



International Conference
**“Western Balkans in 2020 – Overcoming the Economic Crisis
and Developing Competitive Economies”**

Sarajevo, 24-25 February 2010

Concluding Remarks

A two-day regional conference “Western Balkans in 2020 – Overcoming the Economic Crisis and Developing Competitive Economies” which was organised by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat on the occasion of marking the 2nd anniversary of the organization, closed on 25 February 2010 in Sarajevo. The conference was supported by the Balkan Trust Fund.

Participants analysed the impact of global economic crisis on the Western Balkan countries and assessed different policy actions taken, as well as the ways to achieve better competitive position of the region in global economy. The key issue which arose from the discussion is capacity building for development and implementation of appropriate policy options and adequate use of available resources so as to emerge from the crises and, in a long run, achieve steady economic growth based on knowledge and considered competitive advantages of the region.

Three key areas were identified in which further activities in the region will be planned:

- Considering human resources in the region as a key prerequisite of better competitiveness in a long run (education, research and development infrastructure, innovation capacities);
- Creating stimulating conditions for knowledge-based development (role of institutions, business environment, international networking, improvement of cooperation in the region and EU integration);
- Establishing wider cooperation mechanisms which would provide for synchronised activities of over 40 regional organisations and initiatives already operating in different areas and contributing to a more harmonised approach of the region in tackling numerous challenges – from trade, investments, health, research and development, to fight against organised crime and natural and other disasters.

Participants also foresaw development of a long-term regional platform that would facilitate strategic policy options focused on overcoming the crisis and EU accession – launching the project Western Balkan Futures 2020 which would follow the long-term EU 2020 projections as a continuation of the Lisbon Strategy which was developed in 2000 for the period until 2010.

Specific insights of academic institutions from the region and EU member states, European Commission, international financial institutions, OECD, CEFTA Secretariat and other regional initiatives, as well as business people from the region, indicated the main issues the region is facing in the area of economic and social development. Common formula for all mentioned desirable directions of operations is: good governance and the ways to achieve it.

A conclusion is that human resources were in focus at the beginning as well as at the end of the two-day debate which signifies a new state of mind in the region, changes in perception of what the region needs and what has to be supported, and, as a final result, opening room for a new system of values in which knowledge and creativity enjoy the highest appreciation.

Extensive agreement among a wide range of institutions, organisations or independent experts facilitates formulating a detailed agenda which will determine further steps in the process launched by this conference to be supported by top level European and international partners dealing with long-term forecasting, development of human resources and improvement of competitive potentials.