



SUMMIT OF THE LEADERS

Sofia, 10 November 2020, 11.00 hrs (10.00 CET), VTC FORMAT

Talking Points of Secretary General *Majlinda Bregu*

Your excellences,

Dear Prime Ministers Zaev and Borisov,

Madam Chancellor,

Dear Commissioner,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In normal times, WB faces a huge amount of problems.

Troubles are never short. And a common goal is hard to find.

The pandemic disrupted all important life flows both globally and locally.

Some expert estimates say that the Western Balkans will experience the worst recession in the past two decades. The burden falls heavily on those least able to bear it.

The regional growth is forecasted to fall to -5.1%. GDP drop in the second quarter of this year is striking, in some cases up to -20%, largely due to collapse in tourism.

Check Against Delivery



As the unrelenting Covid-19 pandemic unfolded, the situation in the region became quite difficult. From lack of medical kits, Covid-19 medical uniforms, equipment/ventilators, recovery protocols, to shortage of doctors and nurses in our economies and goods being delayed in long queues on borders - and the main question became how to respond actively and quickly.

So the Green Lanes were established and **I am proud RCC** coordinated a prompt reaction between WB6 and EC, and was supported with the prominent work done by TCT and CEFTA. **Green Lanes are a remarkable path of cooperation through the pandemic.** Now, as part of the Common Regional Market Plan, we want the region to have joint border crossings, to save time and money. It has been calculated that by having all joint border crossings within the WB6 that work 24/7, the region would save 800.000.000 euro per year. Further, until we establish green lanes with EU MS bordering our region.

We are a small market composed of small economies.

As one of the fathers of EU, Paul Henri Spaak said: “there are two kinds of countries in Europe, small countries and small countries that have not yet realized that they are small”.

We are thankful that the EU swiftly supported the WB during the first months of pandemic and later adopted the Economic and Investment Plan to spur the economic recovery of the region.

But this will not be enough.

Now we know so much more about the necessity to help our business community survive than a year ago. We face the problems and concerns of young people, who get a degree but can't find a job and we want to give them a chance to work anywhere in the region, without visa constraints. Our commercial and trade relations in the region cannot run anymore on business as usual basis. We have to have a common market, individuals and business to move freely, borders to be kept open for the flow of goods



and medicines 24/7, we need digital services to serve people, and we need upskilling and innovations to run. We need diplomas and professions to be duly recognized.

Your excellences,

A new phase of regional economic integration will start today with the WB6 leaders' endorsement of CRM and Green Agenda both facilitated by RCC.

When REA was born and endorsed in Trieste a bit more than 3 years ago, WB6 leaders **agreed to give a chance to this region to build its own economic area by enabling unobstructed flow of goods, services, capital and highly skilled labor, making the region attractive and fit for investment.**

REA paved the way through a mixed track record of success stories and not only for the Common Regional Market.

It helped citizens and business community **leverage the necessity of regional cooperation even more** - 77% believe in cooperation; it helped **politicians perceive that transformation of our this region, though being difficult, means only one thing: the need for a lot of good will, dedication, readiness for compromise, mutual respect and a shared distaste for conflict.** We know this plan is not going to transform the region overnight or to the rhythm of our prayers. **But setting bold goals can help and it will accelerate the change if we can work together. That transformation will have no victims, only beneficiaries.**

That said, on behalf of RCC I am honored to have had our share of work in shaping this document. Developing Common Regional Market was not a comfortable journey, but it is justified because destination is worthwhile. It is a great plan based on four freedoms, the same as the EU single Market, strengthened with Investment, Digital, Industry and Innovation. **We are proud to have shouldered the heavy burden of this process together with NEAR, regional organizations, IFIs, CSO and Business Community, and**



other partners. But, WB6 governments are the authors, holders and doers of making CRM a reality.

This plan facilitates free movement in the region, enables business community to experience the potential provided by a common market based on EU single market model, and highlights the necessity of upskilling the working age population which is shrinking in the region.

Besides aligning with the EU Single Market, the region reached another important milestone with Leaders' Declaration on the Green Agenda that aligns with EU Green Deal. Climate change is unfolding slower than the pandemic, but is constantly ruining lives in this region.

I hope this Declaration will support and accelerate changes and processes in the region with the overarching goal of addressing climate change.

I wish to thank everybody who entrusted us with this work.

I am confident that the Hall of Otherness that separates the region will soon be Togetherness that enriches us!

Finally, I wish to thank both Chairs for the organization of this Summit, although marked by a series of complications. I am confident that CRM born under the Germany Presidency of the Council of the EU will have its first results to show in the coming Berlin Process that will be chaired by Germany.