



Talking Points by the RCC Secretary General *Majlinda Bregu*
at the
Home Affairs Ministerial Meeting, Tirana

Honourable Ministers, dear Deputy Director-General, excellences, colleagues, ladies, and gentlemen,

I am pleased to attend today's meeting in Tirana, ahead of the first Berlin Process Summit to be organised in our region, the second summit in a year to take place in my hometown.

Special gratitude to the organiser and the host of the meeting - MoI of Albania for making such an effort to gather us all here today and exchange on most relevant security challenges that we jointly face.

Security environment today cannot be seen outside of general context of the Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine. This war is not taking place only on the ground, but also online with hybrid threats and increasingly serious disinformation campaigns. As a region where there is geopolitical and strategic interests' competition, WB is the perfect playground for activities relating to hybrid threats.

Among the potential issues affecting perceptions of security in the region, citizens have identified the following three factors as most important:

- Crime, organised crime, drugs and human trafficking, violence or vandalism (60%);
- Misuse of firearms and arms trafficking (48%); and
- Possibility of an armed conflict between ethnic groups or political instability in the WB region (47%).

Concern over the "misuse of firearms and arms trafficking" has significantly risen.

But when asked on disinformation seven out of ten (70%) of our citizens agree that fake news and fake narrative represents a problem for democracy in general and 74% agree that disinformation represents a security threat to their economies. 65% believe there has been an increase of various fake news and disinformation in the past 12 months in their economies.

Specifically, Albania is the economy where the belief that online social networks and journalists are top spreaders of disinformation is shared by 73% and 54% of respondents, respectively.

Many respondents in North Macedonia (54%) consider social media as the top spreader of disinformation, while journalists are seen as top spreaders in Kosovo*, by nearly two thirds (62%).

Serbia is the economy that leads by the belief that all categories (journalists, press and broadcasting management, and online social networks) spread disinformation, shared by a third (33%) of those polled.

In Montenegro, 62% of citizens claim to be able to identify fake news. Albania is home to the biggest share of those polled who do not believe being able to identify news that misrepresents reality (54%).

Disinformation is seen as a threat to national security mostly in Bosnia and Herzegovina (45%), Serbia



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(42%) and Montenegro (39%).



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Fighting disinformation at the regional level is just as important. Connecting organisations, media outlets and educational institutions could be the key to stop the messengers of fake news. EU Code of Practice on Disinformation - the world's first self-regulatory code aimed at addressing the spread of fake news is an excellent model that can be mirrored also by our economies.

Yet, disinformation is only one form of hybrid threats which also creates opportunities for cyber-attacks. Last year we witnessed very serious cyber-attacks in the region, reminding us all that this is the real warfare.

Cyber-attacks are borderless – a joint regional approach to ensure cybersecurity in the region, in line with EU standards has become a must. WB economies need to robust legal frameworks that facilitate cooperation and information sharing among WB economies and WB-EU, but a high-level political commitment to cybersecurity reforms comes first.

WB needs “plug-ins” in all EU bodies, networks, frameworks – in any capacity feasible. For quite some time, RCC is pushing to enable integration of the Western Balkans in the work of the European Union Agency for Cybersecurity (ENISA). This will mark another application of phasing-in and contribute to an accelerated alignment of WB with EU Single Market standards and practices.

In addition, WB is one of the main crossing points for migrants coming from war zones and other areas, looking to reach EU member states. This increases the risk to be exploited for highly profitable business of migrant smuggling but there is also a real risk that firearms could move along the existing Balkan route.

Recently our region was tragically faced with bloodiest mass shooting, making it imperative to continue efforts in reducing the misuse and proliferation of firearms and in addressing the root causes of violence in our societies. Only in the first half of 2023, Western Balkans recorded 1,615 firearm incidents , marking an 11% increase compared to the same period last year.

It is not a surprise that the misuse of firearms and arms trafficking is perceived by the citizens of the region as the second factor negatively affecting their security – 48% (after crime and organised crime), which is a rise by 18% compared to the data of last year.

Since 2002, through SEESAC, RCC has been proudly providing the political umbrella for the WB Small Arms and Light Weapons Control Roadmap.

Streamlining regional security efforts, back-to-back with commitments and agendas developed within the Berlin Process has also been a focus of our work. One of the most important achievements of BP - freedom of movement with ID cards-started as a security-related project that, while lifting all existing restrictions related to free movement, would also support the actions against illegal trafficking, organised crime, terrorism, and other activities that threaten the security of border areas.



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Also, under the EU/RCC led project Integrative Internal Security Governance, the first ever regional mapping of needs and responses has been prepared across three pillars: counter-terrorism, fighting organised crime, and border security, while in the next phase, we will aim to find coherent policy-oriented answers to those needs.

I would like to conclude with the appreciation for the continuous support and law enforcement cooperation between the EU and WB economies, including with EU Justice and Home Affairs Agencies and also bring to attention the 8th Regional Jumbo Security Conference - the only platform gathering all regional security actors dealing with security issues in SEE and the WB, which will be organised by RCC in November under the auspices of the Italian Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

At the end of the day the goals are simple: security and safety.