

The RCC' Secretary General, Ms. Majlinda Bregu, moderated the opening panel at the Summit. She mentioned as very important for the WBDS, regional cooperation on 5G network and interoperability of data and services, attesting region's resilience and forward looking orientation amidst the most challenging of contexts induced by Covid19.

"The outcome of the **Regional Roaming Agreement** – historical in its kind, signed by the respective WB6 ministers, is an important signal of regional cooperation and economic integration and has brought results. The first step of that agreement has already brought results as we now pay between 83% and 96% less roaming charges in the entire Western Balkans. The next step is 0 roaming costs, for the entire region as of July 2021." said Ms. Bregu.

"Balkan Barometer 2020 shows that 80% of managers in the Western Balkans (WB) consider digital skills very important for conducting their businesses. Skills gaps continue to be high as in demand skills across jobs will change in the next five years. It is leaders' responsibility to reformulate policies to educate and reskill people." added Bregu.

**Mr. Roberto Viola, European Commission, General Director of DG Connect**, thanked Ms. Balluku and Ms. Bregu, for showing a leadership role in advancing WB digital agenda. Mr. Viola expressed a big thanks to the leadership of the German Presidency of the European Union, which together with the European Commission, proposed a recovery plan for Europe. The decision is to devote 20 % of the recovery package to digitalization, as an enormous help to boost digital economy and society.

The platforms on which the Summit is set up are of a special importance to Mr. Viola. He said that Connectivity is one of the most important - "Without connectivity there is no digital society. It keeps the society and nations together and helps them to move towards challenges". Also "modernizing the public administration" and "skills and the use of very advanced technologies" are of a great importance, to Mr. Viola, especially those related to health services.

**Mr. Wolfgang Kopf, Member of the Executive Committee of German Eastern Business Association**, mentioned that digital transformation has the potential to move forward the productivity by 4 % per year and create year by year about 9 000 new jobs. That's why in the future we need to focus on the connectivity, education, digital skills and digital transformation. Investment, training and digitalization are priorities.-"These positive developments need to be further enhanced especially in the current crises. There are three factors that are very important for the development and investment in the region, the government of the rule of law, regular frameworks and a developed administration, well educated people and qualified workers", Mr. Kopf mentioned during his speech.

**Mr. Robert Opp, UNDP's Chief Digital Officer** thanked the organizer of the 3-rd Digital Summit. He continued by saying that they see digitalization as a possibility to accelerate their progress. Mr. Opp said that "Everyone is related to the digitalization, each partner across the region and the world rush to bring the tool responding to the crisis and also recovering from it. This is helpful for the government and administration, to work online and to provide services for the citizens facing the challenge that everyone should be included in digital transformation." Education and capacity building is very important for Mr. Opp. During his speech he stressed out that they are trying to do the best with the education.

**Mr. Houlin Zhao, Secretary General of ITU**, thanked the Albanian Government for hosting the summit and for being a valuable partner of the ITU. "ITU is committed to advance the digital agenda throughout the Europe, especially in the Western Balkans, where investments for the high speed connectivity are needed. Connectivity is essential and the region is facing real challenges from digital skills gap to the digitalization of the governmental services, to improving cyber security." Mr. Zhao said. The Secretary General of ITU, also mentioned that next year at this time, ITU will hold the world telecommunications development conference 2021 (WTDC), that will take place in Addis Ababa. ITU

is committed to the digital integration of the WB and is collaborating with the WB in different strategic projects, in different areas, from broadband mapping to digital agriculture. ITU will provide all stakeholders with opportunity to advance the digital agenda in the ICT infrastructure, digitalization, cyber security, innovation etc. Mr. Zhao thanked all the participants for their cooperation in all these activities. He stressed out that- "Now more than ever it is important to work for connectivity and to connect all those who remain unconnected. Also should work to encourage more investments from public and private sectors in the field of telecommunications in Western Balkans region and all over the world".

**Ms. Claudia Dörr-Voß, State Secretary at the Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Energy, Germany** mentioned that it is very important to work digitally and virtually, especially during the time of Covid 19. She mentioned that according to the report of EC, the Western Balkan countries are moderately prepared in the field of digitalization; this has been possible through the positive work of previously Digital Summits organized, which contribute to the development. Ms. Dörr-Voß said that "Digital infrastructure is one important issue because -we need it to be of a high performance type.. In Germany there is a very important project about this and we are doing the best for secure and trust networks for future use. This is a project given to EU where everybody can participate and also WB countries are invited to play a part in this project." -she said. She is thankful for the cooperation through the Summits and also for Montenegro that will be the host country for the next summit and that German Government will be a supporter.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Energy, Ms. Belinda Balluku thanked the participants of the Summit and stressed that the situation we have been living in, clearly shows how important connectivity is. She described this meeting as very important, in order to exchange experiences and share opinions regarding the drafting of joint initiatives.

*"I personally believe that we need to go beyond possible local and national solutions in order to present more opportunities and assistance to our peoples, both bilaterally and regionally, using the opportunities offered by digital transformation",* stressed Balluku.

The Minister of Infrastructure and Energy shared with the participants the initiatives undertaken by the Albanian Government in its path of digital transformation.

*"The development of information infrastructure and technology is one of the priorities of the Albanian Government and part of the national strategic objectives for development and integration. We have adopted a new strategic document for the Sustainable Development of Digital Infrastructure, with the vision to build high-speed and very high-speed digital infrastructure, towards a gigabit society. The spectrum policy document was also adopted, aiming to promote new technologies, to develop the next generation of networking, research and innovation. The preparation of a new strategy for business and innovation and the smart specialization strategy are also in the process".*

Minister Balluku stated that the participating countries are aware of the great work they have ahead in this regard, but also expressed confidence that by working more closely with each other, the countries will achieve even more progress.