



Speech by RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanovic

at the

Berlin Process Leader's Summit

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MOMENT OF TRUTH

Thank you, Prime Minister Spajić and your Government, for the Presidency; the European Union, Germany and all our partners, for their support; and the leaders of this region, for **standing by us** all these years.

Since the Sofia Summit, co-hosted by Bulgaria and North Macedonia, my organisation has, with our partners, spearheaded **a common regional market** in the Western Balkans – for economies of scale, faster growth and faster convergence with the EU: **first gradual, then full access** to the single market.

This taught us **our possibilities and our limits**. We succeeded whenever our **convening power** met the **convincing power** of European magnetism and **resolute political support** from the region. That is how we succeeded with **roaming** – gradual access here long before it had a name – then **SEPA**, and in part the **mobility agreements**. Remove one of these three, and **we get stuck**. We have that experience too. So let me acknowledge: **the momentum of regional cooperation is not where it needs to be**. Technical progress too often moves faster than political decisions – and decisions faster than implementation.

In London last year, **you gave us a task**. Over the past year we made progress on investment facilitation, support for start-ups and small businesses, stronger links with European industry,

and digital connectivity. The **WB6-EU Industrial Parks Partnership**, launched here in Montenegro less than a month ago, shows this cooperation taking practical shape.

Under the Green Agenda, in Žabljak, the region agreed common approaches to climate adaptation, biodiversity and the circular economy. Important steps – **their value now depends on what changes on the ground.**

When the Berlin Process began in 2014, **enlargement was in crisis and the world around it seemed in order. Today, it is the other way around.** Enlargement is finally opening – and almost everything around it is in crisis: the war against Ukraine, tensions in our own neighbourhood.

Nothing remains in a vacuum. **We must adjust our course.**

Between today and the next summit, **we have three jobs.**

First, sharpen the Berlin Process as a catalyst for enlargement – through **gradual access to the EU single market before membership.** We hope the frontrunners join the Union soon, and we will fight for the others to **catch the same train.** But **no one who joins leaves this geography.** Frontrunners must keep working with the region on a level playing field built on mutual respect. And gradual access needs **a clear legal architecture:** rules agreed step by step, as with roaming between the Union and the region.

Second, keep building our common regional market – the economic scale that turns the Growth Plan into **jobs and investment here.**

Third, our credibility is being tested: we still **promise more than we deliver.** We must finish what we promised on the **free movement of people, goods and services** across the region.

Regional cooperation was this region's first security policy – and it still is. Europe will not be secure without a Western Balkans that is **stable, connected and inside its rules.**

The region cannot do this alone, nor can the Union. **Together, we can fix what is stuck.**

The RCC will keep the engine of regional cooperation running – after Sveti Stefan, as after London. Because the truth of this summit will not be in what we say today. **It will be in what people can feel a year from now.**

Thank you.