

Speech by the RCC Secretary General, Amer Kapetanovic Mid-Term Review Conference of the Youth Policy Lab on Green Agenda

Opening Remarks

9 April 2025, Porto Montenegro, *Blue Room*, 09:30h

Starts.

Representatives of ministries, ladies and gentlemen, and most importantly, dear youth,

Or, maybe I should start again,

Dear youth, representatives of ministries, ladies and gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege to stand before you today and open this important conference which marks halfway of your Policy Lab journey. I know today will be a day where we will hear fresh ideas, different approaches and stories of successful partnerships between youth and policymakers.

The need for cooperation, innovative solutions, equality and participation has never been more important. **In a world where environmental challenges are increasingly pressing, it is vital that we establish atmosphere where youth and policymakers sit together**, work jointly and discuss in a constructive manner the priorities and needs of young people, and how those needs can be met. This is the foundation of our gathering today.

The work of the Regional Cooperation Council is driven by a diverse range of agendas such as Common Regional Market, Green Agenda, Security, Employment and much more. Yet, **all these initiatives are united by a singular purpose – to forge a more supportive and dynamic environment for young people**. For those of you present here, who are collaboratively shaping a brighter and more prosperous region, **your commitment and thinking outside of the box are the cornerstone of this transformative journey. In the end, it's all about people. And it always is.**

But first, let's take a step back in time. The concept of the Youth Lab has been prominent for quite a while already, but everything started at the Sofia EU-Western Balkans Summit in 2018 and reintroduced as an experimental project two years after. **While many EU initiatives have yet to be fully implemented, the Youth Lab team has successfully transformed this experiment into a regular practice, now guiding you, the third generation of the Pool of Experts.** Today, the Youth Policy Lab has evolved into a well-established process, recognized by both regional and international communities, as well as by youth and policymakers, as a crucial, successful and innovative approach to policy co-creation and co-implementation.

I know that today all of us, but especially young people, are anxious about many socio-political aspects of our region. **44% of youth are deeply worried about the economic situation,** reflecting the financial challenges they are facing. **Corruption remains a significant issue, with 34%,** while political instability is a concern for 26% of youth, citing it as one of the major concerns.

These numbers show us **the harsh reality young people are living in – not only dealing with environmental threats, but also facing deep socio-political challenges that impact their present, future and overall well-being.**

In addition to financial and social challenges, environmental issues are increasingly raising concerns about the region. Notably, **55% of young people cite air pollution as their most pressing environmental issue.** And this is why we need you.

Studies have shown that climate change takes a profound emotional toll on younger generations. Youth feel the fear, guilt, and outrage caused by its impact – emotions that drive them to take action. **Their passion, courage and sense of responsibility** have inspired thousands of young people around the world to rise as climate leaders, taking on roles as advocates, educators, entrepreneurs and innovators.

By harnessing youth's creative potential, young people are driving efforts for a more sustainable future. Through climate activism, you build connections, share knowledge and empower one another. **You empower us, too.** Your actions are not just a call for change, but a demand for governments to include you in decision-making processes and actively seek your inputs in shaping policies for our future.

And here, I want to praise policymakers as well. I am sure that working with young people can be challenging, sometimes even time-consuming, having in mind that not including them would make your work easier. But also, I am confident that it is **rewarding, fulfilling and inspiring.** It is incredible to witness how, despite generational differences and life experiences, we can actually learn from each other. And that is, I dare to say, the beauty of Youth Lab as such.

From this standpoint I want to let you know that **we at the RCC hear you, we understand you and we value each one of you in this room.** Taking the lead in this process for the past

10 months has undoubtedly been a challenging and responsible role. However, your commitment and support during this time have been invaluable. **You are laying the foundation for youth participation in decision-making, which is essential for bringing the changes that will positively impact young people in the region.** And I thank you for that.

Thank you for your hard work, and great activities you are creating at regional, national, but also local level. **I do not want to spoil the event**, as I am sure everyone is looking forward to hearing about each other's work, but I must admit I have already heard about your initiatives such as **green seats in local youth councils, comprehensive analyses on youth participation in green policies, and even eco-bontons and dictionaries for secondary schools, and many others.**

I am excited to know that this time you are all focused on co-implementation of strategic priorities in your own economies, since co-creation was a *modus operandi* in previous Youth Lab. In this way, we also leverage up and learn how to adapt to new approaches of the Working Groups. Your efforts are vital, and the region needs your dedication.

Reaching sustainable coexistence, by definition, means that no one is left behind. **This is not simply the motto guiding the many EU and regional programs, but also the premise for any action to be successful.**

Young people in the Western Balkans are a blessing and greatest asset we have. For that reason the question “What to do about young people?” has always been the **wrong** one for me. For us who believe in youth, we rather change it into “What to do together with young people” or “How to engage young people in finding solutions for the young people”.

In the Western Balkans, we must stand united, break down barriers and create a region that thrives on sustainability and inclusion. **This is our shared responsibility**, and this is the future we must build together. I am counting on your support here.

Wishing you a successful presentations today, while I am looking forward to welcoming you at the **Final Conference** in few months as well.

Thank you.

Ends.