



**Talking Points of the RCC Secretary-General, Ms. Majlinda Bregu**

**Seventh Regional (Jumbo) Security Coordination Conference**  
*Security Cooperation in the Western Balkans - Challenges and Lessons from  
Pandemics to War in Ukraine*  
17-18 November 2022, Rome

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Dear Prefect Gambacurta,  
Dear Mr. Celeste,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies, and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Seventh Regional (Jumbo) Security Coordination Conference. This Conference that started in 2016, and has grown in a recognised brand in regional security cooperation, represents RCC's continuous efforts to advance our collective responses to the most current and emerging security threats.

I would like to thank the Italian Government, especially the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation for the constant attention to our shared security threats. We rejoice in the fact that the Annual Jumbo Security Conference, thanks also to your support, is increasingly focusing the attention of regional and international security actors in our region and is also helping to establish crucial links for coordination and streamlining of security cooperation efforts.

The EU and the Western Balkans share many evolving, borderless security threats, from radicalisation, violent extremism, and return of Foreign Terrorist Fighters to irregular migration, organised crime, corruption, disinformation and cyber-attacks. Such joint priorities have been re-validated by the war in Ukraine by also making clear the crucial role of the Western Balkans in maintaining peace and stability of Europe's eastern borders.



As the war in Ukraine is reshaping the world, we are experiencing unprecedented security challenges, coming from a variety of sources, both within Europe and beyond and we have a collective responsibility to direct our attention to finding the proper proactive, timely and above all joint response to these challenges. The emerging challenges are neither local nor singular. They affect us all simultaneously. Therefore, our resilience should be collective as well.

Between January and April 2022, there was a 69% increase in the number of irregular entries in Europe as compared to the same period in the previous year. The sudden increase is due to the instability of migratory route along the Western Balkans that is responsible for about half of the entries, also involving Ukrainian citizens fleeing from the conflict. The Western Balkans route is now the number one preferred route for smuggling illegal and irregular migrants into the EU. A conservative estimate of the migrant-smuggling market has an annual turnover of at least 50 million EUR.

In 2022, the overall number of irregular arrivals from the Western Balkans to the EU is increasing compared to 2021. Only in the first 7 months of 2022, 70 770 irregular border crossings have been detected on the EU external borders or nearly three times the total from the same period last year.

Experience has taught us to strive for a holistic approach that takes into account not only expert assessments of the security situation but also the pulse of public opinion. That is why we annually measure citizens and business perception of security threats in the WB. This time we went beyond our periodic edition by having a special edition on security threats while we are having a war on our continent. The data I will share with you now are fresh and have not been published yet, but they will pepper up your two-day discussion during this Jumbo:

- Two in three (66%) citizens believe that the war in Ukraine poses a risk to their own economy;
- When asked about the most worrisome effect of the war they single out the economic downturn (77.3%) and food and gas security (62.6%) as their top concern;
- As the Russian aggression in Ukraine has triggered heightened price volatility and energy insecurity which are impacting strongly the EU and WB, the rise in energy prices is also having an impact on other vital sectors such as the agri-food sector and other commodities. And now we can see its consequences: reducing the purchasing power for 92.5% and posing a threat to the WB security and political instability (84.5% of the citizens);



- An overwhelming percentage of citizens (85.6%) believe that the war in Ukraine makes it more urgent to invest in renewable energy;
- **An overwhelming 78% of citizens are worried about the increased flow of various fake news, disinformation, semi-information, and propaganda activities.**

This is why all these major concerns are not only on the agenda of this year's jumbo conference but will continue taking a special place on RCC's agenda in the near future. While the full scale and exact nature of upcoming challenges are difficult to predict with certainty, both the first indications and the past experiences can serve as a starting point to identify good cooperation practices for going forward in these difficult times. But, not all bad news come without the good news. In times of need, neighbours are your strongest ally. **82.9% agree** that regional cooperation can help their economies to **better economic resilience in responding to the negative consequences of the war**. This is leapfrog support from last year to regional cooperation in WB. Moreover, 69.4% believe that the war in Ukraine calls for greater security cooperation with the EU and NATO.

While the EU has integrated the Western Balkans into its own food and energy security, there is large untapped potential for building sustainable strategic partnerships within the region and with the EU. This meeting is a good opportunity to consider this potential and to set up a structured dialogue among the relevant stakeholders for a coherent, proactive, and timely response.

In conclusion, I would like to bring to your attention that the preceding month was nothing short of a historical one. After two years of hard work, we finally succeeded in delivering to the citizens of the region a key milestone toward real freedom of movement. Let this serve as an impetus at a critical moment in time to which we need to dedicate drive and commitment as never before.

This conference brings together participants who have a common interest in improving the solutions through the Western Balkans. Let us collectively find our common ground and remain working there; synergise our strengths, build on what we have already been doing, and synergise efforts for more committed actions.

I want to thank all of you for your commitment and contribution to security cooperation. RCC will continue building upon it, but let's use the discussions taking place over these 2 days to see how to best direct our efforts so as to reach the best results with the resources we have available.



- According to the RCC SecuriMeter 2022 report, the overall satisfaction with the security situation in the region has not improved; 33% of respondents claim to be mostly or completely dissatisfied. Even more worrisome is the pessimistic trend, as now one (1) in five (5) citizens expect their personal security situation will get worse.

Addressing serious and organised crime (91%), financial crime (89%), and terrorism (88%) are top priority concerns to citizens in all economies of the region, where organised crime, including corruption, is able to fully exploit opportunities created by different crises.