

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.

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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

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## 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(e)(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 congres-  
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 Balkans 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 exercising 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.

○