



# **REGIONAL OWNERSHIP AND BEYOND**

## **SETTING UP OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL**

**CONCEPT PAPER PREPARED BY THE SECRETARY  
GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL,  
MR. HIDO BISCEVIC**

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## **1. PROGRESS IN SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE, REGIONAL COOPERATION OWNERSHIP AND BEYOND**

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) was founded only a year ago by the decisions of the Heads of States and Governments of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) Participating States at their Zagreb Summit, May 11, 2007, ending Croatian Chairmanship-in-Office.

The fundamental aim and motive for the establishment of the RCC was to ensure full regional ownership over the comprehensive regional cooperation process in the mutually recognized priority areas with the aim to accelerate economic and social development of South East Europe within the European and Euro-Atlantic framework and perspectives.

The priority areas of cooperations were outlined and agreed upon under the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEEC.

The transition to the regional ownership was to be achieved through transformation of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe into fully operational RCC with its Secretariat in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The transformation process was led over the period from Zagreb Summit by joint work of Stability Pact Special Coordinator Dr. Erhard Busek and RCC Secretary General Hido Biscevic and their respective teams. The process was also supported by the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office, all SEEC Participating States and also by the European Commission.

Broader international community also supported the new vigour to the cooperation in South East Europe, as the increased and broadened cooperation reflected a new spirit in the region and renewed readiness of the SEEC Participating States to move the South East Europe forward at this historical junction.

Particular attention and support to the establishment of the RCC is paid by the European Union (EU) and strong engagement of the European Commission in the transformation process from the Stability Pact to the RCC's full operability reflected a visible interest of the EU to reinforce the region's integrations within European and Euro-Atlantic structures as part of building of a new united and undivided Europe.

On many occasions European Union underlined that it is of common interest that all South East European countries proceed with political, economic and security reforms, and also with the resolution of open and status issues, reconciliation and protection of minority communities, and thus secure their individual progress toward the EU.

The EU and the SEECP Participating States also recognize that a fresh impetus to the the Thessaloniki Agenda and the Salzburg Declaration was given with the Brdo kod Kranja EU Presidency Statement „New Focus on the Western Balkans“.

Of particular importance for the future work of the RCC is the European Commission's Communication „Western Balkans: Enhancing the European perspective“ of 5 March 2008, as an important platform for continued efforts to implement commitments and conditions for progressing towards the EU.

The role of the RCC in the context of the regional cooperation in South East Europe has also been addressed in the Communication of the European Commission on the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2007-2008 of 6 November 2007. In this document of utmost importance for the overall enlargement process as well as for the realisation of the region's European perspective, the intention of the European Commission to participate in the RCC and to have an active role in the context of the regional cooperation process in South East Europe has been explicitly confirmed.

The importance of the process of regional cooperation in South East Europe and the role of the RCC in this context, have been particularly emphasised in the conclusions of the Council of the European Union of 10 March 2008 relating to the formal handover from the Stability Pact to the RCC. These Council conclusions, stressing the need for increased ownership and leadership by South East European countries in the framework of regional cooperation process, will remain valuable guidance for the future activities of the RCC and its Secretariat.

For the future work of the RCC it is of utmost importance that the EU recognizes and engages the RCC as a key interlocutor of the European Union in strategic planning, defining and addressing development oriented initiatives in South East Europe which should prompt the countries of the region to move ahead toward the lasting stability, security, cooperation, development and prosperity of South East Europe within the accession framework.

As regional cooperation, good neighbourly relations and resolution of the remaining outstanding issues in line with the overarching interest of all countries and peoples of the region to live in peace, security and stable democratic environment remain essential elements for the advancement of the region, it is also most valuable that our commitment to regional security and stability, based on democratic values, remains steadfast. This particularly important role of the regional cooperation in the context of strengthening security and stability in the region of South East Europe was also confirmed by the Bucharest Summit Declaration of the Heads of State and Government participating at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest of 3 April 2008.

For the future work of the RCC the enhancement of security in the region through closer cooperation between all SEECP Participating States on security issues will be a guiding principle in supporting the South East European countries to contribute to the building of a new united and undivided Europe.

The transformation from the Stability Pact to the RCC took place during a challenging and demanding period and against the background of several outstanding issues shaping general political environment in the region. It was also evident that shaping of a lasting and durable security and stability architecture in South East Europe is still in the process, with broader implications both with the individual domestic policies and wider European and international affairs.

In this light, the political process under the Stability Pact that has generated broad acceptance of the necessity to continue and widen the regional cooperation is even more important. This legacy greatly contributed to the very establishment of the RCC, but it is of fundamental and lasting importance that the spirit and energy of cooperation is preserved and kept during this transformation period and against the background of many outstanding and potentially divisive issues.

This is certainly a true measure of general improvement of conditions in the South East Europe over the comparatively short period of time, from the establishment of the Stability Pact to the present situation.

For the future work of the RCC it is of essential importance that the SEECP Participants acknowledge the necessity to complete the peace in our part of Europe, to address and resolve remaining status issues and to proceed towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations.

The integration into the EU and NATO Alliance does not have viable political alternative for the candidates and aspiring countries, as it was also stressed by the recent Ohrid Summit of the Presidents of Central European States, and therefore the intensification of necessary reforms, together with the continuation of the EU support in this process, remain of particular importance. However, an additional attention and resources are required by all concerned regional and international actors in order to further strengthen stability and prosperity of the region of South East Europe.

South East Europe is still faced with several outstanding issues, but substantial progress is also evident.

This must be sustained.

EU perspective must be made tangible through the elaborated EU strategy and planning for the South East Europe. The international community must remain focused on South East Europe as the developments in this part of Europe are related to the broader interests of peace, stability and security in Europe and in the world. The SEECP Participating States must continue to deliver and enhance their commitments.

The period ahead may prove to be crucial. On one hand, the EU and the international community will need to engage even more to enhance and secure the European future of the South East Europe, whilst the countries of the region will have to accelerate reforms and do more to prepare themselves for accession negotiations and full acceptance of the EU standards. Joint comprehensive strategy and determination will be needed to build on the successful policies that brought the evident advancement so far.

The main task of the RCC is to work out the operational platform to build upon the synergy of these interests.

The transition period from the Stability Pact to the RCC was also marked by substantial progress of the countries of the region towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations. Undoubtedly, this had an additionally positive impact on the RCC formation process. By anchoring themselves closer to the European and Euro-Atlantic structures, countries of the region tend to be more opened to the full-fledged regional cooperation.

Substantial progress in accession negotiations with **Croatia** is notable and it is possible that Croatia meets its goal to soon complete the negotiations, as it makes significant efforts to accelerate reforms in key areas and meets the set benchmarks. It is evident that progress and accession of Croatia to the full EU membership is having an impetus effect on the entire region, as EU aspirant countries recognize the importance of firm and delivery oriented reform policy and its appraisal by the EU.

The progress in accession negotiations with **Turkey** is also welcomed. Turkey's declared intention and renewed commitment to continue the reform process is important both for the process of accession negotiations as well as for the security and stability of the EU, as often stressed by the European Commission.

Steps towards opening of the accession negotiations with **the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** are also possible, provided it has fulfilled the established conditions.

The progress of **Montenegro** is also evident and could serve as an inspiration to other countries of the region. As Montenegro would want to accelerate the implementation of the Interim Agreement, it would also make further efforts in building institutional capacities to prepare itself for the next steps in its relations with the EU.

The progress made by **Albania** should also be noted and appraised. In order to reach the next stage in its relations with the EU Albania would also want to accelerate the implementation of the Interim Agreement.

Signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement between the EU and **Serbia** is seen as an encouraging sign of progress and Serbia's increased responsibility to confirm and fulfill necessary commitments and remaining conditions on its European path. For the RCC, it is imperative to continue to be engaged with Serbia with the aim to constructively assist in implementation of programmes and initiatives aimed at accelerated economic and social development.

Signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement with **Bosnia and Herzegovina** is now within a short reach as the agreement is reached on the police reforms legislation as part of a broader measures and reforms that will need to be addressed along Bosnia and Herzegovina's way to the EU.

In the aftermath of declaration by **Kosovo** Parliament, the SEECP Participating States took note of the EU recommendation to decide on their relations with Kosovo in accordance with national practice and international law and acted accordingly. It is of highest importance for the stability and cooperation in the region to preserve and enhance dialogue, coexistence, mutual understanding, solidarity and a clear EU perspective as an impetus and framework for addressing all Kosovo related issues. It is also highly encouraging that despite differing positions, the political will is evident to continue and enhance regional cooperation. For the RCC it is imperative to continue to play a constructive and conducive role at the political level and facilitate, under the guidance of the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office, in a pragmatic way, dialogue and cooperation on the issues of interest for the development, institutions building and betterment of the people.

Relationship between the EU and **Moldova** are increasingly developing. Moldova is an EU partner country within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In this context, of particular importance is the establishment of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument as a tool of practical implementation of the ENP.

It is the belief of the RCC that these events in the region warrant renewed assistance and assurance by the EU to the countries and peoples of the South East Europe and assisting the political leaderships to progress with the reforms and deliver the commitments made.

Peoples across the South East Europe recognize the importance and the meaning of their European choice and expect their leaders to follow this choice as a driving force for the consolidation and improvement of political, economic and social conditions in their countries.

In this light, the mission of the RCC is to focus on the development and modernization oriented cooperation among the SEECP Participating States, based on the projects in the priority areas, in order to further promote the European and Euro-Atlantic orientation of the South East Europe and build-upon the synergy of the interest and programmes of EU and individual Governments.

The strategic working platform of the RCC is to be a key interlocutor and operational link between the EU and the SEECP countries in generating and coordinating multibeneficiary regional projects aimed at the accelerated recovery and development in the region, with the aim to make up for the losses in the recent period of the region and also with the



aim to increase general competitiveness of South East Europe and to profile the region in Europe and on the international scene.

## **2. TRANSFORMATION OF THE STABILITY PACT FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE**

### **2.1. Key achievements**

The Stability Pact has significantly contributed to the stabilization of South East Europe and to the improvement of overall social and economic situation of the region. It has also promoted the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries of South East Europe. The Stability Pact served as a forum and intermediary that brought different organisations and countries together in achieving common goals, thus enhancing dialogue and creating common understanding on various issues. Efforts undertaken by the Stability Pact increased effectiveness of international assistance and resulted in the broad acceptance of regional cooperation.

### **2.2. Lessons learned**

Regional cooperation is beneficial to all regional actors, contributes to tackling common problems and acts as a confidence building mechanism. It is today fully accepted as an important instrument to enhance political stability, security and economic growth.

In line with the Stability Pact's experience, the RCC will continue to match the priorities of the countries of the region with the programmes and funds of international organisations by prompting, monitoring and supporting regional cooperation processes as an independent forum and intermediary bringing together regional actors and international partners on equal terms. RCC will keep flexible and tailor-made-approach in meeting the aims in its priority areas.

The RCC will continue with the implementation of the regional cooperation agenda and promote active participation of the countries of the region in the regional cooperation processes providing a major argument for furthering their advancement to the EU and Euro-Atlantic integration. The RCC can also provide the European Commission with valuable know-how and advice in the identification of priorities for regional programmes under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

An effective RCC communication strategy delivering clear messages about its aims, the potential benefits of regional cooperation and its complementarity to national goals will also be a necessary tool for achieving the mission of the RCC.

### **2.3. Overview of legacy and challenges**

The set of regional co-operation initiatives passed to the RCC reflects the current priorities and issues faced by South East Europe. These priorities and issues may change over time and the RCC will retain the necessary flexibility to adapt accordingly.

The final meetings of the Stability Pact Working Tables in December 2007 in Tirana provided an opportunity for a detailed review of the Working Table progress reports on the activities undertaken and the status of each individual task force or initiative. At the Final Meeting of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact in Sofia on 28 February 2008, Stability Pact Special Coordinator Dr. Erhard Busek presented the Final Report on Regional Ownership and Streamlining of the Stability Pact Task Forces and Initiatives. The purpose of that final report was to summarise the status of the transition process within each Stability Pact initiative. The Final Report also outlines the key challenges facing those initiatives that will remain active under the auspices of the RCC.

The RCC will continue to build on the legacy of the Stability Pact by keeping strong political momentum both at the level of single initiatives and in support of regional cooperation in general.

Effective cooperation between the SEECP, the RCC Secretariat and the individual initiatives will be necessary.

The RCC Secretariat will develop good working relations with the countries of South East Europe and international members of each initiative and ensure that comprehensive information flows are well established and structured. Sound expertise within the RCC Secretariat on the different thematic co-operation processes is vital to provide capable support to the individual initiatives and to ensure that the broader political vision is achievable.

The RCC will ensure that the necessary cross initiative communication channels are put in place. It is very important that the various initiatives are properly integrated into the broader socio-economic environment in the region. The RCC Secretariat's seat on various steering committees and

management boards as well as its overall political interlocutor role will greatly facilitate this.

RCC will provide the framework for increased ownership and leadership by South East European countries by enhancing the operational capacities of the SEECP through its Secretariat and task forces, and will also provide a forum for the continued involvement of the donor community. The South Eastern European countries, the SEECP and the international community should ensure full implementation of the decisions taken so far to ensure a successful RCC.

## **2.4. Transition Process**

Transformation and streamlining process was launched in 2005 with the final aim of having the new framework for regional co-operation in South East Europe in place by 2008. Senior Review Group (SRG) was established in order to have an assessment of the contributions of the Stability Pact and to receive various proposals on how the future regional co-operation framework should look. The final report of the SRG outlined certain preconditions for a sustainable regional co-operation framework in South East Europe which have to be kept in mind: a strong involvement of both the South East European countries and the EU; full political commitment by the countries of the region; and involvement of the non-EU donor community during the transition process towards regional ownership.

Following consultations with the countries of South East Europe in 2005 and 2006, the Regional Table in Belgrade in May 2006 took decisions on the transformation into a more regionally-owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation framework in South Eastern Europe. The main task of such a framework is to be a facilitator of regional co-operation and support to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region, while ensuring continued involvement of the donor community, thus preserving the legacy of the Pact. It was agreed that the streamlined RCC and its Secretariat should focus its activities on six areas which the countries of the region have already identified as those where regional co-operation will be beneficial to all: Economic and Social Development; Infrastructure and Energy; Justice and Home Affairs; Security Co-operation and Building Human Capital with Parliamentary Co-operation being an overarching theme that is linked with each of the other areas.

Parallel discussions on several levels took place following the Belgrade meeting of the Regional Table in order to progress towards the agreement reached that the new RCC would be fully operational by early 2008. Most importantly, the representatives of the region (who met under the framework of the Financial Working Group) met under the leadership of the Croatian Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP and the Stability Pact reached consensus on a cost-sharing proposal to the RCC Secretariat.

Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the SEECP that took place on 2 March 2007 in Zagreb within the framework of the Croatian SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office adopted the procedure for the appointment of the first Secretary General of the RCC and the procedure for the designation of the Seat of the RCC Secretariat.

The Regional Table in Zagreb on 10 May 2007 took the process further. It endorsed the nominations of the RCC's first Secretary General and the Seat of the RCC Secretariat, and adopted the RCC Statute. The next day the Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the SEECP Participating States approved the nominations of Mr Hido Biscevic as the RCC's first Secretary General, and of Sarajevo as Seat of the RCC Secretariat. The Host Country Agreement between the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Governments of the other SEECP countries and UNMIK/Kosovo was signed in Plovdiv on 14 September 2007.

The final meeting of the three Working Tables of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe – Democracy, Economy and Security - took place on 3 and 4 December 2007 in Tirana. Each meeting gave special attention to past achievements, lessons learned and remaining challenges for the RCC with regards to the Stability Pact's various initiatives and task forces.

The final meeting of the Stability Pact Regional Table took place in Sofia on 27 February 2008. This meeting marked the final step in the transformation of the Stability Pact into the new regionally owned cooperation framework, the Regional Co-operation Council. The Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the RCC was adopted at this meeting, marking the formal handover from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe to the RCC.

### **3. FORMATION OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL AND THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL SECRETARIAT**

#### **3.1. Political decisions and legal ground**

The European Commission and the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe jointly proposed in April 2006 that the SEECP Summits and ministerial meetings should play an important role in promoting regional cooperation at the political level and that a RCC should be established as a supporting body of the new regional framework after the phasing out of the Stability Pact.

The above mentioned decisions and processes have underlined the strong political support of the countries of the region, European Union and the wider international community for the process of establishing a regionally led and owned forum for fostering and further strengthening regional cooperation. They have also paved the way for the ensuing practical steps taken with the aim to put in place the RCC Secretariat and make it operational according to the plan.

Regional cooperation has been recognised as a valuable tool for promoting stability, prosperity and social and economic development in South East Europe as well as for addressing the challenges faced by the region. It has also played a significant role in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region with individual countries achieving considerable progress.

At their meeting on 14 September 2007 in Plovdiv, the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs signed a Host Country Agreement between the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and all the SEECP Participating States as well as UNMIK/Kosovo. The Agreement provides the legal basis for the establishment and functioning of the RCC Secretariat in Sarajevo.

On 27 February 2008 the final meeting of the Stability Pact Regional Table and the inaugural meeting of the Regional Cooperation Council was held back-to-back with the meeting of the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 28 February 2008 in Sofia. This meeting marked the final step in the transformation of the Stability Pact into the new regionally owned regional cooperation framework, the RCC. On that occasion the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council

with the Statute of the Regional Cooperation Council was adopted which reaffirmed the political commitment of all the stakeholders to the RCC and the regional cooperation agenda.

The three basic documents, namely the Statute, the Host Country Agreement and the Joint Declaration provide a legal and political basis for the functioning of the RCC, its Secretariat and its Liaison Office in Brussels, alongside political commitment of the stakeholders evidenced throughout the process of transformation of the structures of regional cooperation architecture in South East Europe.

### **3.2. Formation process**

The formation process and build-up of the RCC Secretariat in Sarajevo with its Liaison Office in Brussels started with the signing of the Host Country Agreement with the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina in September 2007 in Plovdiv. This document is the legal basis for all the operative steps and the functioning of the Secretariat. On the same occasion, the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs supported the proposed organisational scheme and the outline budget of the Secretariat. The Ministers also accepted the visual identity of the RCC.

The Host Country Agreement has entered into force on 22 April 2008 following the ratification by Bosnia and Herzegovina as a host country of the RCC Secretariat.

So far two informal RCC Board meetings were held, in Sarajevo on 9 October 2007 and in Brussels on 28 November 2007 that adopted important decisions on the establishment of the RCC. The first formal meeting of the RCC was held on 27 February 2008. It marked the official handover of responsibilities from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe into the hands of the RCC. The membership in the RCC Board is dependent on the financial contribution to the RCC Secretariat.

The RCC Secretariat was registered with the authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina as of 5 December 2007.

A bank account in Sarajevo was opened and all the RCC Board Members were informed of it so that financial contributions could be transferred to the RCC budget. Contributions from a number of countries have already been received.

The Secretary General has signed a contract on the assumption of duties with the Bulgarian SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office, as was mandated by the RCC Board.

The recruitment procedure for staffing the RCC Secretariat and its Liaison Office in Brussels was launched in autumn 2007 and is now generally completed, with the aim that the RCC is fully operational immediately by the end of May 2008.

Three rounds of calls for applications were launched attracting more than 2700 applications, which testify to the high profile and importance of the RCC.

After the completion of the screening process of applications, telephone interviews with the short-listed candidates and personal interviews with the best-rated candidates were held, in close cooperation with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The candidates were selected and appointed after a careful scrutiny and on the basis of expertise, experience and merits of the candidates.

The negotiations with the Government of the Kingdom of Belgium on the arrangements of the Seat of the RCC Liaison Office in Brussels started in December 2007 and are nearing completion.

Many of the current Stability Pact donors have expressed interest to be involved in the RCC. There are now 28 members and the EU (represented by the Troika composed of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council of the European Union) which are members of the RCC Board. The members have pledged themselves to contribute financially to the budget of the RCC Secretariat in Sarajevo.

The RCC itself consists of 46 members, including countries, international organisations and international financial institutions.

#### **4. MISSION OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL**

The positive developments and changed circumstances in South East Europe since the inception of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in 1999. highlighted the need for a change in the approach to regional

cooperation. Consequently, the countries of the region, supported by the European Union and the donor community as well as the Stability Pact, engaged in the process of increasing regional ownership and enhancing regional cooperation with the aim of preparing a phased evolution of the Stability Pact into a more regionally owned and led, streamlined and effective regional cooperation framework, the RCC.

The RCC, relying on an increasing degree of political, financial and staffing ownership by the countries of the region with participation of the EU and interested donor countries and organisations was conceived as an operational arm of the SEECP. In this way regional ownership and responsibility for regional cooperation and more extensively for the future of South East Europe are emphasised, while ensuring continued involvement of the donor community and building upon the legacy of the Stability Pact.

In the Statute, the tasks of the RCC are defined as follows: to sustain focused regional cooperation in South East Europe through a regionally-owned and led framework; to provide political guidance to and receive substantive input from relevant task forces and initiatives active in specific thematic areas of regional co-operation; to promote European and Euro-Atlantic integration; and to provide guidance to the Secretariat of the RCC and its Secretary General. The RCC also provides the SEECP with operational capacities through its Secretariat and task forces.

#### **4. 1. Agenda and priority areas of work**

There are five priority areas for cooperation in the framework of the RCC:

- a. Economic and Social Development
- b. Infrastructure
- c. Justice and Home Affairs
- d. Security Cooperation
- e. Building Human Capital
- f. Parliamentary Cooperation as an overarching theme.

In the context of these priority areas, special attention will be placed on gender mainstreaming, social cohesion and the involvement of civil society.

Bearing in mind that the RCC works under the political umbrella of the SEECP, it will contribute to the overall well-being of the region by



facilitating regional cooperation and support for European and Euro-Atlantic integration, promotion of stability and prosperity in the region as well as fostering of good neighbourly relations, dialogue, mutual respect and understanding and tolerance.

One of the crucial components of its work will be to generate projects of common interest for the countries of the region by mobilising their resources, potential and commitment to regional cooperation.

In addition to this, a strong link with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions will be ensured through the RCC Secretariat's Liaison Office in Brussels aiming at achieving synergy with the programmes and activities of the EU designed for the multibeneficiary benefit to the region. On the other hand, projects will be encouraged coming from the region which reflect its commitment to deepen cooperation in the fields leading to fulfilling requirements and benchmarks of the EU and NATO.

#### **4.2. Role of the Secretariat and Secretary General**

The first Secretary General of the RCC, Mr. Hido Biscevic has been appointed by the SEECP Participating States at the Meeting of Heads of State and Government held in Zagreb in May 2007. The role of the Secretary General, as defined by the Statute, is to promote and facilitate the achievement of the RCC's objectives through coordination of regional cooperation activities and initiatives in South East Europe. The Secretary General chairs the RCC Board's meetings and co-chairs the RCC's Annual Meeting together with the SEECP Chairperson-in-Office. In the framework of his activities, the Secretary General maintains close contacts with all members and partners of the RCC as well as relevant regional initiatives and organisations. Particular emphasis in this context is placed on contacts with the SEECP Participating States.

Secretary General regularly participates at the SEECP meetings at all levels and formats including the specific conferences organised by the Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP.

Close cooperation and contacts with all institutions of the EU and with the EU Member States remains one of the main tasks of the Secretary General. These contacts form part of the overall support to the EU integration processes of South East Europe and aim at ensuring full complementarity of regional cooperation activities with the EU integration process. Besides the EU institutions and Member States,

Secretary General will establish close contacts with other relevant international institutions and organisations, such as NATO and OECD and international financial institutions (World Bank, EBRD, EIB). Contacts with the private sector in South East Europe remain one of the important aspect of the activities of the Secretary General, in particular in the sphere of economic and social development. The Secretary General will establish close cooperation and contacts with civil society actors, in areas of relevance for regional cooperation processes.

The Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat is based in Sarajevo, pursuant to the decision of the SEECP Heads of State and Government taken in Zagreb in May 2007. The Secretariat comprises of the Secretary General and 25 officials and is internally divided in the Expert Pool (Head of Expert Pool, five Senior Experts in priority areas, four Experts, two Assistants), Front Office (Chief of Staff, Spokesperson, two Political Advisers, Junior Political Advisor and two Assistants) and Administrative Unit (Head of Administration, Finance Officer, Administrative Officer, IT/Web Expert, Accountant and Translator).

The main task of the Secretariat is to support the RCC as well as the SEECP in carrying out their tasks, with special emphasis on the preparation and timely implementation of decisions of the RCC Annual Meeting and RCC Board as well as decisions of SEECP Meetings of Heads of State and Government and Ministerial meetings in different formats.

The Secretariat provides technical, organisational and analytical support to the Secretary General as well as to the RCC Annual Meeting and meetings of the RCC Board. It will provide, upon request by the Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP, operational support in preparation of the SEECP Ministerial Meetings and Meetings of Heads of State and Government.

One of the main roles of the Secretariat is to act, through the network of its Expert Pool, as a coordination framework for regional cooperation activities in South East Europe as well as an information and focal point for the activities within this framework.

In the process of the staffing of the Secretariat, the RCC Secretary General was guided, in line with the requirements of Article 20 of the Statute of the RCC, by the competencies of the candidates taking into account gender and geographical balance.

### **4.3. Streamlining and affiliating the regional initiatives in South East Europe**

One of the tasks before the RCC and its Secretariat is to monitor and facilitate the work of many existing regional cooperation forums and initiatives in South East Europe.

Besides the assistance and support by the RCC, through its Secretariat, to the relevant task forces and initiatives in acquiring access to political, technical and financial support for the fulfillment of their objectives at both regional and broader international levels, the RCC will work on the establishment of structured and transparent relationships with both current and future task forces and initiatives. One of the aims of the establishment of such structured relationships is also the avoidance of unnecessary duplication and overlapping of the activities, which could potentially adversely affect regional cooperation processes in South East Europe.

In this context, the RCC shall work on the streamlining of the currently existing initiatives in South East Europe in order to achieve maximum synergy.

With this aim in mind, steps shall be taken in the context of the transition from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe to the RCC, while the existing initiatives acting under the auspices of the Stability Pact, such as Disaster Prevention and Preparedness Initiative (DPPI), South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC), the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) and the Business Advisory Council (BAC), will continue their activities under the umbrella of the RCC.

As per the other initiatives existing in South East Europe with which the RCC has formal relationships or direct representation in the governing or executive bodies (such as Energy Community Secretariat, SECI/Regional Centre for Combatting Organised Crime etc.) the RCC will actively contribute to the streamlining and harmonisation of the activities of these organisations in relation to the other existing initiatives as well as in relation to the priorities of the RCC as defined by the SEECP Heads of State and Government.

In the context of the organisations with which the RCC does not have formalised or direct institutional links, the RCC will aim at establishing

closest possible cooperation in practical terms in order to harmonise the activities in line with proclaimed regional priorities.

While the RCC will actively work on the streamlining and, to maximum possible extent, harmonisation of the activities of regional initiatives in South East Europe, it will also aim at gathering all the initiatives under the RCC umbrella, in order to reach desired level of cohesion of these activities. The role of the RCC in that framework will be the overall coordination and political guidance of relevant initiatives acting under the RCC umbrella and facilitation of relationships of these initiatives with relevant regional and broader international partners, including the EU and NATO institutions.

#### **4.4. Role of the Liaison Office with the European Commission in Brussels**

The RCC Liaison Office in Brussels represents an „extended arm“ of the RCC Secretariat with the primary task of regular contacts and consultations with European Commission and Euro-Atlantic institutions. Legal basis for the establishment of the Liaison Office is the Agreement between the Council of Ministers of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Governments of the other SEECP Participating States, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo on behalf of Kosovo in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, on the Host Country Arrangements for the Secretariat of the Regional Cooperation Council, signed on 14 September 2007 and the Headquarters Agreement between the RCC Secretariat and the Kingdom of Belgium on the Status of the RCC Liaison Office in Brussels. The Draft Headquarters Agreement has been agreed upon with the Kingdom of Belgium and is currently awaiting the finalisation of the internal approval procedure on the Belgian side in order to proceed to its signature.

The main task of the Liaison Office is to represent the RCC activities in priority areas and programmes in Brussels in the EU and NATO institutions and to foster the visibility of the RCC in the Brussels based institutions. The Liaison Office will also have a role in preparation of the visits and missions of the RCC Secretary General and other RCC officials to Brussels as well as in providing support in network related matters concerning contacts of the RCC officials with the EU and NATO institutions in Brussels.

The RCC Liaison Office in Brussels will be directed in its work by the Head of Liaison Office on the two-years-rotation basis between the Head

and Deputy Head of Office with the aim to ensure continuity of work. Besides the Head of Liaison Office and the Deputy Head of Liaison Office, there will be two Advisors, Administrative Officer and an Assistant to the Head of Office.

The RCC Liaison Office in Brussels shall be situated in the premises of the EFTA Secretariat Office in Brussels adjacent to the CEFTA Secretariat. The RCC Secretariat has already concluded the sub-lease agreement for the premises of the Liaison Office with EFTA Secretariat.

It is expected that the RCC Liaison Office in Brussels will start with its activities in the course of June 2008, exact timing depending on the timeframe of signing of the Headquarters Agreement on the Status of the RCC Liaison Office in Brussels with the Kingdom of Belgium.

#### **4.5. Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the RCC for relations with the Presidency of the Council of the European Union**

Pursuant to his competencies under Articles 13 c. and 13 i. of the Statute of the RCC, the Secretary General of the RCC has decided to establish the position of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General of the RCC for relations with the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

This special position within the framework of the RCC Secretariat has been established in order to ensure close and continuous cooperation between the RCC and the Presidency of the Council of the EU, including the incoming Presidencies, with a view to necessitate full focus of the South East Europe's political agenda and European and Euro-Atlantic integrations and enlargement policies within the Agendas of the Presidencies.

The Special Envoy will focus the activities on the establishment of close dialogue and interaction with the Presidency of the Council of the EU in respect of all issues of relevance for the regional cooperation in South Eastern Europe and on the activities and work of the RCC Secretariat. The Special Envoy shall directly interact on a permanent basis with the representatives of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union in Brussels as well as with the representatives of the Presidency of the Council of the EU in respective capitals. This interaction also includes the incoming Presidencies of the Council of the EU. His mandate includes

participation at the meetings, conferences and workshops organised under the auspices of the Presidency of the Council of the EU.

The Special Envoy acts under the authority of the Secretary General of the RCC and is responsible directly to the Secretary General, whilst the competencies and activities of the Special Envoy and the RCC Liaison Office in Brussels remain separate and distinct.

## **5. COMMUNICATING AND PROFILING OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL**

As a newly created organization, the RCC has a unique opportunity and challenge to shape its own place and profile in South East Europe and within the broader international community.

The RCC Secretariat's communication strategy translates the RCC priorities and vision on how to realize concrete goals and objectives, keeping in mind the resources available. These elements enable definition of the RCC mission and key messages, the target publics, and the tactics used to reach to those publics and achieve strategic objectives and goals.

The principal goal is to establish understanding and awareness of the RCC mission to help reinvigorate economic and social development in South East Europe through cooperation and inclusion into European and Euro-Atlantic structures. The RCC Secretariat, its Secretary General, the Head of Expert Pool, the Heads of Expert Units, the Spokesperson and other staff intend to use every opportunity to promote the RCC's public policies, projects and activities, and ensure that they are visible, profiled, understood and welcomed.

The strategy involves communication with the media and maintenance of regular contacts with journalists and media workers to encourage them to report on RCC activities on television, radio, newspapers and Internet in as positive a light as possible. It also includes outreach activities, production of promotional materials, such as factsheets, and maintenance of informative and updated RCC website, aimed at reaching wider international and national publics.

A communication challenge is to find the right niche in a situation when the RCC is not country specific but transnational, when some countries of the region already host many international organizations, and most of the

countries and their media are turned to national issues primarily. Hence, the communication needs to be tailored to the joint strategic goals of the countries of the region as well as to the specific needs of each country, demonstrating that they are mutually inclusive.

The communication will offer more opportunities in places with RCC presence, while in other countries the communication tactics will have to be adjusted, and various high-profile events and visits, in conjunction with electronic communication, used to convey our messages.

The targeted publics are the media, the governments and public officials, especially the policy- and opinion-makers, civil society groups (including religious, academia, and researchers), businessmen/investors, the general public (especially the youth) of South Eastern Europe, as well as international organizations and donors.

The strategy defines specific objectives to measure progress towards achievement of the main goal and the tactics as the recommended actions to fulfill each objective. Key objectives include:

#### 5.1.

Planning ahead, together with the Secretary General and the RCC Secretariat departments, to ensure optimal exposure and coverage of RCC activities.

#### 5.2

Using various means of communication with the media, such as press releases and media advisories, statements, interviews, articles, press conferences and other media events, as well as holding background meetings with journalists, to increase awareness of RCC activities and generate public interest.

#### 5.3.

Establishing relationships and positioning the RCC as a key regional player through conducting permanent outreach among politicians, opinion-makers, think-thanks, diplomats, public officials, students, academia, businessmen, etc.

#### 5.4.

Creating and maintaining an updated RCC website to reach out to various Internet publics.

5.5.

Designing other public information materials, such as factsheets and publications, to increase knowledge of the organization.

5.6.

Preparing and disseminating reports and other documents to targeted stakeholders, to ensure transparency and attract continuous support of RCC contributors.

5.7.

Organizing special events for the media and other publics, to raise the RCC profile and improve communication.

5.8.

Promoting internal cohesion, maintaining RCC staff motivation and gaining their support.

The RCC Secretariat and its Secretary General realize the indispensability of managing relations with RCC publics in order to communicate the organization's values and achieve success. Communication is key and integral to the RCC Secretariat's work.