



**Speech by RCC Secretary General
at the opening of the High-Level Western Balkans Cybersecurity
Conference**

CyberPulse 2025: Tracking Progress, Building Resilience, Driving Change

Podgorica, 2 July 2025

Esteemed Deputy Prime Minister Ivanovic,
Distinguished Minister Dukaj,
Representatives of Western Balkan governments (*check if any other minister present*),
Representatives of the European Commission,
Dear Partners from Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre,
Excellencies,
Dear colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

This conference, organised in close partnership with the European Commission and the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre, is a vital platform where ideas meet expertise, where knowledge meets strategy—and where we collectively seek innovative solutions to one of the most pressing challenges of our time: cybersecurity.

Nowadays, every digital advance is a double-edged sword, unlocking opportunity, but opening doors to risk. Cyber threats are not some distant future, they're present. Attacks on critical infrastructure, hospitals, banks, elections, even social media accounts, this is our daily reality.

The recent wave of cyberattacks, including those that struck Montenegro during the pandemic, serve as a stark reminder: no economy, no institution, no individual is immune.

The numbers speak for themselves:

- 85% of people in our region are online - scrolling, swiping, shopping, but not always securely. We're plugged in, but not protected.

- Cyber incidents in the Western Balkans rose by 40% last year, thus compromising over 1.2 million personal records.
- Ransomware attacks have skyrocketed, up 200% in just two years, with ransom demands averaging 150,000 euro and, in some cases, exceeding 1 million euros.

And yet, while the threats are growing, our defences are still catching up.

Even though we lead in ICT education – 7% of graduates hold ICT degrees, well above the EU average of 4.5% – the region faces a shortage of ICT professionals.

On the business side, digital services are becoming essential: 31% of our citizens use online banking, 36% shop online, and 27% access digital education. But only 20% use e-government services—highlighting just how much further we need to go in our digital transformation journey.

There is hope. Based on the upcoming WB DESI 2024 Report, which will be published this week with the WB DESI database, the use of e-invoices suitable for automation increased to 41% in 2023, surpassing the EU average of 38%. And 21% of SMEs engaged in online sales—just ahead of the EU average. Yet, those online revenues remain modest at 6%, only half of the EU's 12% average.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The sheer breadth of areas affected, as outlined in the statistics I provided, brings us to a core message: Cybersecurity is not just a technical issue. It's a multidimensional challenge—technological, legal, educational, and above all, cooperative.

This conference, CyberPulse, is a chance to track progress, build resilience, and drive change, together. Because no firewall, no encryption key, no AI detection tool can replace what we need the most: and that is cooperation. The threats we face are cross-border. Our response must be as well.

This is why RCC, in partnership with the European Commission and the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre, continues to champion regional efforts, from technical support to political coordination.

To better support our region, the RCC, in cooperation with the European Commission and Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG), has initiated the development of a non-public regional cybersecurity needs database. This tool will help us identify, prioritise, and share regional cybersecurity needs, and enable donor coordination across the WB6. The

official launch will take place during the upcoming donor coordination meeting tomorrow, held back-to-back with this conference.

But let me be clear: the success of this initiative depends on the commitment of the Western Balkans Six. It is a resource built for the benefit of the region, but its value lies in our collective ownership.

Cybersecurity is not just about tech, it's about trust, about people, about partnerships. It is a shared responsibility by its nature.

Our goal, through this Conference among other things, is to make “resilience” more than a buzzword and “regional cooperation” not just a headline, but a habit.

I wish you all a fruitful CyberPulse Conference. Thank you.