



Strategic Work Programme of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)

2009 – 2010

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1. Introductory remarks

1.1. Overview

In the course of implementation of its Strategic Work Programme for 2008-2009, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has clearly profiled itself as a key partner of the international community for issues related to the cooperation in South East Europe as well as for general perspectives and development of South East Europe, acting under the political guidance of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). In this framework, the RCC and its Secretariat have closely cooperated with the SEECP and its Chairmanship-in-Office, combining and joining the efforts to enhance and strengthen regional cooperation in South East Europe.

In this period, the regional cooperation in South East Europe acquired new characteristics, becoming a genuine regionally-owned network of cooperation among the governments of South East Europe. It has been demonstrated that regional cooperation through an enhanced ownership principle and the European agenda are linked. The advancement of RCC members from South East Europe on the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration has additionally developed potentials and readiness for regional cooperation and its further strengthening. Conversely, by strengthening regional cooperation, South East Europe sends a message on its preparedness for moving forward in its European agenda. This is particularly important in the context of the current political climate within the European Union (EU), of the refocusing of the international agenda and of the effects of the global economic and financial crisis.

The region became increasingly aware that the existing differences in views do not represent an obstacle but have instead acted as an incentive towards the strengthening of cooperation in the development related sectors. At the same time, there is a growing awareness that the remaining differences have to be resolved with added urgency and self-responsibility of the actors from the region. Mutually acceptable solutions to outstanding issues should be reached in a pragmatic manner.

The past year also witnessed the increasing awareness that in the region with a rather complex historical heritage of ethnic, cultural, religious and other character, there is a clearly existing will to strengthen the culture of mutual respect, dialogue, tolerance and reconciliation in order to make progress towards successful cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

Building on the results achieved in the first year of the RCC and considering the challenges ahead, all actors involved should continue to work even more energetically, determined to undertake all efforts aimed at further development of regional cooperation in South East Europe.

1.2. Tackling the effects of the global economic crisis

Decisive, comprehensive and accelerated measures are particularly necessary against the backdrop of the current economic and financial crisis in Europe.

All efforts must be put into joint action to address the adverse effects of the current economic and financial crisis to the recently most dynamic emerging markets in Europe. Against the

unresolved political issues, the added adverse impact of the global crisis may lead to economic stagnation, or even to the deterioration of the overall social and political situation in the region.

In order to address the adverse effects of current economic and financial crisis, the RCC needs to provide a new impetus for regional cooperation in South East Europe, in particular, in terms of avoidance of economic protectionism regarding the access to the markets in the region. The crisis calls for combined and joined efforts that may provide a new incentive and approach to prevail over remaining political stereotypes, agitations or hesitations towards the regional cooperation.

In this view, efforts at the national levels aimed at countering the adverse effects of global economic and financial crisis in the region should be complemented with the activities and targeted efforts at the regional level, in order to achieve adequate synergetic approach and effects. The RCC shall continue to provide the platform for such action at the regional level, gathering all relevant actors in this context.

1.3. The way ahead

Further advancement of regional cooperation in the priority areas of the RCC activities, including through implementation of concrete projects, will contribute to the overall development of South East Europe and to the region moving closer towards the EU, in line with the established policies and the Thessaloniki agenda and on the basis of individual merits.

The RCC supports all initiatives and activities that render the European perspective more tangible and maintain the region high on the EU agenda. In this context, the RCC welcomes that the European perspective of the Western Balkans has been repeatedly reaffirmed by the EU, most recently at the December 2008 Meeting of the EU Council.

The RCC members from the region, for their part, should remain committed to advance the implementation of their obligations and commitments arising out of the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), including by resolving the outstanding issues in order to assist each other along the European and Euro-Atlantic path and guarantee lasting peace, stability, reconciliation and cooperation in this part of Europe. The RCC encourages all members to take pragmatic steps towards this direction.

The RCC is involved in the preparation and holding of a conference on the Western Balkans to be organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission in Brussels in December 2009. The conference will address issues related to the impact of financial crisis on the region, on the progress of the enlargement process as well as on regional cooperation, with a particular emphasis on the fields of energy, transport and development of infrastructure.

The implementation of activities planned for realization in the course of 2009-2010 will demand even stronger networking, interaction and contacts between the RCC and its Secretariat with the governments of the region, the EU institutions, IFIs and other relevant international partners.

South East Europe is at crossroads again. All efforts must be joined to provide further advancement of this part of Europe and avoid stagnation or backsliding.

The RCC stands ready to continue to provide additional impetus and full support to this aim, also by identifying and elaborating result-oriented projects.

2. Political aspects and general framework of RCC activities

2.1. Coordination, streamlining and networking activities

In line with the provisions of the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the RCC and the Statute of the RCC, and addressing the priority areas of cooperation, the RCC will, focus on the following activities:

- Enhancing coordination of regional cooperation activities to the benefit of the overall development of South East Europe.
- Raising awareness of the importance of regional cooperation for social and economic development of the region.
- Forging confidence and advancement on the path to the EU and Euro-Atlantic integration through the implementation of the RCC Communication Strategy.
- Advancement of cooperation with the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), the EU and relevant international organizations and IFIs with the aim to further develop regional projects.
- Ensuring that all RCC members are able to participate in the RCC activities and meetings as well as in all other pertinent regional initiatives and fora.
- Providing additional expertise and support to regular meetings and activities of the permanent networking mechanism involving the RCC National Coordinators from South East Europe, the European Commission and relevant IFIs, through the RCC Secretariat. This is aimed at identifying concrete regional projects in priority areas of the RCC activities.
- Providing active overall support and assistance to the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office in the implementation of their priorities and agenda, including in preparing the SEECP Summit and ministerial meetings.
- Conclusion of the comprehensive and detailed process of streamlining existing taskforces and initiatives in South East Europe with the aim of advancing coordination, avoiding overlapping and increasing visibility, effectiveness and transparency of regional cooperation activities.

2.2. Cooperation with the EU and other Brussels-based institutions

In line with the general framework of activities, the RCC Secretariat, acting in particular through its Liaison Office in Brussels and the Special Envoy of the RCC Secretary General for Relations with the Presidency of the Council of the EU, will focus on the following activities:

- Further strengthening of cooperation and coordination with the EU and other Brussels-based institutions on strategic aspects of regional cooperation in South East Europe.

- Maintaining intensive contacts with the current Presidency of the Council of the EU as well as incoming Presidencies, the European Commission and the European Parliament, in order to keep regional cooperation in South East Europe in full focus of the EU and its institutions.
- Continuation of the coordination and planning of joint activities with the current Presidency of the Council of the EU as well as incoming Presidencies and the European Commission in supporting and promoting regional cooperation processes in South East Europe and contributing to pinpointing and elaborating projects of paramount regional interest.
- Participation in the preparation and holding of the December 2009 conference on the Western Balkans organized by the Swedish Presidency of the EU Council and the European Commission.
- Continuation of participation of the RCC Secretary General and representatives of the RCC Secretariat in meetings and events related to Western Balkans and South East Europe, organized under the auspices of the EU institutions.
- Continuation of regular contacts and exchanges of views between the officials of the RCC Secretariat and the representatives of the EU institutions, including through regular briefings for the working bodies of the EU Council (e.g. Working Group on Western Balkans – COWEB).
- Consolidating the role of the RCC as a key interlocutor of the EU and its institutions in South East Europe, in particular, in identifying possible initiatives and elaborating projects of strategic importance for the economic and social development of the region.
- Contribution to planning and programming of the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme, in particular, through identification of multi-beneficiary and regional projects to be possibly financed by the European Commission, as a result of regular contacts and exchanges of views with the RCC members from South East Europe.
- Continuation of regular contacts and cooperation with North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and other Brussels-based institutions active in the priority areas of the RCC.

2.3. Cooperation with the International Financial Institutions (IFIs)

In order to enhance cooperation and coordination with the relevant IFIs, within the existing donor cooperation structures, including, in particular, the Western Balkans Investment Framework, presently in the process of being established, the RCC will focus on the following activities:

- Aligning the regional cooperation agenda with plans and programmes of the relevant IFIs.
- Advancement of cooperation and coordination with relevant IFIs through active participation of the RCC in existing donor cooperation and coordination structures, in developing possible large-scale regional projects within the comprehensive approach to tackle adverse effects of the global economic crisis in the region.
- Keeping close working contact and deepening of cooperation with interested IFIs such as the World Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the Council of Europe Development Bank, in particular, through active participation of the RCC in the existing donor cooperation and coordination structures.

- Continuation of the participation of the representatives of the RCC Secretariat in the meetings of the IFI Advisory Group (IFI AG).

3. Priority Areas of Cooperation

3.1. Economic and Social Development

In order to boost economic and social development of South East Europe and tackle the adverse effects of the global economic crisis in the region, the RCC will focus on the following activities:

3.1.1. Business and Investment Climate

- Organizing a ministerial-level Public Private Partnership (PPP) conference securing political commitment to PPP development model and launching regional PPP Network and providing post-launch support to the PPP Network in performing detailed analysis of regional PPP-enabling environment and commencing the harmonization of institutional and legislative requirements for PPP delivery.
- Working with and support to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Investment Compact to improve the investment climate and to encourage private sector development in the region. The RCC will assist in field research and ensure feedback from local authorities and business communities.
- Assisting consultations related to the proposed initiative for the establishment of the South East Europe Investment Bank (SEEIB).

3.1.2. Support to Small and Medium Size Enterprises

- Pursuing the support of IFIs and commercial lenders leading to the establishment of a regional financial instrument aimed at supporting female entrepreneurship.
- Managing South East European female entrepreneurs network under the auspices of the RCC and ensuring donor support for capacity building.

3.1.3. Competitiveness

- Strengthening on-going cooperation with the OECD in the identification and promotion of actions to improve the overall competitiveness of the economies of the region.

3.1.4. Trade

- Providing assistance in the process of resolution of open issues related to the implementation of CEFTA.

3.1.5. Information and Communication Technology (ICT)

- Collaboration with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Secretariat of the eSEE Initiative in organizing an eSEE ministerial conference with the purpose of redefining priorities and deadlines of the eSEE Agenda Plus.

3.1.6. Employment

- Assisting and supporting the efforts aimed at reviving the South East European Employment Network.

3.1.7. Social Dialogue

- Organizing and mediating in an initial bipartite meeting between representatives of the region's employers' and trade unions' organizations, with the aim of identifying common concerns in the context of the economic crisis.
- Ensuring participation of social partners in the South East European Employment Network.

3.1.8. Health

- Providing expert and political support to the establishment of the South East European Health Network Secretariat
- Promoting regional public health programs to the donor community.

3.2. Infrastructure and Energy

In order to continue support to the strengthening of regional infrastructure and energy cooperation as a prerequisite for sustainable development of South East Europe, the RCC will focus on the following activities:

3.2.1. Energy

- Continuation of developing synergies with the Energy Community.
- Launching, jointly with the Central European Initiative (CEI), the initiative on sustainable energy development.
- Co-organizing, jointly with the parliaments from the region and in coordination with the Energy Community Secretariat (ECS) a sequence of tailor-made workshops for parliamentary committees responsible for energy issues from South East Europe.

3.2.2. Transport and Infrastructure

- Elaborating, indicating and proposing, together with the South East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO), based on the input from the RCC members from the region, trans-regional infrastructural projects and acceleration of the realization of the defined infrastructural transport corridors in the region.
- Preparation and organization of a high-level event that would strongly support implementation of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly Resolution on Road Safety by the RCC members from South East Europe.
- Continuation of the assistance in the implementation of the European Common Aviation Area Agreement (ECAA) through the support for the participation of the countries of the

region in the South East European Functional Airspace Blocks Approach Initiative (SEE FABA).

- Examining the possibilities for regional cooperation between civil aviation authorities in different areas, such as accident investigation, licensing, safety oversight of airlines etc.

3.2.3. Environment

- Continuing of cooperation with the Regional Environment Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) in combating Climate Change.
- Organizing, jointly with REC, and in the context of the implementation of the framework programme, three thematic high-level events: Natura 2000 in South East Europe, Multilateral cooperation on environmental issues through Multilateral Environmental Agreements in South East Europe and Priority Environmental Infrastructure Investments in South East Europe.
- Support to the implementation of the EU-funded Regional Environmental Network for Accession (RENA) programme, once the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme for South East Europe (ReReP) project has been completed.
- Organization, in cooperation with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UN ECE) Water Convention Secretariat, the Global Water Partnership and the International Sava River Basin Commission, the conference on Transboundary Water Resources Management in South East Europe. This will include the following parts: (i) institutional and legal settings for cooperation, (ii) multipurpose use of water resources and (iii) climate change adaptation. The results of the conference shall be presented at the fifth meeting of the Parties to the Water Convention in November 2009.

3.3. Justice and Home Affairs

In the area of justice and home affairs, the RCC is working to find innovative ways to collaborate, deliver practical results and real benefits for the citizens, as well as to ensure that regional cooperation releases the desired outcomes and results. To this end, the RCC will focus on the following activities:

3.3.1. Implementation of the SEECP documents in the area of justice and home affairs

- Elaboration of a multi-annual regional strategy on justice and home affairs, based on the rule of law and the promotion and protection of fundamental rights. This strategy will encompass children's rights, justice system reform, security and liberty, partnership with civil society and enhanced cooperation with the EU and international organizations, on the basis of a strategic coordination with the EU and consultations with the RCC members from South East Europe.

3.3.2. Ensuring convergence

- Preparation of a consolidated compilation of international legal instruments in force in the area of justice and home affairs, for the RCC members from South East Europe, to be available at the RCC website.

3.3.3. Organized crime

- Facilitating, through the regionally owned and led framework, focused cooperation to improve the effectiveness of the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of the trans-border organized crime, including through providing support to the RCC members from the region to enhance law enforcement capacity to fight organized crime.
- Continuation of cooperation and coordination of projects with the Southeast European Cooperative Regional Initiative Regional Center for Combating Trans-border Crime (SECI Center) on the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation between the RCC Secretariat and the SECI Center.

3.3.4. Courts and Prosecutors' cooperation

- Promoting more effective, permanent and functional prosecutors' cooperation, including through ensuring continuity, common solutions and connectivity between the South Eastern Europe Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG) and the Prosecutors' Network in South-Eastern Europe (PROSECO).
- Providing support, in cooperation with the International Association of Prosecutors (IAP), to the organization of a regional annual Forum of the Prosecutors General from South East Europe, after consultations with the RCC members from the region.
- Contributing to the development and facilitating the implementation of technical cooperation projects and activities, aimed at strengthening the integrity and capacity of justice institutions, particularly, courts, prosecution services and police, in cooperation with the EU, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), Council of Europe, OECD and Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

3.3.5. Fight against corruption

- Promoting the establishment and implementation of a more coherent and joint approach to address anti-corruption at the regional level through Regional Anti-corruption Initiative (RAI).
- Ensuring the continuation of joint projects of the RCC Secretariat and RAI on Anti-corruption Consultancy and the Survey on Integrity and Resistance to Corruption of the Criminal Judicial System in Countries of South East Europe.
- Organization of the Regional Conference on Justice Systems Integrity.

3.3.6. Migration, asylum and refugees

- Providing political assistance and support to the Migration, Asylum, Refugees Return Initiative (MARRI) as well as facilitating consultations on visa regime issues and providing support in identifying and elaborating projects related to the integrated approach to migration through dialogue, cooperation and partnership with countries of origin and transit.

3.3.7. Police and law enforcement cooperation

- Providing political support to the South East European Police Cooperation Convention (PCC) and its Secretariat as well as in raising visibility of this new regional instrument.
- Facilitation of the continuation of the programs on Organized Crime Training Network (OCTN), the International Criminal Police Organization (INTERPOL) I24/7 IT system connecting border control points and the Crime Analysis Project, by the South East European Police Chiefs' Association (SEPCA), through assistance in fund-raising and providing political support.
- Contributing, together with SEPCA, to the organization of the 2010 Stolen Vehicles Crime Conference.
- Providing political and strategic assistance and support to the EU-funded Project on the Establishment of International Law-Enforcement Coordination Units (ILECUs).

3.3.8. Developing partnerships and coordination of regional taskforces and initiatives

- Maintaining strategic partnership with UNODC, in particular regarding the implementation of the Regional Programme 2009-2011 "Promoting the Rule of Law and Human Security in South East Europe".
- Mobilizing resources for the implementation of regional projects in the justice and home affairs area through the organization of a meeting of potential donors.
- Continuation of coordination of activities of regional taskforces and initiatives in South East Europe in the area of justice and home affairs, on the basis of the established platform.

3.4. Security Cooperation

The efforts of the RCC in preserving effective and valuable activities of regional initiatives and taskforces in the area of security cooperation shall continue while, at the same time, emphasis will be placed on the development of possible cooperation mechanisms that are supported by the RCC members from the region. To this end, the RCC will focus on the following activities:

3.4.1. Disaster Preparedness and Prevention

- Establishment of the South-Eastern and Central Europe Catastrophe Insurance Facility (SECE-CRIF), a joint project of the World Bank, the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UN ISDR) and the RCC Secretariat, by signing of the stakeholders agreement.
- Providing active support, jointly with the World Bank and the UN ISDR, to the efforts aimed at the establishment of the South East Europe Firefighting Regional Center (SEEFREC) and ensuring compatibility with the EU Civil Protection Mechanism.
- Providing support to the further institutional strengthening, as well as, to the substantial activities of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for South Eastern Europe (DPPI SEE).

3.4.2. Non-proliferation of small arms and light weapons

- Initiating a process of transforming the South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) into a fully fledged regionally owned initiative.

3.4.3. Defence policy cooperation

- Providing support and active assistance to possible institutionalization of regular meetings in the format of the Defence Policy Directors and International Cooperation Directors of the Ministries of Defence from South East Europe under the auspices of the RCC, following consultations with the RCC members from South East Europe.
- Providing support and assistance to possible establishment of regular meetings of the Heads of Military Intelligence from South East Europe, following consultations with the RCC members from South East Europe.
- Initiating the elaboration of a registry of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) working in the security cooperation field in South East Europe.
- Elaboration and development of a regional project on Military Base Conversion, in cooperation with the UNDP, following consultations with the RCC members from South East Europe.

3.5. Building Human Capital and Cross Cutting Issues

The area of building human capital remains crucial for the overall development of South East Europe with long-term effects on, virtually, all segments of society. In this view, the RCC will focus on the following activities:

3.5.1. Education

- Preparation of an action plan, based on the input from the RCC members from the region, regarding development of education programs and activities within the education systems in the areas of Quality Assurance, Life Long Learning and Evidence Based Policy Making.
- Providing support in raising awareness in the region regarding the potentials of the Knowledge Based Economy as a tool for accelerated development.
- Providing support in raising awareness in the region regarding the importance and potentials of building a Trust Based Society as a tool for social cohesion necessary to focus social energy on accelerated development.
- Providing support to the activities of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE), in particular, regarding the enhancement of the network of regional and international key actors and promotion of regional ownership.
- Providing additional assistance and advice regarding legal aspects of the establishment of the South East European Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning (SEE ECL) as a regional initiative with legal personality.

3.5.2. Science and Research

- Providing active assistance and support to the process of development and implementation of the Regional Strategy on Research and Development for the Western Balkans, following conclusions of the Ministerial Conference.

3.5.3. Culture

- Active participation in coordination of the activities and specific projects and programs of regional importance, in particular the Ljubljana Process in the field of cultural heritage.

3.6. Parliamentary Cooperation

- Providing active support and assistance to the activities of the Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in South Eastern Europe through the organization of joint events.

4. Concluding remarks

In line with the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the RCC, the RCC Statute, this Strategic Work Programme covering the period 2009-2010 and the operational guidelines provided by the Board of the RCC, the RCC, under the political guidance of the SEECP and in close cooperation with the Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP, will continue to position itself as a key interlocutor and pivotal framework for strengthening, focusing, coordinating and streamlining regional cooperation activities in South East Europe. Having in mind the inclusive character of regional cooperation in South East Europe and interest of each and any of the individual Members to benefit from the overall development of our region, the implementation of the Strategic Work Programme 2009-2010 will provide a prerequisite for the continuation of development and further profiling of the activities in the RCC framework, as a solid confirmation and proof of the unreserved commitment of all RCC members to the unhindered deepening of such cooperation. The envisaged activities, both in the general sphere and in the concrete priority areas of cooperation, represent an important opportunity to clearly demonstrate forward looking orientation of South East Europe, in the context of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration processes. On that path, targeted regional project cooperation and activities within the priority areas should be further developed to match the needs and goals of the region with agendas and financial programmes of the IFIs. Challenges of the global economic and financial crisis should be seen as an opportunity to forge new partnerships in meeting the goals in priority areas, as well as to pace up and focus regional cooperation activities. Cooperation with the EU and its institutions, in particular with the Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, will remain of crucial importance. In this context, regional cooperation, operationally led by the RCC, under the SEECP political guidance, adds value to efforts, at the national level, to contribute to stability, security and development of South East Europe.