



## RCC Secretary General speech at the EU-WB Foreign Ministers Meeting 6 October, Tirana

With each next high-level ministerial meeting, forum and Summit, Tirana is *confidently “earning its stripes”* as a place of meaningful dialogue that boosts both the regional cooperation and the Europeanisation of our region. So honourable Chair, *heartfelt congratulations on hosting* the Berlin Process Summit meetings and today’s MFA ministerial, just less than a year since the breakthrough with *hosting the first EU-WB Summit* outside of the EU.

Tirana has also been and IS the place where I am proud to again stand among you and *share some positive news* – the type our region and our challenging context are *in dire need of*. Positive news of the type Schuman had in mind when speaking of the *concrete achievements* that Europe would be made with – rather than immediately or according to a single plan. News and tangible results *that concern those chiefly intended for – our citizens*, who haven’t had the easiest of times in a very long period.

Dear all,

A success story of *EU-rules based regional cooperation* and *a symbolic entry ticket to EU single market* saw the light of the day on 1 October this year – when the *EU-WB roaming reductions came into effect*. It was a *demonstration of commitments made and pledges kept*. Against a very difficult backdrop in our region currently, this 1 October we managed all together, in close partnership and cooperation with the European Commission, and under the political guidance and support of the European Union and with the support of 38 telecom operators, to see the first roaming charges reductions between European Union and Western Balkans. It might look like an achievement that has been there. After long processes and expectations, people start to take things for granted, but all of us here working on the Common Regional Market Action Plan know how hard it can be. We know how difficult it is to come to a conclusion, and have a success story. Now, the citizens of the region are going to use their mobile phones whether they are in Berlin, or in Paris, travelling from the region. But not just them, even all of you that came to Tirana today with up to 99% decrease means a lot. But this is just one flagship that came out of the Common Regional Market. For us it means a lot, as it gives sense to the regional cooperation. Whenever we want to deliver something that is tangible for citizens, and we work towards it together, than good things can happen.

Strong efforts, as the Commissioner rightly mentioned, have been invested in order to expand the set of professions covered under the first landmark mobility agreement on recognition of professional qualifications in our region. Last year in Berlin, we signed the first set of these agreements, and now, at least from the side of the Regional Cooperation Council, the second set, the new four professions that are to be recognised is ready to be endorsed on 16 October, at the Summit.



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Yet – as we have seen this year – *there can be a considerable gap between the signature of regional agreements and the actual entry into force and implementation and maintaining the enforcement commitments* taken from summit to summit. Our visa-burdened fellow citizens or our professionals will still navigate through lengthy hurdles in the recognition processes – and I still believe that whenever we lose a day the signal we are sending to the citizens is not one of hope. We are already looking ahead in order to make *quantitative and qualitative leap with the new and rebooted – more transformative CRM 2.0*. And we are looking forward to the new broad plan that the Commissioner Várhelyi mentioned, and that will be moving towards us in the coming days and months.

Again, debriefing you with these positive developments has a *bitter-sweet taste* to it. Our gathering today was sadly preceded by a *spike in regional tensions*. And notwithstanding the significant progress we have made in the last two decades, *our region is not where we wanted and should be and unfortunately, friction still persists*, and conflicts can hinder investments and economic growth and can spill over on the process of regional cooperation.

This is our hope, and a call to the Western Balkans to do its part. It is a relentless work, there is a great deal of work for the region, and the Western Balkans has to do it, but sometimes it doesn't. This has to change sooner rather than later, because making the enlargement credible both for the region and the EU lies ahead of us, with keys in our hands.

We still confirm our commitment to continue to work hard and prepare this region, as much as we can, to be the part of not only European Union, but part of every single development that comes as part of the regional cooperation.