

**Talking Points by the RCC Secretary General *Majlinda Bregu***  
**at the**  
**Dubrovnik Forum, Dubrovnik**

Dear participants,

Dear guests,

The language of power is the language of leadership.

By necessity and maybe not by choice EU is learning every day that speaking the language of power is power itself.

European leadership, power and unity has never been more important, never more needed and never more obviously in the interests of EU MS and other regions worldwide. Western Balkans included.

‘Europe will be forged in crises... - a repetitive, yet perpetually relevant quote.

Only in the last three years, the EU was faced with a series of unprecedented emergencies: the pandemic inflicting economic damage across the continent, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine causing millions of people to seek refuge in the EU, and intensifying a broader food and energy crisis.

They have exposed the EU's vulnerabilities and limitations. It has struggled to project a unified voice and to act swiftly and decisively in times of crisis.

We all have read and been part of different analysis in roundtables or papers, it is very interesting to read the citizens perception on few element of “EU power on international arena”. According to Eurobarometer,

- Majority of Europeans think that since the war started, the EU has shown solidarity (79%) and has been united (63%) and fast (58%) in its reaction.
- Majority of European citizens (56%) remain satisfied with the European Union’s response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.
- 77% of EU respondents are in favour of a common defence and security policy among EU Member States,
- Moreover 65% of Europeans considered EU membership as a good thing, the highest result since 2007 when it was at 58%.
- But on the other hand, only 4% are concern on EU's influence in the world

There are different elements that makes a country/ union powerful: economic, military, norms shaping global order. But let’s discuss one concrete topic of EU language of power on enlargement.

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Europe can be more. But as a bigger, enlarged one. Enlarged not only due to the geopolitical necessity lens. But an enlarged one that acknowledges that integrated Western Balkans is a genuinely smart investment as well. That our youth, entrepreneurs, culture, overall potentials - add to the “whole”. That they are the part of the “main”.



1. Energy security,
2. EU's ambition for security and defence
3. Credibility about EU enlargement

Are the three areas that mark an immediate challenge for EU? These are all elements of a struggle for or against Europe.

I don't think it's wise of EU to let a piece of its continent be left outside. This is like a tango. And it always takes two to tango. It's not like our countries have been doing great meeting all the requirements. But it is true, that the enlargement has been shifting and moving away from the mantra of Union's first days.

Two decades ago there was a clear promise of EU perspective for WB, but unfortunately now we have a "waiting fatigue" of WB citizens. Although, the support for EU membership remains high in the WB, but unfortunately we have noticed a negative trend in the last years (this year 59% of the citizens supported EU membership. One in three citizens in the region doesn't believe their country will join the EU in their lifetime.

But what we noticed that whenever citizens see waters moving from EU side in right directions, their support follows the trend, or vice versa. Let me give you a couple of examples:

1. in BiH- after the positive decision on granting the candidate status, the support for EU membership has slightly improved from 50% that has been in the last couple of years, to 52%;
2. This year, the support of North Macedonia support on EU membership has dropped from 56% to 50%;
3. A negative trend of dropping the EU support, is noticed in KS as well, last year it was 73% while in 2023 is 66%.

If the process of negotiations moves in same pace and speed as it is right now, we will need more than 125 years to finish the negotiation process for all of the Chapters.

Either we need new mindset of the enlargement, or we all need to decide what kind of EU integration we want to be following from now on. Is there a need to shift the focus? I personally believe we only have 3 ways.

One is the way of domestic reforms, the other of deeper economic integration and regional cooperation and the third one is to catch up with the EU no matter what. Catch up at the level of reforms that will bring Western Balkans economically closer to the EU.

This doesn't mean just enlargement and membership as we were and are told years ago, but it means at least that we will be closer to concrete terms and projects and policies. It means as well that we will have a more solid legal frame bringing us closer and faster to the EU. As the hidden benefit we can have that the Western Balkans, not just as the region, but the countries separately will become greater players in the international terrain.

These might be some solutions for a lengthy process that as said might take at least 20 years before we see a decision on which countries are ready to join the EU first. In the meantime it might be wise for all



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of us to speak in one voice when it comes to re-framing the process of EU integration for our countries, as it must come the priority again.

Going back to the core of the panel question: Has EU learnt the language of power?

A Stronger Europe most definitively is the one with integrated Western Balkans. Completion of the European dream for the region requires a strategic vision and hard work. On the EU side, it would take political willingness and dedication to enlargement. Western Balkans are hopefully done for good with the “ifs” on our accession to the EU, rightly focusing on the “when” and “how”.

We are now eager to embark on bolder translation of declarations into tangible actions, restoring EU accession credibility inspired by Schuman’s straightforward vision: Integration through concrete achievements! Whatever the concept, our citizens and region deserve a re-energized enlargement process and membership advantages in advance of full accession that this was the course RCC was fiercely advocating for.

Since 2022, WB have started to establish a Common Regional Market, and it goes hand in hand with closer association of our region with the EU’s single market. We now have an EU-rules based regional model, a momentum and raised conscience about regional cooperation – key ingredients. In same line, couple of weeks ago, the President of EC launched the idea of a Growth Plan for WB, that would enable more access to EU Single Market.

I would say that the litmus test will be the upcoming EU summit in December 2023, as a decisive moment for the EU to set out what it will do to make enlargement a reality, before entering to the EU election mood

It will need to put in place a functional plan to be able to accept the Western Balkans countries and the trio of former Soviet states Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia.

The EU should do four things: set a target date of 2030 for enlargement; agree a plan to adapt EU policies to accept new members; formulate a ‘Madrid criterion’ of foreign policy alignment for aspiring members; and grant Kosovo candidate status.

Under the Polish presidency in the first half of 2025, the EU should therefore adopt the Warsaw agenda 2030 – a comprehensive plan to make EU policies and finances fit for enlargement.

The EU heads of state and government should define the path towards the Warsaw agenda in the coming months and announce the plan at the EU summit in December. Following next year’s European Parliament election, the new European Commission should provide an impact assessment and policy recommendations to support this. In parallel, an institutional reform process needs to be enacted with the aim to be completed by 2030.