



MINISTÈRE
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FRENCH STRATEGY FOR THE WESTERN BALKANS





The Western Balkans region includes six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia

**“If Europe wants to see
itself as a power, to have a
geopolitical destiny, it needs
to reunify.”**

Emmanuel Macron

President of the French Republic
(Tirana, 17 October 2023)

France-Balkans relations: a few key figures

Over 120 meetings

between the French authorities and Western Balkan leaders (ministerial level or higher), including 60 visits to France (2019-2024).

€1,5 billion invested by the invested by the Agence française de développement (AFD) Group in the Western Balkan countries since 2019.

Almost 20 international technical experts (ITEs) deployed to partner administrations in Western Balkan countries to support their reform efforts.

€2,6 billion in trade with France (2024: up 56% on 2020).

Over 1,500 training days provided by the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C) since it opened in 2023.

220,000 French tourists visited Albania and **93,000** visited Montenegro (2024).

21 Balkan universities are members of the Francophone University Agency (AUF).

€2 million to support reconciliation actions and the shared European future of the six Western Balkan countries ("Shared Horizons" project).

Background and ambitions

The French Strategy for the Western Balkans, launched in 2019, demonstrates France's determination to strengthen its commitment to countries in the region, to which it is linked by history, geography and shared interests.

As highlighted by the President of the Republic, the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union is part of the "reunification" of the European continent. In a region exposed to many foreign influences, Russia's war of aggression since 2022 has further strengthened the geopolitical necessity to anchor the Western Balkans in Europe.

France stands with the Western Balkans to support their reform efforts with a view to their joining the European Union. The accession process is based on the individual merits and progress of each candidate country.

The **5** pillars of the French Strategy for the Western Balkans



**Developing
political
relations**



**Contributing to
regional peace,
security and
stability**



**Strengthening
the rule of law**



**Developing
cooperation
and economic
relations**



**Strengthening
human and
cultural ties
between societies**



Developing political relations

→ Increasing high-level **political meetings** in and **bilateral visits** to France and the Western Balkans countries.

The President of the Republic has visited Albania (October 2023) and Serbia (July 2019, August 2024), and has received all the Heads of State and government of the Western Balkans. Ministers, particularly the Minister for Europe, travel to the region regularly.

→ A **special envoy** for the Western Balkans was appointed in October 2023.

Deepening outreach

The special envoy engages with political authorities, civil society and France's diplomatic partners and takes part in events and conferences. His work helps to increase France's visibility, knowledge of its positions and its links with regional actors.

→ France is working within the **European Union, as well as with international institutions** active in the Western Balkans (NATO, UN, OSCE, etc.). It is supporting **regional cooperation**.



Contributing to regional peace, security and stability

→ France is working to promote **peace** and **security** and to **resolve disputes** in the region.

It is actively supporting the EU-facilitated Dialogue on the normalisation of relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

→ It is conducting bilateral cooperation projects in the **area of defence** and **taking part in** EU and NATO operations and missions on the ground.

France is contributing to the NATO-led Kosovo Force (KFOR) and leading the strategic command of Operation ALTHEA, the European Union Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

→ France cooperates closely with countries in the region as regards **internal security**, particularly to strengthen the fight against **organized crime, irregular immigration, drug trafficking and human trafficking**. For over 20 years, an inter-ministerial centre for expertise dedicated to security in South-East Europe has been based in Belgrade.

Combating arms trafficking

In 2017, France and Germany initiated a regional roadmap to fight arms trafficking in the Western Balkans. Extended until 2030, this roadmap aims to harmonize legislation and control mechanisms for small arms and light weapons with those of the EU and to enable interoperability of ballistics databases using French software.

Fighting human trafficking

France has an inter-ministerial cooperation strategy to fight trafficking in human beings in South-East Europe. Since 2019, over 25 workshops bringing together experts from the region have been organized to help with prevention, enforcement, cooperation and the identification of victims of human trafficking at the regional level.

→ **Cyber security** is a strong part of France's enhanced cooperation with countries in the region in the face of growing cyberattacks.

The Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C)

France, Slovenia and Montenegro established the WB3C, based in Podgorica (Montenegro). Inaugurated on 9 December 2024, its mission is to provide training and build the capacities of Western Balkan countries in cyber security, digital diplomacy and the fight against cyber crime.



Strengthening the rule of law

→ Supporting the consolidation of **the rule of law** is central for the Western Balkans. France aims to support reforms underway in partner countries, particularly as regards the **fight against corruption**, and strengthening **justice, human rights, good governance** and **gender equality**.



Developing cooperation and economic relations

→ France's increased commitment to the region's **economic and social development** is seen in:

- the roll-out of the work of the **Agence française de développement (AFD)** in cooperation with public institutions, private companies and civil society organizations;
- the implementation of bilateral and European **cooperation** projects in multiple sectors (environment, climate, transport and infrastructure, resilience and urban adaptation, agriculture, social services and administrative reform).

Strengthening French cooperation

Since 2019, AFD has become an important actor in the development of the Western Balkans. Its portfolio includes some 40 ongoing projects, covering sectors such as energy, the environment, transport and climate, thus contributing to the adoption of European standards and the ecological transition.

→ In a region which offers opportunities for French companies, France's engagement is aimed at supporting the development of its **economic presence** and **trade**.



Strengthening human and cultural ties between societies

Cooperation initiatives have been developed:

- in the area of **French teaching** and **promoting the Francophonie**;
- in the **culture** and **audiovisual** sectors;
- in the areas of **higher education, science and research**;
- in support of **young people** and **civil society**.

These projects also help to strengthen France's presence and visibility.

Have you heard of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Western Balkans (RYCO)?

Created in Paris on 4 July 2016, the Regional Youth Cooperation Office for the Western Balkans (RYCO) is inspired by the Franco-German Youth Office (FGYO). A key actor in regional reconciliation and cooperation, RYCO develops exchange programmes and projects to promote youth participation in political and social life and to encourage a culture of dialogue and mutual respect.

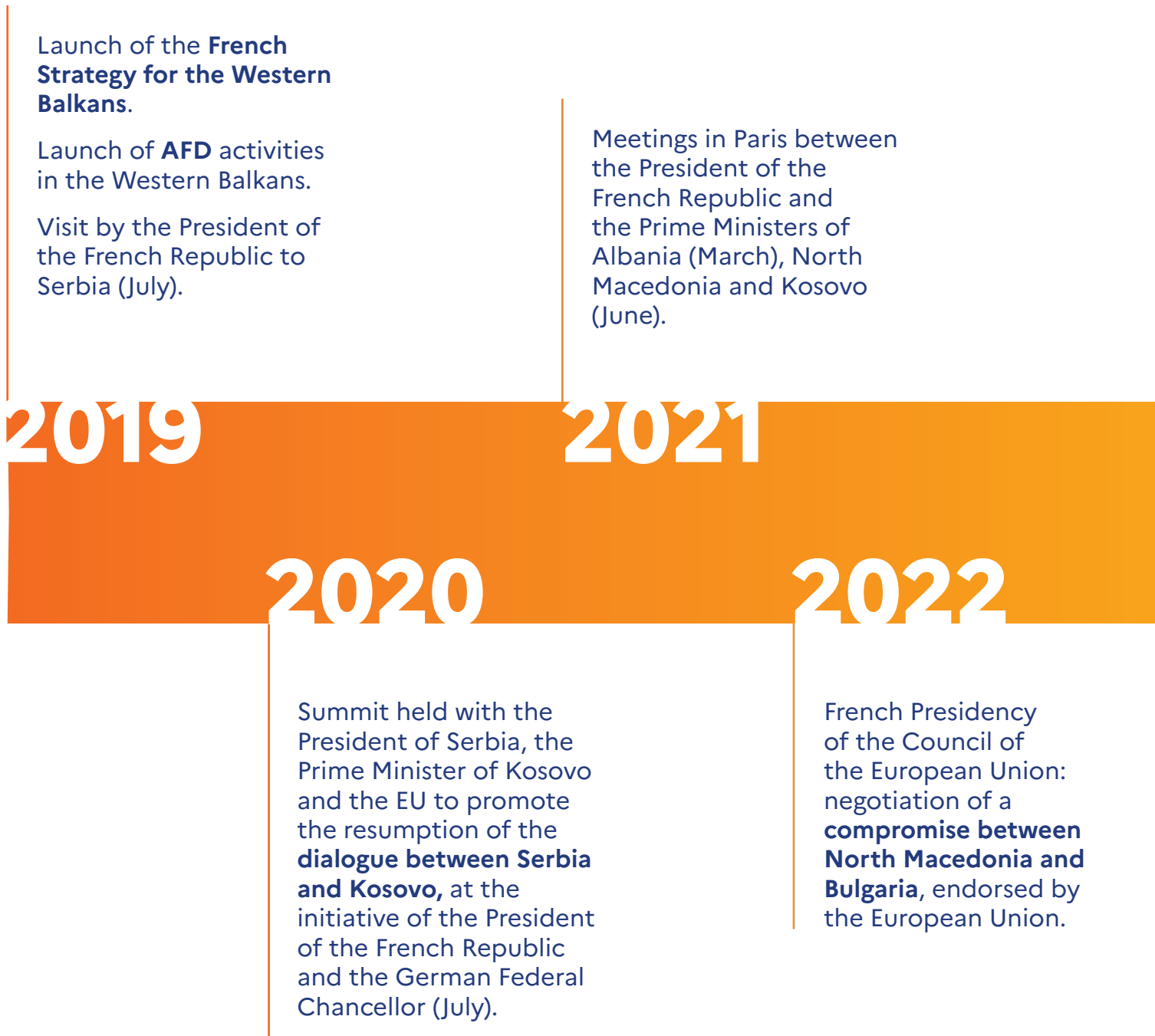
Project focus: Shared Horizons

The "Shared Horizons" project aims to promote reconciliation and a shared appreciation of the European future of the Western Balkans. Launched in September 2024, it is operational across the six countries, through partnerships with civil society actors, focusing on four themes:

1. Developing **youth mobility**, based around the theme of sport;
2. Reclaiming and promoting shared historical **heritage**;
3. Fighting **disinformation** and hate speech;
4. Promoting **debate**.

For example, in 2025 a regional centre for peace, reconciliation and cooperation will be launched in Belgrade; camps will bring together young people from the region; and "European Dialogues" in Bosnia and Herzegovina will gather civil society, young people, historians and academics.

Timeline



Appointment of a **special envoy** for the Western Balkans.

Visit by the President of the French Republic to Albania (October).

Meeting between the President of the French Republic and the three members of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina (on the sidelines of the Paris Peace Forum, November).

Adoption of the **Ohrid Agreement between Kosovo and Serbia**, the result of an EU-backed French-German initiative (March).

Global Partnership on **Artificial Intelligence**: ministerial meeting, co-chaired by Serbia (Paris, 9 February).

European Political Community Summit in Tirana, Albania (16 May)

2023

2025

2024

Meetings in Paris between the President of the French Republic and the Prime Ministers of Montenegro (February) and Serbia (April).

Visit by the President of the French Republic to Serbia (August).

Launch of the “**Shared Horizons**” project (September).

Opening ceremony of the **Olympic Games** (26 July) and the reopening of **Notre-Dame de Paris** (7 December): participation of many Heads of State and Government from the region.

Inauguration of the **WB3C** in Podgorica, Montenegro (December).

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