

## **SEECP PODGORICA SUMMIT DECLARATION**

**Podgorica, 27 June 2023**

Under the Chairmanship of President Jakov Milatović, we, the Participants to the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Summit,

In the presence of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretary General Ms. Majlinda Bregu,

Reaffirming our strong commitment to the founding principles of the SEECP Charter, the United Nations Charter, as well as to the relevant documents of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe,

Emphasizing our belonging to the same community of values; reaffirming our commitment to the future of our region in the European Union, as its natural political habitat and framework for peace, security, cohesive and sustainable economic growth, and overall progress;

Stressing our adherence to the values and principles of democracy, rule of law, respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, solidarity, inclusiveness and equality,

Reiterating our dedication to good-neighborly relations and inclusive regional cooperation that contributes to successful merit-based integration of the region, as cornerstone for prosperity and stability, as well as for the overall development of the region and wellbeing of our citizens,

Acknowledging the unique role of the SEECP, as the main political platform for regional cooperation in South East Europe, based on principles of equality and regional ownership; underscoring its potential to streamline regional efforts in achieving common goals,

Deploring and condemning in the strongest terms the illegal, unprovoked and unjustified invasion in Ukraine by the Russian Federation; reiterating our steadfast support for Ukraine's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence; expressing our solidarity with Ukraine, as well as our commitment to continue providing assistance and support to its government and the Ukrainian people,

Committing ourselves to stand together in the face of complex threats and challenges to security of Europe, to uphold and safeguard democratic values and the rules-based international order,

Recalling the previous Declarations adopted by Heads of States and Governments as guidelines for strengthening of cooperation and partnerships, and transforming our region into an area of peace and prosperity,

Underlining the significance of the SEE 2030 Strategy as essential framework for advancing the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals within our region,

Reaffirming our resolve to jointly work at regional level on addressing all common challenges,

Agreed on the following:

### **ACCELERATING EUROPEAN INTEGRATION**

We firmly believe that the future of our entire region is in the European Union, and remain committed to jointly work on achieving this goal, which is of utmost interest for both the region and the European Union. As the political and economic framework which, since the end of the World War II, has provided peace, security, stability and continued development in Europe, the European Union remains the primary source of convergence of values, principles, objectives and standards within our continent.

The threats to security and stability stemming from Russia's war in Ukraine, the geopolitical upheavals and growing menaces to democracy, accentuate the need for strengthening the resilience of Europe and call for a renewed engagement within the integration process on the part of the aspiring SEECP Participants and the European Union. While aspirants remain committed to implementing the reforms and fulfilling the EU accession criteria, with focus on the rule of law, consolidating of democratic institutions and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, good neighborly relations, revitalizing the integration process and keeping the vision and sense of purpose to the enlargement, remains a necessity.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the EU-Western Balkans Thessaloniki Summit, the drive for the enlargement remains the shared strategic objective for the aspiring SEECP Participants and the European Union.

We welcome the intensified political dialogue between the EU and the aspiring Participants in the past year, and the enhanced policy engagement of the EU with the region, recognizing the importance of a number of milestone achievements towards their EU aspirations. These accomplishments give reason for optimism and raise the level of expectations in terms of delivery, both on the part of the aspiring Participants and of the European Union.

The EU members from the region will continue to provide support to aspiring Participants, in particular regarding sharing best practices and experiences in EU integration related reform processes, and promoting the EU perspective of the entire region. Likewise, we call for a merit-based acceleration of the European integration process, in accordance with the progress achieved by each of the aspiring SEECP Participants, while recognizing the SEECP as a regional forum best suited for finding solutions to outstanding issues in the region through dialogue.

Recognizing the significance of socio-economic transformation and closing the development gap between the aspiring Participants and the European Union, we underline the important role of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in streamlining regional activities focused on achieving prosperity and stimulating growth in South East Europe, while supporting European and Euro-Atlantic integration. As we move towards these goals, close coordination and synergy with other regional cooperation frameworks, in particular the Berlin Process and CEFTA, is indispensable for making the most of available regional mechanisms. While welcoming last year's landmark accomplishments in facilitating freedom of movement, with the three Berlin Process mobility agreements, and opening of the CEFTA-Transport Community green and blue lanes with the EU, we urge the implementation of outstanding commitments under the Common Regional Market.

In our efforts for preserving and strengthening democracy, as well as protecting and promoting the human rights, we remain committed to further bolstering democratic institutions, developing close partnerships with civil society organizations, and fostering media freedoms and independence.

### **STRENGTHENING SECURITY**

The deeply concerning geopolitical threats, with an unprovoked war of aggression being waged by the Russian Federation against a sovereign neighboring state in our immediate vicinity, in defiance of all principles of international law, makes joint efforts and cooperation on strengthening security more important and necessary than ever.

Likewise, the need for strengthening of our collective cyber security, made evident by, among other, recurring large-scale cyber-attacks in our region, calls for coordinated engagement for enhancing the resilience of our critical IT infrastructure and systems. We welcome the decision on establishing the Western Balkans Cyber Capacity Centre (WB3C), based in Podgorica, which will be a valuable tool for improvement of operational and institutional

response capabilities for dealing with cyber threats, including cybercrime and ransomware, and cyberattacks in the region.

Considering the increasing hybrid threats, including disinformation, Participants attribute great importance to joint actions in addressing malign hybrid activity in the region.

We recognize the need for further strengthening of resilience, preparedness and response capability building as well as raising awareness, and enhancing of media and information literacy.

We are determined to closely cooperate and undertake coordinated action aimed at confronting and defeating persistent menaces, such as organized crime, high-level corruption, smuggling of migrants, trafficking in human beings, arms and drugs smuggling, terrorism and violent extremism, including conducive to terrorism, addressing misuse of new and emerging technologies, thus, reinforcing Participants' efforts in combating these threats through wider, regional endeavor. In this regard, we also call for international solidarity and responsibility sharing.

The Participants emphasize the increasing significance of cooperation with the EU on security matters, including through regular dialogue at all levels, recognizing the importance of harmonization of respective positions and alignment of policies on matters which fall under EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and Common Security and Defense Policy.

The Participants are resolute to further step up efforts in combatting all forms of violence including but not limited to gender-based violence and femicide, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, antigypsyism, hate speech and hate crime, both offline and online, as well as all forms of violence and discrimination against persons belonging to vulnerable and minority groups.

Given that our region is prone to natural disasters, adequate preparedness, resilience, response capability building and disaster management in South East Europe requires close coordination and joining forces and capacities. The recent catastrophic earthquakes in Türkiye and Syria are yet another call for us to do more to be enabled to act with more efficiency and substance in mutual assistance. With that in mind, we take note of the activities on establishing quadrilateral collaboration between UNDRR Office for Europe and Central Asia, DG ECHO, RCC and DPPI SEE in the domain of disaster management and risk reduction, within the SEE 2030 Strategy.

The evolving role of NATO in South East Europe testifies to its increasing relevance for maintaining security and peace in our region, recognized to be of

strategic importance for the Alliance, especially in the current geopolitical context. We will continue to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and the reform efforts of the candidates to fulfill the membership criteria.

### **ADVANCING ECONOMIC COOPERATION AND CONNECTIVITY**

Transportation and Energy are critical components for economic growth and improving connectivity. The primary focus is on maintaining smooth traffic flows, ensuring the efficient transportation of goods and passengers throughout the South East Europe region.

Aware of the significance of furthering economic cooperation within the South East Europe region, as well as between the region and the EU, as prioritized by the SEE2030 Strategy, the Participants are committed to strengthen partnerships and jointly work on creating favorable and stimulating environment for thriving economic activity. The regional economic integration has the potential to boost growth, increase attractiveness and competitiveness, create employment opportunities and reverse depopulation.

Improvement of infrastructure connectivity is a critical prerequisite for greater economic and overall development of the region. Investing in transport infrastructure, especially in interregional projects, will encourage mobility, and contribute to enhancement of economic exchange within the region as well as with the European Union. In this regard, Participants welcome the inclusion of the Western Balkans/East Mediterranean Corridor into the extended trans-European Transport Network.

The energy supply uncertainty and commodity supply disruptions brought to surface our dependencies and vulnerabilities. At the same time, they led us to prove our strength and resourcefulness. Lessons learned should guide us in our endeavors for providing energy security and strengthening self-sufficiency and resilience, through further development of energy infrastructure and diversification. In order to alleviate these structural deficiencies, we stress the importance of further development of LNG regasification terminals, electricity and gas interconnections and investment in renewable sources, as well as the support of the EU through its various financial instruments.

The integration of regional markets, and of non-EU Participants' markets with the EU Single Market through early integration measures and implementation of the four freedoms, among other, within the framework of the Common Regional Market (CRM), fostering competitiveness and inclusive growth and strengthening trade are key to transforming the region into an area of sustainable economic development and overall progress and prosperity.

In order to increase trade exchanges, the participants commit to removing non-tariff barriers that hinder intra-regional trade.

## **PROMOTING GREEN TRANSITION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

Acknowledging the urgent need for addressing climate change, securing sustainable development, mitigating development disparities and reducing inequality, as essential conditions for achieving peace and prosperity in South East Europe and globally, the Participants are determined to undertake joint action in reaching the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

We support and call for increased coordination and engagement in implementing the SEE 2030 Strategy, as the most comprehensive regional tool for achieving sustainable economic growth, reducing poverty and inequalities, improving social inclusion, empowering women, decelerating depopulation, and accelerating green and digital transition without disrupting competitiveness and private sector development. Likewise, we underline the importance of the Green Agenda for the Western Balkans in reaching climate neutrality by 2050, through increasing the production of energy from renewable and clean sources, as well as by reducing energy consumption through increasing energy efficiency.

Solidarity and common efforts of the Participants are needed to overcome the recent challenges in the energy sector following the war in Ukraine.

In addition to our commitment to further increasing efforts to reach the Paris Agreement goals, we are determined to step up cooperation and activities in the areas of environmental protection, waste management, improvement of water and air quality and addressing deforestation, as well as sustainable and accountable use of natural resources.

We highlight the importance of Zero-Waste philosophy as a means to advance the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and welcome the UN General Assembly Resolution 77/161 entitled “Promoting zero-waste initiatives to advance 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” which recognizes the importance of raising awareness initiatives at all levels to promote climate action, including through innovative climate-resilient waste management initiatives.

Along with preserving resources and a sound environment for future generations, we recognize our responsibility to integrate environmental protection and green economic growth as a self-evident attitude and underlying assumption of green transition. With that in mind, we highlight the essential role of education, and commit ourselves to work on raising

awareness of youth on these topics, through educational systems and curricula, developing student exchange programs, as investment in youth is crucial factor for improving relations in the region.

The participants are determined to further strengthen efforts and create conditions for better access to environmental information, public participation in decision-making and access to justice in environmental matters.

The wide scale and range of COVID-19 pandemic repercussions, and lessons learned, as well as the impact of climate change on emerging and reemerging of infectious diseases, call for constant vigilance and timely adaptation of policies and their implementation, raising awareness and promoting immunization, in order to provide preparedness and adequate response of health systems to future health crises.

### **PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE SEECP**

Recognizing the importance of interparliamentary dialogue and cooperation, as well as the central role of Parliaments for democracy, strengthening of democratic institutions, the rule of law and efficient implementation of reforms on the European integration path, the Participants express high appreciation for the work of the SEECP Parliamentary Assembly. We support the continued exchange and cooperation between the Parliaments in the region.

We note that Parliaments play an important role in implementing the SDGs being concurrently one of the key stakeholders in implementing the SEE 2030 Strategy. With its role as the facilitator for the implementation of the SEE 2030, RCC will play a key role in acting as an interlocutor between the SEE 2030 governance structures, SEECP and SEECP PA.

The Participants welcome and commend the Parliament of Montenegro for having successfully chaired the Podgorica Chairmanship-in-Office SEECP Parliamentary Assembly on its 10 Anniversary, contributing to further strengthening of its role and significance.

### **SEECP-RCC SYNERGY**

Marking the 15 Anniversary of the RCC, the Participants congratulate and recognize its unique role and accomplishments in promoting cooperation, the overall development of the region and advancing towards a common future in the European Union, under the SEECP political guidance.

The SEECP will continue to provide guidance and advise to the RCC aimed at achieving greater convergence, synergy and efficiency in our common task of

transforming the region into an area of prosperity and stability, through enhanced regional cooperation. We encourage the continued engagement of the RCC on facilitating the implementation of regional programs and projects, among other through identifying potential partners and financial instruments for their realization. In that context, we put a special emphasis on the implementation of the SEE 2030 Strategy.

We acknowledge the significance of the RCC as a focal point for streamlining the endeavors of different regional cooperation platforms.

We endorse the Annual Report of the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council for 2022-2023, and welcome the activities in line with RCC Strategy and Work Program 2023-2025.

In accordance with the provisions of the RCC Statute, the Participants will continue their efforts to reach consensus on the selection and appointment of the Secretary General of the RCC.

#### **PODGORICA SEECF CHAIRMANSHIP-IN-OFFICE**

Participants express their appreciation for the Podgorica Chairmanship-in-Office 2022-2023 under the motto “A SEE of Culture, a SEE of Cooperation”, putting an emphasis on the cohesive power of the cultural ties in our region, and their potential to stimulate and move forward the overall cooperation and development of our economies.

Participants welcome the priorities set by the Podgorica Chairmanship-in-Office i.e. EU integration of aspirant SEECF Participants, strengthening security cooperation, respect and protection of human rights, rule of law and strengthening of democratic institutions, enhancing of economic cooperation and infrastructural connectivity and further mitigation and overcoming of health, economic and other consequences of COVID-19 pandemic and strengthening resilience to future health crises.

The activities and events organized during the Podgorica Chairmanship-in-Office contributed to advancement of our regional cooperation and reaffirmed the relevance of the SEECF.

#### **FUTURE CHAIRMANSHIPS IN OFFICE**

The Participants welcome the incoming Chairmanship-in-Office of Skopje for the period 2023-2024.

The Participants agree that Tirana will assume the SEECF Chairmanship-in-Office for the period 2024-2025.



The Chairmanships-in-Office will be exercised in accordance with current SEECF practices and in a neutral manner regarding documents, procedures, premises and symbols.