



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Directorate-General Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations (DG NEAR)

D - WESTERN BALKANS

D.5 – WESTERN BALKANS REGIONAL COOPERATION AND PROGRAMMES

Head of Unit

Brussels,  
NEAR.D5/MM**EXPLANATORY NOTE TO THE IPA II COMMITTEE**

**Subject: Opinion of the IPA II Committee on the Amendment to the IPA II Multi-country Action Programme for Western Balkans Guarantee for the years 2019-2020 - submitted by urgent written procedure**

The COVID-19 pandemic not only represents a worldwide public health emergency but has become an international economic crisis that could surpass the global financial crisis of 2008–2009. Right now, containment and mitigation measures are necessary to limit the spread of the virus and save lives. **A vaccine will be key to the resolution of the COVID-19 crisis.** Immunisation is one of the most effective public health interventions – both in terms of saved lives and in terms of economic benefits.

**While the EU itself is heavily affected by the pandemic, it has a particular responsibility and interest to lead the global response and provide assistance to partners in need, especially in its immediate neighbourhood and among pre-accession partners.**

Through its Joint Vaccine Strategy, the EU has supported the ramp up of the development and the production, and secured doses of several promising vaccines. The European Commission has concluded six legally binding agreements on behalf of the 27 EU Member States reserving around 1.3 billion doses to be delivered throughout 2021. Some of these vaccines are due to become available by the end of 2020, after the European Medicines Agency's (EMA) approval and the European Commission market authorisation. This means that Member States will - in the coming weeks - have access to vaccines considered safe and efficient to be able to start a vaccination campaign for their priority groups.

**It is very important that our partners in the Western Balkans are also given access to a limited stock of the vaccines as early as possible to enable them to start their vaccination campaigns at the same time as the EU,** based on vaccination strategies and plans. Our economies and people are closely linked and vaccinations in the Western Balkans will be an important health security measure for the EU, as well as a sign of strong solidarity and EU's continuous commitment vis-à-vis the region. It will also help promote the most efficacious and safest vaccines (on the basis of EMA authorisation) available on the market to be used in the region and to avoid any potential health risks related with the use of insufficiently verified alternatives.

To be effective in terms of quantities, logistics and timing, the provision of the vaccines to the region will have to be based on a mix of donations from the Member States and EU funding support, accompanied by possible assistance to the region in the deployment of the vaccine.

In practical terms, the amendment consists in re-orienting the 2020 allocation for the Western Balkan Guarantee for a total of EUR 70 000 000 for an action contributing to the availability and access to vaccines against COVID-19 in the Western Balkans.

A part of the assistance (maximum 15%) may also be used for the purchase of equipment, medical devices, material and consumables necessary for the delivery of the COVID-19 vaccines.

At this stage the priority, both from a health and economic point of view, is to stop the pandemic. Under IPA III, considerable funds will be deployed for the setting up of a Western Balkans Guarantee Facility under EFSD+, which will be able to inject large scale funds in the economy. Impact of such interventions would be more sustainable once the root cause of the pandemic has been addressed with the roll out of vaccination campaigns as early as possible, hence the need to anticipate support to the Western Balkans for the purchase of COVID-19 vaccines.

The substantial amendment of this decision is motivated by the fact that the amendment involves EUR 70 000 000 being shifted for the creation of a new action. (i e. a substantial amendment is required when there is a cumulated reallocation between actions within the same financing decision above 20% of the total EU budget).

On 31 December 2020 both the current Multi-Annual Financial Framework will come to an end. It is therefore imperative that the present COVID-19 amendment to the programme is therefore submitted for the opinion of the IPA II Committee before the end of the calendar year by **urgent written procedure of three working days**.