

*Excerpt of the interview by Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Majlinda Bregu to Deutsche Welle
/courtesy translation/*

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The Fifth Conference of Western Balkans Ambassadors took place in Berlin this week, as an initiative of the Embassies of Albania and Croatia to Germany, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation so as to exchange ideas on the future of the region. The novelty this year was the meeting's transatlantic focus with the participation of the US Envoy for the Western Balkans, Mr Matthew Palmer. Also present was Mrs Majlinda Bregu, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council.

Deutsche Welle: *Mrs Bregu, you took part in Konrad Adenauer Foundation's Western Balkans Ambassadors Forum in Berlin. What was the novelty of this conference?*

Majlinda Bregu: It is always good [to come together]. This time it was more interesting as it was the first in-person meeting after so many months of on-line work only. The important thing, however, is that in the framework of German Presidency the Albanian and Croatian Embassies in Berlin, and the Konrad Adenauer Foundation found an interesting moment to discuss both enlargement and transatlantic co-operation and its significance for the entire Western Balkans.

Deutsche Welle: *Matthew Palmer, the United States official with responsibility for the Western Balkans in the Department of State, was present in this meeting. Did you notice any competition between the EU and the US in terms of the Western Balkans?*

Majlinda Bregu: I can tell you in all honesty that I have no interest in seeing this as a matter of competition. The truth on the region is that whenever there has been good co-operation between the European Union and the United States, and whenever transatlantic co-operation has been strong, the problems have been easy to resolve.

Deutsche Welle: *The EU's Enlargement Commissioner, Olivér Várhelyi, also took part in the conference. He has already published his speech, in which, he mentioned, inter alia, the efforts that are being made to be able to have the first inter-governmental conferences with Albania and North Macedonia take place. Given the discussions you heard, are you of the opinion that this is likely to happen by the end of this year?*

Majlinda Bregu: I can tell you what I already know: that the European Commission is working very hard in this regard, along with countries that support the process and more so Germany which, at the moment, holds the Presidency of the Council of the European Union and has strongly supported the European perspective of the Western Balkans. I cannot say whether this will happen by the end of December 2020 as there are a lot of factors that still have a role to play, although I do very much hope that German Presidency will not be a lost opportunity.

Deutsche Welle: Mrs Bregu, let's now move to the documents that were signed in Washington DC last week. What impact will they have on your work as Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council?

Majlinda Bregu: I am in charge of an institution which is strongly linked with the European Union. I very much hope that the development of economic relations not only between Kosovo* and Serbia, but also the Pristina-Belgrade dialogue which commenced some years ago with the Brussels agreement, does continue and moves ahead. The region is very much in need of foreign investments. The region is also very much in need of overcoming this situation which will continue to be difficult next year as well. I am referring to the economic situation which became more severe due to the pandemic. For quite a while now, entrepreneurs have expressed the need for and necessity of smoother co-operation in the region. All economies in the region are intensively working together to prepare the Regional Economic Area (REA) 2, thus moving to the second phase of creating a common economic area, which was initially launched as part of the Berlin Process. In other words, things are moving although sometimes we do delay things more than we should, but that said, I hope November will be a good and positive moment in time.

Deutsche Welle: As the RCC Secretary General, would you, please, explain to us the difference between the Mini-Schengen Area and the Regional Economic Area you are trying to accomplish?

Majlinda Bregu: Any initiative that takes economic co-operation forward is always welcome and worth discussing. However, on the other hand, I think there is room in the Western Balkans to include all those good ideas that may come from initiatives, such as the so-called Mini-Schengen initiative, in this very framework of the Regional Economic Area on which we have been working for several years.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

The original interview in full is available at: <https://www.dw.com/sq/majlinda-bregu-na-duhet-njē-zonē-e-pērbashkēt-ekonomike/a-54876513>