



## **BERLIN PROCESS INTERIOR MINISTERS' MEETING**

**16 October 2020**

### **TALKING POINTS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE RCC**

**Majlinda Bregu**

Honourable Ministers,

Dear participants and colleagues,

- It is my great pleasure that today, under the joint Chairmanship of the Berlin Process by Bulgaria and Republic of North Macedonia, we are discussing rationale for the Regional Agreement on free movement with ID cards.
  
- 14 years ago, the WB 6 agreed to enhance regional economic integration by removing trade barriers. There has been some positive implication, but not as much as expected. Only 1 in 2 business people benefited from this.



- Whilst WB 6 have struggled to remove travel barriers with EU and move without visa, unfortunately, we do apply visa regime among each other in this small region. **We cannot steam trade without removing barriers to ensure free movement of business people, drivers and citizens.** Let me be more concrete: the share of KS exports to BiH is less than 3% of the total export whilst the BiH to KS is 0.22%.
- The number of Kosovar business people in BiH is nearly inexistent, and you can find just 13 (not the lucky number) business people from BiH operating in KS.
- The situation is not that positive when it comes to the movement of citizens. The number of KS visiting BiH is less than 800 per year, the statistics are less promising on the Bosnians travelling to KS – around 500 per year. I am not entering into details on commenting people-to-people component, but when it comes to tourism perspective, especially in this time of pandemic, this statistics are devastating. Both economies rely on intra WB tourism (around 30%).
- In a region characterized by numerous social and family ties between the economies, it is worth noting that only 54% of respondents travelled anywhere in the region in the past 12 months. And only 13% of those travelled for business. It is worth pondering the untapped potential which this fact reveals.
- WB 6 has shown to overcome the political rhetoric, and green lanes initiative was a good example. It has proven its ability to respond quickly and efficiently in the presence of political will. But issues like this deserve greater commitment than reactive and *ad hoc* solutions. And the regional political complexities call for a comprehensive, regional



framework agreement, addressing the freedom of movement across the region. As a first and most basic step we must allow citizens to be able to travel with ID cards.

- Let us only briefly return back to the beginning of the story. Last year I proposed such a framework agreement at the Summit of the Berlin Process in Poznan. **The idea was welcomed and it is part of the Chair's Conclusions of the SEECF Summit 2019, and we are committed to make it happen as one of the key deliverables of the new document of Common Regional Market Action Plan 2021-2024. From Poznan Summit where on behalf of RCC I pointed out this proposal I was sure it was not only full of well-meaning but it has all the chances to be a brilliant achievement of our common endeavours to cooperate and be stronger together. We didn't invent anything, but we are pushing proudly to make this a success story confirmed by leaders at Sofia Summit.**
- **We know so much more about the necessity to help our business community survive than a year ago. We face the problems and concerns of young people, who get a degree but can't find a job and we want to give them a chance to work anywhere in the region, without the visa constraints. Our commercial and trade relations in the region cannot run anymore as business as usual. We have to have a common market, business to move freely, borders to be kept open for the flow of goods and medicines 24/7, we need digital services to serve people, we need innovations to run.**
- Mobility of individuals on the basis of ID cards is the integral part of the new agenda, buttressing the targeted actions towards establishing: free movement of goods, services,



capital and people; regional investment area; regional digital area; and regional industrial and innovation area.

- **We know things are difficult, that we are not a perfect region, but we want to make the best out of an imperfect picture.**
- We commend the Co-Hosts of the Berlin Process that included this important topic as part of this outstanding ministerial. Nailing it in the conclusions is the best signal we can share with our citizens and business community as the 1<sup>st</sup> concrete deliverable of the Common Regional Market.
- Both the Common Market agenda and the freedom of movement with ID cards constitute building blocks of the new Economic and Investment Plan, presented earlier this month by the European Commission.
- Let me remind you also that the support of the citizens and of the private sector for regional cooperation has been consistently rising. According to our latest survey of public opinion, Balkan Barometer 2020, 77% of respondents believe that regional cooperation contributes to improvement of their societies' economic, political, and security affairs.
- The agreement on free movement with ID cards will create an all-inclusive, multilateral regional framework. Participation of all WB6 economies in this endeavour remains the key prerequisite for its success.
- Please rest assured that the RCC, upon your endorsement, is ready to facilitate our joint work at the level of the Working Group aimed at drafting all-acceptable and all-inclusive regional Agreement which will bring about tangible benefits to all citizens of our region.



- Before I finish, let me leave you with two infos

In line with the efforts to streamline regional initiatives, as of 1 April 2020 RCC has become the host of the IISG. This is the project which shapes the contours of regional action in the field of security which is intrinsically linked and supportive to all our efforts in socio-economic field. Head of the IISG Secretariat, Mr. Agron Sojati, will later brief you in detail on the IISG's activities since coming under the RCC umbrella.

On the Agreement itself (main punchlines for clarification):

- **This Agreement should regulate only travel of citizens of the Western Balkans within the Western Balkans;**
- **Third country citizens, working permits and all other issues stemming from Free Movement of People pillar will be treated separately;**
- This agreement is set to change that in all-inclusive fashion, based on the following principles:
  - a. all existing bilateral agreements will be taken into consideration;
  - b. all commitments towards the EU White Schengen list will also be taken into consideration;
  - c. only biometric ID cards will be used and duration of free stay will be 90 days or otherwise will have to be regulated separately (working permits, studying, etc.);
- RCC will be facilitating and co-chairing (only in case EC wants to be part of it) the Working Group composed of representatives of all WB6 relevant institutions;



- The main comparative advantage of this agreement is its all-inclusiveness, and ambition to build on a set of bilateral agreements, and to sort this issue where bilateral arrangement is not possible;
- I think we are on course. So let's keep going.

**As there is a general regional agreement to enhance regional economic ties, there is no common market without freedom of movement.**