



Regional Cooperation Council

# ANNUAL REPORT

OF THE  
SECRETARY GENERAL  
OF THE  
REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL

2018-2019



Co-funded by the European Union

good.  
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Sarajevo, June 2019

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# FOREWORD

This is my first foreword to the Annual Report of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). I have assumed the position of the Secretary General with motivation and enthusiasm to contribute to an organisation which puts the benefit of the people in South East Europe at the forefront of its efforts. The role of the RCC in this regard has been undeniable and recognised by all of its participants and partners. As a sui generis organisation, spanning geographically and thematically, yet with clear focus and specific goals, it carries a truly transformative potential. In 20 years since the establishment of Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, considerable progress has been achieved in the region.



*Majlinda Bregu, RCC Secretary General  
(Photo: Hhodi Hysa).*

However, the region still faces economic, social and political challenges. Recent development shows that cooperation is not a given fact, but rather a result of good will, commitment and trustful dialogue. Although 74% of the citizens believe that regional cooperation is a good thing to transform their lives, 44% of them have not seen any improvement in the recent years (Balkan Barometer 2019).

With the support of participating governments and the European Union, a Regional Economic Area was established to ensure the development of an area where goods, services, investments and skilled workers can move without obstacles. In this respect, the past year brought about the first major tangible results. Poznan Summit under the Berlin Process, to be held in Poland in July, will be a crucial moment to showcase the road that has been walked - as well as the road yet ahead.

A Regional Roaming Agreement was concluded and progress is being made towards agreeing on the Declarations on recognition of academic diplomas and on mutual recognition of professional qualifications. These agreements represent an important step toward the establishment of a Regional Economic Area. We wish to see our region interconnected and integrated, because only in this way will the citizens be able to reap the benefits of the true potential which the region holds.

Over the past year RCC staff has been working relentlessly to push forward these agendas by providing expertise, facilitating negotiations and fostering a climate of mutual trust and cooperation. At the same time, building on the past experiences and successes, RCC has shaped an ambitious, yet realistic vision for the next triennial strategy, SWP 2020-2022.

The Strategy will carry forward and transcend the SEE2020 Strategy, integrating the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the EU strategic goals "Towards a sustainable Union by 2030". Our aim and



focus is on utilising the full regional potential, by enhancing regional connectivity through strengthened cooperation and socio-economic integration of the region into a shared, inclusive and competitive space.

Undoubtedly, the future of the region is in the region's hands. The past year has clearly shown the potential for both success and pitfalls. It is our task to choose which path we will take. There is no other way to a connected, integrated, democratic, and secure South East Europe but to pursue the European values.

Majlinda Bregu  
Secretary General  
Regional Cooperation Council

## SUMMARY

During the reporting period April 2018 - May 2019, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has devoted its utmost attention to delivering positive change and facilitating necessary reforms in the region, aimed at speeding up economic convergence with the EU and (re)connecting the Western Balkans economies with the global and EU value chains.

The work was buttressed by close cooperation and coordination between the RCC and consecutive Slovenian and Bosnian SEECP Chairmanships-in-Office (C-i-O), whose priorities perfectly matched the essence of shared regional aspirations. The support of the EU has been indispensable in this respect.

The commitment of regional governments to processes of regional cooperation, as well as European support to these efforts and the EU perspective, was reiterated once again at the EU-Western

Balkans Summit organised by the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in May 2018 and at the London Summit of the Berlin Process in June 2018. Euro-Atlantic integration process remained a key priority for RCC aspirants. This strategic orientation has also been positively reflected against the general sentiment of citizens across the region. Findings of two consecutive Balkan Barometer (BB) surveys for 2018 and 2019 have shown resolute support towards the EU perspective of the region and even stronger support to the regional cooperation.

Signing of the historic Prespa Agreement on the name issue between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia added significantly to such positive trends, thus boosting the hope that hard work on reforms, combined with political prudence, represents an indispensable amalgam for viable change.







Implementation of Multi-annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) has brought the region a comprehensive transformative agenda. This report coincides with MAP REA's important trajectory from a grand plan and vision to some concrete deliverables in the fields of mobility and digital integration. The final phase of implementation of the South East Europe 2020 Strategy (SEE2020) and the RCC's triennial Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) have also paved the way for stepping up real transformation along these and other lines of intervention.

RCC worked in close synergy with its stakeholders and partners to implement key flagships of the SWP 2017-2019: skills and mobility, connectivity and competitiveness. Notable progress has been achieved across the board, in time to be presented at the Poznan Summit of the Berlin Process in July 2019.

In terms of skills and mobility, RCC has been driving the process of removing obstacles to the mobility of professionals and researchers. Emulating the



Key results of the implementation of Multi-Annual Action Plan on Regional Economic Area (MAP REA) were presented at the panel dedicated to this topic of the Economy Ministers' Meeting of the London Western Balkans Summit held in Vienna on 4 July 2018.

practice existing in the EU, ensuring mutual recognition of academic and professional qualifications between regional participants would support the development of skills and education, expand the labour pool and contribute to sustainable growth. The formal signing of an agreement<sup>1</sup> that will lead to mutual recognition of four pilot professions - doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers - is expected at Poznan Summit of the Berlin Process, and it would represent a very encouraging step forward.

When it comes to connectivity, RCC devoted its focus to supporting digital transformation and sustainable development. The Digital Summits held in April 2018 in Skopje, followed by Belgrade in April 2019 represent a milestone in MAP REA implementation. Furthermore, they have confirmed the political will to continue moving forward in regional cooperation, assisted and facilitated by the RCC.

The intensive, wide-range efforts led by RCC brought about an agreement of crucial importance which broadens the geographical scope and further reduces roaming prices among the Western Balkans economies, paves the way for a Roam Like at Home regime in 2021, as well as opens the possibility to reduce roaming prices between the region and the EU.

Integration of the region to create a single investment space has continued in the previous year, from endorsing the Regional Investment Reform Agenda for harmonising investment policies to developing and adopting individual-economy reform agenda plans, in close coordination with not only governments but also experts and the private sector.

Overarching conditions for real and sustainable growth are the rule of law and security. Activities in the field of rule of law have been directed towards establishing the basis for improved intra-regional

<sup>1</sup> At time of the endorsement of the Annual Report by the RCC Board, Declaration on Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications was endorsed at the Poznan Summit. The Western Balkans Leaders in Poznan took note that, despite the progress made, the negotiations of a Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications were not possible to be completed in time for the Poznan Summit and they committed to work to find appropriate forms to ensure the timely delivery of results in this regard.



Western Balkans sealed the deal at the 2nd WB Digital Summit on 4 April 2019 in Belgrade by signing the Regional Roaming Agreement enabling RoamLike@Home system (RLAH) for its citizens as of 2021.

judicial cooperation and mutual trust-building. RCC cooperated closely with national anti-corruption agencies, contributing to capacity-building in corruption proofing and corruption risk assessment, focusing in particular on the health sector. The overarching aim of these efforts continues to be promoting transparency and independence of judicial and public sectors.

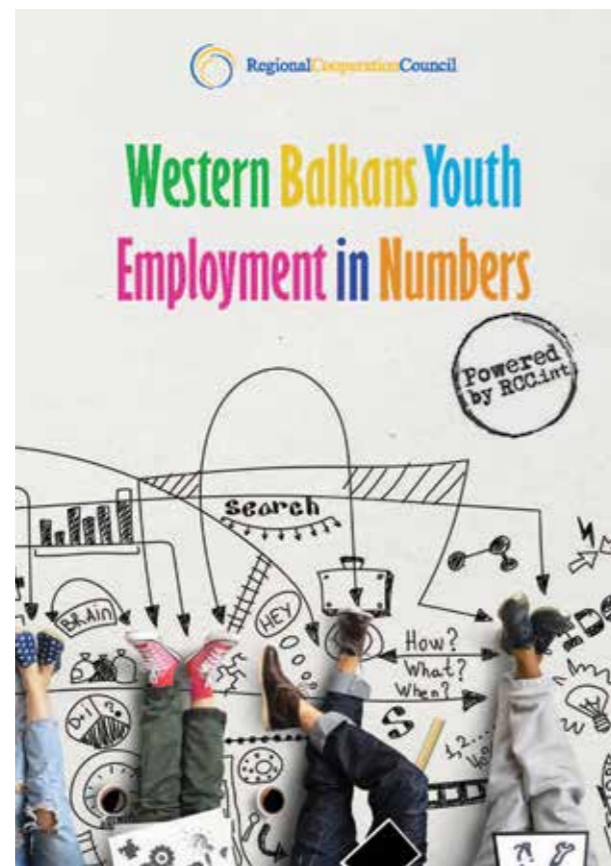
Security cooperation gained further importance both at regional level and in the EU integration process. Along with the implementation of the SEE countering violent extremism platform, assisting and coordinating regional security activities in this area, RCC's efforts were focused on ensuring coordinated, streamlined and efficient regional actions in the implementation of priorities. RCC has nurtured close cooperation with key international partners in this respect. Special emphasis has been given to support the EU backed Integrative Internal Security Governance Initiative (IISG) as well as the implementation of the Regional Roadmap on small arms and light weapons, coordinated by SEESAC.

Moreover, implementation of the three projects - Employment and Social Affairs Platform, Triple P Tourism, and Roma Integration 2020 - has continued apace, targeting inclusive growth, social cohesion, mobility and creating conditions for inclusive Roma integration into societies. Thanks to the financial support of the EU combined with Open Society Funds for the Roma Integration 2020 pro-

ject and strong commitment of all regional stakeholders, RCC-led efforts in these three important societal aspects have contributed enormously to better understanding of the course of present and future actions. Roma 2020 has worked on innovative approaches to employment of Roma. The project has compiled an expert report on the potentials for Roma employment in the EU enlargement region that has been discussed among governments. This served as the starting point for the policy advice to the governments, with a view to adopt effective programmes to increase the employment among Roma in the region. This will ensure gradual transition from social welfare and undeclared work towards formal decent employment, that would benefit the many Roma (average rate in the region is around 61% according to EC/UNDP/WB regional survey) engaged on the informal labour market in the region. The issue is a particular focus of the second phase of the action. The Triple P tourism project widens the platform for better regional synergy in this industry while ESAP has been pursuing, among other things, new models of social investment policies in building human capital in the region as well as importance of striking the right balance between welfare and economic development. Even though more than 700 thousand jobs have been created in the Western Balkans since 2012, labour markets still exhibit low activity and employment rates, high unemployment, and specifically youth unemployment, persistent long term unemployment, and widespread informal employment.







# GENERAL TRENDS IN REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE AND THE ROLE OF THE RCC

Entering the final year of the triennial strategy for 2017-2019 has served as an opportunity to reflect on the actual achievements accomplished since the Trieste Summit and the commitment to implement a regional economic area. The period that followed further mainstreamed RCC's efforts on greater economic and social integration through easier flow of capital, people, goods and services within the SEE and between the SEE and the EU, underpinned by better governance, rule of law and security cooperation. Within this operational framework, RCC made a decisive shift towards a more streamlined, better integrated and result-oriented approach to implementation and towards forging strong partnerships with other regional organisations and development partners around strategic result areas that are crucial for leveraging each other's resources. This period has also seen RCC embedding regional reform agendas into high-level, structured political processes that are able to yield multilateral binding instruments that govern the implementation of reforms.

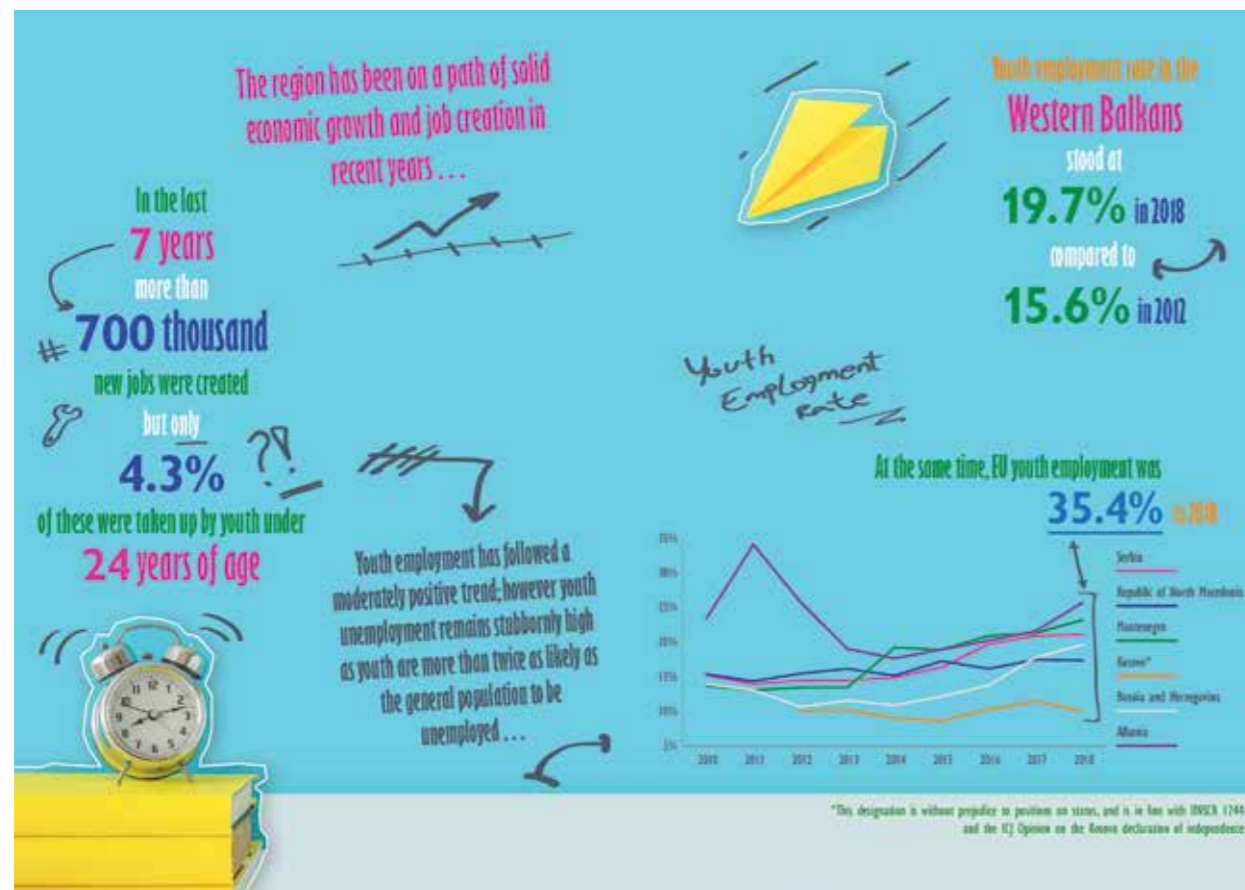


The actions geared towards enhancing the mobility of people, easing communication and business through digitalisation, attracting and facilitating investment through harmonisation of investment policies, implemented throughout in the spirit of all-inclusiveness and regional ownership have proven crucial for regional as well as individual-economy progress, and attainable where there is will and commitment.

Important high-level events which had taken place in the past year have shown that both regional governments and the European Union are keenly aware of challenges which emanate from the most pressing needs such as better employment oppor-

tunities, coherent economic convergence with EU trends, better social cohesion and inclusion as well as rule of law and security prospects. These challenges have not only lead to the flagship approach of the new Enlargement communication, but have also better shown the rationale behind such approach, as developed in the SEE2020 Strategy and the Multi-annual Action Plan. Better recognition of these challenges has nurtured more coherent actions and consequently has increased the visibility of the RCC and enhanced awareness of the RCC's role in the process.

Having in mind RCC's political raison d'être, its statutory obligations and the overall organisation-







Participants of the RCC Annual Meeting held on 23 April at Brdo pri Kranju in Slovenia (Photo: RCC/ Tamino Petelinsek).

al framework, close collaboration with the SEECP participants and Chairmanships-in-Office remained one of the most important supportive elements in the implementation of the SWP 2017-2019 and MAP REA. Besides endorsement of the Annual Report of the RCC's Secretary General (SG) and nominations for the new SG of the RCC, the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting reaffirmed the commitment for intensified regional cooperation, good neighbourly relations in SEE and support to progress in the EU enlargement agenda.

The fruitful Chairmanship by Slovenia was completed with the RCC-SEECP high-level events held in Brdo Pri Kranju on 23-24 April 2018, which highlighted the importance of an inclusive regional cooperation in SEE for further development of stability and prosperity in the region and progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration. They resulted in several very important outcomes: election of the new RCC SG Majlinda Bregu (January 2019-January 2022) and Igor Luksic (January 2022- January 2024) subsequently; agreement on the next C-i-O's for 2018-2019 and 2019-2020 and endorsement of the Annual Report of the RCC SG for 2017-2018.

Overall, the Slovenian SEECP C-i-O brought effectiveness and dynamism to the regional cooperation

process in SEE as well as increased relevance of the SEECP. It also created the context for enhanced regional cooperation on topics of major importance such as regional economic integration, security challenges, youth and parliamentary cooperation.

Priorities of the current SEECP C-i-O, under the motto "Better Connectivity for a Better Life", complement perfectly the efforts of the RCC toward a genuinely connected, integrated region for the betterment of life of its citizens. RCC also provided assistance to the parliamentary dimension of SEECP, aware of the need to involve legislatures and legislative processes both in the process of regional cooperation and European integration.

Both Slovenian and BiH SEECP C-i-Os ensured the involvement and commitment of regional governments to the cooperation process and European integration and worked closely with the RCC on the implementation of regional initiatives and priorities.

Furthermore, the Fifth Plenary Session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly, held on 13-14 April 2018 in Ljubljana, adopted the Final Declaration, praising the role of the RCC, and urging all its participants to seek expertise and support from RCC

Secretariat, when deemed necessary, for all relevant regional activities.

EU-Western Balkans Sofia Summit, hosted by the Bulgarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in May 2018, noted the progress which has been achieved as well as that the path to EU membership can only be cleared by comprehensive political and socio-economic reforms. Sofia Declaration and Priority Agenda, with their emphasis on regional cooperation, commitment to Euro-Atlantic values, socio-economic transformation focused on connectivity and security agenda, align fully with the RCC mission. The invitation and participation of the RCC at this event confirmed indisputably RCC's importance and role in regional cooperation.

The London Summit of the Berlin Process, held in July 2018, reiterated largely the same message. Without doubt, the Berlin Process has been fully operationalised, with achievements noted across the board. Particularly welcome were the endorsement of the Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA), opening of negotiations on mutual recognition of professional qualifications in the region and the Western Balkans Digital Summits, co-organised by the RCC.

An incredible boost to the regional hopes came in the form of Prespa Agreement, in June 2018, on the decades-long name dispute between Greece and the Republic of North Macedonia. The agreement was warmly welcomed as a diplomatic success, an example of resolving bilateral disputes to mutual benefit, and in very concrete terms, as opening a key door in the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Commitment by the RCC to the regional agenda has driven the cooperation process yet further in the reporting year. By establishing a climate of dialogue, facilitating negotiations, providing analyses and expertise, the RCC assisted its regional participants to transform declarations and promises into tangible results. Concrete reforms pave the way for long-term sustainable development and are the only path to convergence of the region with EU standards. The SWP 2017-2019 in its final year

of implementation made the maximum use of the potential for improvement, aware that real results are most necessary to ensure growth that is inclusive, smart, sustainable and integrated, in a secure and democratic environment.

This awareness was affirmed by all participants of the now traditional RCC-organised working breakfast of the Western Balkans Foreign Ministers and the Commissioner for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement, Johannes Hahn, at the margins of the UN General Assembly session in September 2018. Foreign ministers, together with Commissioner Hahn and Secretary General of the RCC, concluded that the credibility of MAP REA hinges on reaching specific goals which produce actual effects.

The Fifth Meeting of the SEE 2020 Governing Board held in July 2018 confirmed that economically, the region had returned back on the growth path, with the return of the employment and the regained workforce. However, there is still much more work to be done in order to ensure faster convergence with the EU. Additionally, presentation of the An-







nual Report on Implementation for 2018 revealed that there is a renewed demand in the main export markets that, in combination with increasing domestic demand and private investment, has brought the region back onto a growth path which led to a much-needed rebalancing of trade and increase of employment.

These efforts, as well as others in the fields of investment, mobility and connectivity, were grounded in the profound understanding that the reforms can only come to fruition in an environment that is safe, supported by the rule of law, inclusive and recognising the many sources of its potential. Cross-cutting projects implemented by the RCC, namely the Employment and Social Affairs Platform, Roma Integration 2020 and Triple P Tourism Project, have continued to be essential in this regard. It is an acknowledgment of their work that so far ESAP and Roma Integration 2020 have been approved for extension for the forthcoming period.

Singing of the Regional Roaming Agreement, at the second Digital Summit in April 2019 in Belgrade, has already been of crucial importance. Decreasing

substantially the roaming charges is paving the way for a roaming-free region in 2021. The successful conclusion of the Roaming Agreement represents an enormous economic gain for the region and its citizens, and delivers an invaluable political lesson on the benefits of cooperation. Indeed, it represents the most tangible deliverable achieved in the implementation of MAP REA so far.

The upcoming Poznan Summit of the Berlin Process in July 2019 is expected to be the opportunity to showcase the achievements of the SWP 2017-2019 and MAP REA. The preceding period has witnessed intensive negotiations in the field of mobility to be successfully concluded with the signing of the Agreement on mutual recognition of professional qualifications for the doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers and a Declaration on mutual recognition of academic qualifications. Synergy was also sought with organisations and initiatives relevant in the implementation of specific activities within the SWP and MAP REA, and the status of the RCC was affirmed and enhanced by its participation at events important for the region and its future, such as various ministerial meetings, COWEB meetings, international conferences, summits and panels. Throughout the reporting period, RCC worked closely with all EU institutions, and especially with relevant Directorates-General of the European Commission.

On the 22<sup>nd</sup> of March 2019 the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the EU organised a brainstorming meeting, in cooperation with SEEC C-i-O Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Sarajevo, in the SEEC C-i-O format: Streamlining regional cooperation in South-East Europe: Enhanced regional ownership, synergy and cooperation. Its aim was to launch a reflection process on streamlining regional cooperation mechanisms by making better use of available resources and maximising benefits for partners in the region, so that both the impact of their activity and the funds allocated by the EU and other donors would be maximised. The feedback on the event was very positive, the participants (MS EU, COM, SEAE, SEEC C-i-O participants) appreciating the initiative and launching of this debate as a good point for analysing the possibilities of optimising the nu-

merous regional cooperation structures. The invitation and participation of the RCC at this event confirmed indisputably RCC's importance and role in regional cooperation.

Regional cooperation in the field of security is undeniably the most, if not the only, effective way of addressing modern-day, trans-border security challenges, in particular when it comes to countering terrorism (CT) and preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) efforts. RCC has intensified its support to efficient, streamlined regional security cooperation in close cooperation and consultation with the EU, NATO, OSCE, UN and its specialised agencies, and other relevant actors.

The advantages of the uniqueness of RCC's role in security cooperative order in SEE, support to peer-learning, exchange of experience and expertise, harmonisation and streamlining of security policies in order to maximise efficiency and avoid duplication of efforts has gained great recognition in SEE and among key partners. Moreover, led by the same reasoning, RCC has continued to support and facilitate the regular work of SEE National Se-

curity Authority Chiefs' Forum (SEENSA) and SEE Military Intelligence Chiefs' Forum (SEEMIC). RCC has remained mindful of the importance of ensuring the principle of all-inclusiveness, while working on well-coordinated, efficient and streamlined action. As one of the priorities in security cooperation and in order to support implementation of the necessary reforms and deliver tangible results in the implementation of the EU-backed security agenda, the RCC's political and operational support to the IISG and to the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearing House for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), as joint RCC-UNDP initiative, has been instrumental.

The new Secretary General, Ms. Majlinda Bregu, who assumed office on 1 January 2019, continued and enhanced the practice of maintaining close contact with the beneficiaries and key international supporters of the regional cooperation process. She began her mandate with a series of political consultations in the SEE region, the EU and the RCC partners. Mrs. Bregu used these opportunities to emphasise the benefits of the work done by the RCC, but also to present the new vision for the pe-



RCC officially marked the beginning of its 3-year project dedicated to the development and promotion of tourism in the Western Balkans, in Sarajevo on 28 June 2018.





riod ahead which will be reflected in the new SWP 2020-2022, tailored to deliver realistic and tangible deliverables to the benefit of the people in SEE. “Stepping up the Transformation” will be the guiding principle of RCC’s future engagement which will build and expand on the results from the previous period. Regional cooperation in SEE has matured through a web of regular contacts, structured via platforms at the highest political level, but also at the expert and technical levels. The regional cooperation remains a key catalyst for the enlargement process and is a key enabling factor for comprehensive reforms and the return to sustainable economic growth. Current economic policies in the region leave a lot to be desired, if assessed from a growth-oriented point of view. For the most part, public investment in education, science, innovation and digitisation is far from sufficient. Necessity of better job opportunities for women in the region and quality gender mainstreaming in all walks of life remain challenges. Inclusion of local communities in the overall regional reform process seems to be indispensable for stepping up the real transformation of the region as well as strengthening the role of parliaments where this transformation has to be approved. The development of a globally competitive skills base and research systems which foster innovation is a key factor for economic recovery and sustained growth. The ability to use and transfer technology, underpinned by information and communication technologies and infrastructure, will be crucial in moving WB towards knowledge-driven, globally competitive economies. In order for the growth to be sustainable, the region should also address longer-term challenges brought by climate change, rapid technological progress and negative demographic trends.

Additionally, communication activities of the RCC, following the RCC Communications Strategy 2017-2019 continued to successfully promote better and more thorough understanding on what the RCC stands for, what it does, why, who with and who for, while at the same time increasing general awareness of the benefits of the EU membership. A shift has taken place in information dissemination approach, with its target audiences widened to be more inclusive, by adding new communica-

tion channels to its distribution network as well as establishing many new partnerships in the region and the EU.

2019 will undoubtedly prove to be a year of delivery, where numerous efforts by RCC Secretary General and all of the RCC staff will become visible in terms of signed agreements, but even more so when implementation of these agreements kicks in. Step by step the region is adopting EU modus operandi. While this should be welcomed from the perspective of the accession process, even more importantly it will bring about real changes in people’s lives and living standards. Economy and security still rank high, according to the newest BB findings. The progress has been noted, but neither the RCC nor its participants should now falter. While the road ahead is still difficult, the last three years have shown that it is not impossible.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN PRIORITY AREAS OF REGIONAL COOPERATION IN SEE AND THE ROLE OF RCC

Implementation of the SEE 2020 through a flagship approach, developed into a concrete result-oriented programme in the shape of a final sprint in the implementation of SWP 2017-2019 as well as the MAP REA as a firm set of pillars, continued to be the cornerstone of RCC’s work. The plans were carefully crafted to address priority areas for regional integration and cooperation, all geared to support socio-economic development.

The guiding deadline to deliver on a set of goals has presented itself in the form of the Poznan Summit of the Berlin Process, to be held in Poland in July 2019. As an opportunity to take stock of the recent developments in the enlargement region, reports on positive and specific moves forward will boost the confidence of both the RCC as-

pirants and their European and international partners. It is of crucial importance that initiatives such as MAP REA do not remain at the level of a declared commitment, but present themselves in real form, with benefits enjoyed throughout the region.

The progress in priority areas that has been achieved in the past year, and building upon the work beforehand, meets these expectations. At Poznan, RCC and WB leaders will be able to note great steps in terms of investment integration, digital agenda, mobility, as well as increasing relevance of cooperation in other areas, such as justice, security, tourism, employment and social affairs, Roma integration, and others. As every year since 2015, the Summit will testify to the overar-



Implementation of the SEE 2020 through a flagship approach, developed into a concrete result-oriented programme in the shape of a final sprint in the implementation of SWP 2017-2019 as well as the MAP REA as a firm set of pillars, continued to be the cornerstone of RCC’s work.



ching importance of interconnecting the region, with the announcement of an annual connectivity investment package, also covering transport and energy.

The main achievements by Poznan which should be marked are in the field of digital: the new Regional Roaming Agreement which will remove roaming charges within the WB region by July 2021; Declaration on Mutual Recognition of Academic Qualifications and Mutual Agreement on Recognition of Professional Qualifications for Doctors of Medicine, Dentists, Architects and Civil Engineers, which will ease the movement of people and the process of practicing one's profession in other WB economies; and the Roma Declaration on advanced measures for integration of Roma population in the region, thus specifically targeting a social dimension in economic development.

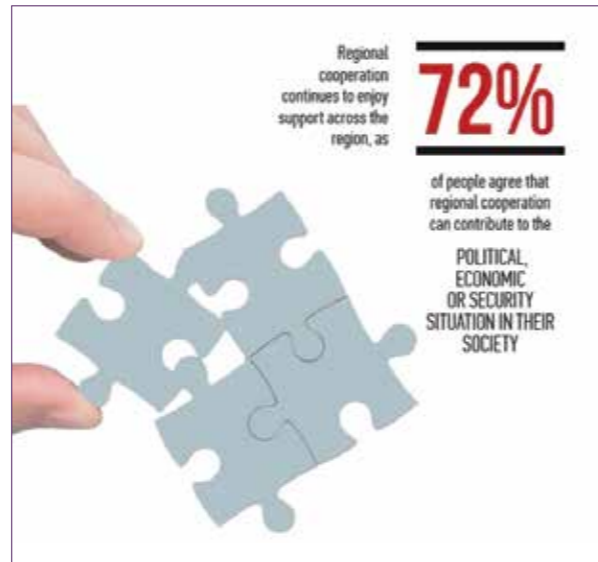
## HORIZONTAL ACTIVITIES

Horizontal processes remained in the service of SEE 2020 Strategy, SWP 2017-2019 and MAP REA implementation. RCC activities in this regard supported and coordinated the established governance structures of the SEE 2020 Strategy.

The progress on MAP measures was regularly reviewed at the MAP Component Contact Points (CCPs) meetings in May and October 2018. The process included identification and formulation of the 2019 key deliverables: the Regional Roaming Agreement, the Mutual Recognition Agreement on four professional qualifications, and conclusion of negotiations on the model for recognition of academic qualifications. Deliverables so formulated were further validated by the regional Sherpas at a November meeting.

Moreover, the meetings of MAP CCPs validated the first Annual Report on MAP REA implementation. Subsequently the MAP Brochure was prepared, tracking progress at regional and individual-economy level along the four components.

In line with the coordination task, RCC assisted with the preparations of the Economy Ministers'



Meeting of the London Summit, at which it presented the key achievements and next steps, with Ministers recognising the pivotal role of the RCC in MAP REA implementation. The Abridged Report on MAP REA implementation, covering the developments between July and December 2018, had been validated and published at the end of 2018.

## PROGRAMMING ACTIVITIES

RCC internally prepares the annual programming cycle and the Draft Programming Document in consistency with the SEE 2020 targets and in close cooperation with the Regional Dimension Coordinators and national authorities. The reporting period saw the finalisation of the fourth cycle of monitoring process of the SEE2020, with the results being made available to the wider public through the SEE Scoreboard Platform.

Through the SEE 2020 monitoring committee, the national authorities agreed with the SEE2020 Annual Report on Implementation for 2018, which was endorsed by the SEE 2020 Governing Board in July.

## COORDINATION AND MONITORING ACTIVITIES

After the RCC finalised the fourth edition of the Balkan Barometer, its findings were presented in Brussels in July 2018. It provided measurements

of the public and business opinion in the six Western Balkans economies in the year 2017 and analysis of perceptions on the aspects of MAP REA - mobility, investment and digital agenda. The launching event was well covered by the media, and the findings were also made available as a brochure with infographics to make them more accessible.

In the second half of the reporting period, with the launch of the 2019 monitoring cycle, data for the fifth edition of the Balkan Barometer was collected and preliminary report drafted.

The fifth SEE2020 Strategy monitoring cycle was likewise launched with the SEE2020 Monitoring Committee meeting in Vienna in December, where beneficiaries agreed on the scope and timeframe of the new cycle, clarified certain indicators and data collection methodologies, and defined roles and responsibilities of the several actors involved.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and last Call for Proposals from the RCC grant facility, with the aim of supporting the implementation of MAP REA, was finalised. Approximately EUR 80,000 was used to fund three projects directed to enhancing public-private dialogue for reducing trade barriers between CEFTA parties, invigorating Civil Society - Government Policy Dialogue on RIRA and supporting the regional approach for improving digital skills in WB6.

## A. SKILLS AND MOBILITY

### A.1.1. Removal of obstacles to mobility of students and highly skilled workers

In the past year, the Working Group on Recognition of Academic Qualifications worked on developing and finalising the beta version of a Joint Information System which will facilitate recognition of academic qualifications in the region. The System is expected to be up and running in 2019. Moreover, RCC assisted the Working Group in following up on



The initial statement on the Western Balkans participation in the Horizon Europe, a European Commission's € 100 billion worth prestigious research and innovation funding programme was prepared by the RCC in July 2018.







Joint Working Group on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications (JWG on MRPQ) at the meeting held in the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) headquarters in Sarajevo on 7 May 2018 (Photo: RCC/Alma Arslanagic Pozder).

the exercise on selected cases for the joint academic recognition.

The overarching aim is to support the process which would bring about the automatic mutual recognition of academic qualifications in the region. An important step forward in this regard will be the Declaration on Recognition of Academic Qualifications, which the RCC has helped prepare and which is to be endorsed by the Ministers responsible for higher education in June, ahead of the WB6 Prime Ministers Summit in early July in Poland.

#### A.1.2. Removal of obstacles to mobility of professionals

In May 2018, the Joint Working Group on Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications met for the last time, recommending the opening of negotiations on mutual recognition of professional qualifications (MRPQ) for four pilot professions: doctors of medicine, dentists, architects and civil engineers. Negotiating teams were appointed by national governments and lead negotiators familiarised with the concept of the agreement, its legal implications and the implications for education system and curricula. In a series of meetings, the

negotiation teams were given the opportunity to formally present their positions on all aspects of the draft Agreement.

The completion of negotiations is expected by early June 2019. According to this timeline, the Agreement will be ready for signature by Prime Ministers of regional governments at Poznan Summit.

In addition to supporting a much needed process of removing obstacles to trade in services, the successful conclusion of the MRA will help the region tap into a flexible and mobile pool of experts and introduce common EU standards to education and training for these professions, thereby increasing the quality of our education system, as well as of services provided to our citizens.

#### A.1.3. Removal of obstacles to mobility of researchers

RCC supported mobility of researchers by assisting regional peer learning on mapping research infrastructure. It supported greater integration of the Western Balkans into Horizon Europe, the new EU programme, by facilitating a joint statement from the region. Furthermore, RCC gathered EURAXESS contact points in the region for the first time, with

the aim of supporting their networking and capacity-building potentials.

When it comes to WB6 research infrastructure, European Commission DG Research and Innovation noted progress at the institution level in initiating Open Science policies. For the second time regional economies were invited to participate in the regular EU reporting on Open Science, on an equal footing as the EU Member States. Furthermore, through the Working Group on Open Science, RCC has been helping map, strengthen and open the research infrastructure in the SEE and enhancing innovation capacity to aid in faster integration into the EU research frameworks.

#### A.1.4. Employment and Social Affairs Platform

In February 2019, ESAP finished its first three-year project, entering a no-cost extension phase on 1 March 2019 during which ESAP will share the results of the actions implemented and take stock of current employment policy progress in the Western Balkans.

The first phase of ESAP was implemented to build the capacities of employment institutions to design, implement and monitor active labour market policies and measures through mutual learning on employment policies and programmes, and to

support modernisation and effectiveness of Public Employment Services (PES) in WB6 through the implementation of an EU model of bench-learning process design. ESAP has significantly strengthened regional cooperation in the area of employment through actions that included: peer reviews on employment policies; bench-learning among PES; upgrading the regional analytics on labour markets; and operating a flexible on-demand technical assistance for the priorities of the Western Balkans economies (with more than 30 technical assistance interventions provided in direct support to the economies).

Overall, during its first three-year period ESAP held 6 peer reviews on employment policies and produced 6 national diagnostic reports that look at drivers of undeclared work, institutional framework and current policy approaches. The national workshops, organised in the Western Balkans capitals, aimed to provide policy-makers, employers' and employees' organisations, economic experts and other key stakeholders with expert analyses and discussion on tackling informal employment from a holistic perspective, learning from the European Platform Tackling Undeclared Work. The workshops paved the way for a more structured cooperation in the Western Balkans in terms of addressing and responding to the issue of undeclared work, through exchange of good practices and peer-learning.

## A.2. CONNECTIVITY

### A.2.1. Digital Integration Agenda

A big step in the direction of digital transformation of the region was made with the first Western Balkans Digital Summit, held in Skopje on 18-19 April 2018, where the Prime Ministers and line ministers agreed on the framework for regional digital agenda cooperation. Following the commitment expressed by the WB leaders, RCC assisted in drafting the Statement of Support for the WB Digital Agenda of the Sofia Summit. Likewise, RCC supported the preparation and endorsement of the Digital Agenda, which was launched on 25 June 2018. To support this agenda, EC launched a substantial technical assistance package, with 30



ESAP has during its first three-year period produced 6 national diagnostic reports that look at drivers of undeclared work (Photo: Shutterstock).





European Commission launched the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans at the Digital Assembly 2018 in Sofia on 25 June 2018 (Illustration: European Commission)

million Euro earmarked, for the identification of potential digital investments through WBIF.

Subsequently, the efforts were directed at advancing the key deliverables set for 2019: concluding a new Regional Roaming Agreement (RRA2), as an integral part of MAP REA, WB Digital Agenda and the political commitment of the Sofia Summit, and successfully organising the 2019 Digital Summit in Belgrade. The text for the new Regional Roaming Agreement was successfully finalised through a dynamic, transparent and all-inclusive process, which gathered support and guidance from regional ICT Ministries, DG CONNECT, and regulators from the WB economies. RRA2 aims towards the introduction of the Roam Like at Home regime in the region by July 2021.

At the same time, RCC was involved in the preparation of the second WB Digital Summit together with its hosts in Belgrade. The purpose of regular Digital Summits is to maintain a permanent high-level dialogue on digital transformation of the region. RCC's contribution to the preparations included drafting the Summit's Conclusions, supporting the development of the Summit agenda, and assisting in all organisational and logistics activities.

In an effort to boost the overall level of cybersecurity in WB, targeted capacity building and re-

gional networking of Western Balkans Computer Security Incident Response Services Teams was also supported by RCC.

Following a series of national training workshops to promote more digital sector applications under WBIF organised by RCC, the successful digital connectivity projects will be announced at the Poznan Summit, as part of the regional connectivity agenda.

#### A.2.2. Environment and Sustainable Development

RCC remains committed to supporting and advancing development in sustainable terms. The activities in the past year focused on implementing actions pertinent for the Bonn Ministerial Declaration, and coordinating implementation of regional projects and partners' activities.

RCC, in cooperation with GIZ ORF, continued to support the work of the regional Biodiversity Taskforce in the implementation of the Biodiversity Work Plan, and maintained high-level dialogue on environment through the regional working group. For the first time, Western Balkans economies participated at the Biodiversity Conference of Parties. Furthermore, the implementation of the two projects developed under the SEE 2020 Strategy - Water-Food-Energy Nexus and ClimaProof - has progressed, firmly rooted in principles of coordination and regional ownership.

In February 2019, the Ministers of Environment and Energy of the six Western Balkans participants signed the mutual Statement on clean energy transition in Podgorica. The Statement calls for coordinated joint work on reaching 2030 decarbonisation and energy efficiency and renewable energy targets. Furthermore, the Statement envisages a cross-sectoral and regional cooperation in development of National Integrated Energy and Climate Plans which will contribute to the Energy Union objectives and a clean energy and air for Western Balkans citizens.



Signing of the Regional Roaming Agreement at the second WB Digital Summit, in Belgrade on 4 April 2019 (Photo: BETA)

In the area of energy, Skopje Ministerial Council approved the Projects of Energy Community Interest in November 2018. All 3rd national plans for energy efficiency were adopted and under implementation. ECS launched a study for calculation of 2030 EE/RES/GHG targets in line with the EU policy goals following the same ambitious principle, while the adoption of 2030 targets is expected in 2019. All National Renewable Energy Action Plans were likewise adopted and they are in the implementation process. The transition to the introduction of market-based support schemes to comply with the state aid legislation was initiated. The 3rd Energy Package was transposed in 5 out of 6 WB6. Activities are ongoing towards establishing balancing markets; functional day-ahead markets; finalisation of TSO certification and DSO unbundling in all WB6. Further on, activities are undertaken towards the implementation of regional day-ahead market coupling in WB6, as well as on intra-regional electricity balancing. The second Sustainability Forum was organised in June 2018 to review progress in implementing the Sustainability Charter.

A new activity in the region has been the involvement in the SPIDERWEB project, where RCC cooperates with EU IMPEL. In 2019 this project will assist Western Balkans economies in the implementation and enforcement of environmental law, with focus on nature protection and waste management.

The WB will also benefit from the two regional projects developed by the European Commission and financed with € 4 million contribution. The projects commissioned in the reporting period are building on the achievements of successfully implemented ECRAN[1] with the principal goal of addressing the key environmental and climate challenges in WB.

In the area of transport, following the termination of SEETO's mandate at the end of 2018, steps are undertaken towards full operationalisation of the Transport Community Secretariat, with a seat in Belgrade. The Summit in Poznan will see the announcement of the new batch of infrastructural projects, supported in the framework of the Western Balkans Investment Framework and the





RCC together with the Ministry of Environment and Physical Planning organised 3rd Ministerial Panel on Environment and Climate Action in the Western Balkans, in Skopje on 21 November 2018 (Illustration: RCC/Sejla Dizdarevic)

overall 1 billion pledge for connectivity agenda in the period 2014-2020. In the next period more emphasis will be put on horizontal reform measures and small-scale high-value projects and actions, including: (i) road safety improvement, with the main objective to reduce road fatalities by 50% by 2030; (ii) border-point crossing, with 32 key border crossing points within the WB and the EU identified for improvement; and (iii) a regional rail strategy aiming for a regional rail market, providing legal certainty to rail investors.

### A.3. COMPETITIVENESS

#### A.3.1. Investment integration

In the past year, regional dialogue led to the finalisation and endorsement of the Regional Investment Reform Agenda (RIRA), first at the SEE Investment Committee Ministerial Meeting in May, subsequently confirmed by regional Economy Ministers and finally by the Prime Ministers at the WB6 Summit in London. A first initiative of its kind, RIRA aims at harmonising regional investment policies with the EU standards and international best

practices, and constitutes an integral part of SEE 2020 Strategy, CEFTA and EU pre-accession and accession process.

In the process of developing RIRA it was made sure that individual-economy priorities were properly addressed. Following RIRA's endorsement, Individual Reform Action Plans were developed, finalised, adopted by regional governments, and their implementation is now being assisted with the development of a Regional Investment Instrument.

Through the process of investment integration, RCC was led by the principle of inclusivity, and consulted representatives from government institutions, private and civil sector and academia, ensuring that all voices would be heard and considered.

Furthermore, RCC cooperated with the World Bank to facilitate a detailed proposal for a Joint Investment Promotion Initiative, as well as commenced a series of capacity building initiatives for the region's Investment Promotion Agencies.

Recognising the importance of the free flow of capital for integration in real terms, RCC established the Working Group on Capital Markets, and received substantial support from relevant line ministries and other participants to assume a coordinating role at both political and expert level. Work was devoted to developing a programme for preparation and implementation of regional strategy on capital markets and translation of this strategy into individual economy policy reforms. The Working Group on Capital Markets was subsequently transformed into the Working Group on Financial Markets, and it was agreed that the work would continue on identifying main challenges for development of the financial sector, preparing adequate responses and implementing relevant policies.

#### A.3.2 Industrial Development

As one of the key strategic sectors, RCC has supported the development of a regionally integrated tourism offer through the implementation of the Triple P Tourism project, which was formally and publically launched in June 2018. Based on industry assessments in prioritised sector niches - culture and adventure tourism - the main lines of regional tourism products development were defined, and progress in their development has been noted throughout the reporting period.

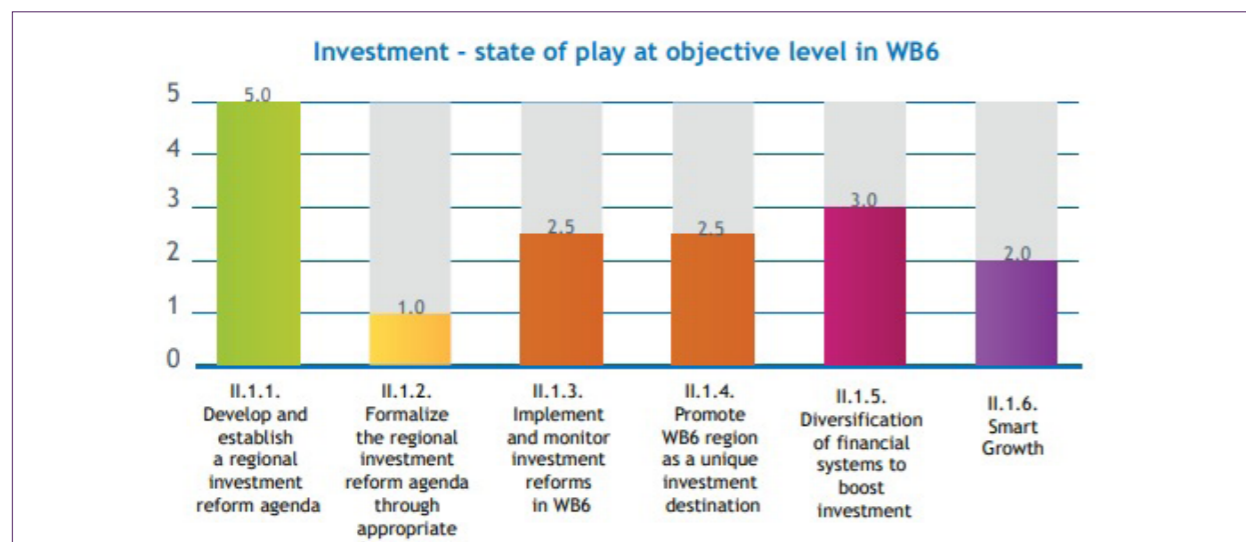
In cultural tourism, these are: (i) integration of archaeological sites of the Western Balkans into the existing Roman Emperors and Danube Wine Route, in collaboration with the Council of Europe and Danube Competence Centre; (ii) development of the concept of Crossroads of Civilisations as a shared overarching regional identity, which focuses on fortifications illustrating diversity of legacies and heritage; (iii) development of brand new regional route dedicated to art and design of post-World War II monuments and buildings.

In the area of adventure tourism, expansion of Via Dinarica trails has been prioritised, together with creation of its joint regional management structure and coordination mechanisms.

The delivery of these priorities was assisted by an online tourism policy survey which consulted governments, civil and private sectors to identify the main barriers and key gaps in culture and adventure tourism. Bringing the project closer to the public was ensured by the creation of a "project media pool", whereby a core group of journalists/media was assisted in communicating the project's goals and objectives. The project was furthermore presented and promoted at various opportunities, including cultural festivals and tourism meetings in the region and beyond, and publications in various travel- and nature-related magazines.



Data from the South East Europe 2020 Strategy Implementation Results 2018.



Investment - state of play at objective level in WB6, data from the Brochure: Implementation of the Multi-Annual Plan for a Regional Economic Area (MAP REA): Economies at a Glance>State of Play and Way Forward

Meanwhile, the first Call for Proposals: Support to the implementation of the RCC Triple P Tourism in SEE was completed, with the total of twelve grants awarded across the region to the total sum of close to 550,000 EUR.

## B. GOVERNANCE, RULE OF LAW AND SECURITY COOPERATION

### B.1. Public Administration Reform

In the field of supporting the reform of public administration in Western Balkans economies, RCC has maintained close partnership with ReSPA. A study on public participation in drafting legislation was commissioned and finalised, and a number of peer missions were conducted in the region with a view of enabling peer learning exercise on public participation performance and accommodating existing best practices. This activity supports the implementation of regional standards on public participation. Likewise, RCC supported the first peer review mission to implement the Western Balkans Recommendation on Public Participation.

### B.2. Rule of Law/Justice Reforms

Regional cooperation in the area of justice, facilitated by the RCC, continues to provide essential support to the governments of the Western Bal-

kans in achieving the European Commission standards and fulfilling benchmarks related to Chapters 23 and 24 of the EU accession negotiations. This was confirmed by the regional Working Group on Justice.

The EU-Western Balkans Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial Forum in October 2018 underlined the key importance of the rule of law, justice and fundamental rights in the EU's relations with the region, as well as highlighted the importance of practical cooperation. To evaluate the status and performance of judicial systems and the progress of justice reforms, the Ministers called on the European Commission to work with CEPEJ to identify a number of key indicators. Moreover, on the topic of home affairs, participants affirmed their support for close cooperation in preventing radicalization and extremism, and their backing for strengthening the existing security cooperation formats and networks.

In supporting an independent, transparent and efficient judiciary, RCC cooperated with the Council of Europe's CEPEJ and HELP commissions to organise different judicial training activities in the Western Balkans. RCC also cooperated with TAIEX in the organisation of a regional workshop for judges and prosecutors on judicial ethics, based on RCC's proposal and concept note.

The past year has likewise seen the development of the process of identifying and determining common standards in regional judicial training, which would serve an improved intra-regional cooperation and trust- and confidence-building among the regional judiciaries. A draft study on this topic was prepared.

Furthermore, RCC partnered with GIZ ORF-LR to develop a regional database of legal experts in European law.

### B.3. Anti-Corruption

Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI) has continued facilitating regional negotiations for the International Treaty on Exchange of Data for the Verification of Asset Declaration, in which RCC takes part. This has been an on-going development in anti-corruption efforts. The Treaty would be significant for strengthening regional cooperation and data exchange in the fields of asset disclosure and conflict of interest.

RCC devotes its efforts to supporting and building capacities of national anti-corruption agencies, cooperating closely in this field with RAI. In the past year, workshops were held in Montenegro on enhancing capacities of Montenegrin stakeholders in conducting the preventive measures in line with the RCC's Regional Methodologies. Meanwhile, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the 2<sup>nd</sup> training was held on corruption risk assessment in healthcare institutions in order to support the capacities of efficient self-assessment and the development of integrity plans.

At the beginning of the reporting period RCC finalised the study: Checklists on Corruption Risks in the Healthcare Sector, which is available on the RCC website.<sup>2</sup>

Regional actions are also undertaken towards strengthening the capacity of key institutions to further align domestic practices with international and European standards in the field of asset recovery.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcc.int/pubs/68/checklists-on-corruption-risks-in-the-healthcare-sector>

### B.4. Security Cooperation

Western Balkans London Summit showed keen awareness of the relevance of the security dimension in regional cooperation and EU integration process, considering SEE as a key external nexus for EU's internal security. RCC gave its contribution to the development of the security agenda of the Summit and participated in formulating commitments that the leaders at the Summit endorsed. The implementation of these commitments will be monitored by the Berlin Process.

In the past year, RCC advanced with the implementation of the Regional Countering Violent Extremism and Foreign Terrorist Fighters (CVE-FTF) Platform by assisting in updating the legal and institutional framework and enhancing regional and international cooperation.



Checklists on Corruption Risks in the Healthcare Sector, publication published by RCC in September 2018





Journalists discuss how media should cover stories of violent extremism, terrorism, radicalisation and related issues, at the RCC-organised Workshop in Budva, Montenegro on 25 October 2018 (Photo: Radonja Srdanovic).



Students from various Universities across Bosnia and Herzegovina gathered in Sarajevo at the RCC-organized Workshop to discuss radicalisation-related issues, in Sarajevo on 18 September 2018 (Photo: RCC/Armin Durgut)

The meetings of the National Focal Points for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (NFP P/CVE) in the past year led to conclusions on the efficient means of preventing violent extremism, through a normative and legal approach, but maintaining throughout the right of freedom of speech. The emphasis was placed on an approach which involves whole societies and ranges from prevention, disengagement, rehabilitation and re-integration to raising awareness and minding local radicalization. In December 2018, the RCC organised the Third Regional Coordination Conference for Counter-Terrorism and P/CVE, in partnership with the IISG and the Government and Ministry of the Interior of Turkey. The meeting discussed the enhancement of cooperation and coordination of CT and P/CVE programmes, as well as provided good opportunity to present the RCC-commissioned study on cyber security and online radicalization. As a unique regional organisation that pursues a holistic approach in regional cooperation, the Conference was a major step forward in the overall RCC efforts to support efficient,

coherent and streamlined regional security cooperation.

Moreover, RCC continued to support the existing specialised regional security cooperation formats in SEE, namely South East European Military Intelligence Chiefs' forum (SEEMIC) and the South East European National Security Authorities forum (SEENSA). SEEMIC adopted the OSINT report Challenges to Critical Cybersecurity Infrastructure in SEE, and agreed on the hosts for 2019 and 2020, Slovenia and Turkey respectively.

Special focus has been given to providing political and operational support to IISG and to SEESAC as joint RCC-UNDP Initiative. The RCC advanced with the implementation of the DCAF Project/Programme: IISG/WBCTi IPA II 2016 Regional Action on P/CVE in the Western Balkans, aimed at contributing to the implementation of relevant goals and benchmarks set by the IISG and in particular with Western Balkans Counter-terrorism Initiative and its Action Plan. Having this in mind, as one of the imple-

menting partners, RCC embraced the logic of whole-of-society approach, focusing on work in the local community, targeted law enforcement stakeholders as well as study/research on topics pertinent for better comprehension of phenomena linked to the violent extremism.

As one of the most successful RCC and UNDP joint initiatives in this area, SEESAC has been instrumental in facilitating regional cooperation on arms control for the past 17 years, thus contributing to efforts towards promoting safety and security. Having in mind the RCC's strong political mandate as well as coordinative role in the regional security cooperative order, the RCC has provided firm political and operational support to the activities of SEESAC and in particular to the implementation of the Regional Roadmap on SALW.

## C. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES

### C.1 Communication

Closely following the implementation of the RCC SWP 2017-2019 and MAP REA, the communication activities included widespread and/or targeted (when and where needed) dissemination of news on the organisation's activities as well as other RCC products (studies, reports, surveys) to the media, but also to the relevant stakeholders. RCC's communication activities increased its direct contact with regional media, projects' grantees and partners, etc. to establish new networks and channels of word-spreading activities about not only RCC and its core activities, but equally important benefits of its results, accomplishments and initiatives to ordinary citizens in the region.

Dissemination of communications contents varied, going from a wide range of audiences to the targeted ones, and accordingly different tactics and tools were used to achieve the best reach - from





a direct approach with specifically relevant information sent to a list of technical target audiences, to promoting content more generally for the benefit of the general public through various channels such as social media, traditional media, direct contact with established network of partners, etc. As the network of media in the region was identified as relevant and strong communicator of RCC's activities and efforts, the practice of widening and strengthening this network was continued.

In order to continue expanding information reach, RCC developed a mobile website application. The website keeps undergoing redesigning throughout the year so to respond to the requests of the audiences and make it easier to navigate and find information of interest. It is now a regularly updated, visually appealing pool of documents, publications, photos, videos, etc. It provides information on specific processes related to the areas of cooperation, but also information on general developments, brief news and presentations of 3 active RCC projects on employment, tourism and Roma integration.

The turn of 2019 has been marked with a new approach to RCC's social media communication, aiming to widen the palette of its earlier audiences to include young people more. Hence, besides the existing social media presence of the RCC on Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and LinkedIn, as of January 2019, RCC introduced its Instagram channel that for a very short period of time gained a lot of attention and generated new dimension of interactions with new audiences. The focus of the social media communications was also adjusted as in this stage of RCC's work there are some concrete, tangible results that affect the lives of ordinary citizens in the region. Therefore, the information shared on these channels targets to promote benefits of regional cooperation and the EU to the citizens as the 'end beneficiaries', but also to share positive image of the region with the EU citizens in order to increase understanding of the enlargement process and potential new members. The overall result is a continued trend of steady growth of people following the RCC



RCC redesigned organisation's slogan "good.better.regional" to reflect its clear EU commitment.

on social media, causing more interactions with representatives from all trades of targeted audiences.

According to quarterly monitoring and evaluations, RCC has met and exceeded the overall goals and objectives of its Communications Strategy, so the RCC today has been recognised as an regionally-owned mechanism boosting regional cooperation and growth of South East Europe, but also as the key interlocutor for regional cooperation and integration for many societal groups - governments, civil society, media, academia, and others.

### C.2 Parliamentary Cooperation

In line with the commitment to support the parliamentary dimension of SEECP, which aims to strengthen and coordinate activities among the



RCC launched an initiative to include more women in the labour market. WE project followed by a video and social media campaign "Listen to Women" empowering the voice of women in the region.



RCC awarded You are a Sunflower Foundation as a Champion of Regional Cooperation, in Sarajevo on 13 march 2019.

parliaments of participating economies, RCC maintained close relations with and provided assistance where necessary to both C-i-O's in the reporting period, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina respectively.

At the fifth plenary session of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly (PA), hosted by the Slovenian Parliament on 14 April 2018 in Ljubljana, the role of the RCC was explicitly recognised in the final declaration, which called for an ever closer cooperation between the SEECP PA and the RCC. Possibilities of enhancing synergy between the two were likewise discussed at the Standing Committee meeting held under the Bosnian C-i-O of SEECP PA in December 2018.

In addition, RCC contributed to the work of the three SEECP PA General Committees - on Economy, Infrastructure and Energy; on Justice, Home Affairs and Security Cooperation; and on Social Development, Education, Research and Science - by offering assistance and expertise.

### C.3 Roma Integration 2020

Through a set of conferences, workshops and public dialogues, the RCC brought together the National Roma Contact Points (NRCPs) from the Western Balkans and Turkey, relevant government and public officials and civil society to address a range of topics. In terms of the question of housing, a holistic approach was promoted, with particular focus on the implications of such approach for housing legalisation and social housing.

Economic (in)dependence of Romani women likewise featured prominently, with a large regional conference on this topic co-organised with the government of Serbia on 31 October-1 November 2018, where the actual data about Romani women employment situation, as well as practices, factors and obstacles influencing their employment were presented and discussed.

The issues pertinent for the employment of Roma were examined at a regional conference co-organised with ESAP and the Roma Education Fund in December 2018. Low labour force participation of







Roma, combined with predominant exclusion of Roma youth from employment, education or training, was emphasised and the conference accordingly focused on ways to tackle these issues.

Furthermore, the Roma Integration 2020 established a regional Working Group on Roma Responsible Budgeting, comprising NRCPs and representatives from the Ministries of Finance of the Western Balkans. The Group was established on the initiative of the participating economies with the aim of initiating the process of developing guidelines

on Roma responsible budgeting. Such guidelines were endorsed at a Task Force meeting in December 2018, where it was also agreed to pilot Roma responsive budgeting from 2019 onwards.

In the Phase II implementation of the project, which began in 2019, economy-specific roadmaps on Roma Integration containing concrete measures and targets have been developed, with special attention on housing and employment as the key areas requiring attention.



Regional Workshop Addressing Discrimination and AntiGypsism in the Enlargement Region in Berlin on 13 February 2018

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>BB</b>	Balkan Barometer
<b>CCP</b>	Component Contact Points
<b>CEFTA</b>	Central European Free Trade Agreement
<b>CEPEJ</b>	The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice
<b>C-I-O</b>	Chairmanship-in-Office
<b>CoE</b>	Council of Europe
<b>COWEB</b>	Working Group on Western Balkans of the Council of the European Union
<b>CT</b>	Counter terrorism
<b>CVE</b>	Countering of Violent Extremism
<b>CVE-FTF PLATFORM</b>	South East Europe Regional Platform for Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism and Recruitment of Foreign Terrorist Fighters
	Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces
<b>DCAF</b>	
<b>DG</b>	Directorate-General
<b>DG CONNECT</b>	Directorate General for Communications Network, Content & Technology
<b>DG GROW</b>	Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs
<b>DG NEAR</b>	Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement Negotiations
<b>EC</b>	European Commission
<b>EP</b>	European Parliament
<b>ESAP</b>	Employment and Social Affairs Platform
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>EU IMPEL</b>	European Union Network for the Implementation and Enforcement of Environmental Law
<b>FTF</b>	Foreign Terrorist Fighters
<b>GIZ</b>	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
<b>GIZ ORF- LR</b>	Open Regional Fund - Legal Reform
<b>HELP</b>	The European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communication Technologies
<b>IISG</b>	Integrated Internal Security Governance
<b>IPA</b>	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
<b>MAP REA</b>	Multi-Annual Action Plan for a Regional Economic Area
<b>MRA</b>	Mutual Recognition Agreement
<b>MRPQ</b>	Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NFP CVE-FTF</b>	RCC Group of National Focal Points for Countering Radicalization and Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism and Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Southeast Europe
<b>NRCPs</b>	National Roma Contact Points
<b>NSA</b>	National Security Authority
<b>ORF</b>	Open Regional Funds for South East Europe
<b>ORF LR</b>	Open Regional Fund for South East Europe - Legal Reform
<b>OSCE</b>	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
<b>OSINT</b>	Open Sources Intelligence Assessment
<b>PICVE</b>	Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism



<b>PES</b>	Public Employment Services
<b>P-CVE</b>	Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism
<b>RAI</b>	Regional Anticorruption Initiative
<b>RCC</b>	Regional Cooperation Council
<b>RDC</b>	Regional Dimension Coordinator
<b>RIRA</b>	Regional Investment Reform Agenda
<b>RRA</b>	Regional Roaming Agreement
<b>ReSPA</b>	Regional School of Public Administration
<b>SALW</b>	Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>SEE</b>	South East Europe
<b>SEE 2020</b>	South East Europe 2020 Strategy: Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective
<b>SEECP</b>	South-East European Cooperation Process
<b>SEECP PA</b>	South-East European Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly
<b>SEEIC</b>	South East Europe Investment Committee
<b>SEEMIC</b>	South East Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs
<b>SEENSA</b>	South East European National Security Authorities
<b>SEESAC</b>	The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
<b>SG</b>	Secretary General
<b>SWP</b>	Strategy and Work Programme
<b>TAIEX</b>	Technical Assistance and Information Exchange instrument
<b>UN</b>	United Nations
<b>UNDP</b>	United Nations Development Programme
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>WB</b>	Western Balkans
<b>WBCTI</b>	Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative
<b>WBIF</b>	Western Balkans Investment Framework





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