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Foreword

When the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) entered this reporting year, the question before us was not whether regional cooperation still matters. It was whether it could move fast enough, work concretely enough, and prove its value clearly enough in a world that is becoming more fragmented, less predictable and less patient with slow delivery.

This Annual Report covers my first full reporting cycle as Secretary General. It reflects a year in which the RCC carried forward its mandate but also sharpened the way it uses it: less as an agenda of meetings, and more as a platform for implementation. The message of this report is simple. South East Europe does not lack strategies. What it needs, and what the RCC is built to support, is the discipline to turn strategies into systems, commitments into rules, and regional trust into everyday benefits for people and businesses.

I want to thank the RCC Secretariat for the professionalism, resilience and sense of public responsibility behind that work. Much of what the RCC does is complex and often invisible: aligning positions, managing political sensitivities, preparing technical solutions, keeping partners at the same table, and following through when the headlines have moved on. This is not coordination for its own sake, but institutional work that makes delivery possible.

My gratitude also goes to the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) Chairmanship-in-Office during this reporting period, and to all participants of the RCC Board. Their political guidance, ownership and support remain essential to the RCC's ability to act as a credible regional platform. This year also brought important changes to the RCC Board. We welcomed the United Kingdom as a new Board participant, strengthening the RCC's partnership base at an important moment for the region.

That work has become more important because the environment around us has changed. Economic pressure, labour shortages, climate risks, security concerns, technological disruption and geopolitical fragmentation are no longer separate files. They reinforce one another. In such a context, regions either become more coherent and more capable of acting together, or they become easier to bypass, divide and delay. For South East Europe, this is a strategic choice.

For the RCC, regional cooperation is therefore not a procedural chapter on the road to the European Union. It is strategic self-interest. It supports credible accession, but it also prepares

the region to function as part of the EU Single Market in practice: through common standards, reduced barriers, interoperable systems, predictable rules and stronger institutions. The objective is not only to bring the region closer to Europe, but to make the region work better for its own people.

This is the logic behind the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2026-2028, the Common Regional Market, the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans, SEE2030 and our work under the South-East European Cooperation Process. They are not separate labels. Together, they form a practical architecture for a more competitive, resilient and connected South East Europe. Through this architecture, the RCC helps translate political agreement into the daily mechanics of integration: mobility, payments, investment, digital trust, green finance, climate adaptation, skills, youth participation and security cooperation.

During this reporting period, that approach produced concrete results. The Berlin Process cycle under the United Kingdom Chair brought forward a strong package of RCC-facilitated deliverables, from sustainable investment and green finance instruments to financial literacy, tourism branding and social security portability. The Green Agenda moved from general commitment to more structured implementation through the Dubrovnik Declaration and the revised Action Plan. The SEE Regional Network on Disaster Risk Insurance and Risk Sharing began turning climate and disaster resilience into a regional policy and financial agenda. Work on digital interoperability, innovation ecosystems and mobility continued to reduce the practical distance between the region and the EU.

These results matter because they speak to something citizens understand: whether cooperation makes life easier, safer and more predictable. Can a student move with fewer barriers? Can a worker keep social rights across the region? Can businesses operate with lower transaction costs and clearer rules? Can communities prepare better for floods, fires and other climate-related disasters? Can young people see a future here that is connected to Europe, not waiting outside it? These are the questions by which regional cooperation will increasingly be judged.

Efficiency, for us, is not speed at any cost. It is credibility, continuity and implementation that lasts. It means choosing priorities carefully, avoiding duplication, using partnerships intelligently and being honest about what regional cooperation can deliver.

The year ahead will require exactly that discipline. We will focus on a limited number of priorities where the RCC can bring clear added value: advancing the Common Regional Market and gradual integration with the EU Single Market; supporting the Green Agenda and climate resilience; operationalising SEE2030 as a framework for inclusive and sustainable growth; strengthening security cooperation and evidence-based policy; and keeping youth, skills and human capital at the centre of the region's future.

Above all, we will continue to use the RCC's convening power responsibly. In fragmented times, keeping dialogue open is not a soft task. It is hard infrastructure. It allows economies, institutions and partners to keep working together even when politics becomes difficult. It protects trust. It creates predictability. And it reminds us that cooperation is not measured only by declarations signed, but by problems solved.

This Annual Report is therefore both a record and a direction of travel. It shows a region capable of delivering when priorities are clear, partners are aligned and ownership is shared. It also shows the work still ahead. The RCC will approach that work with realism, focus and confidence: anchored in South East Europe, connected to the European project, and committed to making cooperation visible in the lives of the people it is meant to serve.

Executive Summary

In a shifting geopolitical context, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) made substantial progress across key regional agendas, with clear shift from framework-setting to result-oriented implementation. Efforts focused on **advancing CRM implementation, strengthening Green Agenda delivery, and operationalising SEE 2030 priorities**, while reinforcing cooperation in digitalisation, human capital development, youth engagement and regional security with a stronger focus on delivery, institutional anchoring, and measurable results. including alignment with EU initiatives, such as the EU Growth Plan for the Western Balkans and enhanced coordination with EU and regional partners.

The [SEE2030 Strategy](#) advanced through a high-level political endorsement, and strengthened evidence-based policymaking, positioning RCC as a key driver of inclusive growth and EU convergence. Key results included the endorsement of the **SEE2030 Mid-term Update and Mid-term Implementation Report**, the completion of the **SEE Inclusive Growth Index (IGI)**, a new benchmarking tool for inclusive growth, the operationalisation of the Beyond GDP agenda, and the shift to operational delivery of the [SEE Regional Network on Disaster Risk Insurance and Risk Sharing](#), which launched feasibility workstreams and EU-aligned regional risk solutions with international financial institutions.

In **competitiveness and sustainable finance**, RCC delivered substantial progress in regional investment and financial framework under CRM 2. Key achievements include endorsement, under the Berlin Process, of the [Recommendation on Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment in the Western Balkans Six](#) and [Regional Model Clauses on Sustainability](#) alongside [Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation in the Western Balkans Six](#), supported by implementation tools such as a [Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment Policy Toolkit for the Western Balkans Six](#) and **WB6 Investment Facilitation Roadmap and Regional Green Investment Standards**. Sustainable finance further progressed through the [Whitelist of the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy for the Western Balkans Six](#), [WB Green Bond Standard](#), and [Regional Financial Literacy Framework for Individuals](#), mobilising finance for the green transition and advancing sustainability in the region. Regional financial integration also marked major milestones, with four Western Balkans Six (WB6) becoming operational in **Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA)** enabling faster, more cost-efficient payments, and closer alignment with the EU financial system.

Industrial development efforts positioned green industrial transformation and sustainable tourism as core drivers of competitiveness in the WB6. A major milestone was the adoption of the [Joint Statement on the Development and Adoption of Regional Green Public Procurement Criteria in the Western Balkans Six](#) under the Berlin Process, enabling alignment with EU standards and leveraging public spending to drive greener growth. Progress was complemented by strategic transition towards **Eco-Industrial Parks (EIPs)**, as means to advancing green industrial transformation, and introduction of a **Sectoral Policy Toolkit**. Tourism cooperation advanced through smart tourism frameworks, the launch of digital nomad and pilot destination initiatives, and unified regional branding in Durres on 4 June 2025, later adopted under the Berlin Process as the [Declaration on Western Balkans Six Tourism Branding](#).

Human capital development progressed through strengthened alignment in **higher education** quality assurance with **EU standards**, and targeted institutional reforms, reinforcing trust in qualifications and enabling more effective academic and professional mobility. The RCC also elevated women's economic empowerment through adoption of the [Joint Call for Action on Gender-Responsive Green Finance and accompanying recommendations](#) and **Compendium of Good Practices on Access to Finance for Women Entrepreneurs**. It also strengthened youth participation in climate and circular economy policymaking.

Innovation and research capacity were strengthened through Horizon Europe mobilisation, securing EUR 180.4 million and leveraging over EUR 9 million via regional innovation platforms, including [Digital Innovation Hubs](#), **AI Factory Antennas**, and smart specialisation initiatives¹. These efforts improved funding absorption and strengthened links between research and market application. New instruments, such as the [Regional R&I Matchmaking Platform](#) for research infrastructures, startup ecosystem analysis, and targeted sector programmes such as **Level UP**, further enhanced innovation capacity and policy alignment. Complemented by the **Butterfly Innovation Forum** and capacity building initiatives, these actions are helping close the research-to-market gap, scale innovation ecosystems, and support the WB6's gradual convergence with the EU innovation landscape. Labour market convergence progressed through Employment and Social Affairs Platform

¹ Such as NextHub Programme, [Smart Specialisation Ecosystems Initiative](#) and [Knowledge Transfer Toolkit](#)

(ESAP3), with strengthened public employment services, updated [WB6 Social Scoreboard](#) monitoring, and expanded cooperation on undeclared work and job–skills matching.

The digital agenda delivered concrete regional results, including the **WB Digital Summit** outcomes², interoperable digital identity and trust services frameworks³, cybersecurity coordination tools, and the [WB DESI 2025 Report](#) reinforcing the WB6’s collective drive towards accelerated digital transformation across the region. Key advances included strengthened broadband reform analysis including comprehensive public–private review of permitting procedures, a cybersecurity database under IISG, and regional agreements on digital connectivity and identity interoperability aligned with EU standards.

Through RCC-facilitated coordination, all 2025 Berlin Process Green Agenda deliverables were completed and endorsed at the Second Ministerial Meeting in October 2025 in Dubrovnik. This resulted in the [Dubrovnik Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#) and adoption of key regional instruments, including the [Revised GAWB Action Plan \(2025-2030\)](#), [WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap](#), [Regional Action Plan for the Implementation of the Joint Statement on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter](#), [WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 \(BSP 2030\)](#) and [2024 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan \(GARI\)](#). These outcomes strengthened regional political commitment and operationalised EU-aligned green transition priorities across the WB6. In 2026, focus shifted to implementation of the Dubrovnik Declaration commitments, including operationalisation and monitoring of the WB Green Agenda, harmonised regulatory frameworks, establishment of the GAWB Observatory Platform and integrated data driven reporting (2025 GARI Report).

RCC advanced parliamentary cooperation, good governance, and security through structured regional platforms, supporting SEECF Parliamentary Assembly work by presenting regional trade and transport analysis, facilitating COSAP cooperation and structured parliamentary dialogue with EU institutions. In security, RCC reinforced its role as a driver of operational cooperation through the [Regional Security Coordination Conference \(JUMBO Conference\)](#) and its [Post-Conference Report](#), and analytical role through [SecuriMeter](#), to

² [Joint Statement on Digitally Connected Western Balkans Six](#)

³ [Joint Statement on Achieving Western Balkans Six Interoperable Digital ID Wallets and Trust Services](#)

support evidence-based policymaking and stronger, more coherent regional security cooperation. The evolution of the **Internal Integrative Security Governance (IISG)** mechanism into a [Security Governance Hub](#) enhanced EU–WB coordination and evidence-based policymaking. Collectively, these efforts demonstrate RCC’s dual impact in the security field: facilitating practical, high-level regional dialogue through platforms such as [JUMBO](#), [SEEMIC](#), and [SEENSA](#) and producing rigorous analytical tools to guide policy, strengthen institutional alignment, and support WB6 security resilience and EU integration.

Beyond policy implementation the RCC also developed trusted regional analytical tools, including the annual [Balkan Barometer](#) public and business opinion survey, [SecuriMeter](#), **Butterfly Innovation Forum** and [Employment Observatory](#), providing evidence-based insights for policymaking and EU benchmarking.

RCC’s outreach strategy significantly enhanced the visibility of flagship initiatives, CRM, GAWB, SEE2030, and gender and youth empowerment, through multimedia campaigns, public diplomacy, and high-level events. Digital engagement expanded substantially, reaching up to 10.9 million views across platforms and strengthening public interaction. The Brussels Liaison Office continued to serve as a key bridge with EU institutions, diplomatic missions, international organisations, and think-tanks.

The past reporting period was characterised by a decisive shift from strategy formulation to measurable implementation, with RCC-supported frameworks increasingly translating into tangible regional outcomes. Across policy domains, progress was marked not only by the adoption of key regional instruments, but by their operationalisation through monitoring systems, financial tools, and institutional mechanisms embedded at regional level. Key results included deeper financial integration through SEPA expansion, shared sustainability standards for investment and finance, strengthened Green Agenda governance, and expanded innovation and research linkages with EU programmes. Digital, security, and labour market cooperation also advanced towards greater interoperability and data-driven governance. Collectively, these developments demonstrate that the region is entering a more mature phase of integration, where success is defined less by policy alignment and more by delivery capacity, institutional anchoring, and measurable socio-economic impact in line with EU convergence objective. The period was characterised by coordination, evidence-based work, and a sustained effort to

reduce friction for citizens and businesses. The task ahead is to sustain momentum, deepen use of existing frameworks, and continue translating consensus into concrete results on the ground.

Support to the Implementation of Regional Programmes

A. Western Balkans Common Regional Market (CRM)

A1. Economic Competitiveness

A1.1. Investments and Financial Markets

Notable progress was made in advancing regional investment policy, promotion, and facilitation across the WB6 during the reporting period. A key milestone was the endorsement of the [Recommendation on Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment in the WB6](#) and the [Regional Model Clauses on Sustainability](#) under the Berlin Process in October 2025. These measures aim to enhance the region's attractiveness to quality FDI and maximise its contribution to sustainable development. Their implementation is supported by the accompanying [Sustainable FDI Policy Toolkit](#), a practical instrument for implementation. Additionally, the WB6 agreed on the [Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation](#), marking the first regionally agreed framework for streamlining procedures, enhancing transparency, and reducing investment barriers.

Building on these achievements, initial drafts of the **WB6 Investment Facilitation Roadmap and the Regional Green Investment Standards**, both stemming from CRM 2, have been prepared and are currently under technical review within the Joint Working Group on Investments (JWGI). The former is intended to operationalise the endorsed Joint Principles and define a clear pathway for investment facilitation, while the latter sets a regional benchmark for effective and fiscally responsible green investment incentives.

In terms of investment promotion, Investment Promotion Agencies (IPAs), with the support of the RCC and the World Bank, conducted another round of successful investor lead generation campaigns. In addition, the RCC supported the UK Department for Business and Trade in organising the Berlin Process Business Forum, held on 16 October in London, and the EU Western Balkans Investment Forum, held on 13-14 October in Tirana. These promotional

efforts are contributing towards the target of attracting EUR 300 million worth of FDI within the timeframe of CRM 2.

Another major milestone was the endorsement of the Whitelist of the [Sustainable Finance Taxonomy for the WB6](#) and the [WB6 Green Bond Standard](#) under the Berlin Process. These tools are central to mobilising finance for the green transition and advancing sustainability goals in the region. In addition, the [Regional Financial Literacy Framework](#) for Individuals was endorsed, encouraging the implementation of a common basis for strengthening financial education, including sustainable finance. Meanwhile, an initial draft of the Regional Financial Literacy Framework for Businesses has been prepared and is under technical review within the remit of the Working Group on Financial Markets (WGFM).

Significant progress was also achieved in advancing regional financial integration. During the reporting period, Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Moldova, and Serbia became fully operational in SEPA, with the first transactions executed, marking a major step towards faster and more cost-effective intra-regional payments, as well as deeper integration with the wider SEPA area.

AI.2. Industrial Development and Sustainable Tourism

During the reporting period, notable progress was achieved in transforming green industries in the WB6. A key milestone was the adoption of the [Joint Statement on Regional Green Public Procurement Criteria](#), under the Berlin Process, establishing a regional framework for the development of green public procurement criteria in the region and calling for the gradual alignment with EU directives and the voluntary use of green criteria, as a means for public institutions in the WB6 to choose goods, services and works responsibly and with a lower environmental impact throughout their life cycle. In a region where public procurement accounts for an average of 10% of GDP, adopting green practices paves the way for a greener economy and sustainable growth.

Further in line with the CRM 2 activities for green industries, work under industrial development activities continued from **Green Public Procurement (GPP) to Eco-industrial Parks (EIPs)** to advance green industrial transformation and strengthen green industries. The RCC commissioned a regional situational assessment of the EIPs to identify potential gaps and align with internationally recognised standards. Based on these findings, RCC is engaging with

the Working Group on Industrial Development (WGID) to develop and adopt a roadmap for EIP development, aligned with good practices and tailored to existing regional capacities. In addition, RCC is facilitating cooperation between WB6 and EU industrial parks. This includes engagement with successful EU park models to promote innovative business approaches, adoption of modern technologies, improved market access, and stronger integration of WB6 companies into regional and global value chains.

Further during the reporting period, RCC developed a Sectoral Policy Toolkit in collaboration with the region, and in consultation with and supported by the WGID to identify and select priority sectors and support modalities and intervention tools, considering the challenges of a green and digital transition.

In the area of **Sustainable Tourism**, the reporting period was marked by the finalisation of a comprehensive package of three strategic documents under the Tourism Expert Group (TEG) in September/October 2025: the **Enhancing the Regional Tourism Brand in the WB6 roadmap**, which included a proposed **Declaration on Western Balkans Six Tourism Branding; the Smart Tourism in the WB6 framework**, featuring designated pilot locations across the region to support the digital and sustainable transformation of tourism services; and **the Digital Nomads Criteria** at the regional level, providing a harmonised set of standards to position the WB6 as a competitive destination for remote workers, a fast-growing and high-value segment increasingly targeted by leading European destinations.

The political commitment to this agenda was firmly established through the endorsement of the [Declaration on Western Balkans Six Tourism Branding](#) under the Berlin Process. Building on this high-level endorsement, the implementation phase commenced, laying the critical groundwork for the establishment of the Regional Tourism Fund. This transition from strategic planning to implementation creates a structured pipeline for targeted investments, ensuring that regional branding efforts are supported by sustainable financial mechanisms and concrete capacity-building initiatives in line with the shared objectives of the Common Regional Market (CRM).

A2. Human Capital Development

A2.1. Research and Innovation Area

WB6 have significantly increased their engagement in the **Horizon Europe** programme contributing to scientific excellence and Europe-wide networking. Halfway through the programme, the region effectively grew performance to EUR 180.4 million compared to the previous EUR 171.4 million Framework Programme obtained under Horizon 2020. The strongest performing fields are Pillar II, with more than 400 grants awarded, followed by Agri-Food (170+ Grants), Climate, Energy, Mobility (84 Grants), and Digital & Industry (58 Grants). The WB6 have also experienced growing academia-industry cooperation, emergence of digital innovation hubs, science and technology parks, and advancements in artificial intelligence. Notably, two AI Factory Antennas have been established in Serbia and North Macedonia, providing companies with access to Europe's artificial intelligence infrastructure. In parallel, [Smart Specialisation Strategies](#) are laying a solid foundation for the prioritised and targeted investments in research and innovation. According to the 2025 European Innovation Scoreboard, the WB6 are classified as Emerging Innovators⁴. Despite all WB6 remaining below 70% of the EU average, sustained growth since 2018 indicates clear momentum towards stronger regional innovation capacity.

The RCC continued supporting [Digital Innovation Hubs \(DIHs\)](#) through its **NextHub Programme**, running until summer 2026. The NextHub's focus is on assisting DIHs collaborative efforts towards the preparation of joint project proposals for funding and capacity-building schemes offered by the EU. Apart from regional networking and trainings offered to DIHs, the previous two iterations of the Programme enabled the participating DIHs to attract more than €9 million through **Horizon Europe** and **Digital Europe (DEP)** programmes, including both EU and matching funds. Some of the initial NexHub partner organisations have evolved into **European Digital Innovation Hubs**, in total 11 across the WB6, further reinforcing the region's innovation ecosystem.

⁴ Serbia leads at 51.5% of the EU average, followed by Montenegro (45.3%), North Macedonia (40.0%), Albania (37.9%), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (25.7%). Serbia ranks 4th among Emerging Innovators, driven by SME innovation, ICT uptake, and employment in innovative enterprises. Montenegro and North Macedonia show steady gains in business R&D and doctoral-level human capital, while Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, now part of the EIT Regional Innovation Scheme, are gradually integrating into broader European innovation ecosystems.

As a practical follow-up to the RCC's brokered [Declaration on Research and Innovation Infrastructure Access and Collaboration](#) signed at the 10th Berlin Process Summit in 2024 a beta version of [Regional Online Matchmaking Platform for Research & Innovation Infrastructures](#) has been developed. Several regional focus group sessions and preliminary demonstrations of the Platform have been organised to gather valuable feedback from the RCC's partners including universities, research institutes, DIHs, business associations, etc. The Platform will be officially launched by the end of 2026 to facilitate structured interactions and data-driven connections.

The RCC advanced the **Strengthening Regional Smart Specialisation Ecosystems Initiative** by introducing targeted technical assistance to enhance the institutional capacity of Smart Specialisation Strategy (S3) teams, enabling stronger EU project proposals, improved knowledge transfer, and deeper inter-regional collaboration. The RCC's Regional S3 Initiative technical assistance programme, developed in direct response to priorities identified earlier, was designed to strengthen regional capacities, enhance skills, and provide practical guidance on fundraising strategies. The end goal is to empower regional S3 teams to mobilise resources more effectively and ensure the long-term sustainability of their projects. Two regional workshops, on 2 July in Tirana and on 16-17 December 2025 in Ljubljana, facilitated knowledge exchange and provided practical insights from Slovenia's S3, including discussions on the challenges and successes of its strategic documents. The Tirana workshop streamlined regional initiatives that support the implementation of shared S3 priorities, and facilitated networking opportunities for policymakers and industry representatives, strengthening partnerships and encouraging collaborative projects that promote innovation and regional economic development.

In addition, the RCC launched the **Level UP: Regional Gaming Industry Catalyst Programme** to tackle structural and capacity-related challenges within the gaming ecosystem in the WB6. Its purpose is to map and promote EU-based funding and development opportunities specifically relevant to the sector and strengthen the collaborative and technical abilities of local stakeholders to craft strong, cross-regional proposals under programmes such as Creative Europe and Digital Europe.

The RCC published the [Western Balkans Start-up Ecosystem at a Crossroads study](#) focusing on emerging trends in the regional start-up ecosystem in partnership with the

European Institute of Innovation and Technology (EIT) and Enterprise Europe Network (EEN). The study, launched at the regional Ministerial Meeting held in Podgorica on 20-21 October 2025, provides an overview of the current market dynamics, key challenges faced by startups, potential funding and support mechanisms. It offers a set of policy and practical recommendations with a special emphasis on the use of existing and emerging digital tools to drive innovation in growth in the WB6's startup ecosystem.

The RCC has developed a [Toolkit for Knowledge Transfer at Public Universities in the WB6](#) to strengthen collaboration between academia and industry across the region. This toolkit serves as a structured framework to help universities and research organisations collaborate more effectively with businesses and commercialise research results, innovations, and technologies into practical application. As part of this technical assistance, RCC organised a series of targeted training sessions designed to highlight promising funding opportunities and to support public universities and research institutions within the WB6 region in preparing competitive project proposals. These measures directly contribute to closing the research-to-market gap and fostering sustainable innovation partnerships and economic growth in the region.

The RCC **mapped the deep-tech and green-tech manufacturing potential in WB6.** The study identified several high-potential areas including Industry 4.0 technologies (AI, IoT, robotics) for energy efficient and resource efficient manufacturing, advanced materials and biotechnology for sustainable packaging and bio-based materials, waste valorisation, and digital platforms and sensors. The study provides concrete, policy-oriented and action-driven recommendations for WB6 governments to unlock these sectors' growth potential.

The RCC successfully convened the fourth Butterfly Innovation Forum, held on 19-20 November 2025 in Novi Sad alongside the [Butterfly Innovation Award \(BIA\)](#) competition ceremony. As a flagship regional platform, the Forum showcased RCC's ongoing efforts to build a robust regional innovation ecosystem and foster collaboration across the Western Balkans. The Forum highlighted the growing importance of artificial intelligence and the role of DIHs in the WB6, the need to facilitate knowledge transfer, investments in niche industries such as gaming, and access to finance as critical drivers of the region's innovation ecosystem. These elements provided participants with opportunities to exchange knowledge, explore

partnerships, and strengthen peer learning, including networking between start-ups, early-stage teams, and innovation stakeholders.

Complementing the Forum, the RCC awarded six innovative teams with the **Butterfly Innovation Awards (BIA)**. The BIA aims to inspire creative individuals and organisations to develop scalable, market-ready innovative solutions. By recognising achievements across six categories – green innovation, industry, STEM, women, university, and youth – the BIA promotes a culture of innovation while advancing both digital and green transitions. Since its inception, the BIA has supported 24 teams providing financial support and enhanced visibility.

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

Under Women’s Economic Empowerment, RCC successfully contributed to the Berlin Process Summit 2025 leading to the adoption of a [Joint Call for Action on Regional Gender-Responsive Green Finance and Accompanying Recommendations](#), calling for partnerships and collaboration among policymakers, financial institutions, SMEs, CSOs and other stakeholders to implement the report’s key recommendations aiming to integrate women economic empowerment and inclusive green finance into the governance frameworks of the WB6. In parallel, the RCC contributed to the **Gender Equality Forum 2025**, held on 10 September 2025 in Sarajevo, as a side event to the Berlin Process Summit, where it highlighted the women’s economic empowerment dimension of the Berlin Process.

In support of its Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship, the RCC developed a Compendium of Good Practices on Access to Finance for Women Entrepreneurs in the WB6, providing an in-depth analysis of women entrepreneurs’ access to finance in the region, combining data, policy developments, and success stories. The importance of the “Joint Call for Action on Regional Gender-Responsive Green Finance” was emphasised and the Compendium’s key findings presented in a regional online meeting held on 3 October 2025 where participants discussed challenges of and solutions to access to finance, identified priority actions and collaboration opportunities, and brainstormed on ways to boost visibility by promoting as many success stories of women entrepreneurs in the region as possible. The meeting also featured contributions from the European Bank for Reconstruction and

Development (EBRD), which provided updates on the progress and implementation of the Women Entrepreneurs Finance Code in the region.

Finally, RCC has launched a gap analysis of gender statistics to improve the availability and quality of gender-disaggregated data on entrepreneurship across the WB6. Under Women's Economic Empowerment, the objective is to improve the quality, availability, and comparability of gender-disaggregated entrepreneurship statistics, enabling more evidence-based policymaking while aligning the region with EU standards and key frameworks on business statistics, including gender disaggregation. This targeted approach aims to enhance institutional readiness and support compliance with EU obligations in gender-disaggregated and entrepreneurship-related data.

A2.3. Free Movement of People

Progress continued in advancing the free movement agenda in the WB6. Developments in higher education mobility, recognition of professional qualifications, and social security coordination supported the implementation of the CRM and alignment with the EU acquis.

In the area of higher education, regional **quality assurance systems** further advanced towards alignment with the **European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)**. A major milestone was achieved on 27 June 2025, when the Kosovo* Accreditation Agency (KAA) obtained full registration in the European Quality Assurance Register (EQAR), strengthening trust in qualifications and facilitating academic and professional mobility. RCC also supported the Agency for Quality of Higher Education of North Macedonia (AVKO) through targeted peer-learning and legal review activities, resulting in concrete recommendations and a dedicated roadmap guiding the agency towards ESG compliance and its forthcoming ENQA review.

A milestone in advancing regional cooperation was the **high-level conference *Bridging Futures: Internationalisation of Higher Education in the Western Balkans and Southeast Europe***, organised by RCC in cooperation with the World Bank and the Ministry of Education and Science of North Macedonia, held on 26–27 March 2026 in Skopje. The conference brought together around 100 participants, including Ministers of Education, senior

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

policymakers, global higher education experts, and stakeholders from the Western Balkans Six and the SEECP. The Conference marked a shift from fragmented approaches towards a more integrated, system-level perspective anchored in mobility, quality assurance, and labour market relevance, while providing a structured platform for peer-to-peer exchange and policy dialogue at regional and international level. Cross-sectoral engagement addressed key bottlenecks related to recognition of qualifications, quality assurance alignment, and workforce mobility, particularly in regulated professions. Through thematic sessions and expert exchanges, the conference strengthened cooperation, reinforced institutional networks, and contributed to a shared understanding of reform priorities. Its outcomes are feeding into ongoing regional processes under the CRM 2 and the SEE2030 Strategy, further supporting alignment with EU standards and advancing the mobility agenda.

Progress was recorded in **operationalising the Agreement on Access to Higher Education and Admission to Study (AHEAS)**. The first working meeting of the Joint Commission was held on 24 February 2026 in Podgorica, formally launching the institutional framework for implementation. Parties agreed on the next steps towards adopting Rules of Procedure, establishing the basis for practical cooperation in facilitating access to higher education across the region.

However, implementation of regional mobility agreements in higher education remains constrained by political and technical bottlenecks: despite being in force, the implementation of the Agreement on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications is still stalled. RCC facilitated a meeting between Belgrade and Pristina in December 2025, with the participation of the European Commission (EC), to explore options for overcoming the impasse. Addressing this issue remains critical, as delays risk affecting the operationalisation of related agreements, including AHEAS.

Technical infrastructure supporting mobility has in the meantime advanced. RCC completed the migration and expansion of the [Regional Recognition Database \(RRD\)](#) as of December 2025. While this represents an important enabling tool, its effectiveness depends on systematic data input by all parties, which remains uneven.

In the area of **professional qualifications**, as of January 2026, RCC supported WB6 efforts to align with Directive 2005/36/EC through a comprehensive regional assessment. This included

economy-specific fiches, stakeholder consultations, and a roadmap outlining sequencing, governance models, and priority implementation actions. Together, these provide a solid technical and policy basis for advancing alignment of curricula, accreditation systems, and recognition procedures.

On 11 September 2025 in Brussels, the fourth meeting of the Commission monitoring the implementation of the Agreement on Freedom of Movement with Identity Cards in the Western Balkans was held with participation of all contracting parties and Bosnia and Herzegovina as an observer amid its ongoing ratification process. The meeting highlighted the smooth implementation of the Agreement, noting more than 23 million intraregional movements from January to July 2025, exercising the right to travel using identity card. Discussions also addressed challenges related to the travel of minors without identity cards, with efforts underway to identify inclusive and practical solutions. In May 2026, the Commission held its fifth meeting online, reviewing comparative data for the first and second halves of 2025, as well as cumulative implementation data. This continued the technical monitoring of the Agreement and supported evidence-based follow-up on regional mobility arrangements.

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

During the reporting period, efforts in the telecommunications sector focused on improving the business environment, particularly permit-granting procedures, identified by operators as key barrier to broadband network deployment. To assess these challenges, questionnaires were distributed to telecom operators across the WB6 in August 2025 and to local municipalities in February 2026. Initial findings, presented at the Advisory and Coordination Group meeting in October 2025 alongside the WB Digital Summit, highlighted issues such as unpredictable timelines, excessive administrative requirements, environmental constraints, digitalisation gaps, and high and inconsistent fees.

Building on these results and in line with the February 2026 WB6 Working Group on Connectivity, the RCC launched a more detailed review incorporating input from both the public and private sectors, including assessment of municipal responses on permitting procedures. The next phase will involve organising meetings in each WB6 to present the

findings and engage stakeholders in identifying measures to streamline and improve permitting procedures.

The voluntary EU/WB Roaming Declaration, signed in December 2022 by 38 operators from WB6 and the EU, has proven highly successful. Since the introduction of reduced data roaming charges on 1 October 2023, prices have dropped significantly, often falling well below the agreed price caps. The most recent analysis confirms this trend.

Although the data roaming price cap is set at 14 EUR/GB for the period from 1 January 2026 to the end of 2027, most operators already offer substantially lower rates. Around 85% of signatories provide data roaming at under 9 EUR/GB, with many offering prices below 3 EUR/GB. In the second half of 2025, discussions with the signatories focused on adjusting the price caps to better reflect current retail market conditions. However, this proposal did not receive sufficient support. The announced prospect of integrating the WB6 into the EU Roam Like at Home (RLAH) regime has largely shifted stakeholders' strategic focus and resource allocation towards that process, with the voluntary price reduction having served its purpose as a very effective transitional instrument.

Discussions on roaming within the WB6 Working Group on Connectivity at meetings held in October and December 2025 and February 2026 shifted towards supporting institutions in the process of introducing RLAH with the EU. In this context, RCC organised regional consultations with Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology (DG CONNECT) to address alignment with the EU roaming acquis.

Following Moldova's accession to the RLAH regime with the EU on 1 January 2026, Moldovan experts presented their experience at the February 2026 meeting, highlighting key challenges and lessons learned. Additional discussions within the Working Group led to the development of a joint regional proposal, submitted to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in March 2026. The proposal focuses on capacity building in radio-frequency spectrum, as well as on raising awareness of new technologies and services. These initiatives are envisaged to be implemented through a collaborative effort between the region and the ITU.

The RCC, with the support of the EC, and jointly with the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C), successfully organised the **High-Level Cybersecurity Conference – CyberPulse2025** on 2 July 2025, in Podgorica. The event brought representatives from across

the Western Balkans, including ministries and agencies responsible for cybersecurity, alongside participants from the EC, donor community, international organisations, the private sector, etc. The conference attracted a diverse and distinguished audience of over 150 stakeholders, reflecting strong regional and international engagement in cybersecurity.

The conference was complemented with a donor coordination meeting, held on 3rd July 2025, during which the regional **database for the identification of cybersecurity needs** was formally launched. This marked an important step towards enhancing coordination, cooperation and alignment in addressing cybersecurity challenges across the WB6. The database is the result of joint efforts by RCC, Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG), and the EC, which collaborated on its development. Designed as a secure, non-public platform, it aims to strengthen regional dialogue and coordination by enabling the structured exchange of cybersecurity priorities across the WB6. The database has reached 81 users across 29 institutions, confirming strong interest in enhanced cybersecurity coordination. It has also undergone technical upgrades and security testing, ensuring compliance with international standards and enhancing its reliability as a regional coordination tool. Over time, the database has evolved from a static repository into a dynamic platform supporting real-time coordination and donor alignment.

The **7th Western Balkans Digital Summit (WBDS)** took place in Skopje on 1 and 2 October 2025, bringing together key regional and international stakeholders to advance the digital agenda of the WB6. The RCC played a central role in facilitating the preparation of the Summit, including coordinating organisational aspects and leading the drafting of the official Conclusions of the WBDS. It also supported the preparation of the agenda, and actively participated in several high-level panels and discussions focused on regional connectivity and interoperability.

Further, the RCC supported the development of the two key policy documents, the [Joint Statement on Digitally Connected Western Balkans Six](#), and the [Joint Statement on Achieving Western Balkans Six Interoperable Digital ID Wallets and Trust Services](#), both of which were officially endorsed at the Summit. The Summit Conclusions reaffirmed the collective commitment of the WB6 to accelerate digital transformation across the region.

The official preparations of the next WBDS started with the first WBDS Steering Committee meeting, held in May 2026, with Belgrade being the Host and following the order of the first cycle.

As part of its continued efforts to systematically monitor digital transformation across the WB6, and building on established practise through the development of the [Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index \(WB DESI\)](#) reports, fully aligned with the EU DESI methodology, the RCC finalised the [DESI 2025 Report](#).

In November 2025, the RCC organised a dedicated workshop to present and clarify the methodological framework and analytical approach underpinning the Report. This edition provided a comprehensive assessment by calculating all DESI indicators for the WB6 over a two-year reference period. The Report was finalised in March 2026, with the accompanying online dashboard subsequently updated to reflect the latest data and insights. The preparations and work for the next DESI Report are planned to start in May 2026.

The RCC, in cooperation with the SIGMA/OECD Programme, Eastern Partnership Regional Fund for Public Administration Reforms (led by GIZ), and the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA), organised the **3rd High-Level Data Protection Week** from 1 to 4 December 2025 in Brussels. The event was held in partnership with the EC, European Data Protection Board (EDPB), and the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS). It served as a strategic platform for exploring the transformative potential and associated challenges of Artificial Intelligence (AI), while simultaneously strengthening the institutional capacities of Data Protection Authorities. In addition, the event further fostered knowledge exchange on emerging technologies, developments within the evolving regulatory landscape, and other related policy and operational considerations.

Further, the RCC kick-started the regional dialogue on **Artificial Intelligence (AI)** with organisation of the first regional meeting of the Working Group, organised on 13th and 14th May 2026, in Podgorica. The meeting served to discuss the results of the AI mapping exercise, jointly conducted with the UNDP, aiming to support further preparation of the AI Roadmap, one of the priorities outlined in the Common Regional Market Action Plan 2025–2028.

The RCC has actively supported the WB6 in advancing regional recognition of advanced and qualified trust services, progressing towards inclusion in the EU Third Country Trusted List, and developing interoperable regional Digital ID wallets. This support has been delivered through targeted meetings and joint workshops with key partners, including CEFTA, GIZ (EU4Digital), and the World Bank. These efforts resulted in the preparation and endorsement of a [Joint Statement on Interoperability of Digital Identity Wallets and Trust Services](#) by the WB6. Through this statement, the commitment to advancing interoperable Digital Identity Wallets and trust services in line with EU standards was reaffirmed.

The statement also welcomes establishing the RCC Platform on Regional Digital Identity Wallets and Interoperability of Trust Services as a central mechanism for political coordination, technical harmonisation, and knowledge exchange. It supports the launch of regional pilot use cases to demonstrate tangible benefits for citizens and businesses, and commits to strengthening regulatory and technical capacities, enhancing mutual recognition of electronic identification and trust services, and ensuring close coordination with partners such as CEFTA, ReSPA, and GIZ, under RCC's leadership and coordination towards a trusted and interoperable regional digital ecosystem.

Building on these achievements, the RCC is currently developing a regional roadmap for implementation of Digital ID Wallets and, in cooperation with the World Bank, supporting the development of the Digital ID Wallets implementation roadmaps for each WB6.

In May 2026, the RCC advanced regional digital integration by preparing a draft regional arrangement on the interoperability of eIDs and Digital ID Wallets. In cooperation with EU4Digital, it also developed a declaration on interoperable Digital ID Wallets and the launch of a regional pilot use case. These are expected to be adopted by the regional working group by the end of May 2026 and endorsed by the WB6 as Berlin Process deliverables, reinforcing their commitment to interoperability and accelerating practical implementation.

In parallel, the first meeting of the **WB6 Working Group for an Improved Online Environment** (DSA & DMA) marked a concrete step towards strengthening operational readiness for the implementation of the Digital Services Act (DSA) and the Digital Markets Act (DMA) across the region. This progress supports alignment with the EU Digital Single Market and is expected to deliver tangible outcomes, including improved online safety,

stronger protection of fundamental rights, and a more fair and competitive digital market. By addressing anti-competitive practices of major online platforms and gatekeepers, these efforts contribute to creating a more transparent and trusted digital environment.

The DSA & DMA advanced regional alignment by adopting the **draft Regional Roadmap for the implementation of the DSA and the DMA** in April 2026, together with specific roadmaps for each WB6 partner. These roadmaps are grounded in key findings and tailored recommendations derived from bilateral consultations and questionnaires provided by relevant institutions and regulatory authorities across the WB6. The process resulted in the identification of priority actions and concrete next steps, strengthening institutional preparedness and accelerating alignment with the EU digital regulatory framework.

A4. Sustainable Growth and Climate Change Resilience

During the reporting period, the Regional Cooperation Council actively led and implemented the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans (GAWB) processes, ensuring structured regional coordination, monitoring, and political guidance. Implementation was supported through regular meetings of the Regional Working Group on the GAWB, RCC-led monitoring and reporting mechanisms, and the organisation of the GAWB Ministerial Meeting, which provided high-level political direction.

A key analytical output of the RCC during this period was the [2024 Report on the Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan \(GARI\)](#), providing a comprehensive assessment of regional progress across all Green Agenda pillars.

The report confirmed that the WB6 have made overall progress in implementing the Green Agenda, although unevenly due to differing domestic contexts and capacities. Notable advances include the adoption of climate adaptation strategies aligned with EU frameworks, increased deployment of nature-based solutions, strengthened renewable energy policies, and ongoing preparation of domestic Energy and Climate Plans (NECPs) with the support of the Energy Community Secretariat. At the same time, persistent challenges remain in areas such as grid stability, energy poverty, coal phase-out, and infrastructure for alternative fuels. Progress has also been recorded in depollution investments, circular economy development, agricultural reforms, and biodiversity protection, supported by key regional partners including

the Transport Community, Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development (SWG RRD), and International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN).

During the reporting period, the RCC focused on three key priorities: revising the GAWB Action Plan, preparing the Second Ministerial Meeting on the GAWB, and finalising GAWB-related deliverables under the Berlin Process 2025, ensuring coordinated regional progress and alignment with EU frameworks.

The revision of the GAWB was led by the RCC in close cooperation with WB6 ministries through the RWG GAWB, under the political guidance of PM Sherpas, and with support from the EC and key regional coordinators under GAWB Action Plan (GAWB AP), including the Energy Community, Transport Community, Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development, and International Union for Conservation of Nature. The process was inclusive, engaging stakeholders from the private sector, civil society, donors, and local authorities, including through a public call for CSO input.

The revised Action Plan delivers concrete results: it reduces the number of actions from 58 to 41, introduces clear timelines and milestones throughout 2030, and strengthens alignment with EU acquis and global framework. It also integrates key regional deliverables, mainstreams climate adaptation, reinforces the social dimension through just transition and energy poverty measures, and introduces SMART indicators to enable measurable progress and stronger accountability.

In parallel, all Green Agenda-related deliverables under the 2025 Berlin Process were finalised through RCC and RWG GAWB facilitation and coordination and formally endorsed at the Second Ministerial Meeting on the GAWB. The Second Ministerial Meeting on the GAWB was held on 14–15 October in Dubrovnik under the UK-hosted Berlin Process. The meeting was organised by the RCC in partnership with the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany and the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition of Croatia, and supported by the EC. As the highest annual forum on the Green Agenda, it built on the outcomes of the Hamburg Ministerial and marked a significant step forward in strengthening regional cooperation and political ownership. The meeting resulted in the endorsement of the Dubrovnik Declaration, reaffirming high-level commitment to the Green Agenda and endorsing key regional deliverables:

1. [The Revised GAWB Action Plan \(2025-2030\)](#);
2. [WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap](#) - providing a strategic framework and recommendations for developing a Regional Adaptation Strategy by 2026 to strengthen resilience across key sectors aligned with the EU Adaptation Strategy;
3. [Regional Action Plan on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter](#)- which operationalises the 2023 Joint Statement through concrete targets and measures to reduce single-use plastics (SUP), enhance recycling, and protect ecosystems, including phasing out the most polluting SUPs and improving regional standards by 2030;
4. [Outline of WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan](#) – which sets the foundation for a regional response to biodiversity loss, aligning with EU and global frameworks while defining targets for conservation (30% protected areas) and ecosystem restoration to guide the full Plan’s development; and
5. [GARI 2024](#).

To maximise impact, ensure strategic alignment, and optimise the use of available support, the RCC organised the Donor Coordination Meeting on GAWB on 15 October, alongside the Ministerial Meeting in Dubrovnik. The meeting served as a structural platform for dialogue between the donor community and the WB6 authorities, focusing on priority investment needs, opportunities for joint donor interventions, and improved coordination across ongoing and planned initiatives. It also enabled an exchange on the implementation status of the Sofia Declaration, helping align donor supported programmes with regional strategies and strengthen partnerships with the WB6. WB6 representatives presented their programmes, outlined funding priorities, and proposed new project ideas, while identifying practical measures to enhance the region’s capacity to absorb and effectively utilise available financial resources. Overall, the Ministerial Meeting brought together around 120 participants, reflecting strong stakeholder engagement.

On 26–27 November 2025, the RCC, in cooperation with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit and the IHE Delft Institute for Water Education – Global Sanitation Graduate School (GSGS), organised an Extended Meeting of the RWG GAWB in Budva, dedicated to the water and sanitation sector. The meeting advanced RCC’s mandate to support Green Agenda implementation by strengthening regional dialogue and capacity development, with a focus on water depollution and sanitation management in emergency contexts. Discussions addressed two critical regional challenges: the shortage of qualified

professionals and the growth impact of climate-related extreme events on water systems. The outcomes directly contributed to the development of a WB6 roadmap aligned with the EU Water Resilience Strategy 2030, completed in December 2025. Strong participation from regional academia ensured the integration of scientific and educational expertise into the road map.

In 2026, priorities focused on advancing the follow-up to the commitments set out in the Dubrovnik Declaration, preparing the 2025 GAWB Implementation Report, and convening regular and extended meetings of the RWG GAWB to support coordination and implementation. The RCC followed up by developing a first draft of the WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy, aimed at establishing a shared regional vision for climate resilience, defining strategic objectives and priority adaptation actions, and identifying flagship regional initiatives to strengthen coordinated responses to climate risks and align with EU policy frameworks. To move this process forward, the RCC convened a closed RWG GAWB meeting on 26 March 2026 to agree on next steps, methodology, and key deliverables under 2026 Berlin Process. This was followed by an extended RWG session on the same day, organised in cooperation with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, where the draft approach to WB6 Climate Adaptation Strategy was presented and initial feedback was gathered from WB6 institutions, partners, and experts to further refine the document. These efforts were further reinforced through RCC's contribution to the Tirana Climate Conference on 5 May 2026, including a ministerial panel that advanced regional dialogue on climate adaptation and strengthening political momentum for the Strategy's development and implementation.

Following the endorsement of the [Outline of the WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan](#), the RCC developed the [WB6 Biodiversity Strategic Plan 2030 \(BSP 2030\)](#), with technical support from external experts and the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The Plan provides a common regional framework to advance biodiversity conservation, ecosystem restoration, and sustainable natural resource management. As a key instrument under Pillar 5 of the GAWB, the Plan is aligned with major European and global frameworks, including the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Following technical consultations, the final draft was presented at the 16th regular Biodiversity Task Force meeting on 19-22 May in Tirana, organised by IUCN ECARO. Technical-level endorsement at the next RWG GAWB meeting is planned for mid-June.

Activities under the **Circular Economy (CE) pillar** continued with the support of Switzerland through the Green Coop project. To ensure strategic continuity and coherence of regional efforts, RCC engaged a Circular Economy expert, funded by Switzerland through September 2026, to provide high-level strategic and technical guidance across the WB6. This support also contributes to the preparation of a new four-year Swiss-funded regional intervention aimed at advancing the CE agenda.

The RCC advanced the operationalisation of the [2023 Regional Joint Statement on Plastic Pollution Prevention](#) by developing an integrated analytical package assessing legal, institutional, and implementation frameworks across the WB6. The analysis identified key governance and enforcement gaps and produced both harmonised regional recommendations and tailored policy measures, focusing on priority single-use plastic (SUP) items, strengthened extended producer responsibility (EPR) systems, and improved recyclability, reuse, and recycled content. In parallel, RCC prepared a draft Joint Statement on phasing out the five most littered SUP categories for inclusion in the forthcoming Ministerial Declaration, committing the WB6 to coordinated action through a harmonised approach with shared definitions, milestones, and monitoring arrangements. To support measurable progress, RCC established a regional monitoring framework with key performance indicators (KPIs) and a Monitoring, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system aligned with existing data capacities.

Policy recommendations were further translated into practical market solutions, including deposit return systems (DRS), food-grade PET recycling value chains, and reuse models. Building on this, RCC supported the development of a regionally harmonised EPR Plastic Packaging Framework, with technical assistance launched in April 2026, covering baseline assessments, stakeholder consultations, and preparation of a common toolkit for governance, fee structures, monitoring, and regional comparability.

In line with its mandate to monitor and report on the implementation of the GAWB, RCC launched **GAWB Observatory Platform**. The online platform provides a comprehensive and user-friendly visual overview of progress in implementing Sofia Declaration, structured by policy area and supported by indicators, timelines and annual data collection cycles. The RCC has consolidated all relevant documentation and policy references related to GAWB and EU policy processes, which are systematically integrated into the Platform. The RCC completed the **2025 GARI Report** which is in the process of validation through RWG GAWB. 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 status of GAWB implementation.

In 2026, the RCC organised two RWG GAWB meetings, an online meeting on 25 February and an in-person meeting in Belgrade on 26 March. Both meetings brought together representatives of the WB6, the EC, and key regional coordinators under GAWB AP including the Energy Community, Transport Community, IUCN and SWG RRD to coordinate 2026 priorities, align planned activities, and reinforce joint ownership of the Green Agenda implementation process.

In parallel, RCC is in the final stages of concluding a financial agreement with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit to further support the implementation of the Green Agenda pillar.

A5. Projects

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

During the reporting period, the Western Balkans Youth Lab 2 (WBYL2) implemented a range of activities that strengthened youth participation and engagement in policy-making processes across the region. Through these initiatives, WBYL2 has significantly advanced the role of young people as active contributors to decision-making and supported development of more inclusive and responsive policies.

The Youth Policy Labs on the Green Agenda were successfully concluded with the [Final Conference, titled *Blooming Garden of Tomorrow*](#), held on 21 October 2025 in Ljubljana. This event built on earlier milestones, including the [Kick-Off Conference](#) in June 2024 in Sarajevo and the [Mid-Term Conference](#) on 10 April 2025 in Tivat. The final conference provided an important platform for working groups from across the WB6 to present the outcomes of their work and exchange experiences. Key achievements included the development of the Green Seat Manual and a methodology for introducing green seats in Local Youth Councils in Albania, youth dialogues and development of the Eco Bonton in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a comprehensive gap analysis of youth participation in environmental decision-making in Kosovo*. Furthermore, frameworks for Youth Climate Councils were established in

Montenegro, complemented by practical guides, workshops, and educational tools such as the Eco Youth Dictionary developed in North Macedonia.

Awareness-raising campaigns further encouraged youth engagement in environmental issues. Together, these efforts demonstrated the collaborative spirit of young people in driving sustainable change.

Following the completion of the Green Agenda cycle, a new thematic focus emerged as a priority. The fourth Youth Policy Lab, dedicated to Disinformation and Media Literacy, was officially launched at the [Kick-Off Conference](#) on 18 November 2025 in Tirana. Prior to the Conference, Regional Pool of Experts participated in a Training on Youth Policy Lab Methodology aimed at strengthening their understanding of the Youth Policy Lab and clarifying their role. During this initial phase, participants developed [12 regional recommendations](#) to guide future activities. Following the conference, each working group submitted requests for technical assistance and capacity-building support to facilitate the implementation of their initiatives at the local level.

Progress under the fourth Youth Policy Lab was presented at the **Mid-Term Conference on Disinformation and Media Literacy** held on 22 April 2026 in Tivat. The event served as a dynamic platform for young people from across the Western Balkans to present achievements and ongoing efforts in strengthening digital resilience and advancing media literacy. During the conference, each working group outlined its key activities and areas of focus. In Albania, efforts focus on research into youth skills for using AI tools, alongside the development of a Code of Conduct for social media influencers and the organisation of a bootcamp. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, activities centre on developing practical handbooks and guidelines to better integrate youth perspectives into journalism and institutional communication, complemented by research on youth representation in the media and a follow-up media campaign. In Kosovo*, work is focused on developing a disinformation and media literacy manual. In Montenegro, activities aim to improve media literacy through research on youth visibility and participation in television media, supported by workshops, press conferences, and formalised cooperation mechanisms. In North Macedonia, efforts are directed towards introducing media literacy as an elective subject in school curricula, supported by research and advocacy campaigns. In Serbia, activities include research on youth competencies in AI and media literacy, followed by training of trainers, local training sessions, and a media campaign.

To ensure that youth voices are not only heard but meaningfully represented in policy processes youth structures must operate in a professional, inclusive, and sustainable manner, particularly when engaging diverse groups of young people. In this context, WBYL2 provided targeted capacity-building support aimed at strengthening the internal organisational capacities of Youth Councils across the region. The Youth Congress of Albania was supported through a two-day strategic planning workshop for Local Coordinators. The workshop focused on analysing internal and external factors affecting the network's development and on defining a roadmap to address identified risks in preparation for the Youth Council General Assembly in 2026. The Youth Council of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina received support in developing a methodological framework for monitoring the implementation of the Youth Law. The framework focuses on youth organising, participation in decision-making, and the development of local youth policies, alongside improvements of the Council's web platform. The Youth Council Kosovo* (KYC) was supported through strategic communication and digital transformation initiatives aimed at enhancing its visibility and strengthening youth engagement. The Youth Network Montenegro received support to strengthen its capacities for meaningful youth participation in Green Agenda policy processes. The intervention focused on improving skills for engagement in structured green dialogue, with the objective of reinforcing cooperation between youth and governmental institutions. The Youth Council of North Macedonia (NYCM) received targeted capacity-building support focused on developing a comprehensive Communication Plan for 2025 and creating a renewed visual identity. The Youth Council of Serbia (KOMS) was supported in strengthening its internal governance and communication capacities to enhance transparency, accountability, and institutional credibility. This included the development of a Crisis Communication Plan, drafting of an Ethical Code and Rules of Procedure for the Governing Board, and capacity-building in project writing, fundraising, and strategic communication.

In addition to the Youth Policy Labs, WBYL2 organised two Regional Fireside Talks during the reporting period. The **fourth Fireside Talk** took place on 18 November 2025 in Tirana under the title [*The Growth Plan & Common Regional Market: Where Does Youth Fit In?*](#). The discussion brought together representatives from the RCC, the Delegation of the European Union to Albania, the Embassy of Sweden to Albania, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, and the Regional Youth Cooperation Office (RYCO). It fostered an open and

interactive exchange with young participants actively engaging with high-level speakers in a candid dialogue.

The **fifth Fireside Talk** was held on the margins of the **ESG Adria Summit** on 22 April 2026 in Tivat, providing a platform for young people to engage directly with senior representatives, including the RCC Secretary General; Deputy Prime Minister of Montenegro for Foreign and European Affairs; Ambassador of Ireland to Serbia and to Montenegro; Ambassador of the European Union to Montenegro; and Founder of Sustineri Partners and the Adria Future Summit. Topics included the stability of the Western Balkans, progress in the European Union integration process, and strengthening regional cooperation.

Furthermore, WBYL2 supported the participation of young representatives from the Western Balkans in high-level international events, strengthening their engagement in regional and European policy discussions. These included the fifth edition of the International *EYC Educo Camp*, held from 12 to 14 August 2025 in Mojkovac, which brought together young people from the region and the EU to develop skills in sustainability, entrepreneurship, digital safety, communication, and leadership through interactive workshops and discussions.

WBYL2 also facilitated youth participation in the *European Values for the Future of the SEE Region*, held in Kruševo in September 2025. The event convened young leaders, policymakers, and civil society representatives for thematic sessions on EU integration, peacebuilding, digital transformation, and media collaboration, with a strong focus on empowering youth as active contributors to the region's future. Building on their engagement in international platforms such as *Bridging the Gap* in Tirana, young participants also took part in the *EU Global Gateway* event in May 2025 in Brussels and the *European Youth Event* in June 2025 in Strasbourg. These opportunities enabled young people to contribute to international discussions, exchange ideas, and strengthen their role in shaping regional and European agendas.

A5.2. Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG)⁵

During the reporting period, the RCC-led IISG strengthened its role as the central regional coordination mechanism for internal security in the Western Balkans, advancing towards a

⁵ This project is funded by the European Union, grant number IPA 2020/414-918

more integrated Security Governance Hub (SGH). Progress was marked by consolidation of governance structures, operationalisation of the Cybersecurity Pillar, and enhanced analytical and coordination capacities. The launch of the Cybersecurity Database, alongside upgrades to IISG systems aligned with the Joint Action Plan (JAP) objectives, improved the mapping of regional needs and donor support, while a comprehensive outreach and validation process ensured data accuracy and strategic alignment.

Stakeholder engagement remained strong, with broad participation from the WB6, EU Member States⁶, and international partners, and growing use of IISG tools⁷. The second cycle of needs mapping identified over 900 regional needs across three pillars, and 225 in cybersecurity, while the number of registered projects rose to 129, strengthening the evidence base for coordinated action. Priorities include critical infrastructure protection, legal alignment with EU and FATF standards, law enforcement and investigative capacities, system interoperability, and specialised cybersecurity capabilities.

Structured donor coordination and high-level engagements, including CyberPulse2025, Regional Network of CT/P-CVE Coordinators (RNNC) and steering meetings, further strengthened coordination and visibility, with the Cybersecurity Database providing a transparent overview of needs and support.

Partnerships with organisations such as Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL), CIVIPOL⁸, OSCE, and WB3C were strengthened and further reinforced IISG's coordination role. Capacity-building efforts and improved methodologies, including revised Terms of Reference⁹, supported the transition towards the SGH, envisaging enhanced analytical capacity and integrated regional security governance, a stronger RCC coordination role, and closer alignment with EU priorities.

⁶ Active participation from over 74 representatives from the WB6 and 54 representatives from EU MS

⁷ Usage of IISG databases expanded to 248 users across 43 stakeholders

⁸ CIVIPOL is the international technical cooperation operator of the French Ministry of Interior

⁹ Revised Terms of Reference were developed to support the transformation of IISG into a Security Governance Hub. This transition foresees enhanced analytical capacity, formalisation of the Cybersecurity Pillar, strengthened monitoring of the Counter-Terrorism/Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (CT/P-CVE) Joint Action Plan, and a more operational role for the RCC in regional security coordination.

The IISG governance framework continued to demonstrate efficiency through sustained stakeholder engagement and structured coordination¹⁰. Participation remained high across all formats, reflecting strong ownership by WB6 partners and continued support from EU institutions and international organisations.

The IISG Database and the newly launched Cybersecurity Database remained central to IISG's analytical and coordination functions. The IISG Database grew to 182 users, reflecting increased engagement and improved data quality, while the Cybersecurity Database expanded more rapidly. Both databases were upgraded and security-tested to meet international standards, strengthening their reliability as regional coordination tools.

A total of 15 analytical outputs identified key gaps and overlaps across all pillars. While donor support remains substantial, persistent gaps remain in areas such as AML/CFT, intelligence systems, interoperability, digital forensics, and cybersecurity education, informing more targeted donor coordination and resource allocation.

The second cycle of needs mapping confirmed IISG's central role in evidence-based planning, identifying over 900 needs across the three pillars and 225 in cybersecurity. Priorities include critical infrastructure protection, legal alignment with EU and FATF standards, law enforcement and investigative capacities, system interoperability, and specialised cybersecurity capabilities. Structured matchmaking processes were initiated to better match donor support with identified needs and maximise impact. High-level engagements, including the CyberPulse2025 Conference and donor coordination meetings, further increased visibility and strengthened partnerships. The Cybersecurity Database played a central role by providing a transparent and up-to-date overview of needs and available support.

¹⁰ The IISG Secretariat held bilateral consultations with all WB6 partners, ensuring systematic input into needs and response mapping. It also delivered 12 targeted training sessions, strengthening stakeholders' ability to use IISG databases effectively.

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

The RCC's ESAP 3¹¹, continued to support labour market reforms and regional cooperation in the WB6, with a focus on alignment with EU standards, capacity building, and peer learning.

In cooperation with the European Training Foundation (ETF) and with the support of the EC's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL), ESAP 3 organised a two-day capacity-building event on 24-25 June 2025 in Turin. The event focused on enhancing labour mobility in the EU enlargement economies through the application of the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework. It brought together representatives of WB6 institutions (line ministries and public employment services) to strengthen their understanding of ESCO and its role in improving job matching and labour market transparency.

As a follow-up to the regional event, ESAP 3 delivered targeted technical assistance to Public Employment Service (PES) of Montenegro through a dedicated workshop addressing the operational aspects of ESCO adoption, including institutional coordination and practical implementation challenges.

To ensure continuity of support, ESAP 3 and ETF jointly organised a follow-up webinar on 2 October 2025, focusing on the practical IT dimensions of ESCO, including job-skills matching functionalities and integration into existing employment services systems. Representatives of the WB6 PES, supported by ESAP 3, participated in the PES Network's Annual Stakeholder Conference, *Partnerships in Shaping and Delivering Employment Services*, held on 21 October 2025 in Brussels. This marked the second consecutive participation of WB6 PES in this key EU forum, facilitating exchange with EU counterparts and strengthening their integration into European PES cooperation frameworks.

Throughout 2025, ESAP 3 implemented the fourth cycle of **monitoring WB6 performance against the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)**. The activity resulted in six individual

¹¹ 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.

reports, and a comprehensive regional comparative overview, providing evidence-based analysis of progress and gaps across key social and employment indicators. Moreover, the [WB6 Social Scoreboard](#) was updated to reflect the data collected in this monitoring process. The findings were presented at the Western Balkans Human Capital Days, held on 28-29 October 2025 in Tirana and jointly organised by the RCC, UNDP, ESAP 3, and the EC. The event convened policymakers and key stakeholders to discuss human capital development, with the second day dedicated to presenting EPSR performance reviews and fostering policy dialogue on social convergence with the EU. Two parallel breakout sessions enabled active participation and more in-depth exchanges among participants. The first session, “*Tackling Undeclared Work in the Digital Age*”, addressed the challenges of informality in digital labour platforms, focusing on detection, prevention, and formalisation practices. It also explored emerging trends and data, including data from thematic research by the Eurofound, presented by its expert.

The second session, “*Strengthening Labour Market Governance and Services in the Western Balkans Six*”, explored effective active labour market measures (ALMMs) and ongoing PES reforms. It also highlighted ETF’s work on aligning skills development with labour market needs, with particular attention to green jobs. The session further presented practical job–skills matching tools developed by the EU PES Secretariat, alongside experiences with ALMMs for green skills shared by the Employment Service of Slovenia (ESS).

To complement the analytical work, ESAP 3 implemented the *Imagine if...* awareness-raising campaign, featuring video testimonials from citizens across the region. The campaign highlighted key social challenges addressed by the EPSR, including pensions, healthcare, youth employment, inclusion of persons with disabilities, undeclared work, and the cost of living, thereby increasing public awareness and engagement.

ESAP 3 provided technical assistance to the Labour and Employment Agency (LEA) of Bosnia and Herzegovina in organising the regional Labour and Employment Forum Dialogue and Partnerships for the Future, held on 11-12 November 2025 in Jahorina. The forum served as a platform for regional exchange on labour market trends, policy responses, and the strengthening of institutional cooperation.

Under the Western Balkans Network for **Tackling Undeclared Work**, ESAP 3 launched a new series of Mutual Assistance Projects (MAPs), with initial workshops held on 2 December 2025 in North Macedonia and 8 December 2025 in Albania. These peer-learning activities provided tailored technical support to labour inspectorates, addressing specific enforcement challenges related to the prevention, detection, and formalisation of undeclared work. The remaining MAPs covering all WB6 are scheduled for implementation in 2026.

In parallel, ESAP 3 contributed to knowledge development through the publication of the discussion paper “*Tackling Undeclared Work in the Digital Age: Focus on Platform Work*”. The paper analyses emerging challenges linked to the platform economy and provides policy-relevant recommendations for the region.

Further engagement in this area included participation in a thematic workshop organised by the European Labour Authority (ELA) on 10-11 February 2026 in Bratislava, focusing on undeclared work and bogus self-employment in the private security sector. The workshop facilitated exchange of practices between EU and WB6 labour inspectorates. On the margins of the event, ESAP 3 held bilateral technical meetings with ELA representatives, focusing on the European Employment Services (EURES) and alignment with the EU acquis on the free movement of workers.

The **ESAP 3 Steering Committee meeting** was held on 18 November 2025, bringing together representatives of EU Delegations from the WB6, the EC’s Directorate-General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood (DG ENEST), and facilitated by DG EMPL. The meeting provided an opportunity for the RCC and the International Labour Organization (ILO), as implementing partners, to present key achievements from the previous year, as well as planned activities for the upcoming period. The discussion supported strategic alignment, reinforced stakeholder engagement, and ensured continued coordination with EU priorities in the region.

In the first quarter of 2026, ESAP 3 initiated the **third cycle of the Public Employment Services (PES) Benchlearning exercise in the WB6**, modelled on EU practices. This activity represents a key component in supporting the modernisation and performance improvement of public employment services across the region. The 2026 cycle includes preparatory activities,

a kick-off event, peer visits, workshops, and the development of both individual and regional reports, with implementation continuing throughout the year.

ESAP 3 also strengthened its analytical and data-sharing role through the regular quarterly updates of the ESAP Employment Observatory, providing up-to-date labour market data, analytical findings, and policy-relevant insights for the WB6.

B. Political Cooperation, Good Governance and Security

B1. Political Cooperation

Within the political scope of work, the RCC concentrated on its statutory duties. During the reporting period, RCC's efforts in fostering political cooperation in South East Europe continued to demonstrate steady progress and sustained high-level engagement, particularly in bolstering regional dialogue, stability, and strategic initiatives geared towards European integration and sustainable development.

During the reporting period, the RCC made strong progress in political cooperation by effectively supporting the Tirana Chairmanship-in-Office (C-i-O) of the SEECP 2024-2025. A key milestone was the 5th Political Directors Meeting in Tirana on 10-11 June 2025, which **endorsed the [RCC Strategy and Work Programme \(SWP\) 2026-2028](#)** and the **[Annual Report 2024-2025](#)**, while also recognising the RCC's central role in preparing and implementing the CRM AP 2025-2028, the GAWB, and SEE2030. **The RCC Annual Meeting**, held back-to-back with the SEECP Ministerial Meeting and Summit on 16 June 2025 in Tirana, further confirmed the organisation's role as a trusted regional convener and formally endorsed both documents. These developments also supported the transition of the SEECP C-i-O to Sofia and helped sustain continuity, momentum, and high-level engagement in regional cooperation and EU integration efforts.

Under the theme *Boosting Regional Competitiveness and Inclusive Growth as Pathways to EU Integration*, the **SEECP Ministerial Meeting and Summit** on 16 June 2025 encapsulated the RCC's message that regional cooperation serves both as a proving ground and essential preparation for EU integration. In the margins of the Summit, the RCC Secretary General engaged with the President of Slovenia, Nataša Pirc Musar, exemplifying high-level regional support for the RCC's convening role and the broader SEECP framework.

The transition of the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office from Tirana to Sofia was duly formalised on 1 July, signifying a pivotal juncture in the regional cooperation calendar. As the operational arm of the SEECP, steadfastly dedicated to supporting and implementing its political and strategic priorities, the RCC Secretary General, on the margins of the SEECP high-level meetings in Tirana, conducted meetings with the then President of Bulgaria, Rumen Radev, and the Speaker of the Bulgarian Parliament, Natalya Kiselyova - engagements that underscored the close collaboration with Sofia as the incoming Chairmanship-in-Office. These interactions vividly highlighted the RCC's pivotal function in operationalising the SEECP's agenda and safeguarding continuity and momentum in regional cooperation.

Complementing these proceedings, the 12th SEECP Parliamentary Assembly Plenary Session on 10 June emphasised parliamentary cooperation as a crucial catalyst for enhancing regional connectivity, with a strategic focus on multimodal infrastructure and institutional coherence serving as pillars of economic opportunity and resilience. The RCC presented a Flash Report on Trade and Transport Connectivity, which underscored the region's economic potential, delineated key challenges, and proffered recommendations to deepen regional market integration and infrastructure investment.

RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanović actively participated in key regional forums, including the **Dubrovnik and Bled Strategic Forums** on 12 July and 1 September, where he emphasised the importance of sustaining peace, advancing EU integration, and fostering regional cooperation on priorities such as the CRM and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. These engagements provided valuable platforms to strengthen partnerships with government officials, business leaders, and international organisations.

In parallel, high-level visits and meetings marked the period, including **Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, Igli Hasani's visit to the RCC headquarters** on 10 July, reinforcing Albania's commitment to regional collaboration and EU accession perspectives. Additionally, the Secretary General held constructive **talks with the Chairwoman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Borjana Kristo** focusing on deepening political cooperation and reinforcing RCC's support for regional stability and development.

Earlier in the reporting period, the **first meeting of the SEECP Political Directors under the Sofia Chairmanship-in-Office (CiO)** was held on 17 July in Sofia. The meeting outlined the

Sofia Chairmanship's priorities, emphasising inclusive regional cooperation, European integration, connectivity, innovation, and security, thereby guiding the regional agenda towards stability, resilience, and sustainable growth. This commitment was further reflected in Kapetanović's official visit to Sofia on 15 September, where consultations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs reaffirmed the close cooperation between the RCC and the SEECP CiO. Discussions focused on preparations for the **30th SEECP anniversary in 2026**, including the opportunity to reflect on past achievements and set forward-looking goals for the region's future.

On the margins of the 80th Session of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), RCC and the SEECP C-i-O co-organised the **regular informal working lunch for SEECP Foreign Ministers** on 24 September 2025 in New York. The event marked the upcoming SEECP anniversary, renewed participant commitment to dialogue, solidarity, and regional ownership under the theme *30 Years of SEECP: Navigating the Future through Regional Stability, Security and Sustainable Transformation*.

During the same week, the Secretary General also participated in the **Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII) Foreign Ministers' Informal Working Breakfast in New York**. Hosted under North Macedonia's C-i-O motto "*Empowering Regional Unity – Advancing European Future*", the event highlighted the AII's role in fostering EU integration, bridging infrastructural gaps, and promoting youth engagement. RCC's contributions supported efforts to address regional disparities and reinforce collaboration among AII members.

In Washington DC, SG Kapetanović addressed the **Atlantic Council's roundtable on regional cooperation and the Euro-Atlantic future**. There, he advocated for faster convergence and highlighted the RCC's key role in delivering concrete results on integrated markets, mutual recognition, and improved regional mobility. Additional meetings with the Ambassador of the European Union to the United States and US counterparts explored ways to bolster transatlantic coordination in support of Western Balkans development and integration.

On 27 November 2025 in Sofia, RCC representatives addressed the **2nd SEECP Political Director's** meeting under the Sofia C-i-O, highlighting Berlin Process deliverables and progress on the SEE 2030 Strategy mid-term review. Participants reviewed Chairmanship's

achievements and outlined major 2026 events including 30th anniversary of SEECP. The RCC was tasked with preparing a strategic assessment of SEECP's three decades of cooperation for presentation at the upcoming Summit. RCC Secretary General **Amer Kapetanović** participated in the 62nd Munich Security Conference (MSC) on 16-17 February, contributing to high-level discussions on European security, EU enlargement, Western Balkans' role in the European and transatlantic architecture, and combating transnational organised crime. Secretary General held a series of bilateral meetings with international partners including with **Oana-Silvia Țoiu**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Romania; **Marko Đurić**, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia; **Odile Renaud-Basso**, President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD); **Skoog Olof**, European Union External Action (EEAS) Deputy Secretary General for Political Affairs; and **Carl-Philipp Sassenrath**, Member of the German Bundestag to advance regional cooperation under the [SEECP](#), accelerate implementation of the [SEE2030 Strategy](#), support economic and EU integration of the Western Balkans, and enhance joint responses to organised crime, hybrid threats, and institutional resilience. High-level engagements reinforced the RCC's commitment to dialogue and regional cooperation.

On 18 February in Sarajevo, the RCC Secretary General **Amer Kapetanović** hosted a meeting on regional cooperation with the MFA of Bosnia and Herzegovina **Elmedin Konaković**, the MFA of Serbia **Marko Đurić**, and the Deputy Managing Director for Western Europe at the European External Action Service (EEAS) **Emanuele Giaufret**, at the RCC Secretariat in Sarajevo to advance coordinated responses to shared challenges and common European objectives.

Earlier, on 10 February, the Secretary General held regular political consultations in Berlin with Tim Prange, Head of Division for Bilateral Relations with Central, East and South-Eastern Europe at the Federal Chancellery of Germany, and Michael Reiffenstuel, MFA Director for South-Eastern Europe, Turkey, UK, EFTA States, Arctic Policies, OSCE and Council of Europe to discuss 2026 RCC planning and Berlin Process deliverables. On 3 February, the **Secretary General** welcomed the **Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece, Theoharis Theoharis**, in Sarajevo to discuss SEE2030 implementation, EU integration, and reform progress under the EU Growth Plan, reaffirming Greece's strong partnership and support for RCC priorities.

On 12 January, during a visit to Belgrade, the Secretary General met **Marko Đurić**, Minister of Foreign Affairs, and **Nemanja Starović**, Minister for European Integration of Serbia, who reaffirmed Serbia's continued support for the RCC mandate and its role in strengthening regional cooperation and stability.

The RCC Secretary General addressed the **COWEB Working Party** on 11 December in Brussels, providing a comprehensive overview of recent developments and priorities in regional cooperation, including political and economic integration efforts, strengthened mutual trust, and tangible socio-economic achievements across the Western Balkans.

On 3 December, the Secretary General opened the CEFTA Week 2025 in Pristina, alongside **Rozeta Hajdari**, Minister of Industry, Entrepreneurship and Trade and CEFTA Chair-in-Office; **Valentina Superti**, Director at the EC's DG ENEST; **Matej Zakonjšek**, Director of the Transport Community; and **Pranvera Kastrati**, Director of the CEFTA Secretariat. On the same day, RCC Secretary General met with then acting Prime Minister **Albin Kurti** underscoring the importance of advancing CRM implementation and aligning regional efforts with the EU Growth Plan. RCC's full support to all governments in delivering reforms that generate practical benefits to people and businesses was also reaffirmed.

The **57th RCC Board meeting** of 6 November 2025 in Sarajevo welcomed the United Kingdom as a new Board Participant to enhance regional partnerships. The Board adopted the Secretary General's Regular Report for 1 June-30 October 2025 and approved the 2026 Budget, securing financial continuity for strategic initiatives.

The RCC supported the Sofia SEECP C-i-O agenda by co-organising the **2026 SEECP Junior Diplomats Forum** within the **19th Winter School of Diplomacy**, held 22-27 March 2026 in Sandanski, Bulgaria, alongside the Bulgarian Diplomatic Institute (BDI) and Hanns Seidel Foundation. This initiative delivered a high-impact platform for 20 junior diplomats from SEE, the Black Sea region, and EU Member States, fostering professional development, networking, and knowledge exchange on regional priorities. Under the theme *South East Europe and the Black Sea Region: Bridging Regional Priorities with Global Realities*, the forum provided intensive training on diplomacy, security, geopolitics, and RCC-led efforts like the SEE2030 Strategy and SecuriMeter. Outcomes enhanced diplomatic capacity and reinforced RCC's role in SEECP priorities for regional stability and EU convergence.

At the **3rd SEECP Political Directors** under Sofia CiO on 8 April RCC's Deputy Secretary General Umut Ergezer presented the forward-looking programming priorities in line with the RCC SWP. RCC participated in the **4th SEECP Political Director's** meeting on 11 and 12 May 2026 dedicated to finalising the Sofia SEECP Summit Declaration.

On 10 March 2025, the RCC SG took part in the **Budapest Balkans Forum 2026**, where he joined a high-level panel discussion on strengthening regional stability through strategic connectivity, and held a series of bilateral meetings with senior officials and policy leaders of Hungary. Kapetanović took part in the panel discussion titled "*Building a Stable and Secure Region through Strategic Connectivity*", which gathered senior officials and experts to discuss the role of infrastructure, energy cooperation and broader policy alignment in strengthening regional resilience and advancing European integration in South East Europe.

RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanović moderated the high-level panel discussion "Harvesting Peace in the Balkans: Dialogue, Business, and Connectivity" at the fifth **Antalya Diplomacy Forum** on 18 April 2026. While attending the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, **Secretary General Kapetanović** held bilateral meetings with the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of Albania, **Ferit Hoxha**; Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, **Marko Đurić**; Deputy Managing Director for Western Europe at the European External Action Service, **Emanuele Giaufret**; and **Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Türkiye, Mehmet Kemal Bozay**. The meetings focused on regional cooperation, current challenges, and the importance of maintaining dialogue and advancing common regional agendas.

Throughout these activities, the RCC maintained its inclusive, evidence-based, and strategic approach, bridging diplomatic consultations with operational platforms and reinforcing the region's collective security alongside ambitions of a greener, more digitally integrated future.

B2. SEE2030 Strategy

The RCC supported the Students' Peace Declaration signed in Sarajevo in September 2025, a regional initiative involving over 100 universities. This action highlights RCC's commitment to fostering youth participation and dialogue in South East Europe, in line with the broader objectives of stability, cooperation, and inclusive development set out in the [SEE2030 Strategy](#).

In partnership with the Regional Studies Association, RCC hosted the first edition of the [Beyond GDP Conference](#) on 3-4 November 2025 in Sarajevo, convening leading academics, experts, and policymakers to advance evidence-based metrics for inclusive growth beyond traditional GDP indicators. Key outcomes included a keynote by Prof. Lorenzo Fioramonti, presentations of 12 top-ranked papers from 50 submissions across three continents, and discussions on green transitions and the SEE Inclusive Growth Index (SEE IGI), yielding recommendations to inform SEE2030 Strategy updates and regional policymaking.

The RCC chaired the fourth meeting of the **South East Europe Statistical Network (SSN)** on 5 November 2025 in Sarajevo, presenting the latest draft of the SEE IGI for technical review. RCC facilitated discussions on methodological refinements, comparative visualisation models, and sensitivity analyses, integrating feedback from statistical authorities. Outcomes included a call for written inputs to inform SEE2030 Strategy Monitoring Committee endorsement in April 2026 and SEECP Summit presentation in June 2026.

The Mid-term Update of the SEE2030 Strategy, titled “Turning Commitment into Change”, has been completed (subject of endorsement by the leaders at the SEECP Summit in June), following a comprehensive consultation process and contributions from the SEECP participants. The updated Strategy is designed to respond to overlapping pressures facing the region, from climate change, demographic decline and brain drain, to public health and disaster risks, financing gaps, and evolving security threats. It aims to provide practical policy instruments, sustainable financing models, and effective implementation mechanisms capable of delivering tangible and politically supported results. Three core themes anchor the updated Strategy: resilience, inclusive growth, and regional cooperation. These pillars were identified through a year-long process of consultation and reflection, drawing on stakeholder input, monitoring reports, and emerging data such as the SEE Inclusive Growth Index.

The SEE2030 Strategy Mid-term Implementation Report, *State of Play in 2025*, has been completed in consultation with all SEECP participants. This Report assesses progress of the mid-term findings, highlighting the key achievements, challenges and lessons learned in Strategy’s implementation since its adoption in 2021 at the SEECP Summit in Antalya. It analyses key trends across economic, social and environmental indicators and evaluates the impacts of global shocks on the regional performance. The Mid-term Implementation Report includes a dedicated chapter analysing progress against the SEE2030 Strategy indicators across

its pillars and dimensions. This chapter provides an evidence-based assessment of trends, highlighting areas of advancement as well as remaining gaps in achieving the Strategy's targets.

During the reporting period, **the SEE Inclusive Growth Index (IGI) Report** has also been completed in consultation with all SEECP participants. The purpose of this report is to summarise inclusive growth trends in the region of SEE by analysing the findings from IGI, which allows the comparison of inclusive growth trends and gaps between SEE and Western European economies. The development of IGI applied a mixed-methods research approach, including desk research and a literature review on the multidimensional concept of inclusive growth to determine the relevant components, drivers, and their inter-relationships. The construction of the IGI follows internationally established methodological practices and guidelines, with robustness tests implemented through various statistical methods and sensitivities to the methodological choices. This report presents the results of the IGI across regions and by pillars and dimensions and over time. The results should provide evidence to policymakers aiming to achieve progress in terms of inclusive growth. Throughout the reporting period, the RCC continued its facilitation and coordination efforts involving the Health Ministries of Türkiye and North Macedonia regarding the training to be organised in the context of the SEE2030 Strategy. This training is in line with **North Macedonia's project proposal submitted to the SEE2030 Strategy Programming Cycle** and the readiness of Ankara to provide regional training on brain cancer treatment protocols. This regional training will be held in Skopje, following a bilateral training and on-site implementation in Ankara agreed between Türkiye and North Macedonia.

As a follow-up to the establishment of the SEE Regional Network on Disaster Risk Insurance and Risk Sharing by the RCC Board, in cooperation with the Hellenic Association of Insurance Companies (HAIC), RCC organised the inaugural meeting of the [SEE Regional Network on Disaster Risk Insurance and Risk Sharing](#). The meeting was hosted by HAIC in Athens on 19 November 2025, with the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Greece attending the opening session and delivering remarks. The meeting gathered members of the Network and representatives from the insurance sector regulatory authorities and insurance associations of the SEECP participants. Guest organisations, including European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA), the World Bank, United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), Frankfurt School of Finance & Management gGmbH, Disaster Preparedness and

Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe (DPPI SEE), and Caisse Centrale de Reassurance (CCR), presented global and European trends in disaster risk insurance and reinsurance, lessons from existing regional risk pools, and recommendations for strengthening financial preparedness across the region.

Building on the discussions and proposals presented by delegations in Athens, the RCC, together with the Network members, prepared a **Project Synopsis outlining the initial operational activities of the Network structured around three pillars**: Pillar I – Exploring Regional Solutions for Disaster Risk Insurance; Pillar II – Technical Assistance, Data, and Alignment with the EU; Pillar III – Knowledge Sharing, Experience Exchange, and Know-How Transfer. **The Project Synopsis was approved by the RCC Board Decision at the meeting held on 12 March 2026.** With this Board Decision, the RCC Secretariat has been mandated to undertake technical, analytical, and coordination activities related to the implementation of the approved Project Synopsis under the auspices of the SEE2030 Strategy Monitoring Committee and in consultation with the SEE Regional Network on Disaster Risk Insurance and Risk Sharing.

The RCC has initiated activities under Pillar I (the necessary support towards launching a Feasibility Study exploring possible regional solutions), and Pillar II (Technical Assistance, Data, and Alignment with the EU). Initial meetings in this direction have been held in May 2026 with the EC, the Frankfurt School of Finance and Management, the European Insurance and Occupational Pensions Authority (EIOPA), the European Investment Bank (EIB), the UNDP Regional Office, and the World Bank.

Upon invitation by the Slovenian Insurance Supervision Agency (AZN), the RCC participated in the Regional Seminar for Central, Eastern Europe and Transcaucasia (CEET): *Bridging the Gap: Resilience, Risk and Inclusion in Regional Insurance Markets*, organised by the International Association of Insurance Supervisors (IAIS) and hosted by AZN in Ljubljana on 20–21 November 2025. The RCC presented the newly established SEE Regional Network and its forward-looking agenda. Participants were briefed on the SEE2030 Strategy, with particular emphasis on the Human Security and Resilience dimension, and the prioritisation of disaster risk reduction.

To advance the intraregional cooperation, the RCC hosted the [19th Coordination Meeting of Regional Organisations](#) on 3–4 December 2025. This meeting convened the Secretaries-General of RCC, CEI, AII, and BSEC to address jointly agreed topic on connectivity among the regions: “*Smart, Sustainable and Resilient Connectivity among the Regions: Enhancing sustainable and inclusive economic development for resilience through connectivity among the regions and regional cooperation*”. Guest participants included representatives of the Sofia C-i-O of the SEECP, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the World Bank, ensuring a broader and policy-oriented exchange. The Union for the Mediterranean, as a member of this format, did not participate in the meeting. Upon invitation of the Cyprus Presidency of the Council of the EU, RCC presented the implementation progress and interim results of the [SEE2030 Strategy](#) to the Council Working Party on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development on 4 February 2026. The presentation positioned SEE2030 as a joint commitment of all 13 SEECP participants and a coordinated regional roadmap for accelerating delivery on the SDGs implementation. It highlighted the Strategy’s UN-based, bottom-up methodology, its supporting macroeconomic analysis, and the development of the SEE Inclusive Growth Index as an evidence-based monitoring tool. Particular emphasis was placed on disaster risk reduction and resilience, as well as on the operationalisation of the SEE2030 programming cycle. EU Member State representatives expressed clear support for the Strategy’s implementation and commended RCC’s role as the operational arm of the SEECP in driving measurable regional results.

As part of the ongoing efforts to increase the visibility of the [SEE2030 Strategy](#) and its work on the Beyond GDP agenda, **the RCC participated in the closing plenary session of the 2026 Regional Forum on Sustainable Development for the UNECE region**, held in Geneva on 21–22 April 2026. Following the panel discussion on “Beyond GDP”, which was central to the session, the RCC presented its efforts and role in advancing this agenda under the inclusive growth dimension of the SEE2030 Strategy.

The seventh meeting of the SEE2030 Strategy Monitoring Committee was held in Sofia on 5 May 2026, organised in coordination with and co-hosted by the Sofia SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office. As the primary governance body of the Strategy, the Monitoring Committee endorsed three key documents that sharpen the focus of activities in the upcoming period, provide a comprehensive overview of mid-term implementation, and present inclusive growth trends in the region based on the findings of the SEE Inclusive Growth *Index* (namely: the Mid-

term Update of the SEE2030 Strategy; the SEE2030 Strategy Mid-term Implementation Report; and the Report of the SEE Inclusive Growth Index - IGI). The meeting provided an opportunity for the members of the Monitoring Committee to exchange views on the role of Public–Private Partnerships in the implementation of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, under the theme “*Public–Private Partnerships as a Catalyst for SDGs Implementation towards Resilience and Inclusive Growth in South East Europe*”.

B3. Parliamentary Cooperation

RCC continued its efforts in strengthening parliamentary cooperation in the SEE region by supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina's chairmanship and the organisation of the Conference of Parliamentary Committees on European Integration/Affairs of the Countries Participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process in South East Europe (COSAP) on 17-18 November 2025 in Sarajevo. RCC also participated in the high-level parliamentary conference Role of Effective Parliamentary Oversight in Advancing the EU Accession Process, held from 7 to 10 October in Podgorica, emphasising the significance of parliamentary oversight in facilitating EU integration and reform implementation.

B4. Good Governance

During the reporting period, the RCC advanced its statutory commitment to good governance as a cross-cutting priority underpinning sustainable development, stability, and regional integration in South East Europe. In this context, it supported regional dialogue and institutional cooperation in justice, notably through continued engagement with the South East Europe Judicial Training Institutes (SEE JTI) Network, fostering mutual trust among judiciaries.

Efforts focused on strengthening cooperation among Judicial Training Institutes (JTIs) through the preparation of the 9th JTI Network meeting, scheduled for 3 June in Sofia in cooperation with the National Institute of Justice of Bulgaria. Preparatory work included agenda-setting, coordination with regional partners, and defining thematic priorities, with the meeting set to provide a structured platform for exchanging experiences, identifying common challenges, and promoting good practices in the professional development of judges and prosecutors across the region. The event has confirmed participation of judicial professionals and legal experts from Albania, Greece, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo*, Montenegro, and Romania,

reaffirming the region's collective commitment to advancing judicial capacity-building and cooperation. The activity builds on previous RCC-supported exchanges and promotes the sharing of training methodologies and practical experience, while addressing key issues such as data protection, transparency, accountability, and fair trial standards in line with the EU acquis. It is expected to strengthen the capacities of JTIs, enhance the quality and relevance of judicial training, support a more harmonised regional approach, and inform future priorities and initiatives in this area.

B5. Security Cooperation

During the reporting period, the RCC strengthened its role as a regional platform for dialogue, analytical support, and coordination of security cooperation across SEE and the WB6 by consolidating key regional cooperation platforms, enhancing evidence-based policymaking through [SecuriMeter](#), and advancing coordination mechanisms that support regional resilience and EU convergence. It continued to facilitate structured dialogue among security institutions, promote analysis of public perceptions of security challenges, and reinforce linkages between regional initiatives and security frameworks, while supporting established SEECP security dialogue formats that contribute to continuity and trust-building across the region.

The [17th Conference of the South East Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs \(SEEMIC\)](#) was held in Sarajevo on 17 September 2025, co-organised by the Ministry of Defence of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the RCC. The conference examined the impact of organised crime on regional security and reaffirmed the importance of continued cooperation and information exchange among military intelligence structures in SEE. The RCC contributed analytical input through [SecuriMeter](#) findings on public perceptions of security and key threats affecting the WB region, providing analytical inputs to discussions on organised crime and regional risk trends.

RCC co-organised the [15th meeting of the Heads of South East European National Security Authorities \(SEENSA\)](#), held on 7-8 October 2025 in Varna. The event was hosted by the Bulgarian Commission on Information Security (SCIS) as part of the activities under the Sofia Chairmanship-in-Office of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). Discussions addressed the protection of classified information, communication security standards, and exchange of domestic practices, further strengthening SEENSA as an important

confidence-building platform. RCC presented key [SecuriMeter](#) findings related to trust in institutions and perceived security risks, supporting policy dialogue on emerging threats in the region.

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) organised the [10th Regional Security Coordination Conference, JUMBO 2025](#), held on 11 and 12 November 2025 in Skopje under the theme “*WB–EU: Shared Security, Shared Future*”. Marking a full decade of the JUMBO format, the 2025 edition reaffirmed JUMBO as the primary regional forum for connecting the WB6 with EU partners on shared security challenges, fostering security dialogue and practical cooperation.

The Conference was organised by the RCC, with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI), and the Ministry of Interior, as well as the European Union, and in partnership with the Government of North Macedonia. The Conference brought together over 170 participants, representing more than 15 jurisdictions across Europe, and a wide spectrum of institutions, including representatives of all WB6 Ministries of Interior and Foreign Affairs, multiple EU bodies, agencies, regional security organisations and initiatives, law-enforcement agencies, judiciaries, academia, and specialised centres on cyber, counter-terrorism, and hybrid threats. This broad participation ensured a comprehensive and policy-relevant exchange on regional security challenges.

The second day of the Conference featured three thematic working groups, bringing together over 90 participants to address migration management and Schengen preparedness; gender-based violence in transit, organised crime, and corruption; and cyber and hybrid threats.

Discussions generated concise, policy-oriented recommendations to inform future RCC activities and regional policy dialogue. Recommendations were published on 11 March 2026 as the [Post-Conference Report](#) of the 10th Annual Regional Security Coordination Conference (JUMBO 2025). The report identifies institutional trust, governance quality, and regional coordination as key to resilience and effective security policy, and calls for improved information-sharing, stronger anti-corruption frameworks, enhanced cyber resilience, and closer cooperation among security actors, alongside inclusive multi-stakeholder approaches. It also highlights the RCC’s strengthened analytical role through SecuriMeter—the only continuous regional public opinion survey tracking citizens’ perceptions of security across the

WB6—supporting evidence-based policymaking and sustained regional cooperation. Together, these efforts contribute to stronger public trust, more resilient institutions, and a coherent regional security architecture, while reaffirming the JUMBO format’s value in linking political dialogue with practitioner-level cooperation and delivering actionable outcomes.

The RCC participated in the [Belgrade Security Conference \(BSC\) on 17 - 20 November 2025](#). On 19 November, [during a dedicated session](#), the RCC presented the findings of [SecuriMeter 2025](#), the annual WB6 survey on public perceptions of security, drawing strong interest from security practitioners, policymakers, academics, officials, and media. The panel was organised by the RCC with the support of the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (MAECI). Now in its fifth edition, SecuriMeter remains the region’s only continuous survey tracking citizens’ views on security, governance, and societal risks across the WB6. Based on over 6,000 interviews, the 2025 findings offer a comprehensive overview of perceptions of personal and general security, institutional performance, economic pressures, trust in institutions and the EU, as well as risks related to conflict, corruption, migration, and cyber threats, and overall human security. SecuriMeter findings confirm that trust in institutions remains a key determinant of citizens’ perceptions of security, underscoring the role of institutional performance in strengthening resilience and public confidence. The 2025 edition introduced an econometric Trust Model linking institutional performance and public trust, providing a stronger analytical basis for evidence-based policy dialogue in the region.

SecuriMeter continues to support the RCC’s security cooperation portfolio by connecting public perception data with policy discussions on governance, corruption, socio-economic pressures, and emerging threats. Preparations for the 2026 edition have advanced, with updated methodology aligned to the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2026–2028; the survey is currently in the data collection phase, sustaining RCC’s evidence-based approach to regional security cooperation.

The RCC continued its close cooperation with the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), a joint UNDP–RCC initiative supporting efforts to combat the illicit proliferation, misuse, and trafficking of SALW. It also maintained collaboration with the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI), facilitating regional dialogue and exchange of practices on migration management.

RCC continued its engagement with the South-Eastern Europe Defence Ministerial (SEDM) process by participating in three meetings during the reporting period, including the Deputy Chiefs of Defence Meeting (SEDM-DCHODs) held in Sofia, the 53rd Coordination Committee (SEDM CC) meeting held in Bucharest, and the 54th SEDM CC meeting in Chania. Through these engagements, RCC contributed to discussions on regional security developments, strengthened cooperation, and promoted dialogue on emerging challenges affecting the region. RCC used these platforms to present its ongoing activities, including SecuriMeter findings and regional cooperation initiatives, and inform the SEE2030 Strategy's ongoing activities, while reinforcing its role as a facilitator of inclusive dialogue and coordination among regional and international security actors.

RCC also contributed to the meetings of RACVIAC, Centre for Security Cooperation, by participating in the 54th Multinational Advisory Group (MAG) Meeting held in Rakitje in October 2025, as well as the 55th MAG Meeting held in April 2026 in Sarajevo. These meetings focused on reviewing RACVIAC's annual programme, budget, and strategic development, including the preparation of the new RACVIAC Strategy 2027–2032, while also addressing key areas such as arms control, cybersecurity, and security sector governance. During the Sarajevo meeting, Ambassador Miroslav Šćepanović from Montenegro took over the position of RACVIAC Director for the 2026-2029 mandate. RCC's participation supported continued coordination among regional security platforms and reinforced synergies among RCC, RACVIAC, and other regional initiatives to promote dialogue, capacity building, and trust across SEE. Engagement with international partners and policy platforms was further strengthened.

The RCC Secretary General participated in the [Munich Security Conference 2026](#), contributing to discussions on regional cooperation and coordinated responses to complex security risks in South East Europe. The RCC also contributed to the GLOBSEC Forum, co-organising together with the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP) a session on the links between human security, resilience, demographic trends, and EU convergence, enhancing RCC's visibility in broader European policy debates. Through these engagements, the RCC promoted regional cooperation as a practical tool for addressing shared risks and strengthening stability in the Western Balkans and South East Europe.

During the reporting period, the RCC continued to support the development of the EU's IISG framework, advancing its transition towards a more integrated regional approach through the establishment of a broader Security Governance Hub (SGH) under RCC auspices. This process aims to improve coordination among regional initiatives, reduce donor fragmentation, and strengthen policy coherence across key areas, including counter-terrorism, organised crime, border/boundary security, and cyber threats, while supporting structured, evidence-based policy dialogue and practical cooperation in SEE under a more structural security platform.

Across its security cooperation portfolio, the RCC promoted a comprehensive approach to security, linking it to institutional trust, good governance, and sustainable development. By combining dialogue platforms such as [JUMBO](#), [SEEMIC](#), and [SEENSA](#) with analytical tools like [SecuriMeter](#), the RCC contributes to stronger regional resilience and better understanding of security trends affecting citizens and institutions. These efforts support the implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2026–2028, particularly its focus on resilience, institutional performance, and regional cooperation as key drivers of stability and development in South East Europe.

C. Horizontal Activities

C1. Programming, Monitoring, Coordination

During the reporting period, RCC continued to coordinate implementation of the **CRM Action Plan 2025-2028 and the GAWB**, while ensuring continuity of support to the Berlin Process, including the transition from the United Kingdom's 2025 host cycle to Montenegro's 2026 Presidency. CRM efforts focused on delivery through strengthened stakeholder coordination, regional policy dialogue, and improved monitoring and accountability.

Under the annual **Prime Ministers' Sherpas consultation process**, the RCC convened a series of high-level meetings to reinforce coordination among the WB6, regional partners and the EC. Key consultations were held on 18 June 2025 in Vienna and on 30 September 2025 in Skopje, complemented by online consultations that helped shape the 2025 Berlin Process deliverables and assess CRM progress.

In preparation for the Berlin Process Summit hosted by the United Kingdom on 22 October 2025, the RCC coordinated consultations with Prime Ministers' Sherpas, regional

organisations, and the EC, facilitating a package of 15 deliverables endorsed by WB6 leaders. The endorsed deliverables were:

1. [Declaration on the Coordination of Social Security Systems and Portability of Rights in the Western Balkans Six](#);
2. [Western Balkans Six Green Bond Standard](#);
3. [Whitelist of the Sustainable Finance Taxonomy for the Western Balkans Six](#);
4. [Regional Financial Literacy Framework for Individuals](#);
5. [Recommendation on Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment in the Western Balkans Six](#);
6. [Sustainable Foreign Direct Investment Policy Toolkit for the Western Balkans Six](#);
7. [Regional Model Clauses on Sustainability](#);
8. [Joint Principles for Investment Facilitation in the Western Balkans Six](#);
9. [Declaration on Western Balkans Six Tourism Branding](#);
10. [Joint Statement on the Development and Adoption of Regional Green Public Procurement Criteria in the Western Balkans Six](#);
11. [Joint Call for Action on Gender-Responsive Green Finance and accompanying recommendations](#);
12. [Revised Green Agenda for the Western Balkans Action Plan \(2025–2030\)](#);
13. [WB6 Climate Adaptation Roadmap](#);
14. [Regional Action Plan for the Implementation of the Joint Statement on Plastic Pollution Prevention, including Marine Litter](#); and
15. [Dubrovnik Declaration on the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans](#).

These deliverables advanced labour mobility, sustainable finance, investment facilitation, tourism cooperation, green public procurement, and implementation of the revised GAWB framework, while reinforcing the broader objectives of the CRM and the EU Growth Plan.

The RCC also launched the 11th edition of the [Balkan Barometer](#) Public and Business Opinion Surveys on 11 December 2025 in Brussels. The findings showed record-high support for EU membership, increasing from 54% to 64%, while a new indicator revealed that 64% of respondents believe regional cooperation can improve economic conditions across the WB6. The Barometer remains key evidence base for policy dialogue under the Berlin Process and the CRM.

To strengthen implementation oversight, the RCC advanced the CRM Monitoring Tool as a structured data-driven mechanism for tracking progress across CRM pillars. Developed with CEFTA, the WB6 Chamber Investment Forum, the Transport Community, and the Energy Community, the tool introduces indicators at impact, outcome, and output levels, enhancing evidence-based reporting, transparency, and accountability.

The RCC organised three in-person meetings in Brussels, Vienna, and Skopje, alongside four online consultations with Prime Ministers' Sherpas, regional organisations, and the EC. It also convened the **Coordination Meeting of Western Balkans Regional Organisations** on 11 December 2025 in Brussels, reviewing outcomes of the 2025 Berlin Process cycle, initiating consultations on 2026 deliverables, and identifying priority coordination needs for the year ahead.

On 26 February 2026, the **WB6 Prime Ministers' Sherpas** met in Brussels to review progress under the 2025 cycle, agree on priority deliverables for 2026, and strengthen coordination on key CRM initiatives. The meeting also introduced the CRM Monitoring Tool as a practical instrument for tracking progress and supporting evidence-based decision-making.

In April 2026, the RCC developed the initial concept for a new EC-funded Action Grant, forming the basis for discussions with DG ENEST

C2. Communication

Strengthening Trust, Visibility and Relevance of Regional Cooperation

During the reporting period, RCC communication efforts continued to evolve in line with the Strategy and Work Programme of the organisation, focusing on reinforcing RCC's role as a convening platform and a trusted regional actor in South East Europe. Communication was not only a tool for visibility, but an integral part of delivering RCC's mandate, building trust, strengthening ownership of regional cooperation, and translating complex regional agendas into tangible, people-oriented narratives.

At a time of growing geopolitical uncertainty and shifting global dynamics, communication placed stronger emphasis on positioning regional cooperation as a practical necessity. RCC's narratives increasingly highlighted how cooperation delivers stability, economic opportunity, and resilience, while connecting key regional frameworks such as the SEECP, the SEE2030 Strategy, CRM, and the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans. Through this approach, RCC further reinforced its role as a bridge between regional priorities and European integration pathways, ensuring coherence across agendas and stakeholders.

A more strategic and integrated storytelling approach was applied across all channels. Communication focused on demonstrating impact through concrete examples, from mobility and economic integration to green and digital transitions and security cooperation, while maintaining clarity, relatability, and relevance for diverse audiences. Particular attention was given to human-centred narratives that translate policy achievements into everyday benefits for citizens across South East Europe, strengthening both public understanding and institutional support.

Digital communication remained central to RCC outreach. Over the reporting period, RCC published more than 70 news items and more than a dozen of interviews and articles, while generating over 5,000 media reports across regional and international outlets, reflecting sustained visibility and strong media engagement. The RCC website attracted over 172,000 users, generating more than 600,000 visits and over 608,000 views. Traffic was largely driven by direct access and organic search, indicating strong brand recognition and improved discoverability. Content related to flagship initiatives, Balkan Barometer, SecuritMeter, Regional Butterfly Award, etc. as well as open calls and opportunities, proved especially effective in attracting user attention.

Social media performance demonstrated both scale and depth of engagement. Facebook remained the leading platform, generating 10.9 million views and significantly increasing audience interaction, with over 12,700 engagements and 12,200 link clicks, reflecting stronger content-to-action conversion. Instagram continued to expand RCC's reach, achieving 3.7 million views and reaching 1.4 million users beyond the existing follower base, while maintaining strong engagement levels. LinkedIn strengthened RCC's professional outreach with 291,000 impressions and nearly 7,000 reactions, supporting engagement with institutional stakeholders and partners. On X, content generated over 96,000 impressions and sustained interaction within a targeted audience. YouTube recorded over 39,000 views and nearly 144 hours of watch time, with a significant share of traffic coming from search, highlighting the relevance and longevity of RCC video content. TikTok, while still developing, showed growing potential, particularly through content sharing and organic reach.

Content production continued to adapt to evolving consumption patterns, combining short-form video, visual storytelling, and concise messaging with more in-depth formats such as interviews, articles, and opinion pieces. Communication efforts increasingly balanced accessibility with substance, ensuring that RCC messaging resonates both with the general public and with policymakers, partners, and the media.

At the same time, RCC communication further strengthened its role in supporting strategic initiatives and partnerships, ensuring visibility of both RCC-led and donor-supported activities. This included consistent promotion of key regional priorities such as CRM implementation, green transition under the Green Agenda, and broader development objectives under SEE2030, while reinforcing the visibility of SEECF as the overarching political framework for regional cooperation.

In this context, RCC communication has demonstrated resilience and adaptability, maintaining strong visibility and engagement while further refining its strategic focus. Moving forward, communication will continue to build on these foundations, with an increased emphasis on demonstrating RCC's convening power, strengthening narrative coherence across regional agendas, and ensuring that the value of regional cooperation is clearly understood, recognised, and supported across South East Europe and beyond.

C3. Extending partnerships

Further strengthening partnerships, the RCC signed a [Letter of Intent with UNDP](#) in New York on 24 September. This document focuses on joint support for reform agendas in South East Europe, particularly in governance, sustainable development, and resilience, aligned with frameworks like the CRM Action Plan and the Green Agenda.

During the reporting period, the RCC also signed a **cooperation contract with Switzerland** to support the Circular Economy Pillar work in the RCC. This partnership includes a one-year short-term expert support and funding, laying a groundwork for a more structured, long-term cooperation in this priority area.

RCC signed **Memoranda of Understanding with both the German Development Cooperation (GIZ) and the European Training Foundation (ETF)**, further strengthening its strategic partnerships. The MoU with GIZ updates the 2019 cooperation framework and reinforces collaboration in sustainable economic development, digital transformation, the green transition, and good governance across the Western Balkans. It establishes a platform for regular consultations, knowledge exchange, joint capacity-building, and coordinated regional action, supporting resilience, competitiveness, climate neutrality, and progress towards EU integration.

The MoU with ETF updated the 2017 cooperation framework and continuing cooperation on human capital and broader economic and social development in South East Europe. It further strengthens collaboration in skills development, labour market readiness, and regional competitiveness.

During the reporting period, the RCC Brussels Liaison Office (LO) advanced regional cooperation and the EU enlargement agenda while strengthening RCC's visibility and engagement within the EU's political, diplomatic, and analytical landscape. Through sustained cooperation with EU institutions, diplomatic missions, international organisations, NGOs, and leading think tanks, the LO continued to act as a bridge between South East Europe and Brussels-based stakeholders.

As of June 2025, Mr. Igor Šoltés assumed the position of Head of Office (HO), contributing to the continued guidance and strategic direction of LO. The current composition of the LO's staff is Head of Office, Senior Advisor and one intern.

The Office intensified outreach through introductory meetings with DG ENEST and EU Member State ambassadors, as well as regular engagement with the Cabinet of the Enlargement Commissioner and the Council of the EU. It also hosted a delegation of young diplomats from the Clingendael Academy, presenting the RCC's role in supporting regional cooperation and EU integration of the Western Balkans and supporting the Berlin Process commitments.

In partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the LO co-organised the annual conference *No Future Without Us – Youth Shaping EU Enlargement* on 12 December 2025 in Brussels, opening avenues for continued joint engagement on youth and enlargement. The Office further contributed to regional dialogue by participating in the International Youth Conference 2025 - *European Values for the Future of SEE Countries*, held on 25 September in Kruševo and by establishing regular exchanges with the Council Working Party on the Western Balkans (COWEB), including a dedicated session on SecuriMeter findings and human capital development on 23 March.

The Brussels Liaison Office provided substantive organisational and content support to a range of high-level RCC engagements in Brussels, ensuring effective coordination, visibility, and policy alignment with EU institutions. This included facilitating visits of the RCC Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General, supporting meetings with key counterparts in the EC, EEAS, and European Parliament, and contributing to major events such as the presentation of the Balkan Barometer. Through these efforts, the LO played a key role in advancing RCC priorities, strengthening stakeholder engagement, and ensuring coherent regional input into EU-level discussions, including preparations for the Berlin Process.

The Liaison Office continuously collected, analysed, and disseminated key information on EU enlargement process, including analytical briefs on EC reports and daily bulletins on EU activities. It also reinforced the RCC's policy footprint by contributing to discussions, panel debates, and roundtables with leading Brussels-based think tanks and platforms, such as the Centre for European Policy Studies, Bruegel, Carnegie Europe, the European Policy Centre, Friends of Europe, the New Economy Forum, and the Wilfried Martens Centre for European

Studies. These engagements addressed a wide range of topics, including EU enlargement, political developments in individual economies, the EU Single Market, critical raw materials, innovation and startups, and broader economic, security, and environmental issues such as circular economy, gradual integration, and democratic processes in the region.

Abbreviations

ACG	Advisory and Coordination Group
AI	Artificial Intelligence
ALMM	Active Labour Market Measures
BIA	Butterfly Innovation Award
BSP	Biodiversity Strategic Plan
CEFTA	Central European Free Trade Agreement
CI	Creative Industries
CE	Circular Economy
CEPOL	European Agency for Law Enforcement Training
C-i-O	Chairpersonship-in-Office
COSAP	Conference of Parliamentary Committees on European Integration/Affairs of the Stabilisation and Association Participants
CRM	Common Regional Market
CRM2	Second iteration of the CRM Action Plan
CSOs	Civil society organisations
DEP	Digital Europe Programmes
DIHs	Digital Innovation Hubs
DG	Directorate General
DG EMPL	Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion
DG CONNECT	Directorate General for Communications Networks, Content and Technology
DG ENEST	Directorate General for Enlargement and Eastern Neighbourhood
DMA	Digital Markets Act
DPPI SEE	Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe
DSA	Digital Service Act
EC	European Commission
EEAS	European External Action Service
EIOPA	European Insurance and Occupational Authority
EIP	Eco Industrial Parks
EJTN	European Judicial Training Network
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

ESG	European Standards and Guidelines
ESS	Employment Service of Slovenia
ETF	European Training Foundation
EURES	European Employment Service
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GARI	Report on Implementation of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GAWB	Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
GIZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
GPP	Green Public Procurement
GSGS	Global Sanitation Graduate School
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IFIs	International Financial Institutions
IISG	Integrative Internal Security Governance
IUCN	International Union for Conservation of Nature
JTI	Judicial Training Institutes
JWGI	Joint Working Group on Investments
LO	Liaison Office
MAG	Multinational Advisory Group
MAPs	Mutual Assistance Projects
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
PD	Political Directors
PES	Public Employment Services
RCC	Regional Cooperation Council
RNNC	Regional Network of CT/P-CVE Coordinators
RNWE	Regional Network of Women in Entrepreneurship
RoP	Rules of Procedure
RRD	Regional Recognition Database
RWG GAWB	Regional Working Group on Green Agenda for the Western Balkans
S3	Smart Specialisation Strategy
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEE	South East Europe
SEE IGI	South East Europe Inclusive Growth Index
SEE JTI	South East Europe Judicial Training Institutes
SEE2030	South East Europe 2030 Strategy
SEECp	South-East European Cooperation Process

SEEMIC	South East Europe Military Intelligence Chiefs
SEENSA	Meeting of the Heads of South East Europe National Security Agencies
SEPA	Single Euro Payments Area
SEESAC	South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons
SGH	Security Governance Hub
SSN	Statistical Authorities Network
SUP	Single-use plastic
SWG RRD	Standing Working Group on Regional Rural Development
SWP	Strategy and Work Programme
TEG	Tourism Expert Group
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
WB	Western Balkans
WB6	Western Balkans Six
WBCSCi	Western Balkan Counter Serious Crime initiative
WBCTi	Western Balkan Counter Terrorism initiative
WBDESI	Western Balkans Digital Economy and Society Index
WBDS	Western Balkans Digital Summit
WBYL	Western Balkans Youth Lab Project
WGFM	Working Group on Financial Markets
WGID	Working Group on Industrial Development