



RegionalCooperationCouncil

Stepping up the Transformation

RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2020 – 2022

April 2019

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Driving the regional cooperation transformation

Beyond differences and geographical boundaries there lies a common interest. Jean Monnet was firm in his conviction that the “European nations had to unite in order to survive”. The same holds true for SEE. To maintain weight, in a world that is changing fast, we need to leverage our relations. Tangible results, concrete outcomes and more local ownership are required towards deepening the regional cooperation and socio economic integration of SEE whilst remaining committed to the European values and future. The following document sets a new ground to ensure the all-inclusiveness of different stakeholders involved in the regional agenda.

Socio-economic development of South East Europe (SEE) and its European Union integration agenda depends on its ability to seize the opportunity and benefits of closer cooperation among the economies in the region. For over a decade, RCC has been actively contributing to the regional cooperation and Euro Atlantic integration of the SEE participants by fostering connectivity, skills and mobility, competitiveness, rule of law and security cooperation efforts. Results are obvious and all participants deserve credit. Over 70% of citizens in the region tends to agree or totally agree that regional cooperation can contribute to the political, economic or security situation of their respective societies¹.

The past several years have seen RCC evolve into a leading mechanism for regional cooperation in SEE. RCC of today is a result of a dedicated transformative journey and a strategic shift – from initial broad focus on peace and reconciliation towards a dynamic and technically intensive process of driving political, economic and societal transformation aimed at promoting better growth prospects. In the upcoming period RCC’s vision remains SEE “...region as a prosperous place of dialogue, freedom and mobility, rich in cultural heritage, where each person feels safe and protected by the rule of law”. Together with its participants RCC will reignite the spark of regional cooperation and integration. The previous achievements present a positive starting point.

This Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) 2020-2022 of RCC will serve as an indicative roadmap to step up the efforts and bring the regional cooperation process closer to the citizens. It stems from the SEE 2020 Strategy, 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SDG) and the European Union strategic goals “Towards a sustainable Union by 2030”. It reflects the commitments and the developments in the region such as the Berlin Process.

The overarching goal of RCC’s interventions during the SWP 2020-2022 period is to enhance socio-economic, digital and human connectivity within SEE, and between the region and the EU through strengthened regional cooperation and development of a shared, inclusive and competitive economic space. SEE should use the benefits provided by the potential of the fourth revolution and digital economy, support brain circulation schemes (within the region and with the EU), serve as a safe harbour for investments whilst enabling easy access to the global market, encourage stronger women engagement and promote their leadership in social and economic development, in order to induce sustainable development of human capital in the region.

¹ Balkan Public Barometer 2018, RCC

The SEE needs to define where it wants to be by 2022. To this end, RCC proposes the following key priorities of the SWP 2020-2022:

– **Enhanced Regional Economic Area through implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP-REA)** - enabling free flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labour, making the region more attractive for investment and trade and accelerating convergence with the EU. Main targets on that are:

- *Seamless access to an investment-friendly region* - promoting the Western Balkans as a unique investment destination and facilitating governments' efforts in their reform transformation to attract more investment.
- *Developing human capital, as a driving engine for economic prosperity* - Convergence of social and economic development of the SEE economies with the EU will require unlocking all human capital potentials available in the region. RCC will encourage fostering an environment which will recognise *women* as indispensable part of human capital whose contribution through leadership and creativity in politics, academia, culture and business can be a decisive element in enabling socio-economic development potential of the region. Facilitating conditions for women employment and skills development will be in our focus. RCC will continue supporting the *integration of Roma* through the Roma Integration project in order to advance their performance in reducing the socio-economic gap between Roma and non-Roma.
- *Open and inter-connected region offering opportunities for all!* - facilitating free movement of highly skilled labour in the region, as part of the commitment undertaken under *Mobility pillar* of MAP REA such as: Mutual Recognition Agreement for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers and possible extension of this agreement to other professions, mostly related to STEM; supporting implementation of the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications in the WB; removing obstacles to legal and other barriers to mobility of researchers among WB6 and between WB6 and the EU.
- *Better digitally connected people and businesses* - as part of *Digital Integration and implementation of Digital Agenda for WB*, RCC will facilitate implementation of the Regional Roaming Agreement 2 (RRA2) towards a roaming free WB region; support broadband development; strengthen digital skills and competences; improve e-services delivery and cybersecurity in the WB.
- *Sustainable, cleaner, climate neutral region in line with the Podgorica Statement* - by assisting the economies to transpose EU environmental and climate change policies; facilitate the challenges brought by the new EU 2030 and 2050 energy and climate framework targets, as well as those associated with the Paris Agreement commitments.
- *Regional cooperation "goes local"* - RCC will explore the possibilities for closer engagement of local authorities in order to bring the benefits of regional cooperation closer to the citizens. Involvement of local authorities in implementation of REA is important in promoting closer regional cooperation and socio-economic development in the region.

– **A secured region driven by good governance and rule of law** – crucial for regional peace and stability and EU integration of the WB economies.

- *Strengthening political framework for implementation of regional programmes* - enhancing cooperation within and among SEECF and WB6 frameworks, spanning through multiple levels of socio-political life to advance Euro-Atlantic integration.
- *Enhance engagement of legislative dimension in regional cooperation processes* - more information sharing about goals, challenges and achievements with *the parliaments* in the

region. Legitimacy of the regional cooperation depends on closer involvement of the MPs in meaningful debates about future of the EU enlargement prospective of the region. We will encourage exchange of knowledge and experiences in the EU integration process in different policy areas of common interest, enabling MPs to discuss issues important for the future of the region.

- *Region based on EU standards in rule of law and judicial practice* - improving efficiency and accountability of the SEE judiciaries, ensuring better cross-border cooperation and enhancing competence in EU law implementation, through RCC embedded regional platforms in the area of justice and judicial cross-border cooperation.
- *Tackling security challenges through a coordinated and streamlined approach* – following EU principles of regional cooperative order embedded within the IISG platform, whose one of the partners is RCC, thus avoiding overlapping and supporting coherent regional outreach.

“Citizens First” – this will be the overarching goal of our communication strategy. It’s not all just about facilitating governments’ efforts, but also delivering the results to the citizens. RCC has twisted the communication approach from fully dedicated to the governments and partners, to the one dedicated to citizens by informing them about the regional cooperation results and maintaining EU narrative in the region. RCC will explore new and appropriate approaches to the communication of clear, simple and comprehensive messages. In order to achieve larger outreach, communication activities need to be tailor-made for the citizens to address their expectations or fears through multiple tools of communication.

RCC is a vehicle for sustainable regional cooperation that is required from the SEE economies in the process of their EU integration. Disruptive nature of internal and international environment both in the region and the EU is challenging. SEE economies have a common vision of their joint future. Closer regional cooperation contributes to better preparation of respective societies for the future. With this SWP RCC will continue with the implementation of ongoing activities and explore opportunities for the next 10 years of regional cooperation based on transparent and inclusive public debate about the new vision of region’s European future.

While making the aforementioned assertions, we are aware that external circumstances especially in the political and socio economic realm of SEE might change in unpredictable ways over this time period. So instead of looking at some imaginary outcomes, we have tried to look further at the agenda that shapes regional cooperation in terms of organic demand for transformation. That said, the axes of this SWP have been designed so that the accomplishments might be accelerated or modified during the period envisaged in the document.

In sum we are confident that taken together this strategy represents an agenda for RCC that can be achieved in the next three years.

I. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) for the period from 2020 to 2022. Building on the experience, achievements and lessons learned during the implementation of previous SWPs and in particular the SWP 2017-2019, the SWP 2020-2022 was prepared by the RCC Secretariat to set out the organisation's goals, govern and inform its work, outline the planned resources, and to provide a framework for its actions by 2022.

The objectives and activities contained in this SWP are reflective of the trends observed in the regional environment over the past several years. Regional cooperation in SEE has matured through a web of regular contacts, structured via platforms both at the highest political level and on the expert, technical levels. Political processes, such as the EU accession, backed up by the EU Member States initiatives, such as the Berlin Process, have yielded clear political commitments in a number of key areas for regional cooperation, such as trade, investment, mobility, connectivity, digital integration and fundamental rights. Additionally, the SWP reflects the European Commission's Strategy "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans" (2018). The regional cooperation remains a key catalyst for the enlargement process and is a key enabling factor for comprehensive reforms and the return to sustainable economic growth.

The 2020-2022 horizon will represent a key milestone in the work of the RCC. The key difference, compared to the three years covered by SWP 2017-2019, is the scale at which the organisation intends to operate in the 2020-2022 period, while maintaining its unwavering focus on results, converted into quantifiable indicators. The strategic intent contained in this Strategy and Work Programme, its goals and resources planned to be allocated towards their achievement is the most ambitious since the organisation's founding in 2008. This is also reflective of the confidence that the RCC has gained over the past decade from its participating governments, the European Commission and regional and international partners.

The triennial SWP is prepared in accordance with the RCC Statute to inform the work of its structures, including the RCC Annual Meeting, its Board and its Secretariat. RCC Secretariat shall prepare Annual Reports on regional cooperation in SEE and other periodic reports of the Regional Cooperation Council to track and monitor the implementation of this SWP.

[Building on the results of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy](#)

The SEE 2020 Strategy has proven to be a useful policy tool helping focus regional cooperation efforts towards fewer priority areas with clear targets and RCC took the lead role in addressing, implementing and coordinating it.

The period that followed, governed by the 2017-2019 Strategy and Work Programme, further mainstreamed RCC's efforts on greater economic and social integration through easier flow of

capital, people, goods and services within the SEE and between the SEE and the EU, underpinned by better governance, rule of law and security cooperation. Human capital development, social inclusion and development agenda also cut at the core of SWP's actions. The SWP 2017-2019 was in line with the flagship approach of the European Commission's Strategy "A credible enlargement perspective for and enhanced EU engagement with the Western Balkans". Within this operational framework, RCC made a decisive shift towards a more streamlined, better integrated and result-oriented approach to implementation and towards forging strong partnerships with other regional organisations and development partners around strategic result areas that are crucial for leveraging each other's resources. This period has also seen RCC embedding regional reform agendas in high-level, structured political processes that are able to yield multilateral binding instruments that govern the implementation of the reforms.

This framework also allowed RCC to pursue preparation of the *Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA)* during 2017, which put forward an ambitious agenda for regional economic integration. It builds on the objectives of SEE 2020 and CEFTA and has potential to improve socio-economic development, strengthen economic governance and help prepare the region to withstand competitive pressures of the EU's internal market. Its impact should address the fragmentation of the region's markets by introducing economies of scale, fostering regional production networks, promoting geographically diversified businesses and integrating the SEE businesses into regional and international value chains. Following the Trieste Summit of the Berlin Process, RCC was entrusted with a clear mandate to lead and coordinate the implementation of the MAP REA.

The endorsement of MAP REA by the WB6 leaders further consolidated the regional cooperation architecture and introduced a robust whole-of-government governance framework closely involving the governments both at the political and technical level. MAP governance system has put in place several interfaces between the governments and the regional cooperation structures, enabling better coordination and shortening the feedback loop between the governments' policy makers and the RCC platforms and structures that work on MAP implementation and monitoring.

While work on establishing a regional economic area and human capital development represent the core of RCC's current work, the organisation remains engaged in other areas of regional cooperation within its statutory mandate. Sustainable growth and climate change resilience, good governance (aspects of judicial training, networking and alternative dispute resolution - ADR) and security cooperation are areas of active RCC's engagement, with established and clearly mandated cooperation mechanisms and well-developed agendas.

This transformation of RCC's role has not gone unnoticed within and outside of the region. RCC's mandate, its actions and deliverables have been firmly embedded in the participating governments' strategic frameworks and action plans, as well as EC's 2018 Enlargement Strategy and the Berlin Process. RCC is now acknowledged as the key umbrella regional organisation ensuring all-inclusive and efficient regional cooperation with a strong, clear mandate and sufficient sector expertise and resources to be able to help the beneficiaries address challenges they could not solve on their own. In this respect, RCC has been deemed an organisation that can spur new momentum for dialogue and capitalise on regional cooperation as a self-sustainable and region-owned process. The latest

evaluation of regional organisations undertaken in 2017 has confirmed the establishment of the RCC under the political guidance of the SEECF and its role in regional coordination, including the drafting and guiding implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy as one of the most prominent regional cooperation achievements. RCC's evolution into a focal point for regional cooperation in SEE and a central organisation that is regionally led and fulfilling a key role in bringing together the Western Balkans on regional cooperation and reform issues and in generating and coordinating developmental projects of a wider, regional character to the benefit of each individual participant has been particularly highlighted.

Embedding the SWP 2020-2022 into the broader socio-economic context

Over the past several years, the region of Western Balkans as a whole has experienced uninterrupted economic growth, (trend 3.5 percent in 2019 and a projection of 3.8 percent in 2020) with an analyst consensus that this trend should continue in the medium term, barring unforeseen changes in the external environment. In 10 years, the region increased its exports to the EU by 142%. Yet, the economic advancements in our region are far from sufficient to ensure faster convergence with the EU. Still the GDP per capita in Western Balkans is less than a third of the richest EU members in Western Europe (only 28% of EU average in PPP terms) while sustaining growth rates at current levels would delay prosperity for the region's citizens by decades. The speed of catching up depends on the pace of implementation of wide-ranging structural reforms and on a renewed focus on both regional economic integration policies and pro-growth policies focused on long-term, indigenous drivers of growth. Despite the noted progress, all Western Balkans economies still face major structural economic challenges, with high unemployment rates and high levels of informality, weak business environments with limited access to finance and low levels of innovation.

One of the strongest assets that the region holds is human resource base, given that over the last years we have added more than 1.6 million of highly qualified people to the overall workforce. Even though more than 700 thousand jobs have been created in the Western Balkans since 2012, labour markets still exhibit low activity and employment rates (51% compared to 68% in the EU), high unemployment (17.4% compared to 7.8% in the EU), and widespread informal employment (ranging between 18% and 30% in the Western Balkan economies). Only 42% of working age women are employed compared to 60% of working age men and youth unemployment rate is 39% - more than double compared to 17% in the EU.

Women and vulnerable groups² suffer disproportionately in the Western Balkans, necessitating strong social integration and human capital development and activation policies. Emigration is another negative trend that picked up over the past several years in most SEE economies. While hard figures are difficult to come by, according to some estimates, over the past 5 years WB region has seen hundreds of thousands of its citizens join the 5.7 million people originating from the Western Balkans already residing outside of the region's borders³. This, combined with lowering

² UNDP Regional Roma Survey 2017, <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/roma/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets.html>

³ The Way Back: Brain Drain and Prosperity in the Western Balkans, European Council on Foreign Relations, 2017 https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/the_way_back_brain_drain_and_prosperity_in_the_western_balkans

fertility rates in most of the region, contributes to a gloomy demographic picture in the coming years. Countering these trends in the current socio-economic and political environment remains a considerable challenge.

The economies have also been rebalancing towards external, mostly EU, demand with some of the highest export growth rates in the past three years, an encouraging development in the region that has been plagued by high external imbalances. As a result, the trade deficits have gone down across the Western Balkans economies, helping improve the overall macroeconomic situation. Foreign investment inflows have been picking up as well, and in 2017 they were at their highest level in the past 5 years.

Current economic policies in the region leave a lot to be desired, if assessed from a growth-oriented point of view. For the most part, public investment in education, science, innovation and digitisation is far from sufficient. The development of a globally competitive skills base and research systems which foster innovation is a key factor for economic recovery and sustained growth. The ability to use and transfer technology, underpinned by information and communication technologies and infrastructure, will be crucial in moving WB towards knowledge-driven, globally competitive economies. In order for the growth to be sustainable, the region should also address longer-term challenges brought by climate change, rapid technological progress and negative demographic trends.

South East Europe beyond 2020

The SEE 2020 Strategy underpinned majority of RCC's work since 2014 and will see its end at the start of the new triennial 2020-2022 period. Some of the SEE 2020 targets are met, such as the target on *inclusion of highly qualified persons in the workforce* and the one on *new business creation*, with a positive trend on achieving the targets on *trade balance, trade in goods; FDI inflows and employment rate*. However, there are still targets which will unlikely be reached by the economies, i.e. the target on *GDP per capita relative to the EU average; total trade in goods and services; intra-regional trade in goods; share of renewables in gross final energy consumption and government's effectiveness*⁴.

The Annual Implementation Reports on the SEE2020 Strategy have showed that for small WB economies, sustainable higher levels of growth are impossible without deeper trade and investment integration, and regional integration is a stepping stone to global integration and global value chain participation. Furthermore, the reports showed the need for the region to focus on people. Transformation of the region can only be successful if it benefits all groups of people, communities and regions. Social dimension of the Regional Economic Area and the economic policies need to be strengthened to ensure inclusion, equality, human capital development and including gender equality vis-a-vis women economic empowerment and a socially fair transition, closely aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Beyond 2020, the region will need to carve out its role and position itself clearly in a rapidly changing global and European political, economic and security environment. While only a decade ago, the

⁴ For further information refer to <https://www.rcc.int/seeds/results/1/see2020-progress-tracker>

region's path seemed straightforward and linear, the added complexity of competing political visions, rapid technological change, emerging security challenges and a popular backlash against globalisation is making that task much more complex. RCC will stand ready if called upon to assist its governments in building a common vision for the region beyond 2020, a vision that will secure a stable and prosperous European future for its citizens and a vision that will contribute towards ever more sustainable Europe by 2030.

Delivering on the commitments through constructive regional dialogue

A climate of consistent, productive regional dialogue which paves the way for the successful implementation of SWP, MAP REA and any other strategic regional programmes endorsed by SEECP is of crucial importance. Forging a constructive relationship among regional governments will aid socio-economic development of the region beyond the SWP 2020-2022, since patterns of cooperation tend to be self-reinforcing as they build confidence among all partners in the region. Therefore, in terms of inter-governmental relations, RCC will maintain regular political consultations with national authorities and their representatives, as well as stand available to serve as a forum for voicing and resolving issues which might arise in the process of concluding and implementing regionally agreed agendas.

RCC will promote and engage with other levels of political cooperation in order to spread the qualitative narrative of aims, deliverables and practical achievements of the implementation of regional programmes. The overarching aim of these efforts will be the fine-tuning of RCC's work with needs and wishes of the people in the region. Moreover, this will contribute to making sure that the benefits of the SWP implementation are widely recognised and felt in real terms.

Continuing the engagement with the existing SEECP parliamentary dimension will enable a two-way relationship between RCC and directly elected representatives of the region's citizens. In this way, RCC can keep parliaments informed about the benefits of important lines of intervention through MAP REA and other important projects and their correlation with the overall EU enlargement trajectory. This parliamentary dialogue will serve the purpose of better understanding of goals set by MAP REA, Berlin Process and necessity for better regional cooperation.

Throughout its efforts to provide political foundation to the implementation of SWP and MAP REA, as stipulated and envisaged by the Statute, RCC will continue to coordinate and cooperate fully with SEECP C-i-Os, and to report on its activities to the RCC Board through the regular meetings of the Board and the Annual Meeting, and beyond.

Results from the 2017-2019 period

RCC's previous triennial strategy focused the organisation's efforts towards greater economic integration through easier flow of capital, people, goods and services within the SEE. Human capital

development, social inclusion, better governance, improved functioning of the rule of law and enhanced security in South East Europe have also underpinned RCC's work in the past three years.

The overall implementation of the SWP 2017-2019 can be considered as very successful, with good performance across the priority areas. The programming scale and financial scope of SWP 2020-2022 attest to this performance as well, as it continues directly from the previous strategy and builds on the deliverables and results achieved in the last three years.

Implementing SEE 2020 Strategy through flagship approach has yielded several important deliverables in the three flagships covered. These include:

Key results

Skills and Mobility Flagship:

- The region has started negotiations on *Agreement on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications* for four prioritised professions (doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers) and is in the process of establishing *a joint model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications*. In addition to supporting a much needed process of removing obstacles to trade in services, the successful conclusion of the MRAs will help the region tap into a flexible and mobile pool of experts and introduce common EU standards to education and training for these professions, thereby increasing the quality of our education system, as well as of services provided to our citizens.
- Furthermore, through the Working Group on Open Science and the *regional action plan on open science*, RCC has been helping map, *strengthen and open the research infrastructure in the SEE* and enhancing innovation capacity to aid in the faster integration into the EU research frameworks.
- Finally, the first phase of the *Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP)*⁵ was implemented to build the capacities of employment institutions to design, implement and monitor active labour market policies and measures through mutual learning on employment policies and programmes and to support modernisation and effectiveness of the PES in WB6 through the implementation of an EU model of bench-learning process. ESAP has significantly strengthened regional cooperation in the area of employment through actions that included: peer reviews on employment policies; bench-learning among Public Employment Services; upgrading the regional analytics on labour markets, and operating a flexible on-demand technical assistance for the priorities of the WB economies (with more than 30 TA interventions provided in direct support to the economies).
- The regional interventions implemented within the *Roma Integration 2020*⁶ extended significant assistance to the governments in the region to advance their performance in integrating Roma through their socio-economic policies and played a pivotal role in aligning the policy focus and discourse in the enlargement region with the EU activities and processes (such as anti-gypsyism, and shift of focus on housing and employment). Technical assistance has been extended to the governments of WB and Turkey to incorporate and mainstream specific Roma integration goals in socio-economic policy and budget planning, spending and control.

⁵ www.esap.online

⁶ <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/home>

Connectivity Flagship:

- Cooperation in the digital area helped bring about the *Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans*⁷ coupled with a package of measures stemming from the MAP REA related to lowering the costs of roaming and facilitating regional dialogue on spectrum policy harmonisation, deployment of broadband and digital skills, capacity building in digital trust and security, including strengthening the capacities of WB6 national CSIRTs⁸ through regular regional coordination as well as extended capacity building to respond to the cyber-attacks and enable peer-to-peer learning, and efforts to enhance digitalisation. The *Annual Western Balkans Digital Summit* was launched as the permanent high-level intergovernmental platform dedicated to regional digital transformation aimed at bringing high-level political focus in this area and addressing digital needs through commonly agreed regional initiatives and actions. In addition, *negotiations on further decreasing roaming prices* and covering all end users in the WB have been concluded with the signed all-inclusive Regional Roaming Agreement, introducing the Roam Like At Home (RLAH) regime by 1 July 2021 and unlocking a dialogue on roaming charges reduction between the EU and Western Balkans⁹.
- Furthermore, in the area of environment, RCC has helped set-up a *high-level regional policy dialogue on environment, climate change and biodiversity*, positioned the Regional Working Group on Environment as a steering mechanism to guide and oversee the regional actions and projects in this area, and provided targeted analytical support to inform policy makers' decision-making through studies on climate change in the Western Balkans and climate resilience of transport corridors.

Competitiveness Flagship:

- *Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA)*¹⁰ was endorsed by the region with an aim to reduce obstacles to investor entry, strengthen investor protection, streamline investor attraction policies and better position the region to integrate into global supply chains. Under RCC's guidance, and its SEEIC– CEFTA Joint WG on Investments, and with technical support of the World Bank, the region's Ministries and institutions in charge of investments translated RIRA into national action plans to align the national investment frameworks.
- RCC has also broadened the regional cooperation agenda in the area of *access to finance for the private sector*, extending the regional dialogue beyond capital markets to other non-bank financial institutions and financial markets in general.
- Finally, *regional tourism development agenda*¹¹ was also launched to introduce a regional dimension to the tourism policy reform, develop and promote joint regional tourism products and pilot small scale tourism interventions throughout the region through a small grants programme.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/swd_measures_in_support_of_a_digital_agenda_for_the_western_balkans.pdf

⁸ Computer Security Incidents Response Teams

⁹ Other deliverables indirectly supported by RCC include: launching of the annual ICT regulatory dialogue Western Balkan-EC; WB increasingly integrated in EU digital frameworks, including Broadband Competence Office, Digital cross-border traineeship initiative, EU's Code Week; launched substantial technical assistance package for identification of potential digital investments through WBIF/IPA; scaled-up regional interventions on digital literacy and skills.

¹⁰ <https://www.rcc.int/docs/410/regional-investment-reform-agenda-for-the-western-balkans-six>

¹¹ <https://www.rcc.int/tourism>

Governance, rule of law and security cooperation:

- A dynamic *regional cooperation of the SEECP judiciaries* has also been initiated and supported by the RCC, with particular emphasis on judicial training and the introduction of alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms as tools for increasing efficiency of judiciary in the region. In collaboration with RAI, RCC has supported the processes of *corruption proofing in the health sector* and has extended capacity building support to institutions to conduct preventive measures in line with the developed Checklists¹². In collaboration with ReSPA, RCC has supported the development of regional Recommendations to improve the public consultation processes¹³ (endorsed by WB Ministers in charge of public administration reform) and has supported their application.
- RCC has improved coordination and cooperation at national and regional level in the *security area*, identifying and addressing gaps and overlaps in regional actions to alleviate main security threats and challenges in the region, which are coming almost exclusively from non-state actors.

Key lessons learnt from SWP 2017-2019, reflected in this new SWP are: focused intervention through flagship approach embedded in high political processes (such as Berlin Process); enhanced regional dialogue to minimise spill-over effect of the political issues and flexible framework to reflect the development of regional socio-economic integration.

Strengthening trust and deepening of regional cooperation and partnerships:

RCC helped strengthen and deepen *regional cooperation and partnership* among all participants from SEE and other stakeholders, including the civil society, private sector, academia, media and others. During 2017-2018 there had been immense coordination efforts shouldered by RCC in mapping the needs to support the establishment of the Regional Economic Area through intense national and regional consultations, including donor coordination meeting held annually, aimed at identifying, among others, state of play, available assistance and instruments, capacity building needs and policy and investment gaps, as well as economy-specific needs in view of systematising and reporting them in the established regional coordination framework (i.e. structure overseeing implementation of SEE 2020 and MAP REA). The monitoring system set up initially to track progress of SEE 2020 implementation, extended further to monitor MAP REA implementation, has greatly exceeded its original role, with hundreds of quantitative, qualitative and perception-based indicators being collected and analysed each year, representing one of the most comprehensive repositories of information about the region. RCC's Balkan Barometer surveys are now being used by the governments and policy makers, are regularly referenced by researchers and media alike, and have even become part of other monitoring frameworks (e.g. SIGMA's PAR Principles). RCC's structured programming exercises and its donor coordination process had to leverage substantial additional funding and yielded a number of regional actions implemented by RCC, but also by other regional and international organisations (in the areas of Roma integration, Employment and Social Affairs Platform, Tourism Development, Investment Reforms, etc.) implemented during the 2017-2019 period.

¹² <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/68/checklists-on-corruption-risks-in-the-healthcare-sector>

¹³ <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/59/recommendation-on-public-participation-in-policy-making-process-for-western-balkans>

II. RCC STRATEGY 2020 – 2022

RCC's SWP 2020-2022 will support the stepping up of the transformational efforts in SEE and build on EU integration and regional cooperation as two mutually reinforcing pillars.

The overarching goal of RCC's interventions in the 2020-2022 period is to enhance human capital development and the socio-economic and digital transformation of South East Europe. This goal will be reinforced by actions further strengthening the rule of law, good governance and security cooperation.

RCC will implement the SWP 2020-2022 by grouping its efforts along three main axes, with the following specific objectives:

A. Objective 1: Support to implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP-REA)

A.1. Economic Competitiveness – Investments: Seamless access to an investment-friendly region

Objective:

The aim of interventions under this heading is to improve economic competitiveness by enabling investment policies throughout the region that can attract higher levels of (foreign and domestic) direct investments and regional cross-border investments.

These interventions would diversify financing opportunities for the region's private sector; and increase investment activity resulting in higher level of industrial development, increased volume of overall trade and exports, and ultimately – more jobs for our citizens.

Background:

Investments are the main driver of domestic economic growth, and job increase, as well as a financing mechanism for building value chains that stretch internationally and allow domestic firms to increase their presence in home and foreign markets, hence supporting the export growth. The same opinion is shared in the Western Balkans, although the investment potentials are not utilised to their true capacity. Average level of investment in the region of 23% of GDP is by a third lower than the average in middle-income economies, and the attracted FDIs had limited positive spill-over effects to the domestic economy. In order to improve this, the region has, under the coordination of the RCC and its SEEIC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investments (consisting of relevant government officials and agencies in charge of investment policies and promotion, as well as the private sector), and with technical support of the World Bank Group, designed a joint framework: Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA), which is implemented through Individual Reform Action Plans (IRAPs) so as to reduce obstacles to investor entry, strengthen investor protection, streamline investor attraction policies and help the region improve its position and integrate in European/global supply chains. This work will be furthered through concrete policy reforms in priority areas, and monitoring and impact assessment of these reforms. In order to increase investment entry, protection and retention standards, the RCC will guide the region in setting the RIRA into the most acceptable form of a regional investment instrument and further upgrade the network of international investment agreements, particularly Bilateral Investment Treaties, in alignment with

the EU standards. Complementary with improvement of the investment environment, Western Balkans will be promoted to the global investor community as a unique investment destination, with the aim to increase investment activities across the region.

In order to advance the domestic industrial base that will support investment activities, the work on investments will be further complemented with efforts of the SEEIC Working Group on Industrial Policy (consisting of relevant government officials in charge of industrial policies) to improve the policies and measures for increasing industrial competitiveness and align them with the EU standards and practices (particularly on S3), and develop and promote regional industrial value chains in priority sectors. In regard to the latter, this work is conducted via EU-funded and RCC-implemented Triple P Tourism project and its SEEIC Tourism Expert Group (consisting of relevant government officials and agencies in charge of tourism, as well as the private sector), which is consolidating a currently fragmented tourism offer in the Western Balkans through the creation of joint regional cultural and adventure tourism routes and offers which would attract more international tourists, lengthen their stay in the region, increase revenues and contribute to the employment in the industry and beyond due to the anticipated spill-over effects that tourism has on other horizontally linked areas. The project also includes a policy reform component to support the industry development, and a significant re-granting component with over 0.5m EUR already awarded to regional small scale pilot projects contributing to product development and promotion, with intention for continuation of annual granting schemes in the forthcoming period. In addition to this successful story, and in continuous support to the industrial development, the work on identification of additional priority sectors and development of new regional value chains will be initiated.

In order to further enable opportunities for private sector investments, diversified financial markets and access to funding are needed in the region, as a diversification of currently bank-centric activities. Hence, the RCC coordinates a holistic approach with technical assistance of the World Bank Group towards unlocking the benefits of broader financial sector diversification for boosting growth, jobs and economic convergence. The work the RCC is guiding under its Working Group on Financial Markets (consisting of relevant government officials, agencies, as well as financial market regulators and operators), and with technical support of the World Bank Group, will entail assessment of the challenges and issues in financial intermediation and the A2F issues from the angle of closing the demand-supply gap, as well as the market, regulatory and institutional constraints that hinder growth. As a response, the region will aim to address these issues via short-, medium- and long-term policy reforms, by designing a regional strategy on financial markets deepening, implemented through corresponding national action plans.

The key policy areas within this heading include investment entry, investment protection, investment retention, industry, finance.

Results:

These actions are expected to result in a reformed overall investment policy framework in the Western Balkans. This particularly refers to policies pertinent to investment entry, protection and retention, as well as functional legal framework for investments, and increased visibility of the whole region as a unique investment destination among the international business community. This is expected to lead to higher levels of foreign direct investment and regional investments. Furthermore, actions will contribute to redesigning the region's industrial legal framework in line

with the EU standards and inclusion of its priority industries' value chains into EU value chains. Finally, improved legislation for financial markets in line with EU directives will diversify and improve financing sources for the region's private sector ventures.

Key activities:

A.1.1. Investment policy reform

- A.1.1.1. Coordinating further implementation and monitoring of the Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA) and pertinent Individual Reform Action Plans (IRAPs) - The RCC will continue to coordinate implementation of reforms in policies related to investment entry, investment protection, and investment retention (representing a wide network of policies and legal base expanding much further from investment laws per se) stipulated by RIRA. Furthermore, monitoring and impact assessment of reform implementation will be provided, along with regular updates of IRAPs and definition of additional reform actions therein.
- A.1.1.2. Facilitating placement of the Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA) into a consistent form of a regional investment instrument - Proposal will be prepared in the most acceptable manner for the Western Balkans so as to place RIRA in a form of a regional investment instrument, followed by initiation and closing of negotiations for such regional investment instrument.
- A.1.1.3. Supporting upgrade of the investment agreements network in line with the EU standards - The effects of EU accession on intra-EU and third-party BITs of the Western Balkans will be assessed, and followed by preparation of proposals for the reforms of bilateral investment treaties (BITs) and their alignment with the EU standards.

A.1.2. Investment promotion

- A.1.2.1. Promoting the region as a unique investment destination to the international investor community - The region will be promoted as a sound investment destination to the European and global investor community through tailor-made activities and concrete promotion tools, which will be prepared in line with the investment potentials identified via regional sector scanning and investment mapping. Furthermore, targeted investor outreach activities will be undertaken in identified priority sectors of the region's economies. In order to ensure support to attraction and facilitation of investments in the local economies, assistance will be provided to the region's investment promotion agencies in a form of capacity building training series.

A.1.3. Industrial development and regional sectoral value-chain integration

- A.1.3.1. Facilitating regional dialogue on industrial policy coordination and reforms, and their alignment with the acquis and S3 strategies – The RCC will provide support for the operation of regional institutional platforms relevant for the industrial policy which coordinate, analyse and steer the regional industrial policy agenda, namely the SEEIC Working Group on Industrial Policy. Furthermore, it will enable technical, expert and legal support for the regional policy coordination and development of industrial policy reform measures and instruments. In this way, the RCC will facilitate regional dialogue for effective re-design of industrial policies, and their alignment with the acquis and S3 strategies.

A.1.1.3.2. Continuing coordination of endeavours in expansion and further promotion of existing regional value chains under tourism sector efforts, along with potential identification of additional priority sectors and development of new value chains – The EU-funded and RCC-implemented Triple P Tourism Project will continue with development and promotion of a joint regional product (routes) in adventure and cultural tourism. Furthermore, it will continue to coordinate development and implementation of priority policy reforms pertinent to tourism development. In order to support business activity on the regional tourism routes, the RCC will continue to execute small grants facility for small scale pilot projects. Based on the tourism success story, attempts will be made to analyse the potentials and identify additional Western Balkans common priority sectors of industry, subsequently followed by development of regional value chains in selected additional priority sectors.

A.1.4. Regional approaches to financial markets development

A.1.4.1. Coordinating regional dialogue on development and implementation of a regional framework for financial markets diversification – The RCC will facilitate regional dialogue for development and implementation of a regional strategy for financial markets development, including prioritised policy reform measures and concrete actions, and subsequently will coordinate and monitor the implementation of this strategy via corresponding national action plans.

A.2 Human Capital Development: Open, inter-connected region offering opportunities, decent work and decent life for all!

Objective:

The aim of the human capital development pillar is to support sustainable transformation of the region towards the knowledge-based economy which creates equal opportunities for all citizens and leaves no citizen behind.

Background:

Despite the uninterrupted economic growth over the past several years, the Western Balkans average GDP remains at only 28% of EU average in PPP terms. The persistently low investments into research and innovation systems in the region by both public and private sectors have had a profound impact on performance of the R&D systems which translates into low innovation capacity across the region which in turn has a profound long-term economic effect on the region. Specifically, exports are still far more focused on medium- and low-technology products. Innovative efforts mostly accommodate traditionally strong sectors, which do not necessarily reflect the ideal competitiveness paths for economies in the region¹⁴.

Over half a million of highly educated people were added to the workforce in the region in the past decade and more than 700.000 jobs have been created in the Western Balkans. However, these positive trends have not translated into higher productivity rates or into higher activity rate. Low employment rate (51% compared to 68% in the EU), high unemployment (17.4% compared to 7.8%

¹⁴ “Supporting Innovation Agenda for the Western Balkans: Tools and Methodologies”, EU (2018). Available at http://publications.jrc.ec.europa.eu/repository/bitstream/JRC111430/2018-04-24_western-balkans-report_online.pdf

in the EU), persistent long-term unemployment (70% in the Western Balkans compared to 36% in the EU), and widespread informal employment (ranging between 18% and 30% in the Western Balkan economies) continue to be the key features of Western Balkan labour markets. There is a high poverty risk and inequality (Ginis close to 40, quintile ratio 8-9) in the Western Balkans, and even though the levels of extreme poverty are low (below 1.9\$ per day PPP), there are high levels of absolute poverty (at World Bank's new poverty line for UMICs of 5.50\$ PPP). Women, youth and Roma are disproportionately affected and at higher risks of poverty. Only 42% of working age women are employed compared to 60% of working age men, while 73% of men are active in the labour market compared to only 51% of women. Youth unemployment rate in the Western Balkans is 39% - more than double compared to 17% in the EU. Roma are also disproportionately affected by the dire situation, with employment rate at only 16.5%, labour participation rate at 31.5%, unemployment rate at 44.8%, and even 78.5% of youth at the age of 18-24 not in employment, education or training. Further challenge regarding Roma is the high-level of participation in the undeclared work, with the rate at 60.8%, as well as the high rate of Roma living in illegal dwellings.

Transformation towards the knowledge-based economy which can deliver more value-added products and services, but more importantly offer better paid employment opportunities within the region outside the traditional sectors to our citizens, in particular the youth, is essential for successful integration and sustaining the competitive pressures of the EU innovation driven economies. In order to establish and maintain international competitiveness, retention and subsequent leveraging of human intellectual capital is of fundamental importance for developing knowledge-based economies in the Western Balkans. In an increasingly global economy, the extent to which international high-skilled mobility channels are formed within the region and between the region and the EU is a question of great importance. Creating opportunities for people in the region by enhancing mobility and cooperation will yield significant benefits for the migratory region of Western Balkans.

However, the transition can only be successful if it benefits all groups of people, communities and regions. The needs and expectations of young people in all relevant policy sectors need to be addressed to enable full inclusion of youth in decision-making and their contribution to achieving the goals set forward in the regional strategies. Social dimension of the Regional Economic Area and the economic policies need to be strengthened to ensure inclusion, equality, including gender equality, and a socially fair transition, closely aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights. This implies a higher and fairer participation in the labour market, while focusing on job quality and working conditions, and increased provision of quality services for all citizens, with a particular emphasis on ensuring inclusive, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities across the region. It also implies the respect for minorities' rights.

Policy mix: To support sustainable transformation of the region towards the knowledge-based economy which creates equal opportunities for all citizens a comprehensive agenda which combines research and development, innovation, education, employment and social inclusion policies is needed. Therefore, the Human Capital Development pillar brings forward a set of key activities which addresses opening opportunities for mobility and cooperation in education and science within the region; increases opportunities for businesses by opening possibilities for cross-border provision of services; increases quality of education provision; effectiveness of employment and social affairs policies; Roma integration through direct work with the governments, exchange of practices and setting regional standards, and reflecting EU promising practices at regional level; development of youth policies and inclusion of youth in decision-making in the region.

Results:

Established high-level and administrative cooperation to ensure quality implementation of the Mutual Recognition Agreement for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers; established regular monitoring and reporting system of implementation of the Mutual Recognition Agreement for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers; established high-level and administrative cooperation to implement the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications; established regular monitoring and reporting system for implementation of the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications; strengthened quality assurance systems for higher education fully aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance; Quality Assurance Agencies from WB6 associated and integrated with the European Network of Quality Assurance Agencies and the European Quality Assurance Agencies Register; increased EURAXESS capacity; Open Science and Open Access Policies and Instruments introduced in WB6; established Western Balkans Network Tackling Undeclared Work; implemented recommendations on transformation of undeclared work into declared work through mutual assistance projects among relevant bodies of ministries of labour, economy and finance; Implemented recommendation for better design and monitoring of ALMPs; increased performance of Public Employment Services; increased WB participation in regular EU meetings at technical and high-level; national action plans for meeting the opening and closing criteria of Chapter 19 and Chapter 2 of the EU acquis developed, increased capacity to adhere to the principles of the European Social Pillar and increased capacity for the future use of the European Social Fund; developed programmes/legislation amendment proposals for gradual formalisation of work of undeclared Roma workers; increased number of Roma that have transformed their work from undeclared to declared; developed proposals for legislation amendments and funding proposals for legalisation of Roma owned illegal dwellings; increased number of Roma have legalised their dwellings; governments applying Roma responsive budgeting in annual public budget cycle and increased capacities of public servants to apply Roma responsive budgeting; increased and/or more adequate public expenditure for Roma integration policies; improved mechanisms and capacities for data collection and monitoring of Roma integration policies; strengthened link between public expenditure and impact on Roma integration; established and operational journalist network addressing anti-Gypsyism; regional analysis of the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism and its effects in the EU enlargement region; increased awareness of governments' representatives, the general public and Roma civil society about anti-Gypsyism, its recognition and possible methods for fighting it; increased engagement of youth in decision-making; increased quality and effectiveness of youth policies and improved employment policies and re-skilling efforts, conducive to increased number of women in business and labour market in the Western Balkans.

Key activities:

A.2.1.Increased Mobility

- A.2.1.1. Create opportunities for cross-border service provision in sectors of health and construction by supporting the implementation of the Mutual Recognition Agreement for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers through: ensuring regular operation and supporting the work of the Multilateral Committee for each regulated profession which will oversee the implementation of the MRA and the Joint Commissions of Competent Authorities; monitoring effectiveness of the implementation of MRA through regular annual reports; data collection on recognition decisions and maintaining the Database on Professional Qualifications; capacity building support to the competent authorities of the beneficiary economies and the network of contact points in WB to

implement MRA and align it with the EC Directive on Professional Qualifications. Explore the possibilities to widen the Mutual Recognition Agreement to other professions.

A.2.1.2. Enable effective use of opportunities to learn and study abroad by supporting the implementation of the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications in the WB through: convening regular meetings and supporting the work of the Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications which will oversee the implementation of automatic recognition of academic qualifications in WB; monitoring effectiveness of the implementation of the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications through regular annual reports; data collection on recognition decisions and maintaining the Joint Information System aimed at facilitation of recognition of academic qualifications; capacity building to the ENIC/NARIC centres, Quality Assurance Bodies and Agencies and the relevant Ministries to implement the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications and aligning it with the EC Recommendation on Automatic Recognition of Academic Qualifications (currently in preparation).

A.2.1.3. Remove obstacles to legal, and other barriers to, mobility of researchers between WB6 and between WB6 and the EU and enhance the preparedness of WB6 for Open Labour Market Researchers by supporting the implementation of the European Research Area commitments through: support to the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment to provide coordinated personalised information and services to researchers and provision of capacity building and networking of EURAXESS offices in South East Europe.

A.2.2. Enhanced quality of education systems

A.2.2.1. Support alignment of WB6 with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance and integration into the European Network of Quality Assurance (QA) Agencies and European Register for Quality Assurance in cooperation with ERI SEE through: capacity building support to the QA Bodies and Agencies and the relevant Ministries to implement and align with the European Standards and Guidelines for QA; establish and support the network of WB QA Bodies and Agencies; networking and training of the national peer-reviewers involved in the external quality assurance procedures to ensure understanding and alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for QA; support to development of procedures for quality assurance aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines for QA and prepare regular bi-annual reports on QA practices in the WB.

A.2.2.2. Support quality education and curricula development by ensuring alignment with the EU standards for education and training of Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers. The implementation of the Mutual Recognition Agreement for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers foresees the alignment of the education and training programmes for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers with the training and education standards outlined in the EU Directive on Professional Qualifications. The establishment of Joint Commissions of Competent Authorities and envisaged capacity building to be provided for the implementation of the Agreement will promote and support the alignment with the EU standards for education and training of Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers and therefore contribute to better quality of education in the region.

A.2.3. Open Science and Open Access to Research Infrastructure

A.2.3.1. Develop policies for Open Science and Open Access to Research Infrastructures in WB6 and boost Optimal Circulation and Transfer of Knowledge and Optimisation of Research Infrastructures in the WB6, through: support for the development and coordination of Open Science policies on access to and preservation of scientific information in line with the Communication and Recommendation to Member States on access to and preservation of scientific information in the digital age including through regular meetings of the R&D Working Group; further support the harmonisation of access and usage policies for research and education-related public research infrastructures, enabling consortia of different types of public and private partners in line with the commitments defined in the ERA Roadmaps through technical assistance, capacity building and regular meetings of the R&D Working Group.

A.2.4. Employment and Social Affairs Platform

A.2.4.1. Support the implementation of a holistic approach to innovative policy development on undeclared work through the establishment of a Western Balkans Network Tackling Undeclared Work and implementation of mutual assistance projects among relevant bodies including the Ministries responsible for labour, economy and finance.

A.2.4.2. Enhance capacities of Ministries of Labour and Public Employment Services (PES) for developing and implementing priority employment policies on (1) supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment and (2) employment of youth, women, long-term unemployed and vulnerable groups as areas of shared concern in the Western Balkans. Enhance the performance of Western Balkans' Public Employment Services through implementing the EU PES bench-learning and sustaining the process of mutual learning among Western Balkan PES offices.

A.2.4.3. Support Western Balkans Ministries of Labour and Public Employment Services in their endeavours on the EU accession path through active participation of the Western Balkans in the EU PES Network meetings, as well as other relevant EU networks, working and technical groups, support the EU-WB high-level meetings in the field of employment and social affairs, and support the development and implementation of national action plans for meeting the opening and closing criteria of Chapter 19 and Chapter 2 of the EU acquis, adhering to the principles of the European Social Pillar and preparing for the future use of the European Social Fund.

A.2.5. Roma Integration

A.2.5.1. Support the development of comprehensive and holistic programmes for gradual formalisation of undeclared work of Roma and legalisation of illegal dwellings through direct work with the responsible government officials to formulate sectoral programmes and/or legislation.

A.2.5.2. Enhance the institutional capacities for policy management, including evidence based policy formulation through proper data collection exercises and robust monitoring mechanisms, and increased rate of policy implementation through performance-based Roma responsive budgeting of targeted and mainstream public programmes.

A.2.5.3. Promote recognition and instruments to fight discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism, as the root-cause for the exclusion of Roma, through close cooperation and networking with media, conducting regional analyses of the impact and potential methods

to respond to such phenomena, as well as promotion of structured dialogue with Roma civil society to encourage accountability.

A.2.6. Youth policies and inclusion of youth in decision-making

A.2.6.1. Support development of targeted youth policies to contribute to better opportunities for youth in the region and support inclusion of youth in policy decision-making through implementation of youth policy labs and support to establishment and development of national youth councils.

A.2.7. Empower women in labour market through regional cooperation

A.2.7.1 In the coming period RCC will increase its focus on empowering women in labour market as a key element of human capital development, particularly by supporting increased participation of women in business and labour markets of the WB6. This work will entail tackling the underlying, interconnected barriers that women face in business and access to labour markets in WB6, including by undertaking a direct approach to help mitigate the existing skills gaps on the labour market. Increasing human capital by improving women's skills (especially those desired by the market, such as STEM, digital, entrepreneurship although not exhaustive) is anticipated to result in more opportunities for women penetrating the labour market on a higher level. In order to enhance impact, through its regional structures, the RCC will coordinate with relevant government and private sector stakeholders, academia, and partner organisations, ensuring their commitment to this agenda. Furthermore, the RCC will align this work with its other directly and horizontally related activities, such as investments, industrial development, digital skills and Employment and Social Affairs Platform, as well as Roma Integration that pay special attention to employment and gender as a cross-cutting priority.

A.3. Digital Integration and implementation of Digital Agenda for WB (DAWB): Better digitally connected people and businesses

Objective:

The actions under digital integration aim toward a further and better digitally connected region by making best use of digital technologies to support socio-economic growth of the region as well as better integrated region in the EU Digital Single Market (DSM) so as to enable greater convergence with EU policies and practices and closing connectivity gaps in WB.

Background:

SEE/WB digital market is still fragmented, with underdeveloped digital infrastructure, uneven level of harmonisation of the EU acquis and challenging enforcement of DSM-relevant legislation. High roaming charges, being an impediment to economic development, will be alleviated through the Regional Roaming Agreement (RRA2) signed on 4 April 2019. RRA2 will eventually lead to the introduction of Roam Like At Home (RLAH) regime by 1 July 2021.

Despite significant progress in infrastructure development and existing but unused fibre capacities, the region still lacks high quality and widespread broadband networks, which connect remote and commercially less interesting areas. The 2018 assessment of Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) for WB shows that convergence with the EU's Digital Single market is mixed, with significant gaps in the connectivity (i.e. *coverage of fixed broadband, subscriptions to fixed and mobile*

broadband, coverage of high-speed networks, etc.). WB is catching up or already outperforming EU28 average in the category “Internet use by citizens” and developing faster than the EU in the move from fixed to mobile telephony.

Cyber space remains vulnerable. Increased number of cyber threats continues to represent a challenge for citizens, businesses, the public sector, and operators of essential services.

Digital literacy in all WB economies is below optimal level and there is a significant need for increasing digital skills and competences among citizens, IT professionals, but also among users in business and particularly in public sector. According to DESI 2018, significant gap is present between EU28 average and WB in *basic digital skills, share of ICT specialists in the workforce and graduates in STEM*. Consequently, development and usage of e-services in the region lags significantly behind the EU MS level, slowing down the possibility of citizens and authorities to reap the benefits of e-Government, e-Procurement and e-Health technologies and other e-services. Despite the engagement of WB in many activities leading to better interoperability and easier access to government service, alignment with European Interoperability Framework and respective standards is yet to be achieved.

Digitalisation of industry is the utmost priority for WB while strengthening skills and capacities at all levels represents the key priority for economic transformation and making the best use of digital era. Yet, efforts to embrace technological change and be able to benefit from digital tools are to be made as well as investing in the capacity building of the Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) in the WB and support collaboration with DIHs across the EU.

With the endorsement of the Statement of Support for the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans (DAWB) by the leaders of the region and successful convening of two Digital Summits (Skopje 2018 and Belgrade 2019), the region confirmed that the implementation of DAWB is the key priority for WB. To support this agenda EC has launched a substantial technical assistance package, 30 million euro earmarked, for the identification of potential digital infrastructure investments through WBIF. Although there are encouraging developments in WB economies towards participating with mature projects under WBIF, further efforts need to be invested to ensure efficient absorption of earmarked funds.

Importance of digital transformation is increasing and WB is including digital sector more prominently in the National Single Project Pipelines (i.e. Albania, Montenegro and Republic of North Macedonia have already included, in Serbia the process is expected to be finalised within 2019 and the other two economies will do so in the future). In addition, the Economic Reform Programmes (ERPs), the key strategic reform document for WB, have included concrete reform measures in the area of digital – an increasing trend is seen in the latest ERPs launched with proposed reform measures in all WB.

Results:

The activities implemented under this area of action are intended to result in accelerating digital transformation in the Western Balkans in line with the Digital Single Market requirements. In particular, implementation of the actions under SWP will result in reduced roaming charges (intra-WB and WB-EU); established network of BCOs in the region; identified digital skills needs, including developed training plans and priorities throughout WB6 for selected groups; established platform for cross-border recognition of e-signatures; sustained regional dialogue in the area of cybersecurity and strengthened information exchange among WB6 CSIRTs; developed capacity building programmes for public institutions and civil society on new GDPR; enhanced alignment levels with

EU acquis on data protection through prepared and implemented action plans aimed at full alignment with the new GDPR; lined up work among WB6 in aligning interoperability frameworks with EIF; increased participation of WB6 in EU digital programmes and frameworks; convened annual Digital Summit(s) and maintained high-level regional dialogue on digital transformation.

Key activities:

A.3.1 Reduce roaming charges towards a roaming-free region and support broadband development

A.3.1.1. Reduce roaming charges towards a roaming free WB region through: regular regional coordination towards efficient implementation of the Regional Roaming Agreement and permanent monitoring of market impact with particular focus on the dynamics in volume of telecommunications traffic and prices reduction; regional coordination to support timely implementation of the roadmap for roaming charges reduction between WB and EU; regular monitoring and analyses of roaming price reductions, dynamics in volume of telecommunication traffic and other relevant parameters;

A.3.1.2. Support towards the establishment of Broadband Competence Offices (BCOs) or appointment of the contact points, strengthening of regional cooperation to spur broadband development and facilitate integration of WB into the EU BCO network programme and activities.

A.3.2 Strengthen digital skills and competences

A.3.2.1. Establish regional framework to address digital skills needs and gaps through: establishing a regional multi-stakeholder WG and regular regional meetings to support development of digital skills strategies, priorities and actions in WB; promoting replication of best practices and successful experiences from the region as well as peer-to-peer learning within the region and beyond;

A.3.2.2. Support integration of WB in EU frameworks and initiatives related to digital skills by facilitating participation in EU Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition initiative and other initiatives/frameworks connected with digital skills such as the EU's Digital Education Action Plan.

A.3.3 Improve e-services delivery and strengthen capacities for EU acquis alignment and enforcement

A.3.3.1. Improve e-services delivery and interoperability in WB through: supporting the establishment of a platform for recognition of certificates with e-signature (in line with the eIDAS regulation) and linking digital registries for trusted services; supporting the improvement of interoperability in WB and facilitating participation in EU work under European Interoperability Framework (EIF);

A.3.3.2. Increase capacities for EU acquis alignment and enforcement through: regional coordination to increase capacities for alignment with the electronic communications relevant acquis as well as for alignment with the acquis in the area of data protection and e-privacy, especially its cross-border dimension; regional coordination and dialogue to enable peer-to-peer learning and expose WB to EU MS best practice.

A.3.4 High-level policy dialogue on digital transformation

A.3.4.1. Maintain a permanent structured high-level policy dialogue on digital transformation of WB through: permanent regional cooperation through established topical WB Digital Summit (WB DS) Working Groups and convening annual WB DS at the highest political level for steering strategic regional processes; regional coordination and expert support to facilitate regional cooperation between innovation hubs, science parks networking and peer-to-peer learning, as well as assessing demand and prospects to establish regional digital hubs, and other digital cooperation initiatives.

A.3.5 Improve cybersecurity

A.3.5.1. Improve cybersecurity through: regional coordination towards greater information sharing among Computer Security Incident Response Services Teams (CSIRTs) and other national structures and regular regional meetings to ensure peer learning within WB CSIRTs network and from advanced EU MS; support to extend capacity building for WB CSIRTs through organisation of workshops, trainings and cyber drills on as-needed basis; liaising with other international organisations active in the field and in line with EU values and principles; expose CSIRTs to ENISA work/activity; regional coordination aimed at formulation of actions/measures to enable joint response to cyber threats.

A.3.6 Improve cooperation with local governments on digital services delivery

A.3.6.1. Improve cooperation with local governments on digital services delivery as well as on broadband roll-out, through launching the strategic regional dialogue on the role and contribution of local governments in digital service delivery and broadband investment; facilitate regional discussion with civil society cooperating actively with local governments and organise, where feasible, joint activities.

A.4 Sustainable growth and climate change resilience: Sustainable, cleaner, climate neutral region

Objective:

The aim of RCC's work under this heading is to support WB economies in pursuing the principles of sustainable growth and the development of a framework to mitigate climate change and to increase climate change resilience.

Background:

The Western Balkans economies are facing immense environmental and climate challenges¹⁵. The region is particularly vulnerable to climate change and faces many environmental problems due to fragmented legal and institutional frameworks, lack of capacities for enforcement of environmental law, and various economic constraints which limit investments in concrete environmental and climate protection projects. In addition, further progress is needed to achieve full alignment and implementation of cross-cutting environmental directives (such as: Environmental Liability,

¹⁵ The **Study on Climate Change in Western Balkans** commissioned by RCC in 2017 showed that in the previous period the mean temperature has already risen by 1.2°C and this trend will continue in the future, even under stabilisation scenario which foresees reduction of CO2 emissions beyond 2040, as a result of policies we develop and implement nowadays. On the other hand, under the business-as-usual scenario we could expect increase in mean annual temperature between 1.7°C and 4.0°C additionally, while in some geographical areas of WB this increase can reach even 5°C in summer periods, by the end of this century.

Environmental Crime, Environmental Impact Assessments, Strategic Impact Assessment and INSPIRE Directives). The environmental impact assessment process needs to be considerably strengthened, especially in the hydropower and mining sectors throughout the region, while participation of civil sector needs to be ensured.

In the area of air quality the region needs to invest additional efforts in harmonisation with the acquis, enforcement of legal obligations and establishing air quality monitoring practice. Uncontrolled pollution from the energy sector (thermal power plants), from household heating, industrial complexes, road traffic, incineration of waste and other toxic materials remains a serious problem which continues to impact people's livelihoods and health, particularly in urban areas. Waste remains one of the most significant problems and responsible authorities in the region should take steps towards a circular economy approach, by introducing separation of waste at the source, recycling and recovery of waste streams in order to decrease considerable long-term environmental risks. Increased efforts are also needed to close non-compliant landfills more quickly, while municipalities across the region need to remedy illegal waste disposal sites. On water quality, the level of alignment with the acquis, enforcement as well as inter-institutional coordination, generally remains weak, while systems for quality monitoring of surface and ground waters need to be significantly improved throughout the region. There is a certain improvement in terms of Habitats and Birds Directives implementation in the region, but still there is an ample room for progress in the nature protection area. An effective protection of designated protected areas still needs to be strengthened, as well as illegal construction to be combatted effectively. With regard to climate change all WB economies have their Strategies on Climate Change in place, but need to ensure consistency with the EU 2030 climate and energy policy framework. Also, all economies (with the exception of Kosovo* not being a member of UNFCCC which implements its own strategy targets) submitted their Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement and regularly report under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

In the area of environment, RCC has helped set up a high-level regional policy dialogue on environment, climate change and biodiversity, positioned the Regional Working Group on Environment as a steering mechanism to guide and oversee the regional actions and projects in this area, and provided targeted analytical support to inform policy makers' decision-making through studies on climate change in the Western Balkans and climate resilience of transport corridors. RCC also joined forces with GIZ and IMPEL Project supporting the implementation of the environmental law in WB, particularly focusing on waste and nature protection.

RCC will continue to support high-level regional political dialogue on environment and provide coordination and steering platform through the Regional Working Group on Environment (RWG Env), as well as extend analytical support in areas of joint regional interest.

To address the aforementioned challenges in the WB region, the European Union has provided significant support in a form of three environment and climate projects,¹⁶ building up on the achievements of successfully implemented ECRAN¹⁷ project. Following the last RWG Env Ministerial meeting, organised under the RCC's auspices in November 2018 in Skopje, which reconfirmed the

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

¹⁶ i) Regional Implementation of Paris Agreement Project; ii) EU Support for Climate Action in IPA II beneficiaries - Transition towards the low emissions and climate-resilient economy in the Western Balkans and Turkey; iii) EU Environment Partnership Programme for Accession in the Western Balkans and Turkey

¹⁷ European Communication on Research Awareness Needs

need for strengthening regional cooperation, the WB6 Environment and Energy Ministers signed the mutual statement on clean energy transition for WB (Podgorica, February 2019). The Statement calls for coordinated joint work on establishing 2030 decarbonisation, energy efficiency and renewable targets, as well as for cross-sectoral and regional cooperation in development of National Integrated Energy and Climate Plans in order to ensure compliance with Energy Union objectives as well as clean energy and clean air for WB citizens.

The activities under the area of environment and climate change are designed to tackle, at least partially, some of the challenges that the Western Balkans face, including: delays in transposition of EU environmental and climate policies; lacking national legislation frameworks and weak enforcement capacities; challenges brought by the new EU 2030 energy and climate framework targets, as well as those associated with the Paris Agreement commitments.

Results:

The activities under the area of environment and climate change, which aim to synergise various efforts and maximise the benefits of cooperation with other key stakeholders, are designed to contribute towards addressing some of the challenges that the Western Balkans face, including: delays in transposition of EU environmental and climate policies; lacking national legislation frameworks and weak enforcement capacities; challenges brought by the new EU 2030 energy and climate framework targets, as well as those associated with the Paris Agreement commitments.

Key activities:

A.4.1 Support implementation of commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement and EU 2030 energy and climate policy framework and coordinated regional approach for environmental protection

A.4.1.1. Maintaining a regular regional high-level and operational dialogue under the framework of the RWG Env., contributing to the achievement of the commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement as well as 2030 energy and climate targets.

A.4.1.2. Coordinated implementation of projects of regional interest developed to support environmental protection, mitigation and adaptation to climate change (Water-Food-Energy Nexus, ClimaProof and Regional Biodiversity Initiative). Particular attention will be given to environmental impact of digitalisation (generation of waste, human health, emissions reductions) supporting the concept of green digital transformation.

A.4.2 Analytical support in areas of joint regional interest - Technical Assistance

A.4.2.1. Providing technical assistance and support for development of topical analysis and studies concentrating on areas of regional environmental importance (air pollution, waste management, circular economy, human health, etc.).

B. Objective 2: Political Cooperation, Good Governance and Security

Political cooperation, good governance and improved security are key prerequisites for functioning societies and economies and thus form the cornerstone of the EU accession process. As such, all these three areas of cooperation will remain part of the RCC work for the period 2020-2022.

B.1. Political Cooperation: Strengthening political framework for the implementation of regional programmes

Objective:

The interventions under this heading will serve to enhance cooperation within and among SEECF and WB6 frameworks, spanning through multiple levels of socio-political life, aiding regional progress, implementing mutually agreed regional strategies and programmes to advance Euro-Atlantic integration.

The objective of cooperation in these areas is to facilitate smooth implementation of the SWP 2020-2022 and MAP REA, provide backing to the overall good and cooperative relations between the RCC participants on a multi-level basis, and ensure translation of participants' priorities and preferences into RCC actions.

Background:

By a whole-scale implementation of its statutory obligations, the RCC ensures the advancement of cooperation and coordination within and among the SEECF and WB6 frameworks in implementing SEE2020, triennial SWPs and MAP REA. Likewise, it maintains a fruitful and mutually beneficial balance between the overarching SEE format of cooperation and the operational focus on the WB6 and its European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Although endowed with an operational mandate of implementing SEECF decisions, as a hub and negotiations' facilitator RCC has the capacity to serve as a forum for voicing and resolving issues which might arise in the process of cooperation. Furthermore, by maintaining regular contacts and consultations with relevant actors in respective economies and their local representatives, RCC can anticipate and react appropriately in a preventive capacity to mitigate potential issues. Communicating with political stakeholders, and via them with citizens, serves to maintain support to RCC activities, balance between the beneficiaries' priorities and preferences and the RCC, and to raise awareness of the results and benefits of regional cooperation.

The work of RCC within these policy areas will be implemented through activities such as: holding regular consultations with political stakeholders in the region, with the aim of nurturing a constructive relationship among regional governments and fine-tuning the work of the RCC to correspond to regional and individual economy's views and priorities; organising and serving the Annual Meeting of the RCC and three regular Board meetings of the RCC Board per year, to strategically coordinate between the RCC, SEECF and the EU as well as to provide political guidance; maintaining communication with RCC donors and other key regional and international institutions and initiatives; implementing target-oriented actions and in this way contributing to the advancement of the EU accession process of the RCC aspirants.

Results:

The expected result of these activities is a productive and mutually beneficial two-way relationship between the RCC and SEECF, and between the RCC and socio-political stakeholders in/or involved in the region.

B.2. Parliamentary Cooperation: Greater engagement of legislative dimension in regional cooperation processes

Objective:

Strengthening dialogue on all important lines of interventions at the level of SEECF and enabling SEECF PA and parliaments in the region to be able to monitor activities envisaged through RCC strategic documents is of paramount importance.

By including parliaments in the support for the regional cooperation process and helping them and their respective committees to better understand all important aspects of the implementation of the main MAP REA pillars and the flagships of SEE2020 would help to share right narrative across all important aisles of governance, which could consequently enable a smooth implementation of the agreed cooperation programmes.

Background:

Broad and general parliamentary cooperation in the region already exists, but as governments of WB6 delve deeper into implementing MAP REA and SEE 2020 and the regionally owned social mobility, social cohesion, social inclusion and economic cooperation, parliaments need to be reconnected to these important processes, in a rather informative way. In order to do that they firstly need a better understanding of the new regional context, needs, challenges and agreed trajectories, as well as the regional programmes which are currently being guided almost exclusively by the executives. Without full awareness and inclusion of SEE participants' parliaments in agreed activities, true regional ownership of the cooperation process is left wanting. RCC intends to provide a substantial information sharing among the parliaments in the SEECF format, as this dimension is expected to have positive impact on overall regional interactions. Engagement with SEECF parliamentary dimension will enable a two-way relationship between RCC and directly elected representatives of the citizens. In this way, RCC can assist in the process of aligning and adjusting legislation to regionally agreed actions, support democratic practices and contribute to the path of European integration, whereas parliamentary representatives may provide feedback, share successful practices, and inform on further opportunities for regional initiatives.

These objectives will be achieved through implementation of the following key activities:

- Informing relevant parliamentary committees of SEECF PA about regional cooperation processes stirred by RCC;
- Promoting a necessity for greater support of Parliaments in spreading regional narratives pertinent to the requirements arising from the implementation of regional cooperation strategic documents;
- Helping to increase parliamentary understanding of implementation of the reform agenda envisaged by regional cooperation strategic documents.

Results:

Ensuring better information sharing and constructive dialogue with parliaments will consequently help their better understanding and support to the regional cooperation processes, thus also strengthening the overall political base for the implementation of regional programmes.

B.3. Good Governance – Justice Reforms and Rule of Law: Region based on EU standards in rule of law and European judicial culture

Following the statutory mandate to pursuing cooperation in Good Governance (justice and home affairs) and as an all-inclusive, regionally owned and led framework, RCC will remain focused on coordination and facilitation of the adjustment of judicial practices in accordance with the EU standards through RCC embedded regional platforms in the area of justice and judicial cross-border cooperation.

While progress in this area rests mostly on internal drivers, it can still benefit from peer learning and momentum for improvement that is brought in by the regional context.

Objective:

The interventions under this heading aim at improving efficiency and accountability of the SEE judiciaries, ensuring better cross-border cooperation and enhancing competence in EU law implementation through initiating, supporting, organising and streamlining regional activities in the area of justice.

Background:

Good Governance and the Rule of Law are among the highest priorities in the framework of the EU integration process. Although these issues are mainly part of the national agendas, because of the benefits of cooperation at regional level, they will remain in the focus of RCC's work in the time to come.

The already established RCC-led regional cooperation structures such as Western Balkans Working Group on Justice (WB WGJ), the SEE Judicial Training Institutions and the SEE Association of Mediators Networks, provide solid frameworks for regional judicial cooperation. They bring together participants from the wider SEE region, such as EJTN (European Judicial Training Network), GIZ Open Regional Fund Law Reform, ENM (European Network for Mediation), and other different structures dealing with judicial training and mediation/ADR.

In the period ahead, they will continue to steer practical cooperation among national and regional structures in the aforementioned fields. The operation of these structures benefits from the strong support by the national judiciaries and ministries of justice.

Results:

Activities in this area will contribute to improved competences, mutual trust and enhanced cross-border and regional cooperation among the judiciaries in SEE. In addition, they will seek to improve the institutional capacity of Ministries of Justice, Associations of Mediators/Arbitrators (Chambers of Economy) and Judicial Training Centres and will contribute to increased percentage of cases resolved through alternative dispute resolution.

Key activities:

B.3.1. Support regional cooperation among judiciaries, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals in EU law by facilitating and supporting networking and lifelong education of judges, prosecutors and legal professionals.

B.3.2. Promotion of alternative dispute resolution by facilitating networking, peer support and institutional building of associations of mediators and judges. In parallel, RCC will implement awareness raising activities so as to promote alternative dispute resolution to the wider public.

B.4. Security cooperation: Tackling emerging security challenges through a coordinated and streamlined approach

As a unique regional organisation that pursues a holistic approach in regional cooperation, the RCC actions will be focused on coordinated, efficient and streamlined regional security structure, implementing common security priority actions.

Objective:

The work in the area of security cooperation aims to achieve multiple objectives:

- Efficient dialogue within the framework of the RCC-led SEE Regional Platform for Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism leading to Terrorism and Foreign Terrorist Fighters (SEE Regional Platform on CVE/FTF) applying the principle of all-inclusiveness;
- As requested by SEECP participants, enhancing the regional security cooperative dialogue at the level of SEE 13 to the benefit of the regional security and to the EU integration process of the RCC aspirants;
- Intensified cooperation, creating greater synergy and support to the implementation of the priorities of the EU sponsored Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) Initiative, as a unique instrument for addressing security challenges in the Western Balkans;
- Follow-up and implementation of security commitments within the framework of the Berlin Process;
- Political and operational support to the successful long-term joint project of the RCC and UNDP, the South Eastern and Eastern European Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), focused on ensuring smooth implementation of the Roadmap for a sustainable solution to the illegal possession, misuse and trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) and their ammunition in the Western Balkans.

Background:

Within the framework of evolving security environment, focus has shifted from the flow of FTFs from the region to foreign battlefields in the previous years, to rehabilitation and reintegration of returnees and their families through the whole-of-society approach, the phenomena of continuous local radicalization and cyber security threats today. Violent extremism has also become an issue, both in the region and the EU. Migration and organised crime are also on the top of security agenda in the region. Given the complexity of these issues, they will certainly dominate the agenda in years to come.

As a key mechanism for implementation of the RCC's SEE Regional CVE-FTF Platform, the Group of National Focal Points for P/CVE will play a crucial role in steering a change in security cooperation in the region and in addressing prevailing challenges through concerted, streamlined approach.

In this respect, due attention will be paid to the Integrative Internal Security Governance Initiative, as a unique instrument for addressing security challenges in the Western Balkans. Number of activities under the Platform are also part of EU's Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative (WBCTi). The RCC will continue playing an overarching role in this initiative, with the specific role of enabling and facilitating political decision-making process and policy cooperation and coordination.

The specialised RCC-led regional security cooperation formats bringing together participants from the wider SEE region, such as SEEMIC (South East Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs' Forum) and SEENSA (South East Europe National Authority Chiefs' Forum) have outgrown its trust-building role, evolving into pragmatic, result-oriented formats. In the period ahead, they will continue to steer

practical cooperation among military intelligence services and national security authorities in the region.

Key policy areas of interventions include:

- Addressing the emerging security challenges;
- Implementation of the priorities within the framework of RCC's SEE Regional CVE-FTF Platform;
- Streamlining regional security activities and initiatives for most efficient implementation of regional priorities in the field of security;
- Supporting the existing security cooperation mechanisms in SEE.

While the main activities envisaged to be implemented under this heading are:

- Steering practical cooperation among military intelligence services and national security authorities in the region through SEEMIC and SEENSA, respectively;
- Nurturing close cooperation with key international partners such as the EU, NATO, OSCE, UNDP, USA, UK and other bilateral donors, reinforcing its partnership with other regional initiatives such as Integrative Internal Security Governance initiative (IISG) and providing a follow-up to security commitments of the Berlin Process;
- Continuous support to the IISG and SEESAC.

Results:

The expected result of these activities is a smooth and streamlined regional approach to security challenges and efficient implementation of actions addressing them.

C. Horizontal activities

In compliance with its mandate, the implementation of planned interventions in specific sectoral areas will be complemented and supported by the performance of RCC's general and horizontal functions. The activities in this area will be grouped along several intervention areas:

C.1. Programming, monitoring, coordination

The implementation of SWP and its elements, such as SEE 2020 Strategy, MAP REA and others, will continue to be supported by already established and well-functioning horizontal processes that serve programming of activities and resources, monitoring of implementation of actions implemented by RCC and other regional cooperation structures, as well as coordination with the governments in the region, the European Commission, donor community and many regional cooperation mechanism existing in the region.

C.1.1. Programming and regional coordination:

A wide-ranging programming process and regional coordination involving public administrations, regional organisations and structures, and international partners has proven to be a valuable tool in defining and developing regional projects. RCC intends to continue with these processes in this SWP aimed at aligning needs with concrete RCC-led activities and projects.

C.1.2. Monitoring of the implementation of SWP 2020-2022:

Monitoring will continue to be based on qualitative and quantitative assessment through inputs provided by different regional working platforms, collection of quantitative data through the

national statistical offices, as well as on collection of other data available through international sources.

Additionally, the quantitative and qualitative assessment will be complemented with perception-based assessment – the Balkan Barometer, already consolidated RCC tool for measuring the sentiments of both the public and businesses in SEE. Balkan Barometer has become an instrument and a reference source of data and recommendations that the governments in the region and several international actors are using to receive insight into the socio-economic developments in the region, and ways in which they are perceived, and to identify key areas for policy adjustments.

C.1.3. Donor coordination:

Regional donor coordination will remain in the focus of RCC's activities, as it helps direct the donor community's attention towards those areas requiring intervention, enables better and more efficient use of available resources, as well as better alignment of regional interventions with national priorities. It also helps to streamline regional actions and alleviate overlaps in design and implementation of regional projects.

C.2. Extending partnerships

RCC will actively pursue linkages with other non-governmental actors and work on involving them directly in SWP implementation. This will include liaising with the private sector, civil society organisations and media to create a broader regional coalition supportive of ongoing reforms. This dimension of RCC work is becoming even more important in the upcoming period, as some of the needed reforms might prove difficult or unpopular to implement and might require support of a broader base of stakeholders.

C.3. Communication

Communication remains one of the key RCC activities aiming to deliver results to the citizens and maintain EU narrative in the region. RCC communications raise awareness, inform and educate about the processes and initiatives leading to the overarching goal of SEE and WB in particular - EU integration.

The RCC communication efforts will be focused on reaching out and connecting to the general public, the citizens of our region, working to match our vision with their expectations. Therefore the RCC will develop a new communication strategy beyond 2019 to meet these goals, and at the same time exercise a more active role in appropriate approaches to communicate clearly, simply, and comprehensively on what we do – the results of our actions and tangible impact on citizens' lives that these results would have.

In the same vein, the outreach to citizens through multiple communication tools will be a real task of RCC. All available outreach possibilities, opportunities and channels will be explored to reach to grassroots audiences for specific RCC's activities in order to step up the influence and gain feedback from variety of groups (i.e. associations of women, youth, vulnerable groups, etc.) across the region.

The communication's focus would go beyond the regular strategic, political and programmatic efforts in an attempt of 'humanising' the effects and impacts of regional cooperation and EU integration reform agenda to present the region to the citizens of the EU, thus improving the image

of the region. On top of highlighting the economic topics and issues in its communications, the social aspects will be emphasised as well, in order to complement the expectations of the citizens, clearly voiced in the region (in the Balkan Barometer's surveys as well), thus addressing their concerns and utilising such findings as lessons learned, to re-tailor the communications approach. Simultaneously, the communication will also strive to reinforce the enhanced EU support and engagement, and present the advantages and benefits of EU membership, aimed at raising the support of the region's population to the EU integration.

The main communication goal 'RCC recognised as a power-tool for regional cooperation and growth of South East Europe', set in the previous communication strategy, was met, based on the monitoring results of the indicators set therein, also recognised in the February 2018 Communication of the European Commission, demonstrated in all high-level Berlin Process Summits and the WB-EU Sofia Summit. This allows for continued, but upgraded work, widening the scope of information, messages and audiences to correspond to the RCC's mandate. Reviewing just some of the quantitative measures of the RCC Communication Strategy 2017-2019, the RCC scored splendid results, as the total number of website visitors has increased by 20%; number of media reports increased by 400%, and the share of media reports on RCC programme activities raised from 42% to 71%.

RCC communication efforts in the period 2020-2022 will be translating the RCC priorities as well as the Secretary General's vision into concrete goals and objectives, with all available resources. As the overall RCC's focus in the forthcoming period is based on the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA), outcomes and results of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy, and the organisation's Statute, the communication efforts will follow these marks.

On top of that, the RCC-lead regional interventions focusing on employment policies in the region (Employment and Social Affairs Platform/ESAP), developments of a regional tourism network (Tourism Development and Promotion) and integration of Roma population into the societies of the Western Balkans and Turkey (Roma Integration 2020/RI 2020), but also those that are still to come (women in labour market and youth empowerment) provide additional areas for communication within the RCC's scope of action, adding a valuable specialised communication grounds.

Having all this in mind, the communication actions and efforts will build on the achievements and results yielded through the implementation of the SEE 2020 Strategy, MAP REA, RCC's past communication strategies, expectations and deliverables set before the region, benefits of reforms currently underway through the prism of the end result and ultimately the advantages of the regional cooperation and the EU membership.

Another important feature of the communication efforts involves networking and exchange of public information and communication contents with the partners/stakeholders/beneficiaries of the organisation. The RCC communication activities in the coming three years will utilise the existing partnerships but also work on extending the network to involve new groups such as media, civil society, academia, NGO, private sector and public in an attempt to create a sympathetic 'lobbying' group voicing and promoting the RCC's activities, goals and results, coinciding with our overall efforts and leading towards strengthened regional cooperation in the key domains of the organisation's work and the EU integration reform requirements, benefits and membership advantages.

To achieve this, the communication activities will utilise different sets of messages, tools, tactics, and address multiple audiences through existing and new communication channels, subject to results and lessons learned in the past and resources available.

Key areas of risk and possible constraints

Political commitment and support of national authorities will remain a key prerequisite for the successful implementation of this Strategy, as will the political stability in the region. The political dynamic continues to be a major determinant of success of regional cooperation. Extended periods of instability could have a profoundly negative influence on investment and growth. The effect of such political developments is manifold – it reduces investment inflows and increases the cost of capital, as investors are pricing in the political risk; it hinders the capacity of governments to implement much needed reforms; and it seizes up business activity within the economies, heavily dominated by public sector spending and state-owned enterprises.

Furthermore, the rule of law, democracy and good governance and good neighbourly relations - in particular finding and implementing definitive, inclusive and binding solutions for the bilateral disputes rooted in the legacy of the past and devoting additional efforts to reconciliation – remain key elements for successful regional cooperation and EU integration. These are the crucial underpinnings for a successful political, economic and social transformation. While this area of risk is largely outside of the scope of RCC's direct influence, it needs to be closely monitored to allow for quick and flexible adaption of SWP implementation to changing political circumstances.

On a more technical level, insufficient institutional capacities and limited intragovernmental coordination are factors that could adversely affect the successful implementation of the SWP. Furthermore, some challenges are still noted in enabling adequate representation at regional structures, and this relates not only to the institutions directly in charge of the relevant policy area, but also horizontally linked ministries and agencies, in order to ensure systematic and overarching reform implementation framework. The RCC will aim to address this challenge through its structures and intense communication with national authorities. Establishing further links between regional cooperation structures and the economy-level coordination framework will be needed to strengthen ownership and sustainability of the results to be achieved.

Unlike in the previous period, when availability of adequate financial resources was a major constraining factor, the RCC does not foresee challenges in this area during the 2020-2022 period. However, the increase in availability of financial resources and the considerable surge of both the scale and number of activities planned will need to be coupled with further strengthening of technical, managerial and administrative capacities within the organisation.

Finally, successful implementation of this SWP will also rely on close coordination and cooperation with the EC and increased engagement of the line DGs in the next phase is of particular importance to ensure alignment of the regional processes with the EU policies, practices, plans and trends. Furthermore, RCC will need to assist the Western Balkans governments to increase their exposure to EU programmes and initiatives, mostly through actions that are intended to facilitate the participation of the Western Balkans in several EU programmes, initiatives and institutions. SWP can play a decisive role to better involve Western Balkan policymakers into EU processes, programmes and platforms to socialise them into the practices before formally joining the Union. In relation to the next generation of EU programmes, opportunities to formulate joint positions are many and the existing regional fora should be used by the region's governments. However, a proactive and positive response by EU institutions and other potential partners is essential to ensure that the full potential of these opportunities is used.

III. Work Programme 2020 – 2022

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
A.1 Economic Competitiveness – Investments					
A.1.1	Investment policy				
A.1.1.1	Coordinating further implementation and monitoring of a Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA) and pertinent Individual Reform Action Plans (IRAPs)	Continued implementation of reforms in policies related to investment entry, investment protection, and investment retention (representing a wide network of policies and legal base expanding much further from investment laws per se) stipulated by RIRA; monitoring and impact assessment of reform implementation, accompanied by regular updates of IRAPs and definition of additional reform actions therein.	Improved investment policies in Western Balkans, enabling increase of investment activities.	SEEIC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investments; line ministries; World Bank; European Commission; private sector (CIF, FIC network)	2020-2022
A.1.1.2	Facilitating placement of the Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA) into a consistent form of a regional investment instrument	Preparation of the proposal to place RIRA in a form of a regional investment instrument, followed by initiation and closing of negotiations for such regional investment instrument.	Western Balkans investment instrument in place, setting the regional standards on investments and enabling safe investment environment.	SEEIC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investments; World Bank; European Commission and other relevant partners as per need (, other international partners with similar treaties network)	2020-2022

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
A.1.1.3	Supporting upgrade of the investment agreements network in line with the EU standards	Assessing the effects of EU accession on intra-EU and third-party BITs of the Western Balkans and proposing reforms of the bilateral investment treaties (BITs).	Improved network of investment agreements in line with the EU standards, enabling higher level of investment protection.	SEEIC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investments; World Bank; European Commission; GIZ; and other relevant partners as per need, other international partners with similar treaties network)	2020-2022
A.1.2	Investment promotion				
A.1.2.1	Promoting the region as a unique investment destination to the international investor community	Promoting the region as a sound investment destination to the European and global investor community through regional sector scanning and investment mapping, and concrete promotion tools and activities; investment promotion agencies' capacity development; targeted investor outreach activities in priority sectors.	Increased investment activity across the Western Balkans.	SEEIC-CEFTA Joint Working Group on Investments; World Bank; private sector (CIF, FIC network, and others such as international business network)	2020-2022
A.1.3	Industrial development and regional sectoral value-chain integration				
A.1.3.1	Facilitating regional dialogue on industrial policy reforms, and their alignment with the acquis and S3 strategies	Support for the operation of regional institutional platforms relevant for the industrial policy which coordinate, analyse and steer the regional industrial policy agenda; enabling technical, expert	Identified industrial policy reform measures and instruments in Western Balkans, and embedded in national and regional policy agendas; Western Balkans industrial policy measures and	SEEIC Working Group on Industrial	2020-2022

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>	<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	
	and legal support for the regional policy coordination and development of industrial policy reform measures and instruments; facilitating regional dialogue for effective re-design of industrial policies, and aligning them with the acquis and S3 strategies.	instruments in place, enabling alignment of national industrial policies with acquis and S3.	Policy; European Commission; OECD; other international partners (World Bank, GIZ, UNIDO, etc.), Private sector		
A.1.3.2	Continuing coordination of endeavours in expansion and further promotion of existing regional value chains under tourism sector efforts, along with potential identification of additional priority sectors and development of new value chains	Continuing development and promotion of a joint regional product (routes) in tourism sector; coordinating development and implementation of policy reforms pertinent to tourism development; executing small grants facility for small scale pilot projects in further development and promotion of regional value chains in tourism; analysing and identifying additional Western Balkans common priority sectors of industry; supporting development of regional value chains in additional priority sectors.	Joint regional products in Western Balkans priority sectors (tourism with attempts for prioritisation of other sectors) developed and promoted on international markets.	SEEIC Tourism Expert Group; OECD; European Commission; other international partners as per need; private sector	2020-2022
A.1.4	Regional approaches to financial markets development				
A.1.4.1	Coordinating regional dialogue on development and implementation of a regional framework for financial markets diversification	Facilitating regional dialogue for development and implementation of a regional strategy for financial markets development, including prioritised policy reform measures and concrete actions, implemented via corresponding national action plans.	Regional strategy for financial markets diversification developed and agreed; pertinent individual economy action plans for diversification of financial markets in place and under implementation, so as to enable development of new sources of access to finance for the private sector.	Working Group on Financial Markets; World Bank; European Commission; private sector	2020-2022
A.2	Human Capital Development – Decent work, decent life for all				
A.2.1	Increased mobility				
A.2.1.1.	Implementation of the	Convey and support the work of the committees	Successful implementation of MRA;	Ministries	2020-2022

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)				
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>	<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
Mutual Recognition Agreement for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers	established by MRA; collect data and monitor implementation of MRA; maintain the Database on Professional Qualifications; capacity building of relevant authorities to support implementation of MRA; explore possibilities to widen the MRA.	effective coordination and monitoring mechanisms established.	responsible for professional qualifications; relevant implementation bodies	
A.2.1.2 Implementation of the model for automatic recognition of academic qualifications	Support the implementation of the automatic recognition of academic qualifications through regular meetings of the Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications and the Joint Information System; collect data and monitor the implementation; capacity building of relevant authorities to support implementation.	Successful implementation of the automatic recognition of qualifications; effective coordination and monitoring mechanisms established.	Ministries of Education; ENIC/NARIC offices; quality assurance bodies; Universities; ERI SEE	2020-2022
A.2.1.3 Remove obstacles to mobility of researchers	Support the implementation of the European Research Area commitments, support the implementation of the Declaration of Commitment to provide coordinated personalised information and services to researchers; capacity building and increased cooperation of EURAXESS networks in WB; support the implementation of the HR Strategy for Researchers incorporating the Charter & Code and alignment with the conditions for the European Accreditation Mechanism for Charter & Code based human resources management.	Enhanced preparedness of WB6 for Open Labour Market Researchers; increased capacity of the EURAXESS offices.	Ministries of Science; EURAXESS offices; Universities	2020-2022
A.2.2.	Enhanced quality of education systems			
A.2.2.1 Support alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance	Establish and support the network of WB QA bodies and agencies; networking and training of the national peer-reviewers involved in the external quality assurance procedures to ensure understanding and alignment with the European Standards and Guidelines for QA; support to development of procedures for quality assurance aligned with the European Standards and	Established network of WB QA bodies; raised capacities to carry out external quality assurance reviews; developed QA procedures aligned with the European Standards and Guidelines for QA; regular monitoring of QA practices in the WB.	Ministries of Education; ENIC/NARIC offices; quality assurance bodies; Universities; ERI SEE; ENQA:	2020-2022

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<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
		Guidelines for QA and prepare regular bi-annual reports on QA practices in the WB.		EQAR	
A.2.2	Support quality education and curricula development to for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers	The establishment of Joint Commissions of Competent Authorities and envisaged capacity building to be provided for the implementation of the Agreement will promote and support the alignment of education and training of Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers with the EU standards and therefore contribute to better quality of education in the region.	Established Joint Commissions of Competent Authorities for four professions; raised capacity for alignment with the EU standards for education and training of Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers.	Competent authorities for four professions	2020-2022
A.2.3.	Open Science and Open Access to Research Infrastructure				
A.2.3.1	Develop policies for Open Science and Open Access to Research Infrastructure	Support for development and coordination of Open Science policies on access to and preservation of scientific information in line with the Communication and Recommendation to Member States on access to and preservation of scientific information in the digital age; support the harmonisation of access and usage policies for research and education-related public research infrastructures, in line with the commitments defined in the ERA Roadmaps; support the development, adoption and implementation of national strategies for electronic identity for researchers giving them transnational access to digital research services in line with the commitments defined in the ERA Roadmaps through technical assistance, capacity building and regular meetings of the R&D Working Group.	Developed Open Science policies on access to and preservation of scientific information; Open Access Protocols to Research Infrastructure established and implemented; raised capacity to develop and implement national strategies for electronic identity for researchers.	Ministries of Science; EURAXESS offices; Universities	2020-2022
A.2.4	Employment and Social Affairs Platform				
A.2.4.1	Implement holistic approach to undeclared work in WB6	Support implementation of a holistic approach to innovative policy development on undeclared work through the establishment of a Western Balkans Network Tackling Undeclared Work and implementation of mutual assistance projects among relevant bodies of ministries of labour,	Established Western Balkans Network Tackling Undeclared Work; implemented recommendations on transformation of undeclared work into declared work through mutual assistance projects	Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs; Ministries of Economy; Tax	2020-2022

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<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
		economy and finance.	among relevant bodies of ministries of labour, economy and finance.	Authorities: Ministries of Finance; Labour Inspectorates; PES	
A.2.4.2	Strengthen capacities to deliver ALMP and increase performance of PES	Enhance capacities of ministries of labour and public employment services for developing and implementing priority employment policies on (1) supporting the transition from economic inactivity to employment and (2) employment of youth, women, long-term unemployed and vulnerable groups as areas of shared concern in the Western Balkans; enhance the performance of Western Balkans Public Employment Services through implementing the EU PES bench-learning and sustaining the process of mutual learning among Western Balkans PES offices.	Implemented recommendation for better design and monitoring of ALMPs; increased performance of Public Employment Services.	Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs; PES	2020-2022
A.2.4.3	Support meeting the EU requirements	Support Western Balkan Ministries of Labour and Public Employment Services in their endeavours on the EU accession path through active participation of the Western Balkans in the EU PES Network meetings, as well as other relevant EU networks, working and technical groups, support the EU-WB high-level meetings in the field of employment and social affairs, and support the development and implementation of national action plans for meeting the opening and closing criteria of Chapter 19 and Chapter 2 of the EU acquis, adhering to the principles of the European Social Pillar and preparing for the future use of the European Social Fund.	Increased WB participation in regular EU meetings at technical and high-level; national action plans for meeting the opening and closing criteria of Chapter 19 and Chapter 2 of the EU acquis developed, increased capacity to adhere to the principles of the European Social Pillar and increased capacity for the future use of the European Social Fund.	Ministries of Labour and Social Affairs; PES	2020-2022
A.2.5	Roma Integration				
A.2.5.1	Support gradual formalisation of undeclared work of Roma and	Provide expert and technical assistance and policy guidance to the governments to work on developing a comprehensive programme for	Developed programmes/legislation amendment proposals for gradual formalisation of work of undeclared Roma	Ministries responsible for employment	2020-2021

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)

Area of intervention / Actions	Description of actions	Expected results	Partners	Timeframe
legalisation of illegal dwellings	gradual formalisation of undeclared work, including linking the programme with existing active employment measures and social welfare measures. Provide expert and technical assistance and policy guidance in the area of housing in order to address illegal dwellings in substandard settlements, through developing funding proposals, legislative interventions or assistance in programming, including soft measures to assist legalisation or social housing for those not possible to legalise.	workers; Increased number of Roma that have transformed their work from undeclared to declared; Developed proposals for legislation amendments and funding proposals for legalisation of Roma owned illegal dwellings; Increased number of Roma have legalised their dwellings.	and social affairs; Public Employment Services; Roma civil society; Ministries responsible for housing and local self-governments	
A.2.5.2 Support introduction of Roma responsive budgeting	Enhance the institutional capacities for policy management, including evidence-based policy formulation through proper data collection exercises and robust monitoring mechanisms, and increased rate of policy implementation through performance-based Roma responsive budgeting of targeted and mainstream public programmes.	Governments applying Roma responsive budgeting in annual public budget cycle and increased capacities of public servants to apply Roma responsive budgeting; Increased and/or more adequate public expenditure for Roma integration policies; Improved mechanisms and capacities for data collection and monitoring of Roma integration policies; Strengthened link between public expenditure and impact on Roma integration,	Ministry of Finance; Line ministries; Statistical offices	2020-2021
A.2.5.3 Fight discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism	Promote recognition and instruments to fight discrimination against Roma and anti-Gypsyism, as the root-cause for the exclusion of Roma, through close cooperation and networking with media, conducting regional analyses of the impact and potential methods to respond to such phenomena, as well as promotion of structured dialogue with Roma civil society to encourage accountability.	Established and operational journalist network addressing anti-Gypsyism; Regional analysis of the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism and its effects in the EU enlargement region; Increased awareness of governments' representatives, the general public and Roma civil society about anti-Gypsyism,	Journalists and media; Roma civil society; Line ministries	2020-2021

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<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
			its recognition and possible methods for fighting it.		
A.2.6	Youth policies and inclusion of youth in decision-making				
A.2.6.1	Support development of targeted youth policies and inclusion of youth into decision-making	Support development of targeted youth policies to contribute to better opportunities for youth in the region and support inclusion of youth in policy decision-making through implementation of youth policy labs and support to establishment and development of national youth councils.	Increased engagement of youth in decision-making; increased quality and effectiveness of youth policies.	Ministries responsible for youth; youth organisations; Ministries in charge of programmes targeting youth (e.g. employment; education; etc.)	2020-2022
A.2.7	Address gender issues through development and implementation of policy framework for human capital development				
A.2.7.1	Supporting increased participation of women in business and labour market of the Western Balkans	Establishing public-private/civil dialogue in improving and utilising women employability skills; assessing the gender-segregated labour market needs and skills gaps; supporting development and implementation of a regional policy reform framework (strategy) and concrete actions for increasing women participation in business and labour market.	Improved employment policies and re-skilling efforts, conducive to increased number of women in business and labour market in the Western Balkans.	RCC's regional platform consisting of relevant government decision makers (not only in charge of gender equality, but other line ministries such as labour, economy, and others); European Commission; World Bank; other	2020-2022

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<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>	<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>	
			international partners; private sector; employers' associations; and others as per need		
A.3 Digital Integration and Implementation of Digital Agenda for WB (DAWB)					
A.3.1	Reduce roaming charges towards a roaming-free region and support broadband development				
A.3.1.1	Reduce roaming charges towards a roaming free region	Regular regional coordination and dialogue towards efficient implementation of the Regional Roaming Agreement (RRA2); permanent monitoring of market impact, with particular focus on the dynamics in volume of telecommunications traffic and prices reduction; regular regional meetings to ensure timely implementation of the roadmap for roaming charges reduction between WB and EU.	Reduced roaming charges within WB; coordinated work to implement RRA2 aimed at roaming free region; monitored and evidenced impact to support formulation of policies and remedy measure, if need be; reduced roaming charges between WB and EU.	ICT ministries and regulators; operators from WB	2020-2022
A.3.1.2	Support broadband development	Support the appointment of the contact points for BCO where not appointed yet to spur discussions on broadband development; facilitate integration of WB to EU BCO network programme and activities.	Established BCOs (or contact points) in all WB; networked BCOs from WB and increased interaction and collaboration among them; increased participation of WB in EU BCO network activities and work.	ICT ministries and other institutions active in broadband development	2020-2021
A.3.2	Strengthen digital skills and competence				
A.3.2.1	Establish regional framework to address digital skills needs and gaps	Establish a regional multi-stakeholder WG and regular regional coordination and meetings with participation of different actors from public and private sectors in WB; support development of digital skills strategies, priorities and actions through regular regional coordination and dialogue	Established network of experts from the region to address digital needs skills; maintained regular dialogue at regional level on digital skills needs and policies to address gaps; developed strategies/priorities/actions on digital	ICT ministries and other ministries responsible for education and skills; NGOs;	2020

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<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
		and peer-to-peer learning within the region and beyond; organise practical training workshops for targeted groups (i.e. women) through replication of best practices from the region and beyond	skills; some capacity programmes for targeted groups extended.	women associations, academia; multi-stakeholder WG; EC; ReSPA, CSOs	
A.3.2.2	Support integration of WB in EU frameworks and initiatives related to digital skills	Facilitate participation in EU Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition initiative and other initiatives/frameworks connected with digital skills, such as the EU's Digital Education Action Plan	Increased participation in Digital Skills and Jobs Coalition initiatives, EU Code Week, Digital Opportunity Traineeship etc.	ICT ministries and other ministries responsible for education and skills; academia from WB; EC	2020-2022
A.3.3	Improve e-services delivery and strengthen capacities on EU acquis alignment and enforcement				
A.3.3.1	Improve e-service delivery and interoperability in WB	Support establishment of a platform for recognition of certificates with e-signature (in line with eIDAS regulation) and linking digital registries for trusted services in WB; facilitate participation in EU work under European Interoperability Framework (EIF); facilitate participation of WB in EU programmes and frameworks such as ISA ² , etc.	Established platform for recognition of certificates with e-signature; mapped trusted services in WB; strengthened participation of WB under European Interoperability Framework; increased participation in ISA ² .	ICT ministries and other key line ministries; EC; CEFTA; ResPA	2021-2022
A.3.3.2	Support capacities for EU acquis alignment and enforcement	Provide support to increase capacities for alignment with the electronic communication-relevant acquis; organise dedicated workshops and meetings to enable peer-to-peer learning and expose WB with EU MS best practice; provide support to increase capacities for alignment with the acquis in area of data protection and e-privacy especially its cross-border dimension.	Enhanced capacity to align EU acquis in telecommunications and information society; enhanced capacity in the area of data protection and e-privacy; coordinated work within WB aimed at uniform implementation of the relevant acquis.	ICT ministries; institutions responsible for e-service; Data Protection Commissioners in WB; EC	2020-2022
A.3.4	High-level policy dialogue on digital transformation				

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)

<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
A.3.4.1	Permanent regional cooperation on digital transformation	Organise regular regional meetings through established topical WB Digital Summit (WB DS) to discuss the digital transformation challenges of the region; convene annual WB Digital Summit at the highest political level for steering strategic regional processes connected with digital transformation of WB; regional coordination/meetings and expert support to facilitate regional cooperation between innovation hubs, science parks, etc., networking and peer-to-peer learning.	Strengthened cooperation and dialogue among ICT ministries and regulatory authorities on WB digital transformation; Maintained high-level regional dialogue on WB digital transformation; increased cooperation among Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) in WB; peer-to-peer learning and best practice sharing with EU DIHs.	Steering Committee for DS; ICT ministries; ministries responsible for research and innovation; CSOs; DIHs from WB and EU; EC and other partners; representatives from industry	2020-2022
A.3.5	Improve cybersecurity				
A.3.5.1	Strengthen regional cooperation in the area of cybersecurity	Regional meetings of WB CSIRTs aimed at peer-to-peer learning, greater information sharing on cyber incidents and formulation of actions/measures to enable joint response to cyber threats; support capacity building for WB CSIRTs through organisation of workshops, trainings and cyber drills on as-needed basis. Liaise with other international organisations active in the field and in line with EU values and principles; expose CSIRTs to ENISA work/activity.	Sustained regional dialogue in the area of cybersecurity; strengthened information exchange among WB6 CSIRTs on cyber threats; extended capacity building in areas of cybersecurity and increased capacities of WB CSIRTs to address cyber incidents.	CSIRTs; DCAF; ITU; FIRST; OSCE; and other partners	2020-2022
A.3.6	Improve cooperation with local governments on digital services delivery				
A.3.6.1	Launch a strategic dialogue on the contribution of local governments in digital service delivery	Facilitate regional discussion on the role and contribution of local governments in digital service delivery as well as on broadband roll-out.	Established dialogue with local governments to improve digital service delivery.	NALAS; municipalities of WB capitals, CSOs	2021-2022

A. Objective 1: Support to the implementation of the Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Integration (MAP REA)					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
A.4 Sustainable growth and climate change resilience					
A.4.1	Support implementation of commitments under the Paris Climate Agreement and EU 2030 energy and climate policy framework and coordinated regional approach for environmental protection.				
A.4.1.1	Maintained regional policy dialogue on environment and climate change, under the framework of the RWG Env	Biannual high-level and operational meetings of regional coordination and decision-making body in the area of environment.	Enhanced regional cooperation and policy dialogue in the area of environment through intergovernmental platform.	Ministries of environment; EC; UN Environment; UBA; GWP Med; GIZ; EnC; GIZ; SWG RRD; WHO; and other partners	(started in 2016) 2020-2023 and onwards
A.4.1.2	Coordinated implementation of relevant regional interventions in the area of environment	Establishment of Nexus policy dialogue in WB region and introduction of new concept of prudent use of natural resources (integrated management of water, energy and food production); reducing vulnerability of road infrastructure to climate change in Western Balkans by mainstreaming EU best practices on climate proofing infrastructure and green infrastructure; support for the operation of Biodiversity Task Force and regional actions to improve protection and sustainable use of biological diversity and meet international biodiversity commitments, including the Strategic Plan for Biodiversity and its Aichi Biodiversity Targets adopted under the Convention on Biological Diversity as well as transposition of EU biodiversity related directives.	Strengthened national capacities to understand climate change and related risks; Strengthened national capacities to integrate climate change projections, climate proofing and green infrastructure in infrastructure development at national and regional level; Created environment for regional cooperation and investments in climate resilient infrastructure in Western Balkans; Regional Nexus Assessment Study; Nexus dialogue in selected boundary river basins; Improved regional collaboration and sustainable use of biodiversity; Regional representation at high-level and operational global biological diversity events and conferences with common Aichi targets;	Ministries of environment and water management; GWP Med; ADA; UN Environment; GIZ ORF BDU; IUCN; IPBES Secretariat; CBD Secretariat	(started in 2017) 2020

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<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
			Support to implementation of international biodiversity commitments.		
A.4.2	Analytical support in areas of joint regional interest - Technical Assistance				
A.4.2.1	Regional evidence and fact-based policy dialogue in the area of environment and sustainable growth	Support for development of topical analyses and studies concentrating on areas of regional environmental importance (air pollution, waste management, circular economy, human health, etc.).	Topical studies and scientific documents to support awareness raising and well-informed decision-making in the area of environment (waste, water management, air pollution, circular economy, health, etc.).	Ministries of environment; academia; CSO	2020-2023

A. Objective2: Political Cooperation, Good Governance and Security					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
B.1.	Political Cooperation				
B.1.1.	Support the functioning of SEECP CiO and SEECP platform	Coordination and synergy between the RCC, SEECP, and the EU through RCC Board and Coordination meetings; Assist implementation of SEECP C-i-O priorities and activities.	Better coordination and alignment of priorities between the RCC, SEECP and the EU.	SEECP; SEECP C-i-O; RCC Board; EC; EEAS	2020-2022
B.1.2.	Improved political cooperation in SEE	Regular political consultations with regional political stakeholders.	Improved political cooperation in SEE.	Governments in the region; RCC Board participants; NGOs; civil society	2020-2022
B.1.3.	Political support to the implementation of MAP REA	Enhancing political communication with respective governments in order to identify and mitigate political obstacles in the process of implementation of MAP REA and other strategic priorities envisaged	Political environment conducive to reform processes envisaged by the strategic goals of MAP REA and RCC's SWP.	Governments in the region; RCC Board;	2020-2022

A. Objective2: Political Cooperation, Good Governance and Security					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
		by SWP.		NGOs; civil society participants	
B.2.	Parliamentary cooperation				
B.2.1	Support the functioning of SEEC PA Committees	Provide expertise and relevant information for members of SEEC PA Committees.	Enhanced efficiency and cooperation of RCC-SEEC PA; Greater involvement of the parliamentary dimension in the regional cooperation process, including MAP implementation.	SEEC PA Committees	2020-2022
B.3	Good Governance - Justice reforms and rule of law				
B.3.1.	Support regional cooperation among judiciaries, judges, prosecutors and other legal professionals in EU law by facilitating and supporting networking and centres for life long education of judges, prosecutors and legal professionals.	Facilitate and support networking and centres for lifelong education of judges, prosecutors and legal professionals.	Improved competences, improved mutual trust and enhanced cross-border and regional cooperation among judiciaries in SEE.	European Judicial Training Network (EJTN); SEE ministries of justice; SEE Judicial Training Institutions; Councils for Judiciary	2020-2022
B.3.2.	Promotion of alternative dispute resolution	Facilitate networking, peer support and institutional building of associations of mediators and judges; public awareness raising.	Increased percentage of the cases resolved through alternative dispute resolution.	MoJ; Associations of Mediators; Media associations; Associations of Judges	2020-2022

A. Objective2: Political Cooperation, Good Governance and Security					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
B.4.	Security Cooperation				
B.4.1.	Support to CTV and PCVE efforts in SEE	Capacity building and networking of PCV institutions in SEE.	Enhanced and streamlined security cooperation in SEE.	RCC; EU; NATO; IISG; SEESAC; UK	2020-2022
B.4.2	Continued support to existing security cooperation mechanisms in SEE	Continued implementation of the RCC led CVE/FTF platform; Support networking and peer support of specialised cooperation formats in SEE (Southeast Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs' forum (SEEMIC) and Southeast Europe National Security Authorities forum (SEENSA)); Continued support to the IISG and SEESAC.	Reinvigorated regional cooperation of RCC run security cooperation platforms serving enhanced security in SEE.	RCC; SEEMIC; SEENSA; IISG; SEESAC	2020-2022

C. Horizontal activities					
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>		<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
C.1. Programming, monitoring, coordination					
C.1.1.	Programming implementation of SWP 2020-2022	Annual programming cycles to operationalise the implementation of measures put forward in the SEE2020 Strategy and SWP 2020-2022.	Needs-based programming document, reflecting regional priorities.	Governments, regional organisations and structures; international partners	2020-2022
C.1.2.	Monitoring of implementation of SWP 2020-2022	Structured annual monitoring cycles of the implementation of SWP 2020-2022, as well as SEE0202 Strategy and MAP REA through: (i) collection and analysis of qualitative and quantitative data;	Real-time understanding of progress achieved in implementing SWP 2020-2022, identification of areas needing more attention, providing recommendation on possible	National administrations ; NIPAC offices; national statistical	2020-2022

C. Horizontal activities				
<i>Area of intervention / Actions</i>	<i>Description of actions</i>	<i>Expected results</i>	<i>Partners</i>	<i>Timeframe</i>
	(ii) elaboration of regular reporting outputs (Annual Report on Implementation of SEE2020, MAP annual and abridged reports, visuals on progress and deliverables) (ii) undertaking perception-based assessments in the region through the Balkan Barometer.	adjustments; Understanding the perceptions of the public and business on the situation and trends in SEE.	offices; regional initiatives active in WB, DG NEAR	
C.1.3. Donor coordination	Annual donor coordination cycles involving SEE governments, active regional cooperation mechanisms, international organisations and other relevant stakeholders; Maintenance of the regional donor database, awareness raising and promoting its uptake and use.	Maintained regular regional donor coordination; streamlined implementation of regional priorities, better use of resources; Regional donor database maintained, consulted by relevant stakeholders and updated.	Donor community active in the region; DG NEAR; NIPAC offices; national aid coordination offices; regional initiatives active in WB	2020-2022
C.2. Extending partnerships				
C.2.1. Promoting and extending partnerships with non-governmental actors	Liaising and collaborating with the private sector, civil society organisations and media to create a broader regional coalition supportive of reform in SEE that will require support of a broad base of stakeholders.	Established structured communication with non-governmental actors directly involved in SWP implementation; civil society playing a bolder role in SEE; Broader base of support for reform in SEE promoted and assisted.	Non-governmental community	2020-2022

