**TALKING POINTS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL
COOPERATION COUNCIL, MAJLINDA BREGU
9th Regional Security Coordination Conference dubbed "Working Together in Times of
Global Uncertainties"
7 November 2024, Sarajevo**

**Your Excellency Ambassador Soreca,
Dear Prefect Gambacurta,
Dear Madam Mogherini,
Dear friends, colleagues, and partners,**

It is a great honour to welcome you all to the 9th Annual Regional Security Coordination Conference here in Sarajevo. I would like to extend my gratitude to the Italian Government, particularly the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, for their unwavering support in making this conference a focal point for advancing regional and international security cooperation.

Why RCC decided years ago to enlarge its focus on security matters and launch, exactly 4 years ago, the SecuriMeter as an instrument that assesses security-related perceptions of the Western Balkans citizens?

Quite simple; the socio-economic development is deeply intertwined with security challenges, such as conflict, terrorism, political instability, cyber threats, public service, disinformation, migration, depopulation, energy security, and so on and so forth. **Our region is affected by nearly every global challenge.**

And it is not only the war in Ukraine or Middle East, but the situation in the Western Balkans largely affects the security in Europe too.

This year's theme "Working Together in Times of Global Uncertainties" resonates profoundly with the necessity of cooperation vis-a-vis security challenges.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

*A*s Jean Monnet, one of Europe's founding visionaries, once said *"People only accept change when they are faced with necessity, and only recognize necessity when a crisis is upon them".* Today, we find ourselves in precisely such a moment.

The ongoing global conflicts underscore this reality and surged the need to create a new era of security cooperation across the EU and NATO and their allies.

So what do citizens in the region consider as threat to their security?

1. **The top five issues that impact security in the Western Balkans are:**
   -economic situation,
   - corruption,
   -depopulation,
   -organised crime, and
   -governmental leadership.

2. Citizens believe Western Balkans is not a secure region and the threat of a potential war is present. **One in two citizens consider that the war in Western Balkans is very likely to happen.**

3. **Just 52% of citizens feel secure within their own economies,** while unfortunately citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina **(59%) and citizens of Serbia (58%) are afraid of a possible war in their economy.**

4. **Depopulation and emigration** are not just demographic challenges – now they have become security issues. **One in four citizens in WB6 is thinking or is already in the process of emigrating, for reasons such as higher salary, better life quality and opportunities for their children.** Our population has already shrank, as more than 5 million citizens of WB left during the last 10 years.

5. **Cybersecurity is the most important topic of today and not a threat of the future**. In just the last year, there has been a 40% increase in cyber threats in the Western Balkans.

Dear all,

Our security landscape is rapidly evolving. Migration isn't just a flow of people; it's a national security issue. Brain-drain is now a security threat, not just an economic issue. We face climate change, natural disasters, and the ever-growing menace of cyber threats.

We are permanently under attack. Now, our personal lives can be easily violated and invaded at any moment by a cyberattack. **The internet is less and less Spotify and more and more WannaCry,** and **there is still a lack of clarity about how destructive cyber weapons actually are.**

Security today extends beyond traditional defence. **With more than 40% of citizens in the region spending more than 4h daily on the internet, cybersecurity is no longer merely a matter of national security but has emerged as a regional security challenge.**

Cybersecurity is borderless, as a cyberattack on the critical facilities of one economy can affect other economies in the region. **We are in dire need of prioritising awareness, knowledge, and skills, aligning legislation with the EU, and joining forces with the EU on several fronts.**

As we tackle these challenges, it's clear that our focus can't just be on technical solutions. Rebuilding trust in our institutions - both online and offline - is equally important.

But it's not all challenges. There are positive signs across the region.

The SecuriMeter report also shows that citizens overwhelmingly support deeper cooperation with EU and NATO structures for enhanced security.

As EU is embarking to build a "real European Defence Union" and to "create a true Single Market for Defence", the Western Balkans has to be kept within the arm's length while monitoring the security challenges.

Thus, our commitment to building a resilient, adaptive, and forward-looking security framework is a must. By working together on cybersecurity, firearms control, climate resilience, and more, we are not just enhancing security for the Western Balkans but for all of Europe.

In closing, let me emphasize that the Regional Cooperation Council remains fully dedicated **not just to talking about the challenges but to building solutions.**

To all participants, I wish you productive sessions.

Thank you.