Council of the European Union

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OUTCOME OF PROCEEDINGS

From:	General Secretariat of the Council
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Special Report No 16/2026 by the European Court of Auditors: "Western Balkans Investment Framework - EU support addresses connectivity needs, but integration into the core transport network is slow" - Council conclusions (26 October 2026)

Delegations will find in the annex the above-mentioned Council conclusions as approved by the Agrifish Council at its meeting held on 26 October 2026.

ANNEX

COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS

on the Special Report No 16/2026 by the European Court of Auditors:

"Western Balkans Investment Framework EU support addresses connectivity needs, but integration into the core transport network is slow"

1. The Council welcomes the publication of Special Report No 16/2026 by the European Court of Auditors (hereinafter "the Court").

2. The Council reiterates that the EU will continue to work closely with the Western Balkans and support their reform efforts on their paths towards EU membership. The Council remains committed to advancing the gradual integration between the EU and the region during the enlargement process itself in a merit-based and reversible manner.

3. The Council recalls that the EU welcomes and will continue supporting the strengthening of connectivity, including energy, transport and digital within the region and with the EU. In this regard, the Council underscores that transport connectivity investments through the Western Balkan Investment Framework should support alignment with the EU *acquis* and contribute to the region's gradual integration into the EU internal market. The Council also recalls its support for practices aimed to ensure participation and mobilisation of private sector entities from Member States.

4. The Council underlines the importance of cross-border links, sustainable transport connections with the EU and in the region and the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU TEN-T network.

5. The Council stresses the relevance of the findings and recommendations of the Special Report, notably for the implementation of future EU support for transport infrastructure in the Western Balkans.

6. The Council takes note of the overall conclusion of the Court that, while the EU financed transport projects were generally aligned with EU connectivity priorities, their implementation was hampered by weaknesses in project preparation, monitoring, and sustainability.

7. The Council further notes the Court's conclusion that the visibility of EU support was not fully ensured due to shortcomings in applying EU visibility guidelines of EU-funded transport investments. Recalling the importance of continued mutual efforts on strategic communication, the Council invites the Commission to ensure consistent and full application of visibility requirements of the EU-supported projects.

8. The Council takes note of the Commission's replies attached to Special Report No 16/2026 and notes that the Commission has accepted the Court's recommendations.

9. The Council invites the Commission to address the recommendations of the Court in an effective and timely manner: 1) select only mature projects, 2) obtain evidence from financial institutions on risk assessment and mitigating measures, 3) improve monitoring of project implementation, 4) enhance sustainability of results and EU visibility.

10. The Council highlights the importance of accountability, ownership and absorption capacity of the beneficiaries as well as the timely completion of projects to ensure the efficient use of EU financial support.