



**Speech by RCC Secretary General Majlinda Bregu at the 6th Western Balkans Digital Summit
Sarajevo, 4 October 2023**

As an organisation that is an “*initiator*” and “*spiritus movens*” of the regional dialogue on Digital Agenda – it is my sincere pleasure to *welcome you*, on behalf of RCC, at the sixth consecutive Western Balkans Digital Summit – the *region’s flagship platform on digital transition!*

Rallying today and tomorrow on the Summit’s rich programme and *closing the full regional cycle of Digital Summit editions hosted across the WB capitals – is a great opportunity for self-reflection and forward thinking*. Reflections on the *miles and path* we walked together and the *results and impact* we take pride in showcasing. But also reflections and *objectives-setting* on the *many areas and avenues that need doubling down of our and EU’s efforts* so that the *digital* does not become *yet another divide for our region*.

The WB DS definitely steered a *qualitatively new phase in regional cooperation on digitisation*. It embodies upon the *principles of collaboration, inclusivity, deliverables-setting among the WB6 governments and regional and international partners* – and also it builds on the *strong contribution from the industry*.

The Summit *proliferated the regional cooperation areas*, spanning from roaming, collaboration on 5G, regional data flows, interoperability, cyber-resilience, digital skills and so on. It is these qualities and many more that make it a *unique process - one that is also firmly anchored in the overall Berlin Process Agenda*. Four years ago at the DS we kick-started the process of roaming between WB and EU-WB. As of this week, we *brought it to real life with the official entry into effect of EU-WB data roaming reductions, signed last year under the EU-WB Summit Roaming Declaration*.

After almost *a year of joint work*, under the facilitation and support from us in RCC and EC and with the political support from the EU and the Western Balkans, telecommunications operators from both the region and EU have not only met the requirements of the Declaration but, in many cases, *went beyond*.

This *landmark development*, whose reduction *results are nothing short of remarkable, is a real change* - already reshaping the mobile data landscape for citizens and travellers, as I am sure many of you who have travelled for the DS from EU can already attest.

Reductions that we now enjoy that go *up to 99%* empower both EU and WB citizens to *bridge distances* and *profoundly shift the way we connect with Europe*. As an illustration, after the reduction took place, our Bosnian friends will pay just 0.017 euros per one megabyte - a reduction of more than 99%. For Kosovan citizens - data costs from the regular pricelist of one operator are set to decrease by 147 times. In Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia 1 GB of data to be used in the EU in different roaming packages goes from maximum 12 EUR to, in some cases, even less than 2 EUR.

The *success* of the EU-Western Balkans Roaming Declaration is even *more noteworthy* as a testament to the power of regional cooperation, *transforming communication for the better, even in the face of complex challenges, political tensions, economic and various other struggles*.

Drawing strength from our shared sense of purpose, the achievement we celebrate these days also *builds on the earlier successes facilitated by the RCC*, such as the Roaming Free Western Balkans and mobility agreements enabling free travel and workforce movement. But also, other important successes centring on *innovations, youth entrepreneurship, creativity and our region's rich talent base* - such as *Balkathon* (whose 4th edition was just completed yesterday with 6 more authentic regional entrepreneurial journeys supported).

Our intense work towards a *regional online digital tool for digital pulse for our micro, small and medium-size enterprises* and for an *e-mentoring platform for peer-to-peer support aimed at young girls and women in STEM and entrepreneurship* are also *significant agendas unleashing our region's growth and digitisation potential*.

Dear all,

I started my address also with a call for *reflection on the areas that require MORE - in this rapidly changing digitised world that is in constant flux, transition and transformation*. More political commitment, more cooperation, more integration in EU policies and frameworks, more mature initiatives, more capacities and finances and *chiefly and ultimately* – all these underpinned by *more relentless work. And more forward-looking perspectives*.

Our region is trailing behind the EU when it comes to 5G, interoperability, digital skills, cyber preparedness. Only 35% of the WB citizens possessed basic digital skills in 2021, compared to the EU's impressive 54%.

WB yet needs to benefit from the *trusted European Digital Identity* that can be used to access a wide range of online services. The *list of areas* that needs *reinforced mobilisation* and *bridging various connectivity, skills, accessibility and other gaps* - is *neither a short nor an easy one*.

With the *Digital Summit's journey coming full circle across all WB economies* and with the *anticipated launch of the Growth Plan* and intensified work on *accelerated and progressive integration* – we need to set our *higher aims for accelerating the digital connectivity and accessibility in the region*.

By working on the many agendas aimed at *digitally transformed, yet inclusive Western Balkans – stronger together*, we are *sewing important parts of threads intricately woven into the fabrics of the Europeanisation of our region*. It is a path towards *more connected, accessible, and affordable future for all* that we in *RCC are fully committed and dedicated to*. Our *all-inclusive convening role, facilitation and expert capacities* will remain a *key backing on the challenging digitisation journey ahead!*