

**Speech by RCC Secretary General Majlinda Bregu  
at the  
EU-WB Summit  
Brussels, 13 December 2023**

Excellencies,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at this **wintery** Brussels summit, a year after the **sunny** Tirana, and shortly after the BP Summit.

One year after, is the pace and sense of *heightened urgency* for reforms and regional cooperation on the side of the region, and for institutional and budgetary preparedness of an EU Fit for Enlargement - *more palpable today?*

As scepticism and concerns about the prospects for an enlarged union are still common likewise is the credence that this is going to be the challenge of the age for the EU.

But as a victory of the common sense, we from the region know that *deepening our economic integration and continuing to build on the policies aligning us more with the EU is always valuable.*

A *true and fully functional Common Regional Market*, unhindered by regional disputes, can be *our vessel to the EU Single Market.*

In all likelihood, this will be *our future prospect.*

Again, the entrance into the Single Market will be difficult for both sides, EU and the region. This time, it is Single Market that should be enlarged, but as long as enlargement is concerned, it is no easy feat.

**Yes, I know you will say that is why we launched the Growth Plan.**

I know. We are all grateful and appreciative.

But if we want this to be successful for any of the economies of the region, sticking to the merit-based, reform-advanced approach within 2030, we will need to run two processes in parallel within the next year. Apart from European elections. **The new phase of the Common Regional Market that RCC started to *delineate* where the 4 freedoms of the Single Market will be accompanied with clear strategic aims like:**

**Education, Innovation**, finding new sources of economic growth and mechanisms for future transformation is an urgent task. Good jobs are scarce, and young people continue to leave.

**Digitalisation.** Better governance and services especially at the local level. Thank you for tasking us at the RCC to facilitate the cybersecurity agenda in the region.

**Green, energy and air pollution.** The convergence gap with EU on green transition here is huge. Just one figure. Decommissioning and repurposing one lignite power plant, that of Tuzla which pollutes all over Europe, would cost 35 million euros.

The region has to start swift alignment with EU Climate Law and be included in the European Climate Pact and its activities.

**Migration and brain drain**, considerable challenges for all Western Balkans societies.

**Women economic empowerment.**

Developing the region's potential will require new sources of dynamism and transformation to overcome deep-seated historical, social, institutional and environmental challenges, **less ego and more eco systems** of innovative ideas.

The framework of CRM's successor has *to stand on the tall shoulders, undivided attention and inputs*, working hand-in-hand with *fully focused and mobilised EU services*, along with *key EU MS practitioners!*

Yet, neither CRM nor the very much welcome Growth Plan *can be the sole Europeanisation and convergence engines.*

*Thus, the most difficult part of the new gradual accession of WB into the EU will be planning. Starting from the budgetary debate, the next Multiannual Financial Framework, AND Reconceptualising the EU Instruments vis a vis WB like the SAA.*

*Do not take me ill, but knowing the Balkans and the processes of revision, adoption of an agreement or EU instrument, it is harder than expected. Furthermore, some fine tuning of SAA will not be enough to allow WB entrance into the Single Market.*

Said this, and not mentioning the achievements we managed to have from summit to summit - all are part of this summit conclusions- until next summit, I am sure there is a lot of **relentless work** - centred on domestic reforms, deeper economic integration and regional cooperation and catching up with the EU no matter what! **RCC is primed to contribute strongly!**