



Regional Cooperation Council

Speech by RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanovic

at the discussion titled

“What Do We Ask of the Next Generation? Film, Democracy and Regional Competitiveness”,
held during the Second Regional Conference on Youth Cultural Cooperation, organised by the
RCC’s EU-funded **Western Balkans Youth Lab (WBYL)** in cooperation with the **Sarajevo Film
Festival (SFF)**

19 August 2026, Sarajevo

Dear students and young filmmakers,

Distinguished panellists,

Ladies and gentlemen,

The title of this panel asks an important question: **what do we ask of the next generation?** We ask young people and filmmakers to be courageous. To challenge stereotypes. To defend democratic values. To tell stories that cross boundaries and help our societies understand themselves better. Film is not only entertainment. **It shapes how societies remember, how they debate, and whose experiences become visible.**

But we should also turn the question around: **what can the next generation reasonably ask of us?**

If institutions want young people to carry democratic values forward, then institutions must make room for them **not only as beneficiaries, but as partners** whose voices shape policies and programmes.

Why?

Because creative industries matter to our economies, and they matter to regional competitiveness. Across South East Europe they contribute roughly **three to five per cent of GDP** and around **three**

and a half per cent of employment — comparable to European averages. This is not a marginal sector.

This also matters in a region where **youth unemployment still stands at around 25 to 30 per cent**. Film and the wider creative industries can give young people careers built on their own skills and ideas. But that requires training, financing, professional networks, access to equipment and production opportunities, and a route to audiences.

And this is exactly why my organisation, the RCC, not only supports youth through the Western Balkans Youth Lab, but also works on establishing the **Common Regional Market**, so that a filmmaker from Sarajevo, Podgorica or Pristina can reach audiences far beyond their home market. We helped abolish roaming charges across the region, we work on the automatic recognition of professional qualifications, and on joining the Single Euro Payments Area. Long story short, **we are building the regional infrastructure the creative industries need in order to grow. Yes, as my daughter would put it, we are sometimes chanting peace and love in a minefield, but we are also clearing the mines.**

A few days ago, I asked you a question: **how consequential is your role in our societies?** Let me remind you.

In February 2008, a young Bulgarian director, **Boris Despodov**, premiered his first film at the Berlinale. It was called *Corridor #8*. Later that year, it won the **Heart of Sarajevo for Best Documentary** — here, at this festival.

Corridor #8 is more than a road. It is also a strong metaphor for regional cooperation. It was meant to be the European corridor connecting the Adriatic to the Black Sea — Durrës, Skopje, Burgas — along a route that has existed since the Via Egnatia, the Roman road built in the second century BC.

Despodov made a film travelling along a road that was not there.

And what he found was not what our feasibility studies find. The corridor was missing not only because of money, and not only because of corruption. **It was missing because of prejudice** — because the people at each end of it had been taught, for generations, that there **was nothing worth reaching on the other side.**

There is a tunnel in that story, another strong metaphor. Digging began in 1942. Then the war ended, the borders moved, the politics changed — and the tunnel simply stayed. **For eight decades.** In the film, you see what the local people eventually did with it: **they grew mushrooms inside it.**

And here is the part the film could not have known. In **November 2025**, Bulgaria and North Macedonia finally signed the agreement to build that tunnel. Eighty-four years after the digging stopped. Seventeen years after the film.

I will not claim that a documentary built a railway. I am saying something less comfortable for those of us who work in institutions: **a young director with almost no money identified the real obstacle years before it appeared in any of our strategies. We were counting kilometres. He was counting mistrust.**

That is what this sector does for regional cooperation. **It is why I do not treat it as decoration.**

Democracy is strongest when people can participate, question and imagine alternatives. Film does all three. But young filmmakers need more than encouragement. **They need institutions that trust them, invest in them, and make space for them.**

So perhaps the most important thing we can ask of the next generation is **not to reproduce our answers, but to challenge them and produce better ones.** Boris Despodov did exactly that, with a camera and almost no budget — and he was right.

And the most important commitment we can make in return is to make sure they have **a genuine place — to create, to earn a living, and to be heard.**

Thank you.