

Esteemed Minister Hasni,

Your excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends of the Western Balkans,

I extend a warm welcome to Tirana, the hometown of RYCO. It is indeed an honor to gather here today to reflect upon our collective achievements and the challenges that lie ahead. RYCO, born out of the Berlin Process, stands as a testament to your visionary approach, recognizing the youth as a driving force leading towards a stable and peaceful Western Balkans, and ready to be part of the European family. Furthermore, RYCO is a testament to the European Union's unwavering commitment to promoting its values in the region and expediting the Western Balkans' integration into the EU.

It is beyond doubt that the youth can play a positive role in Peacebuilding, reconciliation, and countering violent extremism. Our experiences in uniting young people from diverse ethnic, national, and religious backgrounds confirm that they are eager to overcome those differences. They are collaborating, connecting, and actively contributing to improving the region, they are also reminding us that violence has no place in achieving our goals, interests, or needs. Today, in the middle of the challenges that threaten peace and stability in the region, our peacebuilding mission becomes more important than ever.

To empower young minds, we must involve them in decision-making processes, provide regional opportunities, support their visionary projects, and boost their capabilities — a concept they, the youth, name it: "meaningful participation" as articulated in their Declaration during the last Berlin Summit.

Since 2016, we have empowered over 31,000 young individuals with an investment exceeding 8 million euros in youth exchange programs. We have supported nearly 250 civil society organizations, 150 schools, nearly 400 young social entrepreneurs, and countless more results that make us all proud.

Tomorrow, we take another step forward by launching the Open Call for Youth Cultural Activism within the framework of the "Western Balkans Youth Cultural Fund," an initiative announced by Chancellor Olaf Scholz and supported by Annalena Baerbock, during the last Berlin Summit — a commitment embraced also by all of you and your respective political leaders, we hereby invite you to check where do we stand with the given commitments, so we can jointly start addressing the pressing social and political issues in the region through arts.

With the invaluable support of the RYCO Governing Board and the GIZ over the past two years, we have undertaken radical and challenging institutional reforms. Today, after seven years of hard work, we can proudly declare that we have matured and are ready for a more impactful role as the Leading youth policy institution in the region. Our unique and robust infrastructure stands at the disposal of the European Union, friends of the region, and all local and international organizations that are eager to foster positive change in the Western Balkans. Our dedicated team of over 55 young professionals is harmonized with the needs and concerns of our youth.

Your Excellencies, dear Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the WB, I would like to seize this opportunity to request your assistance in finalizing the formal registration of our Local branch offices in the

region. With your support, 3 are already registered, and 2 more await completion, with hopes of proudly presenting these great results to your leaders, at the Summit of the Berlin process on October 16th, 2023.

In Tirana today, the “Youth Forum” as a side event to the Summit of the Berlin Process is happening. RYCO has gathered over 150 young leaders from across the region, to discuss the progress and new pillars of the Youth Berlin Declaration, adopted last year at the Berlin Summit, and will be presented later for your consideration.

We must rally behind them and follow their lead. Decades of conflicts in the Balkans pushed our region backward, and we must never allow history to repeat itself. In the words of a famous song, "Give peace a chance," and I dare to say, "Give youth a chance." The youth can be our strength in preserving peace and security in the region.

RYCO stands as a testament to the significant achievements of regional youth cooperation and peacebuilding. Let us not lose the path in this progress and remember that a better region starts with you and the youth — their energy, ideas, and hope.

In the name of RYCO and youth in the region of WB, I thank you all for the support up to now.