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Executive Summary

The strategic direction of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) remained consistent, and the reporting period marked a further maturation of RCC's delivery model: from agreeing regional frameworks to demonstrating their practical value. Building on the direction set in the previous reporting cycle, RCC pursued an approach that was both ambitious and practical, translating regional commitments into measurable results across the Common Regional Market 2 (CRM 2), Green Agenda, digital integration, human capital and security cooperation. The emphasis increasingly shifted to implementation, accountability and regional scale, helping businesses and entrepreneurs grow, strengthening investment and industrial links with the EU, advancing green and digital transformation, and connecting identified regional needs with targeted support. The 2026 Berlin Process and South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) agendas reinforced this approach, positioning regional cooperation as a practical instrument for strengthening competitiveness, resilience and the Western Balkans' path towards the European Union.

The RCC continued to fulfil its statutory obligations and support the seamless transition to the Bucharest SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office (C-i-O) from the Sofia C-i-O, which marked 30 years of the SEECP. The RCC Annual Report was reviewed and endorsed at the 18th RCC Annual Meeting on 9 June, approved by the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs and endorsed by the SEECP leaders at the Sofia Summit on 10 June, together with the SEE2030 Strategy Mid-Term Implementation Report and the SEE2030 Strategy Mid-Term Update. The Sofia Summit Declaration recognised the RCC's role as the operational arm of the SEECP and a regional cooperation hub. The RCC marked the 30th anniversary of the SEECP with a strategic report 30 years SEECP: Charting Shared Regional Transformation. Building on this mandate, the RCC aligned its support with Bucharest's priorities, strengthened cooperation with the OSCE, advanced consultations with the OECD and promoted the SEE2030 Strategy in international policy discussions. It also advanced regional work on disaster financial risk-sharing, coordinating with the European Investment Bank (EIB), the SEECP C-i-O and regional institutions to explore a feasibility study on regional reinsurance and sub-regional risk-pooling arrangements, alongside technical assistance, data development and alignment with EU frameworks. Presenting the initiative at the European Economic and Social Committee further connected regional efforts with wider European discussions on disaster resilience.

Within this broader agenda, the **CRM 2 Action Plan for 2025 - 2028** remained the principal framework for deepening economic integration across the Western Balkans Six (WB6) and advancing gradual alignment with the EU Single Market. The **2026 Berlin Process** provided a political platform for translating these priorities into concrete regional initiatives, linking competitiveness, investment, industrial cooperation, digitalisation, green transition and human capital. The emphasis shifted towards practical instruments that can deliver idea to a business, a business to growth, a growth to a place in the European value chains. This development logic placed entrepreneurship, SME development, investment facilitation, greener incentives and stronger WB6–EU industrial links at the centre of delivery.

A tangible example is the **WB6–EU Industrial Parks Partnership**, facilitated by RCC, through which seven industrial parks and business zones from the WB6 established cooperation with six EU partner organisations. The Partnership creates opportunities for business collaboration, integration into European value chains and the exchange of green industrial practices.

Under the **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB)**, the RCC coordinated the endorsement of a major package of regional deliverables at the September 2026 Žabljak Ministerial Meeting, including the **2026 GAWB Ministerial Declaration**, **WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy**, **WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 (BSP 2030),** **Forest Landscape Restoration Plan** and two regional instruments on single-use plastics and Extended Producer Responsibility: **the Regional Pledge on Phasing Out the Five Most Littered Single-Use Plastics,** and **the Regional Extended Producer Responsibility Framework for Plastic Packaging.** The RCC also launched the **GAWB Observatory Platform** and published the **2025 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan (GARI)** strengthening regional monitoring, transparency and evidence-based follow-up on green transition commitments.

The RCC advanced regional digital integration by developing recommendations to **streamline telecommunications permit-granting procedures,** based on stakeholder consultations, and securing broad support for a **Draft Declaration on Streamlining Telecommunications Permit-Granting Procedures** which was endorsed under the 2026 Berlin Process. On roaming, the RCC's analysis found that retail data prices remained below the agreed €14/GB cap, with WB6 operators charging an average of €0.70–€5.50 per GB. The analysis also

identified a growing trend towards including roaming allowances in domestic mobile tariffs, improving affordability and convenience for travellers across the WB6 and EU. These findings provide an evidence base for further policy action on connectivity and consumer benefits. **The Artificial Intelligence Roadmap** was endorsed at the 2026 Berlin Process Summit, led and facilitated by the RCC, highlighting the importance of an enabling environment for the responsible development, deployment and uptake of Artificial Intelligence. The Roadmap aims to accelerate AI adoption through stronger regional cooperation, improved skills and governance, shared data and computing resources, and the promotion of safe, responsible and trustworthy use of AI. The RCC also developed and published the ICT skills-gap study, initiated preparations for the **Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI) 2026 Report**, and enhanced cybersecurity cooperation with the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C). In addition, it supported the WB6's onboarding to the EU List of Trusted Lists (TC AdES LOTL) addressed outstanding technical and administrative requirements, marking an important step towards greater regional interoperability.

In sustainable tourism, RCC-facilitated **WB6 Regional Tourism Facility**[1] was endorsed at the Berlin Process Summit advancing regional promotion, sustainable tourism and regional mobility for organised tourist groups and adventure tourism. The participants of the 2026 Berlin Process Summit also welcomed the progress made in advancing the RCC facilitated **Tourism Green Lanes Declaration.**

Under **investment and sustainable finance**, the RCC facilitated **WB6 Investment Facilitation Roadmap** and the **Regional Green Investment Incentives Standards,** setting a common benchmark for effective, coherent and fiscally responsible incentive regimes that promote investments in green transition. Complementing these efforts, the RCC supported the development of the **WB6 Financial Literacy Framework for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSMEs),** strengthening financial knowledge and business decision-making.

[1] Belgrade has not yet confirmed its endorsement of the Framework Document, pending the completion of internal consultations and is invited to confirm its endorsement at later stage

Recognising that inclusive economic growth also depends on equal access to finance and business opportunities, the RCC advanced **women's economic empowerment** through the development of **Regional Minimum Core Indicator Set for Gender-Disaggregated Entrepreneurship Statistics**. The indicators will improve the evidence base for targeted policy measures, while the **WB6 Women Entrepreneurs of the Year 2026** awards and related regional dialogue raised the visibility of women entrepreneurs and highlighted barriers to accessing finance, markets and economic opportunities.

Beyond business development, the RCC also addressed the labour-market conditions needed to sustain inclusive growth. Through **Employment and Social Affairs Platform 3 (ESAP 3)**, it supported reforms in employment services and labour inspection across the WB6. The **2026 Public Employment Services Benchlearning** cycle identified opportunities to improve digitalisation, job brokerage, local service delivery and staff capacity, while Mutual Assistance Projects strengthened cooperation on tackling undeclared work and exchanging EU practices in youth employment and risk-based enforcement. The **ESAP Employment Observatory** complemented these efforts by providing comparable labour-market data to inform evidence-based policymaking and institutional reform.

In **research and innovation**, the RCC strengthened regional capacity to access EU funding, commercialise research and develop innovation ecosystems. Through its NextHub Programme, the RCC completed the third round of support for **WB6 Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs)**, fostering collaboration and joint EU project development, while its **Level UP programme** helped gaming studios attract around €500,000 in EU and private funding. The RCC also supported **Smart Specialisation Strategy** teams in developing project proposals and consortia, published a study identifying opportunities and gaps in deep-tech and green-tech manufacturing, developed tools for academia–business cooperation. Building on these efforts, the RCC coordinated regional activities aimed at establishing the **Regional Innovation for Start-up Excellence (RISE) Facility.** creating a basis for improved start-up support, access to innovation infrastructure and funding, and stronger regional innovation cooperation.

The RCC advanced the **free movement of people** through work on professional qualifications and social security rights. It reviewed WB6 feedback on the roadmap for aligning professional qualifications with the EU acquis and facilitated a **Regional Administrative Framework for Cooperation for Portability of Social Security** Rights. The framework aims to strengthen

cooperation and information exchange among social security institutions in the WB6, enabling people working in another WB6 partner to preserve their social security entitlements. Preparations also progressed for the 2027–2028 workstreams on work permits and vocational education and training, laying the groundwork for further practical reforms to facilitate mobility.

Through the **Western Balkans Youth Lab 2 (WBYL 2)**, the RCC translated youth dialogue into practical policy outputs, including research on AI and media literacy, tools to combat disinformation and progress towards integrating media literacy into secondary education. It strengthened the organisational and advocacy capacities of youth structures through five tailored interventions and expanded young people's engagement with policymakers on EU integration, democracy and regional cooperation. The RCC also promoted regional cultural cooperation by connecting 25 young filmmakers and artists through professional development, screenings and networking at the Sarajevo Film Festival (SFF).

The **RCC strengthened regional security cooperation architecture** by combining practical exchanges among security institutions with more systematic needs mapping, monitoring and coordination of international assistance. Key results included securing **SEENSA** Chairmanships through 2029, endorsement of a joint open-source intelligence report by **SEEMIC** Chiefs, and the launch of **SecuriMeter 2026** data collection. In parallel, the **Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG)** mechanism mapped more than 350 institutional needs against ongoing or planned assistance, advanced monitoring of domestic roadmaps under the EU Joint Action Plan on counterterrorism and preventing violent extremism and strengthened cybersecurity coordination. This work supports the transition of the IISG to the **Security Governance Hub (SGH)** and its integration into the RCC, expected to become operational in January 2027, with the aim of improving coordination, complementarity and the sustainability of regional security cooperation.

High-level dialogue and support for parliamentary cooperation continued to advance regional alignment on EU integration and reform implementation. With RCC support, the **23rd Conference of the Parliamentary Committees for European Integration / Affairs of the Countries Participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process of South-East Europe (COSAP)** restored consensus-based decision-making after a two-year interval, resulting in the adoption of a Joint Statement. Participating parliamentary committees

committed to continuing work on revising COSAP's Rules of Procedure, with regular progress reporting and broader participation in the process, providing a stronger basis for inclusive and structured parliamentary cooperation on regional reforms and EU integration.

The reporting period reinforced the RCC's added value in converting dispersed regional priorities into common standards, coordinated instruments and practical delivery mechanisms. Progress was most evident where political dialogue was matched by technical preparation and measurable follow-up, notably through the Berlin Process deliverables, the Green Agenda package, innovation funding mobilisation, and strengthened security-needs mapping and monitoring. The priority now is to convert these advances into tangible benefits for citizens and businesses by closing implementation gaps, addressing financing constraints and strengthening accountability for results.

A. Support to the Implementation of Regional Programmes

A. Western Balkans Common Regional Market (CRM)

A1. Economic Competitiveness

A1.1. Investments and Financial Markets

During the reporting period, RCC facilitated **WB6 Investment Facilitation Roadmap** and the **Regional Green Investment Incentives Standards** setting a common benchmark for effective, coherent and fiscally responsible incentive regimes to mobilise investment for the green transition. Building on the Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation agreed in 2025, the Roadmap provides an actionable framework to improve the transparency, predictability and efficiency of procedures throughout the investment lifecycle. Together, these instruments advance the implementation of CRM 2 and support a more coordinated regional approach to attracting and facilitating sustainable investment.

The RCC also supported preparations for the **2026 Berlin Process Economic Ministers' Meeting** under Montenegro's Chairmanship. This work helped consolidate political support for the region's competitiveness agenda and advance the implementation of CRM 2.

In the area of financial education, the RCC supported the development of the **WB6 Financial Literacy Framework for Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (MSME)**, strengthening financial knowledge and business decision-making. Building on the framework for individuals endorsed in 2025, the new framework provides a common conceptual basis for strengthening MSMEs' financial knowledge and competencies and enabling better-informed financial and business decisions.

Further progress was achieved in regional financial integration. These developments support faster and more accessible domestic payments and lay the foundations for deeper regional payment integration.

A1.2. Industrial Development and Sustainable Tourism

During the reporting period, a major milestone in industrial cooperation was the launch of the **WB6-EU Industrial Parks Partnership** on 30 September 2026 in Budva. Seven industrial parks and business zones from the WB6 signed Memoranda of Understanding with six partner organisations from Austria, Germany and Slovenia. The signing ceremony was organised by

the RCC and the Chamber of Economy of Montenegro, with support from the European Commission, on the margins of the Economic Conference Montenegro 2026 and ahead of the Berlin Process Economic Ministers' Meeting. The Partnership is expected to be endorsed under the 2026 Berlin Process.

The Partnership responds to the green transition and evolving EU market requirements by creating opportunities for business linkages, value-chain development and the transfer of green industrial practices. The seven MoUs provide a framework for practical cooperation in business matchmaking, supplier development, investment promotion, industrial park management, innovation and skills development. They also support the gradual introduction of Eco-Industrial Park approaches, including resource efficiency, circular economy practices, cleaner energy and more sustainable industrial infrastructure. The initiative contributes to Common Regional Market 2 (CRM 2) by helping WB6 businesses strengthen their connections with European suppliers, customers, investors and technology partners.

In sustainable tourism, significant progress was made in translating the **2025 Declaration on Western Balkans Six Tourism Branding** into a structured regional mechanism. The RCC led the preparation of the **Framework for the WB6 Regional Tourism Facility,** laying the groundwork for its endorsement under the 2026 Berlin Process. The proposed Facility, initially to be hosted by the RCC, will provide a phased mechanism for advancing joint tourism initiatives and strengthening the region's positioning as a single tourism destination. It will support regional promotion, sustainable tourism, digital solutions and capacity building. The WB6 participants committed to supporting its implementation, including financially, and encouraged contributions from the EU and other development partners. As an initial step towards putting this commitment into practice, North Macedonia and Albania have each officially pledged a voluntary contribution of EUR 10,000 to support the Facility's first phase.

RCC further advanced regional tourism cooperation through the preparation of the **Declaration on Regional Cooperation for the Mobility of Organised Tourist Groups and Adventure Tourism in the Western Balkans Six** (**Tourism Green Lanes)**. The Declaration, welcomed by the 2026 Berlin Process participants, provides an overarching basis for developing smoother and more predictable mobility for organised tourist groups and adventure tourism across the region. The WB6 participants committed to the initiative's operationalisation, complementing the Facility's wider objectives.

A2. Human Capital Development

A2.1. Research and Innovation Area

The RCC completed the third round of **support for WB6 Digital Innovation Hubs (DIHs) through its NextHub Programme**. This round focused on supporting collaboration among DIHs in preparing joint project proposals for EU funding and capacity-building opportunities. In addition to regional networking and training, the previous two rounds of the Programme helped participating DIHs to **attract nearly €11.5 million** through the Horizon Europe[2] and Digital Europe (DEP) programmes, including EU and matching funds. Some of the original NextHub partner organisations have since evolved into European Digital Innovation Hubs, bringing the total number across the WB6 to 11[3].

As part of the **Strengthening Regional Smart Specialisation Ecosystems Initiative** launched in 2025, the RCC completed the first round of the Smart Specialisation Strategies regional support mechanism. The targeted technical assistance was designed to facilitate the institutional capacity of the region's Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) teams and will continue in 2027. It strengthened regional capacities, enhanced skills of S3 teams in project proposal writing, and provided practical guidance on fundraising strategies. As a result, several consortia were formed and project proposals submitted that will be instrumental in mobilising resources more effectively for long-term sustainability and implementation of S3 priority domains.

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[2] **The WB6 have significantly strengthened their engagement in Horizon Europe**, expanding their contribution to scientific excellence and Europe-wide research networks. The region has secured 621 signed grants and recorded 1,016 participations, of which 447 are unique. This includes 185 participations under Pillar I (notably 143 in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions and three in the European Research Council), 599 under Pillar II, 27 under Pillar III (including 13 in the European Innovation Council), and 205 under Widening. The net EU contribution has reached EUR 213 million, compared with EUR 171.3 million under the entire Horizon 2020 programme. With 8,721 applications and 5,139 eligible proposals, the WB6 success rate stands at 16.16%, against an EU average of 18.4%. This progress is reinforced by closer academia–industry cooperation, the development of digital innovation hubs and science and technology parks, and advances in artificial intelligence, including two AI Factory Antennas in Serbia and North Macedonia that provide regional companies with access to Europe's AI infrastructure. Smart Specialisation Strategies have been developed, or are under development, providing a stronger basis for prioritisation and targeted investment in research and innovation.

[3] The European Innovation Scoreboard (EIS) 2026, shows WB6 as a region with pockets of business innovation but persistently weak research funding, venture capital and commercialisation capacity. All assessed Western Balkans participants remain Emerging Innovators, below 70% of the EU average. The score (60.4 of the EU average) exceeds Montenegro's by 15.7 points, yet remains 9.6 points below the Moderate Innovator threshold. Serbia is also the only assessed WB6 above the Emerging Innovator group average of 45.5. While Montenegro's acceleration is evident, it should not be mistaken for sustained convergence. Albania and North Macedonia, meanwhile, show that earlier progress does not guarantee continued improvement.

In addition, the RCC implemented the **Level UP: Regional Gaming Industry Catalyst Programme** to address structural and capacity-related challenges within the WB6 gaming ecosystem. The programme mapped and promoted EU funding and development opportunities relevant to the sector and strengthened the collaborative and technical capacities of local stakeholders to prepare strong cross-regional proposals under programmes such as Creative Europe and Digital Europe. As a result, several gaming studios have attracted, both through the EU and private capital, around EUR 500,000 in funds.

The RCC published the **Mapping Deep-Tech and Green-Tech Manufacturing Potential in the Western Balkans Six study**. The study assesses the WB6's potential in deep-tech and green-tech manufacturing by reviewing its innovation ecosystems, technological capacities, funding environment and prospects for closer regional cooperation. It highlights notable capabilities in AI, robotics, advanced materials, renewable energy, circular economy and smart manufacturing, while pointing to continuing shortcomings in finance, infrastructure, commercialisation and the retention of skilled talent. The publication also sets out practical, strategic recommendations for aligning the digital and green transitions, reinforcing innovation hubs and research networks, and developing a manufacturing sector that is more competitive, sustainable and resilient.

The RCC developed the **Western Balkans Knowledge Transfer Tool-Kit** to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry across the region. The toolkit provides a structured framework that enables universities and research organisations to engage more effectively with business partners, and supports the practical application of research results, innovations and technologies. The Tool-Kit aims to facilitate the region's knowledge transfer, help bridge the gap between research and commercialisation, and encourage sustainable partnerships supporting regional innovation and economic growth.

The RCC focused on the **regional Online Matchmaking Platform for Research & Innovation Infrastructures** data population**.** The Platform will be officially launched by the end of 2026 to facilitate structured interactions and data-driven connections and will accelerate knowledge transfer and collaboration across sectors and the wider Balkan region.

Both the Tool-Kit and the Matchmaking Platform will play an instrumental role in the forthcoming **Regional Academia-Business Policy Lab** scheduled for launch later this year.

Building on these efforts, the RCC coordinated regional activities aimed at establishing the **Regional Innovation for Start-up Excellence (RISE) Facility.** The Facility's goal is to support early-stage innovators through tailored support, regional networks, access to innovation infrastructure and merit-based funding and alignment with the WB6's sustainable, digital, green, and smart-specialisation priorities. By connecting innovation ecosystems across the region, the RISE contributes to strengthening links between businesses, academia, public sector and investors. The participants of the 2026 Berlin Process Summit welcomed the progress made in advancing the RCC facilitated RISE.

A2.2. Women's Economic Empowerment and Regional Network of Women in STEM

During the reporting period, the RCC advanced work on improving the evidence base for women's economic empowerment by facilitating the **Regional Minimum Core Indicator Set for Gender-Disaggregated Entrepreneurship Statistics**, creating a common basis for collecting and comparing entrepreneurship data across the WB6, tracking progress, identifying gaps and improving targeted support. They aim to strengthen the availability, quality and comparability of regional data in line with EU and relevant international frameworks.

The RCC also organised the **Western Balkans Six Women Entrepreneurs of the Year 2026** ceremony in Sarajevo on 30 June, recognising six women whose businesses are advancing innovation, sustainability, creativity and digital transformation. The recognition increased the visibility of women entrepreneurs and their contribution to regional competitiveness.

In parallel, the RCC contributed to the **Gender Equality Forum 2026**, hosted by Bosnia and Herzegovina under Montenegro's Chairmanship of the Berlin Process. Held under the theme "Progress Under Pressure: Advancing Gender Equality in the Western Balkans", the Forum brought together policymakers, civil society, international organisations, academia and regional initiatives to strengthen cooperation and translate dialogue into practical action. The RCC highlighted the links between women's economic empowerment, inclusive growth, competitiveness, resilience and convergence with the EU, with particular emphasis on women's access to finance, markets and economic opportunities.

A2.3. Free Movement of People

Progress continued in advancing the free movement agenda in the Western Balkans, with developments in professional qualifications, social security coordination, work permits and vocational education and training (VET) contributing to the implementation of the CRM and alignment with the EU acquis.

In the area of **professional qualifications**, RCC supported WB6 efforts to align with Directive 2005/36/EC through a comprehensive regional assessment, including jurisdiction-specific fiches, stakeholder consultations and a roadmap outlining sequencing, governance models and priority actions for implementation. During the reporting period, follow-up work focused on reviewing feedback received from the WB6 on the proposed roadmap and incorporating the relevant inputs. The roadmap is being finalised as a common technical basis for sequencing further reforms, strengthening coordination and identifying priority actions for implementation. This work provides a basis for continued progress towards more effective recognition of professional qualifications across the region and closer alignment with the EU framework.

Progress was also made in the area of **coordination and portability of social security rights**. Following the completion and consideration of the regional assessment, the Working Group on Coordination and Portability of Social Security Rights met twice during the reporting period, first on 10 July 2026 in Vienna and subsequently on 8 September 2026 in Istanbul. The meetings provided an opportunity for the members of the Working Group to review the assessment findings, discuss the proposed way forward and consolidate a common technical approach. Building on this process, the RCC facilitated the **Regional Administrative Framework (RAF) on Social Security Rights**, designed to strengthen cooperation and information exchange among social security institutions in the WB6.

In parallel, preparations have advanced for the **work permit and vocational education and training (VET) workstreams for 2027–2028**. The preparatory work is focused on defining the scope and sequencing of activities and ensuring that the next phase of regional cooperation responds to identified implementation needs and supports practical mobility across the region.

A3. Digital Integration and Implementation of the Digital Agenda for the Western Balkans

During the reporting period, the RCC advanced work on streamlining telecommunications permit-granting procedures across the region. Building on the initial findings presented to the Advisory and Coordination Group (ACG) in October 2025, the RCC conducted a more detailed review of permit granting practices, drawing on consultations with public and private sector telecommunications stakeholders held in April and May 2026, as well as input from local municipalities collected through a dedicated questionnaire.

Based on this work, the recommendations to streamline permit-granting procedures were developed and presented to the WB6 Working Group on Connectivity in June 2026. The recommendations were subsequently discussed through a series of in-person meetings across the region in September, bringing together key telecommunications stakeholders, ministries and operators and other relevant authorities, including those responsible for construction, spatial planning and local government. The consultations confirmed broad support for the proposed measures and helped ensure that the recommendations reflected practical considerations across the different jurisdictions. This work provided the basis for endorsement of a **Draft Declaration on Streamlining Telecommunications Permit-Granting Procedures** at the Berlin Process Summit. The next steps in streamlining permit granting procedures were discussed at the ACG meeting in October 2026, held back-to-back with the Western Balkans Digital Summit.

Regarding the roaming agenda, the RCC continued to monitor the implementation of the EU-WB Roaming Declaration. In July 2026, it conducted an analysis of retail data roaming prices offered by the Declaration's signatories in the WB6 and the EU. The analysis found that higher-volume roaming packages are becoming increasingly common, contributing to a decline in the effective price per GB. For WB6 operators, the average price of 1 GB ranges from 0.70 to 5.50 EUR, well below the 14EUR/GB price cap agreed by operators and applicable until the end of 2027. The analysis also identified an emerging trend towards incorporating roaming allowances into domestic mobile tariffs, enabling subscribers to use a predefined amount of data when travelling across the EU and WB6 without purchasing a separate roaming package.

In the area of digital skills, the RCC commissioned and launched the study **"ICT Skills in the Western Balkans Six: Current Landscape, Emerging Needs, and Directions for Action"**

at an event on 15 September 2026 in Belgrade. The study assesses the current ICT skills landscape across the WB6, identifies skills gaps faced by companies and examines emerging skills needs, including possible directions for regional action. The launch brought together relevant stakeholders to discuss the implications for skills development, employment and the competitiveness of the regional ICT sector. The discussion highlighted the need to better anticipate changing skills requirements, strengthen practical training and cooperation between education providers and employers, and improve curricula and career guidance to support smoother transitions from education to employment.

On 21 October 2026 in Brussels, the RCC, the European Commission, GIZ and CEFTA organised a workshop on AdES List of Trusted Lists (TC AdES LOTL**)** to support the WB6 in completing the onboarding process. The workshop provided a platform to review progress, identify outstanding administrative and technical challenges, and agree on mitigation measures and target timelines for completing the remaining steps towards inclusion in the list. It also enabled WB6 participants to draw on experience gained during the onboarding process, supported by the European Commission.

The RCC initiated the preparation of the **Western Balkans DESI 2026 Report**, aligned with EU norms, practices and the EU DESI methodology. During September and October 2026, the RCC coordinated the data collection process, including market research to address gaps in the available indicators. The first results are expected to be presented in November 2026.

The 8th Western Balkans Digital Summit (WBDS) was held on 13–14 October 2026 in Herceg Novi, bringing together regional and European stakeholders to advance cooperation on the digital agenda. The RCC played a key role in preparing and delivering the Summit, including facilitating the preparatory process and coordinating the drafting of the Summit Conclusions. The RCC also contributed to the substantive programme through participation in the ministerial panel and sessions on regional connectivity and AI.

The Western Balkans Digital Summit (WBDS) welcomed the technical work on the **AI Roadmap for the WB6**, developed by the RCC based on regional priorities and WB6 inputs. The AI Roadmap is officially endorsed at the Berlin Process Summit in October and provides an important basis for a more coordinated regional approach to the development and implementation of AI in the WB6. Through the WBDS Conclusions, WB6 reaffirmed its

commitment to advancing digital transformation and strengthening cooperation across the areas covered by the Digital Agenda.

A4. Sustainable Growth and Climate Change Resilience

During the reporting period, through the framework of the **Regional Working Group on GAWB (RWG GAWB)**[4], RCC focused on the following key priorities:

- Preparation for the organisation of the Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) in Žabljak, Montenegro
- Validation of the regional deliverables to be endorsed in the Žabljak Green Ministerial
- Validation and publication of the 2025 Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) Implementation Report

On 18–19 September in Žabljak, the RCC organised the Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB), held under Montenegro's Chairmanship of the 2026 Berlin Process. Organised in partnership with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany (BMZ), within the framework of the Regional Climate Partnership between Germany and the WB6, and with the support of the European Commission, the meeting provided a key political platform to review progress since the Dubrovnik Ministerial, defining the next phase of regional cooperation and preparing 2026 GAWB package for the Berlin Process Summit. RCC also supported the coordination with the host authorities, delegations, regional coordinators and partner organisations, and led preparations and presentation of the 2026 package of regional GAWB deliverables for endorsement.

The meeting resulted in the endorsement of the **2026 GAWB Ministerial Declaration** or the Žabljak Declaration, reaffirming the commitments of the Sofia Declaration and setting the political direction for the next phase of Green Agenda implementation. The event brought together ministers from the region, representatives of the European Commission and Germany,

[4] **Regional Working Group on GAWB (RWG GAWB)**, brings together representatives of the WB6, the European Commission, and key regional partners, including the Energy Community, the Transport Community, the Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD), and the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN). This structured coordination mechanism ensures policy alignment, joint planning, and effective monitoring of implementation. It is further reinforced through horizontal cooperation with donors, the private sector, international organisations, regional initiatives, local self-governments, and civil society organisations, strengthening ownership, resource mobilisation, and on-the-ground impact across the region. The regional coordination of the GAWB Action Plan is led by the RCC

regional organisations and international partners to review progress in implementing the Green Agenda and discuss priorities for the period ahead. Discussions focused on climate and water resilience, biodiversity and nature protection, circular economy and sustainable finance, as well as stronger regional coordination. The discussions also helped identify implementation challenges, financing needs and concrete follow-up actions.

On the second day, regional technical exchanges focused on key GAWB priorities including plastic pollution and Extended Producer Responsibility, biodiversity and ecosystem restoration, monitoring, reporting, verification and accreditation (MRVA) systems, and sustainable finance. The discussions addressed implementation challenges, financing needs and regional cooperation, and identified concrete next steps for putting the newly endorsed commitments into practice. A key deliverable endorsed in Žabljak was the **WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy**, developed by the RCC to establish a structured regional framework for cooperation on adaptation planning, climate risks and water resilience.

In line with the **Outline of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan** RCC developed the **WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 (BSP 2030),** with technical support from external experts and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) as a common regional framework to advance biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable natural resource management. Endorsed at the Ministerial Meeting, the Plan serves as a key regional instrument under Pillar 5 of the GAWB and is aligned with the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 and the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework. The WB6 Forest Landscape Restoration Plan, developed by IUCN, was also endorsed, setting out regional priority actions to restore forest ecosystems and strengthen biodiversity and climate resilience.

Under the circular economy pillar, two regional deliverables developed by the RCC with the support of Switzerland through the Green Coop project were endorsed**: the Regional Pledge on Phasing Out the Five Most Littered Single-Use Plastics,** supporting harmonised regional action to reduce plastic pollution, and the **Regional Extended Producer Responsibility Framework for Plastic Packaging**, providing a harmonised regional approach to strengthening producer responsibility for packaging waste.

In line with its mandate to monitor and report on the implementation of the GAWB, the RCC launched the **GAWB Observatory Platform**, providing a comprehensive and user-friendly

visual overview of progress across policy areas at both WB6 and regional level. The platform brings together relevant indicators, timelines, annual data and key policy and reference documents, providing a structured basis for tracking implementation of the Sofia Declaration and related EU policy processes.

The RCC also finalised, validated and published the **2025 GARI Report**. This edition, together with previous GARI reports, will be integrated in the Observatory Platform and complemented by dedicated infographics to present a clear and accessible overview of the current status of GAWB implementation.

A5. Projects

A5.1. Western Balkans Youth Lab Project (WBYL)

During the reporting period, the Western Balkans Youth Lab 2 (WBYL2) continued to strengthen youth participation in policymaking, with a focus on translating regional dialogue into concrete, youth-informed policy inputs and practical outputs.

Following the Mid-term Conference held in April 2026, the Youth Policy Lab on Disinformation and Media Literacy moved into an implementation-focused phase, with thematic Working Groups across the WB6 advancing the priorities identified at regional level. Their work focused on research, knowledge exchange and capacity building, development of practical tools addressing disinformation, media literacy and the evolving information environment. This work helped translate regional discussions into evidence-informed inputs and practical resources that can support further policy dialogue and youth engagement across the WB6.

In the reporting period, the RCC organised a *Bootcamp* bringing together young people and relevant stakeholders, including young influencers, to discuss the findings of the "Research on Youth Skills in Using Artificial Intelligence and Conducting Online Research**".** The discussions generated practical recommendations and insights that will inform the development of a Code of Conduct as part of the Working Group's follow-up activities. It also organised an extended meeting to present the findings of the "Youth Study on Young People in the Media and Media Among Youth**".** The meeting brought together a diverse group of stakeholders, enabling the findings to be examined from different perspectives and complemented by direct input from participants. The feedback collected during the meeting was incorporated into the

study's recommendations, strengthening their relevance to the needs and experiences of young people and media stakeholders. "The Manual on Media Education and Disinformation for Youth", was finalised and accompanied by a practical Toolkit. The two resources provide young people and youth organisations with accessible materials to better understand and address disinformation and strengthen media literacy. Their completion represents a concrete output of the thematic Youth Policy Lab and the collaborative work carried out through the regional and local Working Groups. A comprehensive research study on "Youth Visibility, Representation and Participation in Television Broadcasting" was completed during the reporting period. The study analysed media content and institutional practices related to production and editorial processes, providing an evidence base for assessing the representation and participation of young people in television media. The findings were presented at a press conference, facilitating dialogue among the researcher, the Working Group and relevant media stakeholders. In addition, a one-day workshop brought together around 30 stakeholders to discuss inclusive youth representation in the media and approaches to developing content free from illegal or harmful narratives. Together, these activities helped translate the research findings into stakeholder dialogue and practical discussion on improving youth representation in media. The development of a "Curriculum for an Elective Secondary-School Course on Media Literacy" further progressed. The curriculum is intended to address a gap in existing high school and vocational education programmes by providing students with structured opportunities to develop critical thinking, analytical and digital skills needed to navigate an increasingly complex information environment. Its development represents a practical step towards strengthening media literacy within formal education. "The Research on Youth AI and Media Literacy Competencies" was finalised, providing evidence on young people's knowledge, skills and needs related to AI and media literacy. Building on the findings, a three-day Training of Trainers was organised, equipping prospective trainers with knowledge and practical tools to deliver further training on disinformation and media literacy. The activity established a multiplier mechanism for transferring the knowledge generated through the research to local-level capacity-building activities.

In addition to the Youth Policy Lab, WBYL2 organised two Regional Fireside Talks during the reporting period. The sixth Fireside Talk, held at RCC Headquarters in June with H.E. Benjamin Haddad, French Minister Delegate for Europe, focused on the EU accession process

and enabled young participants to exchange directly with a senior European policymaker on the role of youth in European integration.

The seventh Fireside Talk, *"***Investing in Youth: Education, Skills and Regional Cooperation for EU Accession***",* was organised as part of the Forum of Young Political Scientists of Bosnia and Herzegovina 2026. It brought together young political scientists and representatives of academia, the RCC, the EU and the diplomatic community to discuss how education, skills development, youth mobility and regional cooperation can support young people's professional and civic engagement and contribute to the EU accession process. Together, the two events strengthened opportunities for youth to engage directly in policy dialogue and connect regional youth perspectives with broader discussions on European integration.

To ensure that youth voices are meaningfully reflected in policy processes, youth structures require strong organisational capacities. During the reporting period, WBYL2 delivered **five Capacity-Building for Internal Growth interventions**, each tailored to specific organisational needs identified by youth structures across the region. The support strengthened capacities in strategic planning, organisational development, communication, advocacy, membership engagement and youth policy participation.

The interventions included support to the Youth Congress of Albania for the strategic organisation of its General Assembly and enhanced regional cooperation; a Youth Policy Academy module for the Youth Council in Bosnia and Herzegovina; support to the Youth Network of Montenegro to strengthen its visual identity and communication capacities; development of the Youth Council of North Macedonia's Strategic Plan 2027–2031; and support to the Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) in strategic membership engagement, fundraising, digital security and evidence-based youth advocacy, including a 10-year comparative analysis of its Alternative Reports. Furthermore, WBYL2 supported the participation of young representatives from the Western Balkans in regional and international high-level events, creating opportunities for direct engagement with policymakers and institutional stakeholders and enabling young people to contribute to discussions on issues affecting their communities and the region.

In June, young leaders from the region participated in the fifth edition of **Bridging the Gap on Youth Political Participation and Youth Policy**, held at the European Parliament in Brussels. The event brought together youth representatives, Members of the European Parliament, representatives of the European Commission, civil society organisations and youth policy experts. Discussions focused on democratic participation, youth policy, regional cooperation and the EU integration process, providing young representatives with opportunities to exchange perspectives directly with policymakers and contribute to the regional policy dialogue.

In September, WBYL2 further supported the participation of young representatives from the region in the 2026 edition of the regional forum "Reimagining Cooperation Zones: Youth, Democracy and the Fundamentals of the Future" in Kruševo. Bringing together approximately 150 young leaders, youth representatives, policymakers, institutional actors, civil society organisations and other regional stakeholders from 16 jurisdictions, the forum provided a platform for young people to engage in discussions on democracy, regional cooperation and the future of the region, while strengthening their connections with regional stakeholders and peers.

The reporting period was active for the WBYL2 team, including the organisation of the **Second Regional Conference on Youth Cultural Cooperation**, held back-to-back with the SFF, one of the region's largest and most internationally recognised cultural events. The six-day programme brought together 25 young filmmakers and artists from film and art academies across the WB6, providing opportunities for professional development, cultural exchange and regional networking, while enabling participants to engage directly with the festival programme and wider cultural community.

As part of the programme, a dedicated side event provided young filmmakers with an opportunity to present their short films to festival audiences and professionals. This increased the visibility of emerging regional talent while creating opportunities for young filmmakers to showcase their work, exchange experiences and establish professional connections within the regional film sector.

The programme also featured masterclasses with internationally recognised filmmakers and actors, including Academy Award-nominated actor Woody Harrelson, two-time Academy

Award nominee Emily Watson, Academy Award-winning director Paweł Pawlikowski and two-time Academy Award-winning director Asghar Farhadi. Participants further engaged in roundtables and case-study workshops with professionals from the cultural and creative sectors, as well as a high-level panel featuring RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanović and Luigi Soreca, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to Bosnia and Herzegovina. These exchanges exposed participants to international professional experience, industry perspectives and institutional dialogue, while strengthening opportunities for knowledge transfer and regional collaboration.

A5.2. Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG)

During the reporting period, the Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG) Secretariat maintained its core coordination, monitoring, analytical and administrative functions while supporting the transition to the Security Governance Hub (SGH) under the RCC. Progress focused on intensified engagement with Western Balkans Partners, further operationalisation of the Cybersecurity Pillar, preparations for monitoring the Joint Action Plan on Counterterrorism and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (JAP CT/P-CVE), continued development of the IISG and Cybersecurity Databases, and strengthened coordination with the European Commission and international partners.

The IISG Secretariat conducted consultations with Western Balkans Partners in Pristina (21–23 July), Skopje (28–29 July) and Belgrade (26 August), covering the Western Balkans Counter Terrorism initiative (WBCTi), Western Balkans Counter Serious Crime initiative (WBCSCi) and Western Balkans Border/Boundary Security initiative (WBBSi) pillars, as well as cybersecurity governance. The consultations reviewed progress and institutional arrangements, validated partner needs and priorities, and strengthened coordination with domestic institutions, the European Commission and capacity-building partners.

Particular attention was given to implementation and future monitoring of the Partner Roadmap under the new EU Joint Action Plan (JAP), including North Macedonia's newly approved Roadmap. Cybersecurity discussions addressed key institutional, legislative and capacity needs, including NIS2-related reforms, critical infrastructure, risk management, cybercrime and threat intelligence.

Follow-up work in August and September further developed JAP monitoring approach by linking Roadmap measures to identified needs and reviewing baselines, targets, indicators and timelines. Given the different stages of Roadmap submission and validation across the region, the IISG Secretariat worked towards common regional monitoring elements while retaining Partner-specific information to ensure accurate tracking and considering alignment with domestic reporting cycles and regional mechanisms, including the Regional Network of CT/P-CVE Coordinators (RNNC).

Cybersecurity needs mapping continued through review of existing needs, direct consultations with Partner institutions and comparison with ongoing international assistance. The Pristina, Skopje and Belgrade consultations helped validate priorities, identify emerging needs, clarify institutional responsibilities and update Partner Cybersecurity Charters. These jurisdiction-level profiles consolidated governance information, validated needs, institutional contacts and other relevant data, providing a structured basis for monitoring developments and identifying potential areas for support.

Coordination with key cybersecurity organisations and implementers, including WB3C, ITU, CIVIPOL / WB CEPS & Cyber, the Council of Europe CyberSEE project, e-Governance Academy and ENISA, focused on improving information exchange, avoiding parallel needs assessments and linking identified needs with existing or planned assistance. On 3 September, a dedicated session with CIVIPOL / WB CEPS & Cyber team introduced the IISG and Cybersecurity Databases, supported needs validation and facilitated access for relevant project representatives. Follow-up focused on validating cybersecurity and critical infrastructure/critical entities needs and improving information on ongoing and planned support. During September, access to the Cybersecurity Database was extended to additional Partner institutions, including in North Macedonia and Serbia, strengthening its practical use.

The IISG Secretariat maintained and quality-controlled the IISG and Cybersecurity Databases, updating information on projects, needs, institutions, beneficiaries, contacts and international assistance, while facilitating access and technical support for Partner institutions, international organisations, implementing partners and external evaluators. Work also advanced on the future enhancement of the IISG Database, following technical consultations with the ARK IT on 24 July. The proposed upgrade would integrate JAP and partner roadmap monitoring, strengthen reporting and data analytics, and introduce functionality to identify project overlaps,

gaps, complementarities and synergies. Conceptual work further progressed on linking roadmap measures, partner needs and interventions, including monitoring of baselines, targets and timelines and partner-level and regional visualisations. Advanced analytical and AI-supported options were also explored, alongside data protection and GDPR requirements; and ARK IT was requested to submit a technical and financial proposal.

Coordination with the European Commission and strategic partners continued throughout the period, covering IISG implementation, cybersecurity, JAP Roadmap monitoring, future planning and the transition of the IISG to the **Security Governance Hub (SGH)** and its integration into the RCC. Engagement with regional and international stakeholders, including WB3C, ITU, GIZ and CIVIPOL, focused on aligning capacity-building and training needs, exploring joint activities and strengthening visibility and cooperation around future regional initiatives.

The independent external evaluation of the IISG, conducted by First Call Partners (FCP) and covering May 2024–December 2026[5], progressed into its evidence-gathering phase during the reporting period. The evaluation assesses relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability, as well as governance and operational performance, including database and analytical products, donor coordination, cybersecurity integration and the long-term institutional sustainability of the SGH within the RCC framework.

In parallel, under the RCC guidance, the IISG Secretariat contributed technical, operational, indicator-related and budgetary inputs to the new EC grant application for 2027–2029, including the proposed SGH activity structure, indicators, budget projections and responses to initial EC feedback. An internal strategic review initiated in September examined current methodologies, operations and future requirements against JAP monitoring, evolving WB6 needs, SGH responsibilities and Q4 priorities. The review also informed preparations for technical assistance to assess the impact, positioning and continuity of the IISG/SGH pillars from 2027 onwards. Planning for the Cybersecurity Pillar was further developed to support its

[5] The IISG Secretariat facilitated the evaluation by providing key documentation and database access, supporting stakeholder engagement and interviews, and responding to follow-up requests. The inception phase was completed in August, with interviews conducted in September

integration as a core SGH workstream, with future activities linked to validated partner needs, donor coordination and database-based analysis.

A5.3. Employment and Social Affairs Platform (ESAP 3)

During the reporting period, the RCC's ESAP 3[6] continued to support labour market reforms, institutional capacity building and regional cooperation in the WB6, with a particular focus on peer learning, strengthening Public Employment Services (PES), tackling undeclared work and enhancing cooperation with relevant EU networks and institutions.

A key activity during the reporting period was the implementation of the 2026 PES Benchlearning cycle, which continued to support the modernisation and performance improvement of PES across the WB6, in line with the latest EU PES Benchlearning methodology. The cycle combines self-assessment, peer review, exchange of practices and expert analysis to help PES to identify strengths, address areas for improvement and draw on relevant practices and experience from peers across the region and the EU. During the reporting period, the cycle progressed through preparatory activities and self-assessments, followed by peer visits and workshops. These activities are expected to inform individual PES reports and a regional comparative report, both scheduled for completion by the end of the year, providing an evidence base for further performance improvement and modernisation.

ESAP 3 facilitated the launch of the 2026 PES Benchlearning cycle through a workshop held in Jahorina on 3–4 June 2026, bringing together representatives of WB6 PES, and EU and local experts. The workshop introduced the updated Benchlearning methodology and provided guidance on the revised self-assessment process, reflecting the methodological changes. It also enabled participants to discuss common challenges, identify potential areas for improvement in PES performance and service delivery, and agree on the key steps for implementing the Benchlearning cycle. The workshop therefore established a common understanding of the

[6] Comprehensive information on ESAP 3 activities, outputs, and analytical products is available on the project's dedicated webpage (www.esap.online), which provides regular updates on regional cooperation and developments in employment and social affairs.

revised methodology and helped prepare participating PES for the subsequent self-assessment, peer review and learning activities.

Upon completion of the self-assessment process in each WB6 PES, first peer review workshop within this PES Benchlearning cycle was held in Belgrade on 15-16 September 2026. The workshop brought together representatives of the PESs of Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, alongside EU and local Benchlearning experts and representatives of the EU Delegation. Discussions focused on three key dimensions of PES performance: central to local coordination within PES, digital transformation and job brokerage. The peer exchange enabled participants to share practical approaches and good practices, assess their relevance to their own contexts, and explore opportunities for their adaptation and transfer across PES. As part of the programme, participants visited a local PES branch office in Belgrade to gain first-hand insight into the host PES's approaches to operational coordination, digitalisation and engagement with employers, as well as its key processes and workflows.

The peer review continued with the second 2026 PES Benchlearning Peer Review Workshop, held in Prizren on 8-9 October 2026. The workshop brought together representatives of the host PES, as well as representatives from Albania and North Macedonia, alongside EU and local experts. In line with the Benchlearning methodology, the programme combined thematic peer review sessions with a field visit to a local PES office in Prizren. Discussions focused on three thematic areas: PES ecosystem, including cooperation and coordination with local authorities, training providers, social services and other partners; local service delivery, including counselling, active labour market measures, digital and blended services and employer services; and empowering PES staff, including staff capacities, evidence-based service improvement and the use of digital tools and AI. The field visit provided participants with practical insight into the organisation and delivery of local employment services, including registration and counselling, employer services, case management and the use of digital tools. The workshop enabled participants to exchange good practices, identify areas for improvement and formulate recommendations to inform the individual and regional Benchlearning reports.

Under the Western Balkans Network for Tackling Undeclared Work, ESAP 3 continued the implementation of the Mutual Assistance Projects (MAPs) planned for 2026. In June 2026, a plenary meeting of the WB6 Network was held in Jahorina, followed by MAP sessions

dedicated to Serbia and Montenegro on 18 June 2026. The activities brought together labour inspectorates and other relevant institutions to exchange practical experiences and jointly address challenges related to the prevention, detection and formalisation of undeclared work in construction industry. Through targeted peer exchange and practical discussion, the MAPs provided tailored support to participating institutions while strengthening cooperation and operational links among labour inspectorates across the region.

Responding to specific stakeholders needs, ESAP 3 further strengthened cooperation between WB6 PES and their EU counterparts through a study visit of a delegation of the Employment Service of Serbia to the Employment Service of Lithuania on 6-8 October 2026 in Vilnius. The programme provided an opportunity to exchange experience on employment service modernisation and delivery, covering the Lithuanian PES strategy and business model, AI and advanced technologies, engagement with talent, highly skilled professionals and diaspora, employer cooperation, support to vulnerable groups and employed persons, the Youth Guarantee, services for young people not in employment, education or training (NEETs), and implementation of the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) classification.

The delegation also visited the Vilnius Client Service Department, gaining practical insights into the local employment service delivery, including services for vulnerable groups, young people and NEETs, as well as the operation of a Regional Career Centre. The visit provided practical approaches relevant to ongoing PES reforms across the WB6, particularly in digitalisation and AI, employer engagement, targeted services, youth employment, career guidance and ESCO implementation, while strengthening direct institutional links with an EU PES and creating a basis for continued peer exchange.

In addition, ESAP 3 supported the participation of representatives of WB6 labour inspectorates in the European Labour Authority (ELA) study visit on 13-14 October 2026 in Brussels, focusing on risk-based targeting, data-driven enforcement, digital tools and collaboration with social partners in tackling undeclared work. Two representatives from Albania and Montenegro participated in the study visit, providing them with the opportunity to exchange directly with EU counterparts and gain practical insight into approaches used by ELA and EU Members to strengthen risk-based and data-driven enforcement. The activity is expected to support the objectives of the WB6 Network for Tackling Undeclared Work by strengthening practical

cooperation and knowledge exchange between WB6 institutions and EU counterparts. It also contributes to closer cooperation between the WB6 Network and the European Platform Tackling Undeclared Work, supporting the continued participation of WB6 practitioners in relevant European cooperation mechanisms. Through these activities, ESAP 3 continued to strengthen regional peer learning, practical institutional cooperation and links between WB6 institutions and relevant EU networks, PES and agencies. The combination of PES Benchlearning peer reviews, MAPs, EU study visits and direct institutional exchanges provided participating PES and labour inspectorates with opportunities to compare practices, identify areas for improvement and gain practical approaches applied by EU counterparts.

In parallel, ESAP 3 continued to reinforce its analytical and data-sharing function through regular updates to the ESAP online Employment Observatory, providing up-to-date labour market data, analytical findings and policy-relevant insights across the WB6. The Observatory complements the project's capacity-building and peer-learning interventions by providing an evidence base for policy discussions, institutional cooperation and the monitoring of labour market developments.

B. Political Cooperation, Good Governance and Security

B1. Political Cooperation

During the reporting period, the RCC's work in political cooperation focused on two closely linked objectives. The first was concluding the Sofia SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office (C-i-O) 2025-2026, which marked the 30th anniversary of the Process, with the political endorsement of the RCC's key deliverables. The second was preparing its support to the Bucharest C-i-O 2026-2027. High-level meetings and participation in key regional and international fora further strengthened the RCC's partnerships and the visibility of regional cooperation as a tool for European integration and sustainable development.

The 18th RCC Annual Meeting, held on 9 June 2026 in Sofia and co-chaired by the RCC and the Sofia C-i-O, reviewed and endorsed the RCC Annual Report. The Report was subsequently endorsed on 10 June by the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs and by the SEECP leaders at the Sofia Summit. The key SEE2030 Strategy documents were also approved and endorsed in Sofia - SEE2030 Strategy Mid-Term Implementation Report and the SEE2030 Strategy Mid-Term Update. In the Sofia Summit Declaration, SEECP Participants acknowledged the RCC's

contribution as the operational arm of the SEECP, recognised its added value as the hub of regional cooperation, and encouraged the incoming Bucharest C-i-O to continue strengthening SEECP-RCC synergy, thereby confirming political support for the RCC's work in the new Chairmanship cycle.

To mark the 30th anniversary of the SEECP, the RCC produced, upon the request of the Sofia C-i-O, a strategic report on 30 years SEECP: Charting Shared Regional Transformation. Presented at the Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and at the Summit, the report contributes to preserving the institutional memory of the Process and draws lessons for its future direction.

Following the handover of the Chairmanship at the Sofia Summit, the RCC aligned its support with the priorities of the Bucharest C-i-O and conducted a working visit on 28 July to Bucharest, where RCC Secretary General **Amer Kapetanović** met with Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania **Oana Țoiu** and the Secretary of State for European Affairs, the Middle East and Africa **Clara Staicu.** The meetings confirmed the commitment to an active and results-oriented Chairmanship in close cooperation with the RCC and explored possible joint activities. A round table with representatives of ministries, the Parliament, public institutions and specialised agencies discussed opportunities for cooperation across the RCC's programme areas, from connectivity, tourism and SMEs to disaster preparedness, security-sector reform, hybrid threats, youth and demographic challenges. Participants also discussed regional training and policy events that could be promoted during the Bucharest C-i-O.

This cooperation continued at the 1st SEECP Political Directors' Meeting under the Bucharest C-i-O on 9 September 2026, where the RCC presented its activities. It continued as well at the meeting of SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs on Regional Cooperation, held on 24 September 2026 in New York on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly High-level Week under the auspices of the Bucharest Chairmanships-in-Office of the Central European Initiative (CEI) and the SEECP. Under the theme "Regional Cooperation in a Changing World: Delivering Stability, Resilience and Sustainable Growth through Trust-Based, Results-Oriented Cooperation", the RCC Secretary General highlighted human capital, connectivity and resilience, as well as climate resilience and disaster preparedness, as key priorities for future joint action. The ministers welcomed the RCC's contribution and commended its work in translating political commitments into concrete regional results.

The RCC also participated in the Roundtable Discussion on the "Role of Regional Cooperation in Advancing EU Integration", held on 5 October 2026 in Brussels under the auspices of the Bucharest SEECP and CEI CiOs.

High-level meetings also strengthened the RCC's partnerships with SEECP Participants and international organisations. On 19 June 2026, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, **George Gerapetritis,** visited the RCC headquarters in Sarajevo and reaffirmed Greece's strong commitment to regional cooperation and the European perspective of the Western Balkans. The Minister welcomed the RCC's contribution to implementing the political priorities agreed within the SEECP. The talks also looked ahead to Greece's Presidency of the Council of the EU in the second half of 2027 and joint efforts to revive the "Thessaloniki momentum".

On 23 June in Vienna, the Secretary General met with the Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), **Feridun H. Sinirlioğlu,** and discussed coordinated action on counterterrorism, organised crime, boundary security, cybersecurity and climate and environmental security. They agreed to maintain regular exchanges between their teams, encourage mutual participation in relevant activities and deepen cooperation in complementary areas. The RCC also presented the JUMBO Security Forum, SecuriMeter and the transition of the EU-funded IISG initiative into the Western Balkans Security Governance Hub.

During a working visit to the United States in July 2026, Secretary General **Amer Kapetanović** participated in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) event "Bridging the Gaps to Accelerate the SDGs: Policy Coherence across Water, Energy, Industry and Cities", co-organised by the OECD, Spain, Italy and Romania and held during the 2026 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. Presenting a regional perspective on how successful solutions can be scaled up and translated into action, he highlighted the South East Europe 2030 Strategy as the region's common framework for implementing the Sustainable Development Goals through shared priorities, regional ownership and accountability. On the margins of the New York meetings, the Secretary General met the OECD Deputy Secretary-General, **František Ružička**, to discuss expanding cooperation between the two organisations. Building on joint work on sustainable foreign direct investment, the talks focused on inclusive growth, private-sector engagement, development

financing and human capital. Follow-up consultations between the two teams were foreseen to identify concrete areas for joint action. In Washington, D.C., RCC Secretary General addressed a discussion hosted by the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars. He presented the RCC's mandate and priorities to the diplomatic and policy community and underlined the importance of continued transatlantic engagement with the region.

In September 2026, the Secretary General also met the EU Special Representative, **Peter Sørensen**, in New York and discussed regional developments and the European perspective of the Western Balkans. He also met the Deputy State Secretary for International Cooperation of Hungary, **István Lakatos**, to discuss Hungary's role in supporting regional cooperation, connectivity and economic development.

At key regional and international fora, the Secretary General **Amer Kapetanović** presented regional cooperation as a strategic tool for European integration. The RCC Secretary General took part in the Berlin Process Ministerial Forum on the Creative Economy, on 18 June 2026 in Herceg Novi, hosted by Montenegro. The Forum brought together culture ministers and representatives from the Western Balkans and Europe to discuss the role of creative industries in sustainable development, youth employment and regional competitiveness, continuing the dialogue launched in 2025 under the UK Chairmanship of the Berlin Process. The Secretary General stressed that creative industries should be recognised as a strategic driver of regional competitiveness, with stronger regional cooperation needed to scale talent, expand market access and translate creativity into jobs, exports, innovation and sustainable economic value.

At the 19th Dubrovnik Forum on 27 June 2026, the Secretary General spoke at the panel "The EU and the Western Balkans: Resolving Unfinished Business Together", alongside foreign ministers from the region, a Member of the European Parliament and Austria's Special Envoy for Southeast Europe and EU Enlargement. He stressed that a credible, fair and merit-based path towards membership must be matched by delivery, with political commitments translated into reforms, investment, stronger regional cooperation and tangible benefits for citizens. On the margins of the Forum, **Kapetanović** held a bilateral meeting with the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs of Slovenia, **Tone Kajzer.**

Under the 2026 Berlin Process Presidency of Montenegro, RCC Secretary General **Amer Kapetanović** engaged with key Montenegro counterparts on regional priorities and

preparations for this year's programme. On 23 June in Vienna, the RCC convened a meeting of WB6 Prime Ministers' Sherpas to review progress on the 2026 Berlin Process deliverables and coordinate next steps ahead of the ministerial meetings and Leaders' Summit in October. The meeting brought together representatives of the WB6, the European Commission, 2026 Berlin Process host Montenegro, Germany and regional organisations. Discussions focused on the readiness of proposed deliverables, remaining challenges, responsibilities and timelines, with Kapetanović presenting progress across all CRM pillars, including labour mobility, investment promotion, tourism, digital transformation, innovation and the Green Agenda.

On 10 July in Sarajevo, Secretary General welcomed Minister of Public Administration **Marash Dukaj** at the RCC Secretariat for discussions on regional cooperation, reform priorities, digital transformation, connectivity, joint commitments and preparations for the Western Balkans Digital Summit. On 7 September in Podgorica, he met with Prime Minister **Milojko Spajić** to discuss Montenegro's Berlin Process Chairmanship, progress on the regional agenda and preparations for the Leaders' Summit, including key meetings supporting implementation of the RCC-coordinated CRM Action Plan. The Secretary General subsequently participated in the Economy Ministers' Meeting on 30 September in Cetinje and the Meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 1 October in Pržno, the Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) on 18 September in Žabljak and the Interior Ministers' Meeting in Podgorica on 16 September. All engagements were held under Montenegro's 2026 Berlin Process Chairmanship.

Throughout the reporting period, the RCC ensured continuity between the Sofia and Bucharest Chairmanships, broadened its cooperation with SEECP Participants and international partners and supported preparations of the Berlin Process Summit.

B2. SEE2030 Strategy

During the reporting period, the mid-term review of the SEE2030 Strategy was completed and politically endorsed. The RCC Secretary General submitted the SEE2030 Strategy Mid-Term Implementation Report to the 18th RCC Annual Meeting on 9 June and presented its highlights to the SEECP Summit on 10 June. The Mid-Term Update of the SEE2030 Strategy, "Turning Commitment into Change", was approved by the Annual Meeting and endorsed by the SEECP leaders at the Summit. The Update reaffirms the region's commitment to the Strategy's original ambitions and headline targets, while adapting its implementation to a changed regional and

global context. It sharpens the focus on resilience and human security, inclusive growth and stronger regional cooperation, with greater emphasis on practical regional initiatives, investment mobilisation and engagement with the private sector.

The RCC also promoted the Strategy at the global level and in the context of the Bucharest C-i-O. The OECD event "Bridging the Gaps to Accelerate the SDGs: Policy Coherence across Water, Energy, Industry and Cities" was held in New York in July during the 2026 United Nations High-level Political Forum on Sustainable Development. At the event, the Secretary General presented the Strategy as the region's common framework for implementing the SDGs through shared priorities, regional ownership and accountability. The implementation of the Strategy and the Beyond GDP agenda were also discussed as areas for cooperation with Romanian institutions during the Secretary General's visit to Bucharest on 28 July.

In implementing the RCC Board Decision approving the Project Synopsis on disaster financial risk sharing in South East Europe (SEE), the RCC continued its technical, analytical and coordination activities to support:

- A feasibility study on a regional reinsurance mechanism and sub-regional risk pooling arrangements in SEE; and
- Technical assistance, data development and alignment with EU frameworks.

Particular attention was given to coordination with the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Bucharest SEECP C-i-O regarding potential EIB support for a feasibility study covering the entire SEECP region. As part of these efforts, and in line with the Board Decision, the RCC Secretary General formally requested Romania's assistance, in its capacity as SEECP C-i-O and an EU Member State, in facilitating the submission of a formal request to the EIB for support for the study. The study would explore regional solutions for disaster risk insurance and risk sharing in SEE.

The second meeting of the SEE Regional Network on Disaster Risk Insurance and Risk Sharing was held on 27 October 2026 in Bucharest, jointly organised by the RCC and the Romanian Financial Supervisory Authority, which hosted the meeting. The Network reviewed the activities undertaken by the RCC to implement the Project Synopsis approved by the RCC Board, including outreach to European and international partners and consultations on potential support for the regional feasibility study. Discussions covered relevant international

experience, possible cooperation and support, and the contribution of Network members and their institutions to the envisaged activities. The afternoon session focused on priority technical-assistance and capacity-building needs, data development and alignment with relevant EU practices, alongside opportunities for members to share practical experience and lead or host thematic peer-learning clusters under the Project Synopsis.

The RCC participated in the public hearing "Towards a European system of natural disaster risk management", organised by the European Economic and Social Committee's (EESC) Section for Economic and Monetary Union and Economic and Social Cohesion on 27 October 2026. In the institutions panel, the RCC presented the SEE initiative on disaster risk insurance and risk sharing, outlining the regional approach and the activities envisaged under the Project Synopsis approved by the RCC Board. The hearing brought together public institutions, policymakers and other stakeholders to discuss solutions beyond domestic boundaries, including the roles of the public and private sectors in strengthening insurance coverage and disaster resilience. The discussions contributed to the preparation of the EESC opinion proposing a European system of natural disaster risk management, including an EU-wide layer of pooled or solidarity funds to complement insurance schemes.

B3. Parliamentary Cooperation

During the reporting period, the RCC, in partnership with GIZ, supported the 23rd meeting of COSAP, held on 4–6 June 2026 in Struga, with participation of parliamentary committees responsible for European integration from across the Western Balkans, and special guest delegations from Türkiye and Georgia. The conference enabled parliamentary dialogue on regional cooperation and European integration in changing geopolitical context, the role of the Berlin Process, connectivity, energy security and the green transition. It also examined how COSAP and parliamentary cooperation can support the translation of regional commitments into reforms and tangible benefits for citizens and businesses, particularly in relation to competitiveness, investment, financial integration, connectivity and the EU Growth Plan. A key result was the adoption of a Joint Statement, restoring consensus-based decision-making after two years without an agreed statement. Parliamentary committees committed to continuing the revision of COSAP's Rules of Procedure until agreement is reached, reporting progress at each meeting and enabling broader participation by committees responsible for European affairs. These outcomes renewed political momentum for a more inclusive,

structured and accountable parliamentary cooperation framework, strengthening COSAP's capacity to support regional reform and EU integration.

B4. Good Governance

During the reporting period, the RCC strengthened the regional framework for judicial capacity-building on digital justice through the **ninth meeting of the South East Europe Judicial Training Institutes (SEE JTI) Network**, held on 3 June 2026 in Sofia in cooperation with the Institute of Justice of Bulgaria. Bringing together judicial training institutions, judges, prosecutors and experts from across Southeast Europe, the meeting consolidated a common assessment of the opportunities and risks associated with digitalisation and AI in justice systems. Participants identified trustworthy AI, digital evidence, secure communication, interoperability and remote hearings as priority areas for regional cooperation, while affirming that technological innovation must remain consistent with legal and ethical requirements, fundamental rights and fair-trial standards. The meeting produced three operational results: it defined shared capacity-building priorities for judicial professionals; established continuous, practice-oriented training, common training resources and practical guidance as the principal instruments for addressing those priorities; and strengthened institutional links for sustained peer exchange through the SEE JTI Network. These outcomes provide a clearer basis for follow-up cooperation on the secure, rights-based and interoperable digital transformation of justice systems. As a next step, the Network will be positioned to translate the identified priorities into targeted training activities, shared resources and practical guidance aligned with emerging European developments, thereby reinforcing its role as a regional platform for coordinated capacity-building, knowledge exchange and innovation in support of the rule of law.

B5. Security Cooperation

During the reporting period, RCC supported practical exchanges among security institutions, maintained engagement with regional defence and interior-ministerial forums, and launched data collection for **SecuriMeter 2026**, its public opinion survey on security in the Western Balkans. A key result was the identification of volunteers for **three successive SEENSA Chairmanships-in-Office**, providing greater predictability for the network.

The RCC co-organised the 16th Meeting of the Heads of the Southeast Europe National Security Authorities (SEENSA) with the 2026 SEENSA C-i-O on 2–4 September 2026 in Pristina. Participants exchanged practices on handling classified information in judicial and prosecutorial proceedings, including security vetting, access arrangements, declassification and judicial review of clearance decisions, and identified shared challenges related to overclassification, protection of information received from foreign partners, and balancing security requirements with judicial independence and fair-trial guarantees. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and North Macedonia volunteered to host the annual meetings and assume the Chairmanship-in-Office in 2027, 2028 and 2029, respectively, establishing a three-year planning horizon and demonstrating participating authorities' willingness to sustain the format. Comparative work on vetting procedures also generated interest in further technical cooperation and potential RCC support.

The RCC participated in the **Deputy Chiefs of Defence Meeting (SEDM)** on 17–19 June in Tbilisi and the **55th SEDM Coordination Committee Meeting** on 24 September in Corfu, under the Hellenic Chairmanship. RCC highlighted links between its security cooperation formats and SEDM priorities on resilience, energy security and disaster preparedness. The Tbilisi Joint Statement recognised the contribution of regional organisations, including RCC, while the Corfu meeting minutes, approved by consensus, reflected RCC's intervention. The exchanges also identified opportunities to strengthen cooperation on climate-related preparedness through existing regional cooperation formats.

The RCC co-organised the **18th Conference of South East Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs (SEEMIC)** with the Ministry of Defence of Montenegro on 20 October, in Bečići. The conference examined energy dependence, diversification and the security implications of supply disruptions. The SEEMIC Chiefs approved by consensus a joint open-source intelligence (OSINT) report consolidating participating services' assessments. As permanent co-chair, RCC reaffirmed its support for SEEMIC and its links to broader regional security cooperation.

At the **Berlin Process Interior Ministers' Meeting on 15–16 September 2026 in Podgorica**, RCC highlighted how SecuriMeter, institutional needs mapping and JUMBO practitioner exchanges support evidence-based identification of gaps in security cooperation. RCC encouraged institutions to validate priority needs and donors to use this evidence in

programming assistance. Discussions also addressed criminal infiltration of ports and logistics hubs, personnel and information security, and regional firearms-control cooperation, linking these RCC efforts to the protection of legitimate trade and mobility.

The RCC contributed to **SEESAC's Regional Meeting of Border Police and Customs Representatives** on 2–-3 June 2026 in Sarajevo, focusing on practical information exchange and the application of existing training, detection tools and daily operation procedures. Discussions covered firearms trafficking through postal and courier channels and small consignments, as well as emerging risks involving 3D-printed components, counterfeit weapons and drones. The meeting underscored the need to embed procedures in daily practice and use frontline feedback to strengthen training and operational guidance.

The RCC also took part and contributed to **SEESAC's "15th Regional Roadmap Coordination Meeting: Towards Lasting Impact of SALW Control"**, held in on 8–9 July 2026 in Podgorica, which convened representatives of the SALW Commissions and relevant institutions from the six Western Balkans jurisdictions, key donors – the European Union, Germany, France, and the Netherlands – as well as regional and international organizations working on arms control. The jurisdictions reported on the progress they have achieved across all five Goals of the Roadmap, as set out in the Regional Narrative Report for the period July-December 2025 and the Key Performance Indicators report for January-December 2025, while the RCC referred to SALW control as a shared regional and human security priority, utilising elements of the 2025 SecuriMeter.

The RCC contributed to the **23rd Regional Meeting of the South-East Europe Firearms Experts Network (SEEFEN)**, organised by SEESAC on 27-28 October 2026 in Tirana. The meeting brought together law-enforcement, customs, border/boundary, prosecutorial and ballistic experts to exchange experience on preventing, detecting, investigating and prosecuting firearms-related crime. Discussions addressed emerging trafficking trends, ammunition, counterfeit and 3D-printed firearms, new technologies and relevant EU policy developments.

Data collection for **SecuriMeter 2026** commenced across the Western Balkans on 1 September 2026, providing the evidence base for three analytical outputs: econometric analysis through the Trust in Institutions Model and Security Model, the narrative SecuriMeter report, and a thematic report examining a selected security issue in greater depth.

C. Horizontal Activities

C1. Programming, Monitoring, Coordination

During the reporting period, the RCC continued to coordinate the implementation of the CRM Action Plan 2025–2028 and related regional priorities, with a particular focus on monitoring progress, preparing Berlin Process deliverables, coordinating with Prime Ministers' Sherpas and regional organisations, and developing the new EC-funded Action Grant for 2027–2029.

On 23 June 2026, RCC convened the WB6 Prime Ministers Sherpas' meeting in Vienna, bringing together PM Sherpas, representatives of the European Commission and regional organisations. The meeting reviewed the progress in implementation of the CRM and advanced preparations for the 2026 Berlin Process under Montenegro's Presidency. Discussions focused on the proposed Berlin Process deliverables, including their state of preparation and the appropriate way forward, agreeing a differentiated approach between deliverables ready for endorsement and those requiring further technical work or additional political support. The meeting provided political guidance for continued work by RCC, CEFTA and other regional organisations ahead of the autumn ministerial meetings and the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit.

Prime Ministers' Sherpas consultations were also convened on 17 September 2026 in Podgorica. The meeting reviewed the maturity of the remaining deliverables, addressed outstanding political and technical issues and consolidated the package for endorsement. Sherpas expressed broad support, with a number of deliverables requiring final consultations or technical refinements. They confirmed that the Green Agenda deliverables were ready for approval at the Green Agenda Ministerial Meeting in Žabljak on 18 September, while other deliverables progressed towards the Economic Ministerial Meeting on 30 September.

Throughout the reporting period, RCC coordinated and supported the preparation of a number of deliverables for endorsement at the ministerial meetings and the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit on 22 October 2026 in Sveti Stefan, marking culmination of Montenegro's 2026 Presidency of the Berlin Process. The developed package spans human capital development, competitiveness and investment, tourism, digital transformation and the Green Agenda, reflecting the cross-sectoral scope of the CRM and wider Berlin Process agenda. RCC worked with relevant regional organisations, thematic working structures, PM Sherpas and the

European Commission to advance the deliverables and ensure their alignment with regional and EU priorities.

The RCC also strengthened monitoring of the CRM Action Plan 2025–2028 implementation. The CRM Monitoring Tool was updated with implementation data from responsible institutions and regional organisations, enabling more structured and evidence-based tracking of progress across the CRM pillars and supporting discussions with PM Sherpas, the European Commission and implementing partners. To further improve transparency, accessibility and results-based monitoring, RCC contracted specialised consultancy support to develop the CRM Monitoring Tool into an interactive online Power BI dashboard, expected to become publicly available by the end of 2026. RCC also contributed implementation updates to regional policy discussions and events, including the Civil Society Forum held on 5–7 October 2026 in Pristina and the Anti-Corruption Initiative held on 15 October 2026 in Tirana, helping bring civil society perspectives and recommendations into the implementation process. At Tirana Connectivity Forum 2026, held on 6–7 October, the RCC contributed to discussions on the CRM, trade facilitation and railway connectivity, highlighting the role of institutional capacity and human capital development in advancing the Western Balkans' integration into the EU. The Forum brought together policymakers, EU institutions, international organisations and experts to discuss regional connectivity and European integration.

During the reporting period, RCC advanced preparations of the 2026 edition of the Balkan Barometer, its flagship regional public and business opinion survey. A specialised economic operator was contracted to conduct the survey, and data collection and processing were completed across the WB6. Initial findings were analysed and reviewed, providing updated evidence on citizens' and businesses' perceptions of socio-economic developments, regional cooperation, European integration and other key policy areas. The 2026 edition will also introduce two new thematic reports offering more focused analysis of issues relevant to regional policymaking. Analysis and finalisation of the results continued, with publication and presentation scheduled for 1 December in Brussels.

C2. Communication

During the reporting period, RCC communication activities focused on maintaining visibility of RCC priorities, results and regional cooperation agendas, while presenting often technical

processes in a clearer and more accessible way. Website and media outreach were complemented by increasingly visual and people-centred social media content, including reels, profiles, interviews, event highlights and short explanatory formats.

Communication during the summer therefore focused more on extending the visibility of ongoing initiatives and RCC products, individual stories and preparations for the more intensive September-October agenda. The Sarajevo Film Festival was an important exception, providing strong visibility for RCC's work with young people, cultural cooperation and creative industries.

C2.1 Promotion of Regional Cooperation

Communication around RCC's broader regional cooperation mandate remained an important part of the period. The RCC Annual Meeting and SEECP Summit in Sofia in June provided an opportunity to communicate RCC results and priorities, including the endorsement of the RCC Annual Report and SEE2030 Strategy Mid-Term Update.

Visibility of RCC's role continued through communication around Secretary General Amer Kapetanović's meetings and participation in regional and international forums in Vienna, Dubrovnik, Bucharest and New York. Messaging highlighted practical regional cooperation, dialogue with SEECP Participants and partners, and RCC's role in keeping regional cooperation high on the political agenda.

During the SFF, the RCC marked ten years of patronage of the **Heart of Sarajevo for Best Student Film** and used the Festival to promote young regional talent, cultural cooperation and creative industries. RCC also brought together representatives of the diplomatic community and Festival partners, generating additional institutional and social media visibility.

Communication around the RCC-coordinated **Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025–2028** continued throughout the period, with messages focusing on the practical value of closer regional integration for citizens and businesses.

Women's economic empowerment was promoted through the **WB6 Women Entrepreneurs of the Year 2026**. Following the announcement of the winners in Sarajevo on 30 June, RCC continued promoting selected individual stories through social media, helping present women's

entrepreneurship through concrete examples of innovation, sustainability and business development.

Communication work on **Digital Agenda** culminated with promotion of the WB Digital Summit held in Montenegro and developing and communicating clear messages around regional digital integration, digital services, AI, interoperability, cybersecurity and closer integration with the EU digital market.

The **Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB)** was one of the most visible communication priorities of the reporting period. Communication in the run-up to the Third Annual Ministerial Meeting on GAWB covered regional work on climate adaptation, biodiversity, forest restoration, circular economy, single-use plastics and Extended Producer Responsibility. The Ministerial, held in Žabljak on 18-19 September, received extensive communication support through media outreach, website news and social media. Particular attention was given to the concrete outcomes endorsed by the Western Balkans Six, including the 2026 Green Agenda Ministerial Declaration, Climate Adaptation Strategy 2026–2030, Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030, Forest Landscape Restoration Plan and measures on single-use plastics and Extended Producer Responsibility. Supporting social media content also explained climate risks such as heatwaves, droughts, floods and wildfires, helping link regional policy commitments with issues citizens can easily understand.

Security remained an important communication theme, with emphasis on regional coordination, organised crime, cybersecurity and resilience. Communication supported RCC security-related activities and cooperation with regional and international partners, while also providing visibility to RCC's work on cyber resilience and preparations for **SecuriMeter 2026**. The aim was to communicate security issues beyond specialised audiences and show the practical value of regional cooperation and information exchange.

The 2026 Berlin Process agenda represented a separate communication strand, particularly under Montenegro's Chairmanship. In September and October, RCC communication covered all Berlin Process meetings where the RCC took place, as well as RCC-led deliverables. Messaging focused on explaing the results, importance of regional cooperation, especialy under the Berlin Process, as well as in importance of the full implementation of deliverables.

The Green Agenda Ministerial in Žabljak was also communicated as part of the wider Berlin Process agenda leading towards the Leaders' Summit. Towards October, communication preparations focused on the Ministerial Meeting of Ministers of Economy, the Western Balkans Digital Summit and the Berlin Process Leaders' Summit, with emphasis on RCC-coordinated work under the CRM and Green Agenda.

Communication support continued for the RCC-implemented **ESAP 3**. In June, visibility was provided to the launch of the 2026 Western Balkans Six Public Employment Services Benchlearning cycle. ESAP 3 communication continued to focus on employment, labour-market reforms, social dialogue and social rights, with an emphasis on explaining how regional cooperation can contribute to better services and labour-market outcomes.

The EU-funded and RCC-implemented **WBYL2** maintained strong communication visibility during the reporting period. A major activity was the **Second Regional Conference on Youth Cultural Cooperation**, organised within the Sarajevo Film Festival Student Forum. Communication focused on participating students and young filmmakers, their experiences and opportunities for regional exchange, using reels, interviews, photography and social media storytelling. WBYL 2 communication also continued through youth dialogues and Fireside Talks on education, skills, mobility, the Growth Plan, CRM and meaningful youth participation in policymaking.

C2.2 Overall Communication Focus

Across all areas, RCC maintained regular regional media outreach through press releases, media advisories, interviews, statements and photo and video materials. LinkedIn and X were used mainly for institutional and policy communication, while Instagram, Facebook and TikTok allowed greater use of reels, personal stories and explanatory content. Overall, communication during the period combined institutional visibility with more accessible storytelling, with the strongest focus on regional cooperation, SEECP, SEE2030, the Green Agenda, security, youth, women's economic empowerment, the CRM and preparations for the autumn Berlin Process agenda.

During the reporting period, RCC's communication activities continued to drive strong visibility and engagement across digital platforms. The RCC website recorded over 123,000 views in total, engaging around 38,000 users during the period. During the reporting period,

we published 31 news releases with over 1,700 media reports covering RCC activities throughout the reporting period.

Across social media, RCC's channels maintained strong visibility and audience engagement. Over the reporting period, RCC's Facebook content generated nearly 2 million views, alongside 15,323 content engagements and nearly 7,000 page visits, reflecting sustained audience interest in RCC-led agendas. Instagram recorded 782,400 views and reached 233,600 accounts, while generating 5,900 content interactions, a 4.1% increase compared to the previous period. On X (formerly Twitter), RCC content generated 31.2K impressions, while the engagement rate grew by 35%, reaching 3.8%. LinkedIn generated 58,464 impressions and 1,779 reactions, alongside 1,170 views and 610 visitors, reflecting continued engagement with RCC content among professional audiences. TikTok recorded 17,300 video views, representing 25.2% growth compared to the previous period. YouTube content generated around 21,000 views and 46.5 hours of watch time, showing continued interest in RCC's video outputs.

C3. Extending partnerships

During the reporting period, the RCC Brussels Liaison Office (LO) continued to strengthen the RCC's visibility and engagement within the EU's political, diplomatic and policy environment. Through regular outreach to EU institutions, diplomatic missions, international organisations and Brussels-based think tanks, the LO supported dialogue between the Western Balkans and EU stakeholders and contributed to advancing the regional cooperation and European integration agenda.

The LO actively supported preparations for the EU–Western Balkans Summit in Podgorica through regular engagement with the Foreign Policy Advisor in the Cabinet of the President of the European Council, the Cabinet of Commissioner for Enlargement Marta Kos, the Permanent Representations of EU Member States, regional representatives and other relevant stakeholders. These engagements contributed to keeping the RCC priorities and regional perspectives visible in the preparations for the Summit.

The LO also supported the working visit of the Head of SG Office and Head of Programme Department to Brussels, facilitating meetings with senior representatives of DG ENEST and

the Council. The discussions provided an opportunity to present RCC priorities and ongoing work, strengthen institutional contacts and identify areas for further cooperation.

Regular exchanges were maintained with the Chair of the Council Working Party on the Western Balkans (COWEB), including in preparation for the RCC Secretary General's working visit to Brussels in November.

The LO maintained active engagement in relevant high-level meetings and policy discussions, including participation in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) plenary session and high-level debate on EU enlargement in July, where the Head of the RCC Liaison Office, Igor Šoltes, moderated a panel on accelerating socio-economic convergence with the EU, as well as the EESC dialogue in September on expanding the EU Single Market to Ukraine, Moldova and the Western Balkans. The LO also held regular exchanges with ambassadors and representatives of the Western Balkan Six on developments in the European integration process and the regional agenda and participated in the International Youth Conference "European Values for the Future of SEE Countries" in Kruševo, North Macedonia, where the Head of the LO delivered the opening speech.

The LO continued to support the RCC's analytical and information function by monitoring EU developments, preparing analytical briefs and summaries of European Commission reports and Member States proposals and producing daily bulletins on EU activities relevant to the Western Balkans.

The LO strengthened the RCC's policy outreach through regular engagement with Brussels-based think tanks and policy platforms on EU enlargement and gradual integration, regional political and economic developments, the EU Single Market, the Green Agenda, digitalisation, security and environmental issues, helping maintain dialogue and promote regional priorities in relevant policy discussions.

Abbreviations

ACG	Advisory and Coordination Group
BMZ	Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany
BSP	Biodiversity Strategic Plan
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement

CEI	Central European Initiative
C-i-O	Chairpersonship-in-Office
COSAP	Conference of the Parliamentary Committees for European Integration / Affairs of the Countries Participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process of South-East Europe (COSAP)
CRM	Common Regional Market
CRM2	Second iteration of the CRM Action Plan
CT	Counter-Terrorism
DEP	Digital Europe Programmes
DESI	Digital Economy Society Index
DIHs	Digital Innovation Hubs
DG	Directorate General
DG ENEST	Directorate General for Eastern Neighbourhood Negotiations
DMA	Digital Markets Act
DoA	Description of the Action
DPPI SEE	Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South-Eastern Europe.
EC	European Commission
EESC	European Economic and Social Committee
EIB	European Investment Bank
EIPs	Eco-Industrial Parks
EIS	European Innovation Scoreboard
ELA	European Labour Authority
ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EPSR	European Pillar of Social Rights
ESAP	Employment and Social Affairs Platform Project
ESCO	European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations
EURES	European Employment Services
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GARI	Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan
GAWB	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft fur Internationale Zusammenarbeit
HCD	Human Capital Development,
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IISG	Integrative Internal Security Governance
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JAP	Joint Action Plan
JAP CT/P-CVE	Joint Action Plan on Counterterrorism and Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism
JUMBO	Regional Security Coordination Conference
KOMS	Youth Council of Serbia
LO	Liaison Office
MAP	Mutual Assistance Projects
MSMEs	Micro, Small and Medium-sized Enterprises
MRVA	Monitoring, Reporting, Verification and Accreditation

OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
OSINT	Joint open-source intelligence
P/ CVE	Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism
PD	Political Directors
PES	Public Employment Services
RAF	Regional Administrative Framework
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RNNC	Regional Network of CT/P-CVE Coordinators
RNWE	Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship
RIS	Regional Innovation Scheme
RLAH	Roam Like at Home
RRD	Regional Recognition Database
RWG GAWB	Regional Working Group on Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategy
SALW	Small Arms and Light Weapons
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEE	South East Europe
SEE JTI	South East Europe Judicial Training Institutes
SEE2030	South East Europe 2030 Strategy
SEECP	South-East European Cooperation Process
SEENSA	Southeast Europe National Security Authorities
SEEFEN	South-East Europe Firearms Experts Network
SEEMIC	South East Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs
SEDM	Deputy Chiefs of Defence Meeting
SFF	Sarajevo Film Festival
SGH	Security Governance Hub
SUP	Single-Use plastic
TC AdES LOTL	Third Countries AdES List of Trusted Lists
TEG	Tourism Expert Group
VET	Vocational Education and Training
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WBBSi	Western Balkan Border/Boundary Security initiative
WBCSCi	Western Balkans Counter Serious Crime initiative
WBCTi	Western Balkans Counter Terrorism initiative
WB3C	Western Balkan Cyber Capacity Center
WBDESI	Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index
WBDS	Western Balkans Digital Summit
WBYL	Western Balkans Youth Lab