

117TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**S.** \_\_\_\_\_

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

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Mrs. SHAHEEN (for herself, Mr. WICKER, Mr. TILLIS, Mr. DURBIN, Mr. CARDIN, and Mr. VAN HOLLEN) introduced the following bill; which was read twice and referred to the Committee on \_\_\_\_\_

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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. Defined term.

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

1 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

2 Congress finds the following:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

23           (8) support—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



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

6 (1) such person—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

5 (F) assist governments to develop—

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

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

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

13 (i) to eliminate duplication;

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

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

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

4 (J) promote intraregional trade 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 including from the United States Inter-  
12 national Development Finance Corporation  
13 and the Export-Import Bank of the United  
14 States; and

15 (iii) coordinating access to existing  
16 trade instruments available through allies  
17 and partners in the region, including the  
18 European Union and international finan-  
19 cial institutions.

20 (3) SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE  
21 PROJECTS.—The initiative authorized under para-  
22 graph (1), consistent with the BUILD Act of 2018  
23 (division F of Public Law 115–254) and the Euro-  
24 pean Energy Security and Diversification Act of  
25 2019 (title XX of division P of Public Law 116–94),

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

25 (4) LOANS.—

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

18                 (2) to promote cross-cultural engagement;

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

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

24         (f) BRIEFING.—

1           (1) IN GENERAL.—Not later than 180 days  
2 after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Sec-  
3 retary of State, acting through the Assistant Sec-  
4 retary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs,  
5 shall provide a briefing to the appropriate congres-  
6 sional committees that describes the status of ex-  
7 change programs involving the Western Balkans re-  
8 gion.

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

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

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

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

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