

**Speech by RCC Secretary General Majlinda Bregu
at the
Regional Summit on Growth and Convergence Plan**

29 February 2024, Tirana

Two messages beyond what I have already committed at the last meeting in Skopje.

1. **Time is ticking on defining the future of regional cooperation.** Economies are working in two parallel streams: their national reform agenda that would potentially advance their path on phasing-in policies; and secondly deepening regional economic integration among themselves, and providing access to EU Single Market.

On the 1st stream of work, the priority areas are clearly set and defined by the book from EC. We have heard many ideas during this period as to how you would like to advance on to accelerate phasing-in policies and benefit from the new financial instrument of EC.

As for the regional dimension - establishing a functional Common Regional Market within WB, the building blocks are yet to be defined by you. This is the only genuine regionally owned agenda, driven by WB, and visioning how you see this region cooperating/integrating closer together in 4 years from now.

Let me simplify and bring us a little back in time. During the intensive negotiations for the preparation of CRM, in 2020, we wanted to introduce actions that would provide to the region access to EU Single Market. We encountered hard resistance from Commission's side, as this would require changing the existing frameworks. Yet, here we are now, EC is opening to the region access to Single Market in 7 priority actions, or better say 7 success areas were you all have

delivered under CRM AP. Completing the work to which you have committed in the context of the CRM is a pre-condition for closer integration with the single market.

Now it is time to think out of the box on what can be next, how we will deepen and widen the cooperation in the region, what you all can deliver together in order that in few years from now, you can ask EU to provide you access to that specific area once your homework is done.

The work on the national reform agenda as part of the GP in an important scale that builds on the existing work in the Common Regional Market, and as such must be complementary, combining national and regional policy reforms in a consistent manner.

Both these work streams contribute to the same strategic goal – closer association with the EU's single market.

Naturally, the actions of reform agendas should feed the actions of the CRM 2.0, as most of them derive from the existing CRM, such as SEPA or digital skilling.

Today we will have a meeting with your teams to see what more could be done to establish a Common Regional Market in WB. Hopefully, at the upcoming Podgorica meeting, you would endorse the building blocks of the upcoming CRM.

2. Avoid institutional overlapping is my second message:

In the last months, we have noticed a discord when it comes to institutional setup. Starting with the name of this meeting, and the respective preparations for it. CRM, as the sole regionally owned instrument focused on the regional agenda, was born under BP framework. GP acknowledges that as well. The institutional setup of CRM and BP is well established and clear. We welcomed the strong messages given in the draft Joint Statement highlighting the bonds of the regional dimension of GP and BP.

Considering the overwhelming work for your reform agenda implementation and CRM on the other side, synergising and harmonization among the respective teams from your sides is becoming essential.