



Speech by RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanovic

on the occasion of 18th anniversary of Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

16 February 2026

18 years. One region. Working together.

Ladies and gentlemen, dear friends and colleagues,

Welcome to our annual reception, which also marks our 18th birthday.

This year is rich in anniversaries. Alongside the RCC, we mark thirty years of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), thirty years of the Central European Initiative (CEI), twenty years of CEFTA, and ten years of the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). These milestones matter because they signal continuity rooted in necessity. Regional cooperation in South East Europe has evolved through different forms, sometimes imperfect, but it has endured because it has delivered trust and stability.

The RCC, as the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, emerged at a time of **shared commitment to multilateralism**. Despite a legacy of conflict, it helped move the region from post-conflict stabilisation towards cooperation and growth, supported by the Euro-Atlantic partnership and the European Union's political and economic pull.

Today, the RCC comes of age in a different world. The logic that once shaped regional cooperation is increasingly challenged by a narrower understanding of success - **one focused on power, transactions, speed, and short-term measurable outputs**. Efficiency matters, there should be no doubt about that. But **multilateral cooperation cannot be reduced to corporate logic** alone. Quick results without trust may look effective, but they rarely endure.

In South East Europe, progress lasts only when outcomes are matched by process. This is not theory; it is experience.

We are fully aware of this challenge, and we are ready to adapt; with clarity and purpose.

First, we will sharpen our focus on people-oriented deliverables. Regional cooperation must produce **tangible benefits for citizens**: better connectivity, stronger economies, and real opportunities for young people.

Second, we will safeguard trust, mutual respect, and ownership among partners. In today's geopolitical environment, **trust is not automatic - it is strategic**. Without it, no agreement and no reform agenda can hold.

Third, we will fully exercise the **RCC's convening power**. In times of polarisation, keeping all regional actors engaged in structured and inclusive dialogue is not symbolic - it is essential.

This is how we define efficiency: not speed at any cost, but focus, credibility, and implementation that lasts. Business as usual is not an option - but neither are shortcuts that undermine long-term confidence.

This year, we will support **Bulgaria in chairing the SEECP and Romania** as it assumes the chairmanship, using this moment to assess honestly what three decades of regional cooperation have achieved and what must now evolve. We will also **support Montenegro** in chairing the Berlin Process, with a clear emphasis on delivery. Commitments must translate into action.

Together with the European Union, we will advance a renewed triennial regional agenda and continue refining the SEE2030 framework with all thirteen SEECP participants - focused on what is realistic, impactful, and implementable.

South East Europe is not a marginal space. It is an increasingly strategic connector in Europe's political, security, and economic architecture - and our cooperation must reflect that reality.

If two words define our challenge this year, they are **meaning and purpose**. Meaning in a time when cooperation is questioned. Purpose in a time when speed often replaces strategy.

Our purpose is simple: to help our governments succeed in making the lives of citizens better. Whether EU and NATO members, or still on that path, we are bound by geography, by interest, and by responsibility.

Cooperation must remain our strategic choice never an externally imposed obligation, and never a burden.

At eighteen, the RCC reaches adulthood. And adulthood brings responsibility: to deliver, to adapt, and to protect the trust that holds this region together.

Let us ensure that when we gather again, we celebrate not only continuity but results that endure.

Thank you.