



**Speech by RCC Secretary General  
at the SEECP Leaders Summit**

**“Fostering Stability and Prosperity through Regional Cooperation and  
EU Integration”**

**Tirana, 16 June 2025**

Distinguished Presidents,  
Ministers,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you today - not only as Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), but as a firm believer in South East Europe's (SEE) ability to shape its future through cooperation, solidarity, and shared purpose.

Across much of SEE, particularly in the Western Balkans - despite political differences and enduring challenges - one message consistently rises above division: 82% of citizens support regional cooperation, according to the Balkan Barometer. I am confident that if we measured this across the entire SEE, the result would be similar.

This overwhelming support tells us something crucial: people see beyond the headlines. They believe in a common future and trust us to make it real. Such a strong approval rate reflects the shared efforts of our governments and regional organisations like the RCC. In today's fragmented world, perhaps this is one of the rare expressions of unity and trust in multilateralism that still stands.

Allow me to commend the Tirana Chairmanship-in-Office of SEECP for recognising this potential and investing tireless efforts over the past year. Through a rich and focused calendar of activities, Tirana has shown how strategic leadership can build bridges and serve the collective interests of all thirteen SEECP Participants.

As we now look ahead to the incoming Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office, the RCC stands fully ready to support an ambitious and forward-looking agenda.

Excellencies,

We meet at a moment of great global uncertainty. Fragmentation and conflict are on the rise. And yet, new tools for resilience and transformation are also at our disposal. In this context, we must hold the line in South East Europe - defending multilateralism not as a lofty ideal, but as a practical necessity for peace, stability, and progress.

Now is the time for leadership - not only through declarations, but through concrete actions that make cooperation our default mode, not the exception. The political courage we show today will shape the region's credibility, stability, and prosperity tomorrow.

The Sofia Chairmanship also coincides with two important milestones: the 30th anniversary of the SEECP's Sofia Declaration, and the RCC's 18th year of existence - a coming-of-age moment, if you will.

Such anniversaries offer not just an occasion for reflection, but a chance to look forward - with clarity, courage, and collective purpose. This is the right time to ask ourselves:

- What kind of SEECP do we want for the future?
- What kind of RCC do we need to support it?
- What should be our shared priorities in an increasingly unpredictable world?
- How deep should our cooperation go, and what tools do we need to be more effective?

To support this reflection, RCC has launched a new three-year Strategy and Work Programme, built around three regional imperatives:

- Smart development - driving economic modernisation and innovation;
- Skilled societies - promoting mobility, education, and inclusion;
- Sustainable futures - advancing environmental and socio-economic resilience.

This agenda speaks to all SEECP Participants - EU Member States, aspirants, and NATO members alike - spanning 150 million people and nearly USD 3 trillion in combined GDP. What binds us is stronger than what separates us - and our diversity should be our strength.

In the coming period, RCC will intensify efforts to synergise:

- The Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025-2028, endorsed at the Berlin Summit;
- A more operational phase of the SEE2030 Strategy, including the new Regional Disaster Risk Insurance Network;
- The Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, shifting from commitments to measurable outcomes;
- And cross-cutting initiatives around digitalisation, innovation, and skills.

Let me be clear: regional cooperation is not a waiting room for the EU. It is a platform of strategic value in its own right - complementing national reforms with regional momentum.

Yet, despite the progress we achieved on many fronts, from free roaming to freedom of movement, the socio-economic gap with the EU remains too wide - especially in the Western Balkans. Since the launch of the Common Regional Market, GDP per capita in the region has grown from 25% to 39% of the EU average. But at this pace, full convergence could take 50 years.

This is why the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans must become a turning point. It offers a unique opportunity - linking reform to investment, market access to cooperation, and performance to measurable results.

The second pillar - the Common Regional Market - is already underway, with RCC and regional partners at the helm. But implementation must follow intent. Some mobility agreements remain stalled despite being signed and ratified. If we fail to move forward, we risk losing the trust of our citizens. We must find compromise solutions and remove these bottlenecks - the potential is too great to leave untapped.

We also call on Western Balkan governments to finalise and adopt the revised Green Agenda Action Plan, currently under negotiation. It offers a streamlined, realistic pathway for aligning climate goals with economic capacity. A just and inclusive green transition cannot wait.

Excellencies,

Anniversaries compel us to reflect - but they also call for renewal.

As SEECP turns 30 and RCC comes of age, let us not only plan for the next year - but shape the next decade together. The region is ready. Our citizens are asking for it. And RCC - true to its mandate - is ready to support, deliver, and evolve.

Thank you.