

# JHA Cooperation with Western Balkans



**Cornelia Riehle**

## News

On 22 October 2020, representatives of the German Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission met online with their counterparts from the Western Balkans to discuss their cooperation in the area of Justice and Home Affairs (JHA).

More efficient migration management was on the home affairs agenda. Ministers discussed proposals to provide support for the development of interoperable, domestic information systems and for the implementation of bilateral readmission agreements.

With regard to terrorism and violent extremism, the ministers emphasized the need to further achieve the objectives of the joint action plan on counter-terrorism for the Western Balkans.

As far as improvements in the operational cooperation to tackle organised crime are concerned, the EU highlighted the importance of enhancing the Western Balkans' participation in the operation actions of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), cooperating with the relevant EU JHA agencies, and finalising the current revision of the second additional protocol to the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime.

In the area of justice, the ministers underlined the importance of digitalisation in ensuring the quality, efficiency, and accessibility of the judiciary as well as its resilience. The EU confirmed its continued financial and technical support for the Western Balkans' partners in developing digital tools for the justice system. Ultimately, the partners were invited to proceed with fundamental judicial reforms, in particular on the rule of law.

The need for strong cooperation between the EU and the Western Balkan countries is also shown by the rising number of cases, with Albania and North-Macedonia being amongst the countries most involved in Eurojust casework. 110 cases involving Western Balkan countries were registered between January and September 2020 alone compared to 107 cases in 2019.

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