5           nese malign influence operations and campaigns in  
6           Western Balkans countries.

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