Check Against Delivery

RegionalCooperationCouncil

TOURISM MINISTERIAL MEETING

Remarks

By RCC Secretary General Amer Kapetanovic

Tirana, 25 November 2026

Minister Gonxhja, Director-General Björklund, Ministers, colleagues,

The market has already drawn the map. Tour operators sell this region the way visitors already see it: **not as six destinations, but as one journey**. And a lot rides on that journey: tourism is estimated at around 13 percent of our region's GDP, reaching farmers, craftspeople and smaller towns, and giving young people one more reason to build their future at home. So, my question is simple: **how do we turn the brand you have already agreed on into a trip people can actually buy, and actually travel?**

In London last year, WB6 governments agreed to the Declaration on Tourism Branding and gave RCC the lead in implementing it. **What was missing was a vehicle to carry it forward.** In Budva last month, you endorsed it: the RCC-facilitated Regional Tourism Facility, one of our main endeavours this year. **For the first time, the six have a regional mechanism of their own to turn shared priorities into joint action**.

Its purpose is practical: joint branding and promotion, connected routes and experiences, smarter destination management, and the data and skills behind them. It adds what none of us can achieve alone: **scale, continuity and visibility on international markets.**

What we ask of you:

-**First, people**. In the coming period we will begin operationalising the Facility and ask your ministries to designate senior representatives to its Steering Committee. Please give it your full backing and bring clear priorities to the table.

-**Second, resources**. I thank Albania and North Macedonia for pledging voluntary contributions to the Facility, and I encourage the others to follow suit. You will find a short leaflet on the Facility at your place, setting out what it will do and how it will work.

-**Third, one voice abroad**. Regional branding is not about making us look alike. It is about making our differences easier to discover. Under the EU's Destination Europe umbrella, I propose a first joint campaign with the European Travel Commission in one long-haul market. A visitor in Seoul or Chicago does not choose between our economies. They choose a trip, often as part of a wider European journey.

Visitors do not buy frameworks. They buy journeys. If a multi-destination itinerary is hard to plan, or unpredictable along the way, even the strongest campaign will struggle to sell it. That is why mobility goes hand in hand with branding.

Part of the ground is laid. Since July 2021, our phones work across the six at home prices, and the Commission has just opened talks on the EU's Roam Like at Home.

RCC and the CEFTA Secretariat are working together on the Tourism Green Lanes, building on what we learnt from the Green Lanes for goods, to make travel for organised tourist groups smoother and more predictable: sharing information in advance, better communication between authorities, coordinated arrangements. We are working on a declaration to give it political backing, and we count on your support.

We must not, however, forget our domestic tourists. They do not enjoy full freedom of movement across the region yet, and as long as young men and women from Pristina still need a visa to attend a cultural event or visit friends in Sarajevo, we cannot claim a joint tourism branding. This will stay among the highest priorities of our work in 2027 with new authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The newly adopted EU Sustainable Tourism Strategy comes at the right moment. Its priorities, competitiveness, balanced and sustainable tourism, data and skills closely mirror those we set in the Common Regional Market. We want our systems to connect with the EU's, from tourism data to transparent rules for short-term rentals. And we should measure success not only by arrivals, but by how much value stays in local communities, and whether our destinations remain good places to live.

Tourism is moving faster than our responses. Traveller expectations, digital tools and a changing climate reshape it year by year. The Roadmap before us is in step with these changes. Let us report concrete progress, not intentions, at the next Leaders' Summit.

To our international partners: help us build regional capacity and align your support around initiatives that are ready to deliver. The ambition and the ownership belong to the six; RCC will convene, connect and support.

We have been with regional tourism since 2018, and we will stay with it. Measure us by one test: a year from now, can a traveller in Tokyo book one trip across six economies? Let us make regional cooperation something visitors can experience, businesses can build on, and citizens can feel in their daily lives.

Thank you.