



**OPENING ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC), HIDO BIŠČEVIĆ, AT
THE**

3rd CONGRESS ON ROADS

**Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina
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Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very grateful for the opportunity to open the third Congress on Roads and to welcome you today on behalf of the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat as co-organizer of this important event. The event brings to the table high-level representatives of national authorities from South East Europe responsible for road traffic as well as the EU experts, regional transport organizations and academics.

I wish to thank you for being with us today and, in particular, I wish to thank B&H Association of Consulting Engineers (ACE), and B&H Ministry of Communications and Transport for their continued effort in organizing this important event.

I would like to emphasize that ACE is our reliable partner and to take this opportunity to praise its engagement and firm commitment to help the countries of the region to overcome the challenges in transport sector on their path towards the EU. It is worth mentioning that we have already organized two successful conferences that tackled the issue of road safety and we intend to continue working together to provide conditions for the follow-ups.

We are all aware of the poor condition of transport infrastructure in the SEE region. Less than half the road networks are considered to be in good or fair condition. This leads to extra costs and contributes to uneven economic and social development, isolating many areas from markets and business opportunity. Road safety is another problem, leading to deaths and injuries, and burdening the economy with the costs of in some cases up to 2% of annual GDP.

There is a genuine understanding that new or improved road infrastructure brings immediate and long-term economic benefits in modern and developing economies. Therefore, all regional countries have ambitious plans to invest in their road networks, but are particularly constrained by the current economic and financial issues.

Regional cooperation in this sector calls for well-integrated policies, regional planning and effective coordination of investment activities by identifying measures to enhance the efficiency of the sector and to examine the options for financing construction and maintenance of road infrastructure.

Unfortunately, the road network in the region has been neglected over the past period while transport needs have continuously changed over the years in response to new requirements.

Even though, it can be noted that the SEE road network is in the constant process of modernization and that regional governments are eager to build roads within their national borders, the countries in the region have to invest more efforts to upgrade the current road routes while putting special focus on the poor connections at cross-border points. They also have to encourage the combined and multimodal transport based on internationally recognized procedures, as well as to put effort on removing physical and administrative obstacles to free flow in road and also in rail and air transport.

Surely, the construction of wider network of motorways will yield its results over the coming years and citizens will benefit from it in all aspects. Developed transport infrastructure as the backbone of economy, would serve as a catalyst for long-term economic growth, improved competitiveness and social and economic development in SEE.

As one of the topic in the agenda is planning the infrastructure development, RCC recommend to include different levels (supranational, national, regional and local) and different stakeholders (governments, parliaments, business, civil society, think-thanks, universities, etc.). This approach can ensure reflection of different interests and reaching the balanced development, effective regional planning and coordination.

Moreover, RCC recommends a more holistic approach – integration and concentration on planning different sectoral infrastructures (energy, transport and environment) which in the end demands strengthened cooperation among the major regional infrastructure cooperation frameworks. Such an approach can bring numerous benefits to the countries and address the increasing regional and global challenges, in particular climate change and adverse environmental impact of the road traffic sector.

We all know that the road infrastructure investments are very demanding in terms of necessary financing but also the time needed for their completion. Countries cannot afford

to fund these only from their national budgets and that is why some other available financing mechanisms should be used.

The Western Balkan Investment Framework (WBIF), regional Multi-beneficiary IPA (MB IPA), as well as the newly created Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) aimed to achieve the EU's 2020 goals, are some of the important tools to support financing the transport infrastructure. Access to EU funds could be used as a way to better coordinate investment activities at the regional level.

Countries in the region also need to establish a favorable investment climate to encourage private sector participation in financing road transport. Public Private Partnership (PPP) schemes should be based on different private sector inputs, including capital of insurance companies, investment funds and even private savings. RCC contributed to establishing the SEE PPP Network in order to support financing infrastructure projects, amongst others.

In order to achieve concrete and tangible results in this sector, the relevant national authorities need to demonstrate strong political will and be firmly committed to the transport policy reforms while more strongly cooperating at regional level. Governments and private sector need to find ways of better communicating their needs and plans to each other in order to exploit the benefits of well-developed road infrastructure.

In light of accession process of the countries in the region, I truly believe that RCC could contribute to the promotion of regional approach towards identification and launching the concrete infrastructure projects in this area as well as to facilitate access to the available above mentioned EU funding instruments.

At the same time, we are calling for a network of highways encompassing the Balkans. Not having highways as well as efficient railways linking the capitals of the countries in the region is unacceptable. It is high time to connect the region.

Let me finish by saying that joining efforts and resources towards efficient and well-developed transport network will allow us to fulfil our common mission.

Thank you!