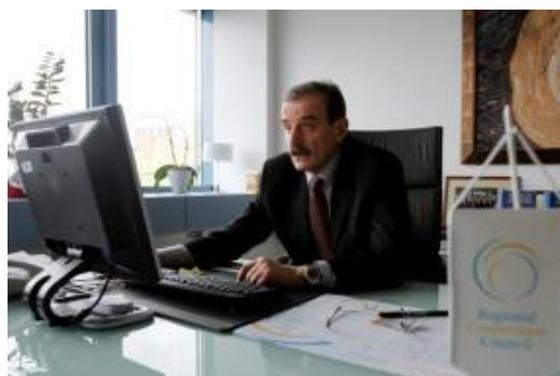


## IN FOCUS

### **RCC ANNUAL MEETING - MIRROR IMAGE: MUCH REMAINS TO BE DONE, by Hido Biscevic, Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council**

Reflecting on the recent Summit of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Annual Meeting, one can quickly come to a simple conclusion: it was a moment of truth for the region, providing a mirror image of a true state of affairs among the member states. At both meetings and, certainly, during the preparatory proceedings at different levels, under the Serbia's SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office (C-i-O), the opportunity was there to observe where the region stands at this point in time, what are the most important problems and challenges, what cumbersome hurdles still need to be addressed and resolved and, last but not least, what still lays ahead in order to deal with the alarming effects of the economic and social crisis.



Indeed, a moment of truth for the region.

First, meetings proved the continuity of a mixture of positive developments, in terms of advancement towards the EU and Euro-Atlantic integration, and a number of residual setbacks, in terms of unresolved issues and open differences bearing potentials for tensions and instability. But, more than before, the meetings indicated that such a mixture of “pluses and minuses” should not continue as it would produce a strategic impasse, imbalance and divisions within the region, with broader strategic consequences. The need for a greater leap forward transpired, even amidst the opposing positions hampering that same leap forward.

Second, the meetings proved that evident political differences and opposing positions regarding several sensitive issues, should no compromise and pragmatic solutions are soon found and agreed upon by the parties, may have a stalemating impact on regional cooperation, whereby a genuine regional cooperation may be substituted by a mere lip service and ineffective routine. A strategic interest to find durable solutions for all-inclusiveness became more than evident.

Thirdly, the meetings and discussions also proved the need to involve the region in an in-depth analysis and honest debate about how to proceed with the regional cooperation in such circumstances. The fact that final declaration was not adopted, along with many other perpetuating issues, strongly suggested that a time has come to reflect comprehensively about the future of cooperation within the SEECP framework. As the SEECP C-i-O framework was transferred from Belgrade to Skopje, one should expect that the reform of the current cooperation architecture in our region will be highly on the agenda in the coming months, including through possible establishment of a Wise Men Group or coordination at the level of the SEECP Political Directors with a strong involvement of the EU institutions. This process, as indicated also during the debates in Belgrade, will have to find a measured form of consolidation without institutionalization. It will have to be focused on elaborating ideas how to enhance political dialogue within the region, regional responsibility in dealing with open issues, the overall profile of the region and its international presence, etc. In addition, given the changing realities in the region over the last years – EU advancement, maturity, common interests, etc. – it may also call for developing a new statutory settings for the RCC, perhaps even the adaptation of the current structure of the Secretariat in order to further align the RCC work with the EU enlargement strategy when preparing the working platform for the period beyond 2013.

As for the SEECP, the ways and forms will have to be found to consolidate attained level of cooperation, precisely because of political realities in the region – anything else would lead to ineffective and declaratory pattern of cooperation, the more so as some countries from the region are to become EU members or will be approaching the membership whilst others may still be preoccupied with their internal or bilateral problems and kept away from EU membership for a protracted period of time: the interest for and approach to regional cooperation may very much differ in such a scenario.

Fourth, the meetings proved the growing awareness of the alarming impact of the current economic crisis on the overall social and political situation in the region. More than on many previous occasions, the region recognized the need to jointly elaborate recovery and development projects in several priority areas. Among other points, the commitment to proceed with initiative to reconstruct and modernize South East European railway system within the EU “Connecting Europe Facility” programme should provide a solid basis for a concrete administrative and expert follow-up, on a national level and with the EU and international partners. In addition, it also indicated one possible way of reforming the pattern of work within the SEECP, e.g. focusing Summit meetings on a specific highly important and commonly shared interests of the region.

Last but not least, meetings proved the importance and value of the Regional Cooperation Council. Whilst on the political level current realities often make it difficult to keep the regional cooperation fully in speed, reminding us that the fuel for the engine of cooperation in

South East Europe still comes more from Brussels than from a regionally embraced genuine will, the RCC in turn additionally proved the added value of the persistent work and its "brick by brick" approach in re-building the scattered and fragmented potentials of the region. Personally, I take the adoption of my Annual Report, with a detailed scoreboard of concrete deliverables and results from the implementation of the Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013, as a confirmation and appreciation of the work done by the entire RCC Secretariat.

In the period ahead, the continuity of this work will have to be ensured, in particular in view of the forthcoming change at the helm of RCC, with Mr. Goran Svilanovic, the new Secretary General, taking over the management in only a few months.

*Hido Bišćević took office as the first Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council on 1 January 2008. A Croatian diplomat, Mr Bišćević previously served as the State Secretary for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia (2003-2007), Ambassador to the Russian Federation (1997-2002), Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs (1995-1997), Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, accredited to the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan (1993-1995), Ambassador and Adviser to the Foreign Minister (1992), and Head of Department for Asian and Arab Countries (1992). Before joining the diplomatic service, Mr Bišćević was the Editor-in-Chief of the Vjesnik daily (1990-1992) and Foreign Affairs Editor at the same newspaper (1985-1989). [Detailed biography of Hido Biscevic is available at the RCC website.](#)*

## OUR SOUTH EAST EUROPE

### ARTICLE by Ivan Mrkic, State Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Serbia

#### *Regional fora - frameworks for establishing peace and prosperity for the peoples of South East Europe*

The atmosphere of cooperation and an active interaction in South East Europe was created due to the dedicated efforts of all countries of the region, and above all, the trust that the pursuit of good-neighbourly relations is deeply rooted in human nature, and not a mere fulfilment of conditions.

Continuous dialogue among the peoples in the region opens the door through which the spirit of good-neighbourliness spreads steadily.

It is clear that without a strong and continuing cooperation within the region, opportunities for cooperation with other regional organizations, such as the EU itself, would have been narrowed.

The regional initiatives and fora are the frameworks where we aim to meet the goal of establishing lasting peace and prosperity for the peoples in the region of South East Europe.

The Republic of Serbia has demonstrated its commitment to strengthen regional cooperation, by holding chairmanships of a number of important initiatives. At the end of the last year and early this year, we brought to an end our presidency over the Central European Initiative (CEI); the Migration, Asylum and Refugees Regional Initiative (MARRI); and the Adriatic-Ionian Initiative (AII). On 15 June this year we completed the chairmanship-in-office of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) by organizing the Summit of Heads of States and Governments. Since January this year, Serbia had also presided over the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), which ended in June as well.

For a little more than four years after its establishment, the operational arm of the SEEC, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), played a very important role in accelerating the reform processes and bringing the region closer to the European Union. The RCC has successfully established a new concept of regional cooperation based on the active relationship of all the relevant subjects, of all the participants, international organizations and financial institutions, and the donor community.

We highly appreciate RCC's engagement at the international level so far, especially in light of the positioning in the EU institutions and the effort towards forming a positive image of the region as a whole.

We believe that the project-oriented regional cooperation is a key mechanism for the effective implementation of political and economic priorities of all countries in the region.

We are particularly interested to see that the next steps to rationalize the existing network of regional initiatives, the Secretariat and the centres, are based on a realistic perception of their role and are focused on the project-oriented function of activity. Emphasis should be placed on institutional, administrative and functional capacity building of all South East European countries in the process of European integration.

The Republic of Serbia is interested in improving the investment climate in the region, development of energy and infrastructure, through the implementation of the Energy Community Treaty and the implementation of major infrastructure projects on Corridors X and VII, as well as the conclusion of the Transport Community Agreement in Southeast Europe. We consider the positive experiences relative to the functioning of the Southeast Europe Transport Observatory, located in Belgrade, to be very important and expect, considering our geo-strategic position, that the seat of a future Transport Community Secretariat will also be in the capital of the Republic of Serbia.

We strongly support the regional cooperation in other areas within the RCC. Of course, among the priorities are: fight against organized crime and corruption, as well as cooperation in the field of security, which is the basis for constructing stable, modern democracies of the present day world.

Particular attention is focused on the strengthening of human resources, promotion of the principles of the knowledge based economy and the application of modern information technologies. To our great pleasure, the seat of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe will be located in Serbia. The signing of the Host Country Agreement by all member countries is in progress.

The Republic of Serbia supports the participation of all from the Western Balkans in regional initiatives. Serbia is of the opinion that this is possible only by respecting the statutes of regional initiatives and the UNSC Resolution 1244 and the Arrangements regarding Regional Representation and Cooperation.



The countries of the region have realized that only together can they breathe new life into the words that we repeat like a mantra - regional cooperation - and take advantage of the great possibilities that it opens.

With this in mind, during the Chairmanship-in-Office we have formally launched with great enthusiasm the exchange of ideas among the SEECP member countries on deepening and expanding regional cooperation, as well as the reform of the Process and RCC, and establishment of the Group of the Wise.

Another important issue marked the end of the SEECP Chairmanship of the Republic of Serbia: the election of the RCC Secretary General. Given the significance and responsibility of this position, and current successes of the Council, it is of a great importance that prominent figures enrich the list of candidates. The quality, expertise and work for the well-being of the whole region were the guidelines in the selection of the RCC Secretary General.

Bringing to an end the chairmanship of the SEECP, the Republic of Serbia continues with devotion its commitment to the idea of integration, with the certainty that it originates from the existence of a long common political and economic history, geographic proximity and multi-ethnic, linguistic and cultural links and mutual influences, the natural instinct of people to live in harmony and peace with its environment.

The common goal of all regional initiatives in the Western Balkans is the development of multilateral cooperation as a basis for economic progress, political and economic stabilization and consolidation of good-neighbourly relations. These are also the presumptions for our integration into the European Union.

With a goal to achieve lasting peace and wellbeing of the people in the SEE region, the full EU membership imposes itself as a political priority.

*Ivan Mrkic has been State Secretary of the Serbian Foreign Affairs Ministry since 2011. Prior to that, Mr Mrkic was Ambassador of the Republic of Serbia to Japan (2006-2011). Among his numerous positions since the beginning of his diplomatic career in 1978, Mr Mrkic served as President of the National Commission for the Implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention, appointed by the Council of Ministers of Serbia and Montenegro (2005), Ambassador in the Federal Ministry for Foreign Affairs (2001-2004), Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia to the Republic of Cyprus, Nicosia, (1993-1999), etc. Ivan Mrkic graduated at Law School of the Belgrade University in 1977.*

## **INTERVIEW with Nikola Poposki, Minister of Foreign Affairs/Chair-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process**

*“Our motto will be Solidarity in Action”, says Minister Poposki*

**Dear Minister Poposki, your country has just assumed the Chairmanship-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process. From the experiences of your predecessors, how effectively do you think the countries of the region are using regional cooperation to advance their development and achievement of individual agendas?**



“Sixteen years ago, a fraction of the countries from the region of Southeast Europe, including the Republic of Macedonia, arrived at a joint conclusion that, in order to pursue their common goals and interests, it is necessary for all of them to speak in unison. They agreed that the concept of regional integration provides a successful and effective platform for creating a stable, secure and prosperous Region. Hence, they created the Southeast European Cooperation Process, the priorities of which are peace, building confidence, interconnectivity in infrastructure and energy, as well as bringing prosperity to the entire region. When trying to answer the question of how effectively regional cooperation is being used, we need to recall the two pillars of our cooperation - *all inclusiveness of regional ownership*. The inclusion of all region countries in this Initiative, as well as the creation of a structure which will allow various individuals and entities from the business, science, education and culture sectors to engage in a wide-ranging networking, are the key principles to which we attach the greatest possible attention. In that context, the quite tangible results that we have thus far had from engaging in specific projects in the fields of trade, energy and aviation (CEFTA 2006, the Energy Community and the European Common Aviation Area) bear testimony to the type of effectiveness that regional cooperation has succeeded in achieving over the years. Nevertheless, it is safe to say that there are various other potentials that we need to exploit together, while strengthening regional ties even further with a view to creating a prosperous region which will help ensure that we all become full-fledged members of the European and Euro-Atlantic structures as soon as possible.”

**As you pointed out earlier, the main priority on the agenda of your country's SEECP Chairmanship will be regional cooperation in relation to European perspective of all the region's countries. What, in terms of specific activities, will this mean?**

“The goal of the Macedonian Chairmanship-in-Office will be to promote regional interest by placing an emphasis on European perspectives. The SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office will provide the Republic of Macedonia with an excellent opportunity to demonstrate its utmost commitment to regional cooperation and fostering good-neighbourly relations. Our motto will be “Solidarity in Action”. In other words, our goal is to see all Region countries demonstrating a strong commitment to pursuing reforms and achieving prosperity, while not allowing open issues to stand as obstacles for developing regional cooperation. In this sense, I should like to say that regional cooperation is a crucial element in the European policies of each and every one of the SEECP participating countries which, in essence, mirror one another in this context, regardless of whether they have already become member states of the EU or are membership candidates or aspirants. What we will specifically try to achieve is to find a common platform and speak in unison within all European institutions. We are interested in developing infrastructure, transport, energy and all kinds of networks. We shall endeavour to improve the frequency and quality in the relations between all individuals and entities in the region regardless of whether they are working in the fields of business and tourism or are simply pursuing personal ties. We expect that, under our Chairmanship-in-Office, we will be able to create a synergy between all existing initiatives in the Region which we believe will help strengthen its credibility in Brussels.”

**What do you see as the most urgent areas for advancing cooperation in South East Europe, the improvement of which would make the region's position towards the EU more favourable?**

“First and foremost, I feel that we need to strengthen the political dialogue between the countries that are having bilateral issues which impedes the EU integration of the entire region. I come from the Republic of Macedonia - a country which has been facing a specific situation concerning its EU integration for many years. In that context, we see our SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office as a challenge to demonstrate our conviction that fostering good-neighbourliness is the basic prerequisite for not only achieving a successful integration of the entire region into the EU, but also for ensuring the individual progress of all region entities. We will certainly try to encourage the other participating countries to strengthen political dialogue as a means for overcoming current obstacles, which we believe will also prove to be instrumental in upholding one of the key principles of all-inclusiveness. Moreover, I feel that it is of paramount importance for all of us to jointly identify which are the infrastructural, economic and energy projects that the EU could endorse.”

**In your mind, what are the key advantages of successful regional cooperation that benefit both the individual countries**

## and the region as a whole?

“Fostering a successful regional cooperation creates a climate of trust, friendship, communication and free circulation of people and ideas. It also facilitates and improves the economic cooperation between the business communities of the countries involved in the process. That, of course, creates a positive atmosphere and a sense of security and stability, but, at the same time, ensures the prosperity of all citizens in the region. Hence, I feel that we need to focus our energy on continuously and constructively fostering communication by initiating and implementing, at the same time, joint projects concerning various areas of our societies and economies.”

## How do you see the role of the Regional Cooperation Council in advancing regional cooperation in South East Europe?

“I have offered my congratulations to the newly elected Secretary General. I am well aware of his abilities and ambitions and, in that context, I feel that under his guidance, the RCC can only strengthen its role in the region. The main challenge for the Council in the coming period will be to improve the communication with Brussels when trying to present and put into operation our priorities. That would be the best way for us to demonstrate that not only individual countries, but the region as a whole is successful in identifying projects that could be beneficial not only to itself, but to Europe in general, as well. On the other hand, it is also important for all participating countries to continue nominating highly professional representatives to the Council. The personal and professional qualities of the nominees are crucial to the successful work of the Council. In general terms, the work of the RCC, as well as its role of facilitating regional cooperation, is a challenge for the Republic of Macedonia, as SEECF Chairing country, as well. In that context, I would like to welcome the readiness of the Central European Initiative (CEI) to continue implementing the IPA project aimed at strengthening the capacity of the RCC and I feel that we need to draft, initiate and promote a project which would address the need of strengthening the capacities of various other networks and initiatives that have hitherto proven to be of great use and value to the region as a whole.”<sup>[1]</sup>

*Nikola Poposki has been the Minister of Foreign Affairs since July 2011. Prior to that, among the other duties, he was Ambassador, Head of his country's Mission to the EU (2010-2011), Team leader of Joint Research Centre of European Commission (2006-2009), and Secretary of Embassy of the French Republic in Skopje (2001-2004). Poposki is the EC trained internal auditor for implementation of integrated environmental management and health and safety standards (ISO 14001, OHSAS 18001). He holds two Master degrees: Master of Arts in European Economic Studies College of Europe, Bruges (2005) and Master in Languages and International Trade in the EU University of Rennes and University of Skopje (2004).*

<sup>[1]</sup> The RCC Secretariat note: in the legal documents of the RCC the name applied is The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia

## RCC's measured and pragmatic approach towards unhindered regional cooperation

Every year since the launch of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in February 2008, the Secretary General of the RCC reports to the organization's Board and 46-strong membership on regional cooperation in South East Europe and the Secretariat's activities, engagement and achievements in a form of an integrated Annual Report. This report is then also submitted to the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) for endorsement.

The Annual Report of the RCC's Secretary General Hido Biscevic for the period May 2011-May 2012 was accepted by the RCC Board on 15 May 2012 and endorsed by the organisation's 4th Annual Meeting held in Belgrade on 13 June 2012.



Looking back at the stated period, the latest Annual Report summarizes the greatest achievements in regional cooperation in South East Europe (SEE) in the previous year, but also highlights the remaining challenges and open issues that impede an advanced progress of the cooperation, linked with further mapping of the region within the European and Euro-Atlantic community.

"Change is evident - reconciliation and rapprochement have taken roots; social climate throughout the region is improving; human contacts are ever more relaxed and widened, from culture and sport to business; many issues from the past are resolved, whilst regional cooperation is becoming more effective and deliverable", says Biscevic in the Report.

According to him, these positive trends provided solid ground for the overall transformation of social mindsets and for continuation of reforms related to EU accession of the aspiring countries from the region.

"The preservation of this trend is more than vital as the region needs to avoid any status quo or strategic vacuum in the context of a broader European and Euro-Atlantic goals, in particular given the political and economic consequences of the current crisis on the EU itself and, to no lesser degree, given the overall changes of the international agenda and priorities."

Over the past four years, the organization has proved to be the leading provider and initiator of cooperation, in political, economic and social field. The 2011-2012 Annual Report reflects work and achievements of the RCC Secretariat in key regionally identified priority areas of cooperation.

### **Economic and Social Development**

Following the overtaking of management of the South East Europe Investment Committee (SEEIC) from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the RCC Secretariat organised the 10th meeting of the Committee on 24-25 April 2012.

The meeting, held for the first time in the region and co-chaired by Albania and the RCC Secretariat, discussed the new mandate and repositioning of the SEEIC as the implementation vehicle for South East Europe 2020 Vision, and adopted its Work Programme for the period 2012-2013 and the Rules of Procedure. The transfer of SEEIC to RCC has been assessed as a major regional achievement which shows trust and reliability of the RCC.

### **Energy and Infrastructure**

Energy and infrastructure, a key theme for discussions at variety of events throughout the region, hosts some important results such as the establishment of Sustainable Energy Development Regional Initiative (SEDRI) and Task Force, jointly launched by the Central European Initiative (CEI) and RCC, and promotion of sustainable energy development as a key to "green economy". The RCC Secretariat also worked with relevant aviation authorities and air traffic experts with the aim to create conditions for better use of market access by developing air traffic services within South East Europe.

### **Justice and Home Affairs**

Focus of the RCC Secretariat for the reporting period was obtaining tangible results for the benefit of citizens, for the security of persons and property and in bringing sustained improvements to the rule of law across the region. Thus the RCC initiated and elaborated the 2011-2013 Regional Strategic Document in the area of Justice and Home Affairs and the Action Plan for its implementation, as well as designed the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism to measure the progress and the results of regional cooperation in this sector.

### **Security Cooperation**

The RCC, recognised as the regional platform providing direct support to bilateral and multilateral cooperation initiatives by ensuring common regional political will, initiated regional mechanisms of cooperation among the Chiefs of Military Intelligence - SEEMIC, the Heads of the South East European National Security Authorities - SEENSA, and the South East European Counter-Intelligence Chiefs -

SEECIC, which are indicative of a stable and progressive development of security cooperation in SEE.

### **Building Human Capital and Parliamentary Cooperation**

Development of the Regional Strategy for Research and Development for Innovation for the Western Balkans as well as the establishment of the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society – in the framework of transition of the Ljubljana Process on cultural rehabilitation to the RCC – required efficient communication with both national institutions and international partners. The RCC was also actively involved in development and formulation of the project on Parliamentary Cooperation in the Western Balkans and Turkey – through support to Cetinje Parliamentary Forum.

### **Media Development**

Media development has emerged as one of the priorities of a paramount regional importance, being also noted in the European Commission (EC) Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2011-2012. Establishment and successful work of the European Association of Public Service Media in SEE, signing of a Protocol on Regional Cooperation in Education and Training among 12 members of the European Association of Public Service Media in SEE, and the international seminar 'South East Europe 20 Years On: Transformation from State to Public Broadcasting' for public media professionals, practitioners, managers, regulatory authorities and media organisations, co-organised with the EC Enlargement Directorate-General and supported by the Association and the European Broadcasting Union (EBU), confirm the ability of the RCC to increase the number of areas where regional ownership is translated into concrete benefits.

#### **KEY RCC ACHIEVEMENTS**

- Streamlined regional activities to make cooperation more efficient, confirming RCC leadership in guiding and monitoring cooperation in South East Europe
- Helped attract over EUR 40 million for regional programmes and projects in South East Europe
- Took over management of South East Europe Investment Committee from OECD, with focus on South East Europe 2020 Vision
- Initiated dialogue with governments, social partners and CSOs on Social Agenda 2020 for Western Balkans to respond to regional challenges and boost social inclusion
- Helped create platform for joint action of stock exchanges in South East Europe to strengthen links among regional capital markets
- Launched the project Women Entrepreneurship as a job creation engine for South East Europe, with SEE Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning and Gender Task Force
- Supported national administrations in South East Europe to adopt and implement road safety acquis and launched initiative to establish Road Safety Training Centre
- Initiated Regional Strategic Document and Action Plan 2011-2013 on Justice and Home Affairs, endorsed by SEECIP ministers, and started annual monitoring and evaluation of its implementation
- Established, with Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative, Integrity Experts Network – a regional structure of national agencies specialized in public officials' assets declaration
- Initiated regional cooperation mechanism among Chiefs of Military Intelligence –SEEMIC, and heads of National Security Authorities – SEENSA
- Established RCC Task Force on Culture and Society and its Secretariat, as a new regional mechanism of preserving cultural heritage, building on Ljubljana Process
- Supported development and implementation of the project Building Capacity for Structural Reforms in Higher Education of Western Balkan Countries
- Helped establish European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe as a non-profit professional body of public broadcasters and brokered signing of a Protocol on Regional Cooperation in Education and Training among members of the Association

## Moving cooperation in South East Europe closer: RCC looks at its own impact

Adoption of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) 2011-2013 at the RCC Annual Meeting and at the Summit of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Heads of State and Government in Istanbul on 23 June 2010 marked the commencement of a new stage in the development and operational work of the RCC Secretariat.

2011 was the first year of implementation of the SWP 2011-2013 but it also marked a significant shift in operations of the organisation - from the transitional period from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe to a well-set, flexible, and regionally owned organisation with deployed multifold activities and recognised factor of regional development in South East Europe.

In order to get objective assessment of the fulfilment of the ambitiously set objectives, as well as to estimate wider relevance, impact and sustainability of the activities performed, the RCC Secretariat prepared its self-assessment report.

The report assesses efficiency and effectiveness of the RCC Secretariat and provides analysis, conclusions and recommendations to assist better implementation of the next phase of the SWP in 2012-2013 and programming of the RCC's strategy for the next period 2014-2016.

Self-assessment Report on the first year of implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013 considers the general context for evaluating regional cooperation in SEE that was framed by political factors: EU enlargement dynamics, SEECP as the main regional political platform and open bilateral issues in the region.

The key segment of the report concentrates on several specific objectives: an assessment to which extent the SWP is based on a balanced and comprehensive planning process; a detailed judgement on the performance in each priority area and related activities; and based on conclusions and lessons learned, an outline of corrective measures to improve implementation and monitoring of ongoing actions as well as future programming.

The SWP identified 22 distinct objectives in the main priority areas (economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital and parliamentary cooperation) to be met by the end of 2013.

"The implementation of these objectives is on-track. Out of 22 objectives, 16 have been accomplished between 30% and 70%, measured against performance and timing planned in the Work Programme. One objective is already fully accomplished, while one has been dropped due to the lack of interest by SEE countries. The remaining 4 objectives have been accomplished between 10% and 25%", reads the [report](#).

While identifying strengths and weaknesses, the report underlines that although SWP significantly helped regional cooperation in different areas the RCC activities should be more focused and coherent, to have more inter-sector and multi-stakeholder approach. The Strategy needs more measurable and specific indicators in order to better evaluate its results.

Other weaknesses that emerged as the main obstacles to unhindered implementation of the SWP are: fragmentation, lack of coordination, insufficient institutional capacity in the region; lack of willingness and cooperation of national authorities and uneven development of different areas of cooperation; insufficient alignment of the region with the EU, especially through enlargement package; communication should be given a more strategic role; additional resources are necessary for the SWP implementation and for boosting RCC's administrative and organisational capacity, as well as the improvement of internal operational coordination.

To the positive side, the report stresses that continuous institutional consultations became an effective instrument in regional cooperation; high participation of stakeholders in the RCC activities mostly met expectations of the regional partners and notably developed RCC analytical capacities and expertise.

In order to facilitate and further advance implementation of the SWP, the self-assessment report issues a set of recommendations that include: a need for a constant political commitment; focus to be given to consolidating cooperation mechanisms in the RCC priority areas and linking them with the political "chapeau" at national and regional levels; continuation of regular contacts and consultations with the European Commission (EC)'s Directorate General for Enlargement in order to precisely identify the impact of closer affiliation of the RCC with the horizontal enlargement agenda, as well as with other EC Directorates General, the European External Action Service (EEAS), Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Parliament; providing the RCC with a longer-term view through stronger focus on the EU Enlargement Strategy and Europe 2020 strategy; alignment of its activities with broader strategies and making it possible to quantify the work; more structured ongoing regional dialogue; etc.

"The RCC would benefit of a more direct and concrete role within the EU enlargement process in the Western Balkans and needs a stronger leverage from the EU institutions in terms of being recognised, promoted and supported as a key instrument for introducing and implementing regional approach to economic recovery and development", concludes the report.



The results achieved so far, general political and economic context, as well as a clear vision will to a large extent shape the strategic orientation of the RCC for the period beyond 2013.

“The vision-building process and identifying priorities of future regional cooperation will be launched through comprehensive and transparent consultations with all relevant stakeholders in the region, in particular the national authorities, regional initiatives and task forces and main donors, primarily the European Commission.”

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## FROM BRUSSELS ANGLE

### **INTERVIEW with Joost Korte, Deputy Director General, Directorate General for Enlargement, European Commission, Brussels**

*Regional cooperation, more than just a tool for South East European countries to achieve EU membership*

#### **Mr Korte, what are key achievements in regional cooperation in South East Europe in recent years?**

Regional cooperation is the essence of European integration. It is, thus, an essential element of the process of moving closer to the EU, to which our partners in South East Europe (SEE) aim. The transition from the Stability Pact to the regionally-owned Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is a major success. The first four years of the RCC's operation can be deemed successful, especially when taking into account the fact that the new organisation had to set up its structures, establish its presence and gain the trust of partners in the region – which, I am happy to say, the RCC has indeed achieved.



Regarding specific achievements, I would like to mention the agreement on the Regional Strategic Document on Justice and Home Affairs and its accompanying Action Plan, the transfer of the SEE Investment Committee from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) to the RCC, and the establishment of the Task Force on Culture and Society which will continue the work of the Council of Europe on the Ljubljana Process on Cultural Rehabilitation. Also, we should not overlook the progress achieved in the area of security cooperation, with the multiplication of meetings of security and defence officials and experts from the region.

#### **How do you assess the current state of affairs in regional cooperation in South East Europe?**

Regional cooperation faces, in my opinion, two main challenges: efficiency and inclusiveness. Despite the significant progress achieved in recent years, especially when it comes to sectoral regional cooperation – also through the work of specialised organisations such as the Energy Community and the South East Europe Transport Observatory – these two challenges have not been entirely met. Regarding inclusiveness, I welcome the fact that all regional partners were present at the RCC Annual Meeting on 13 June 2012. I hope that this will be repeated in all regional meetings and I call, once again, on all partners to be pragmatic, and participate fully in these meetings.

Concerning efficiency, I am happy to say that the first year of the implementation of the RCC's Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013 has made important steps in this direction, but a lot remains to be done in order to streamline the work of regional initiatives and task forces avoiding duplication.

#### **In your view, what are the bottle-necks of a fully-fledged regional cooperation when it comes to commitment of individual SEECP participating states?**

The commitment of our partners in South East Europe towards regional cooperation is well-established. They all understand the intrinsic value of regional cooperation, not only as a criterion they have to fulfil on their way towards the European Union (EU), but as a cornerstone of the European integration project.

However, there are obstacles which need to be overcome. The example of the recent SEECP Summit and the failure to adopt a declaration at the end of it is a case in point. This does not place in doubt the commitment of the region to cooperation; it only demonstrates that further efforts need to be made to achieve fully-fledged cooperation.

Another issue I would like to raise is that of implementation: there are numerous occasions where declarations, political statements, joint statements and agreements have been adopted by the region, including on sectoral cooperation. These need to be implemented, and we look to the RCC to play a more active role in this regard, monitoring their implementation. We also look to the RCC to monitor regional cooperation in general – as it has been doing – identifying gaps that need to be bridged, and suggesting ways to bridge them.

#### **How do you see an increased role of the RCC in advancing regional cooperation to achieve the region's common goal – European integration?**

Allow me to repeat what I said earlier: regional cooperation is not only a *tool* for the countries of the region to achieve their goal of joining the EU. It is that, of course, but not *only* that. Regional cooperation may, indeed, help the countries of the region achieve this goal, and not only as a condition that has to be fulfilled for this aim to be achieved.

On their way towards the EU, the countries of the region face common challenges: consolidating the rule of law, fighting corruption and organised crime, preparing to adopt the *acquis* on areas such as the environment, transport and energy. These challenges can be more

efficiently addressed when they work together. By exchanging best practices, closing any gaps (for example, in judicial cooperation), achieving common solutions to environmental problems, but also by delivering know-how and expertise. Allow me to say that we look to Croatia to play a leading role in this and transfer the know-how from its successful negotiations to the other candidate countries and potential candidates.

Last but not least, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the current Secretary General of the RCC, Mr. Hido Bišćević, for his efforts in establishing the RCC as the main regional cooperation partner in SEE, and to welcome his successor, Mr. Goran Svilanović. I am confident that the excellent cooperation established between the RCC and the Commission will continue, to the benefit of the region but of the EU as well.

*Joost Korte has been Deputy Director-General for Enlargement since January 2012. Prior to that Korte, among numerous other duties, was Director responsible for Relations with the Council, Commission representative in Coreper II (July 2009 to January 2011), G8 Foreign Affairs Sous Sherpa (since October 2010) and Advisor at the General Secretariat; Head of Cabinet of Commissioner for Regional Policy Danuta Hübner; Deputy Head of Cabinet of Commissioner for External Relations Chris Patten. He was also Lecturer in the Law of International Organisations at the Europa Institute, University of Utrecht, and Leverhulme Visiting fellow in the European Community Law at the Centre of European Governmental Studies, University of Edinburgh.*

## GUEST COMMENTATOR

**Hansjörg Brey**, Executive Director, Southeast Europe Association, Munich, Germany

### Regional cooperation needs tireless work of an institution like the RCC

After four years of existence, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), itself being the successor organization of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, has taken an indispensable role as the institution that steers and monitors regional cooperation in South East Europe. The record of RCC's activities, as described in the recent Annual Report of the Secretary General for 2011 and 2012, is indeed impressive. With the RCC's establishment in Sarajevo in 2008, the region has taken the ownership in regional cooperation.

If we take a closer look at the state of affairs, there is however little reason for much optimism as concerns the commitment to regional cooperation on the side of political actors in the region. Secretary Biscevic was right when, in a recent interview, he assessed the main challenges of regional cooperation in South East Europe (SEE) as follows: "its engine and its fuel come even more from Brussels than from the authentic recognition of the real values and advantages of cooperation in the region"[\[1\]](#).



Let me shortly dwell on some of the realities to be seen on the ground. Luckily enough, much of the vision of the inventors of the Stability Pact in 1999, in fostering peace, democracy, respect of human rights, economic prosperity and stability in the region, today has come true – despite the long list of democratic deficits and economic and social turmoil. With the exception of Kosovo\*, all countries have signed Stabilization and Association Agreements, others have become EU members or are on the verge of membership. Most citizens enjoy visa-free travel to the Schengen area.

With new foreign policy issues coming to the forefront and forces bound in fighting against the economic crisis, further European Union (EU) enlargement is rather down on the agenda of any EU country. On the other hand, when Montenegro starts accession negotiations with the EU these days, this may be seen as a proof that the EU has not completely closed its doors for new members from the western Balkan countries. The painful (and open-ended) accession process that Montenegro has started also demonstrates that the transformative power of the membership perspective remains effective. Montenegro has found itself on a fast track to EU membership. This is partly due to the fact that the country has been by and large a success story in conflict resolution – be it through its soft divorce from Serbia or with regard to its managing of domestic inter-ethnic relations. Not surprisingly, Montenegro has been better committed to regional cooperation as compared to some of its neighbors.

Whereas violence in the former Yugoslav republics has been mostly contained by international intervention, post-conflict stabilization is still an unfinished business in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, most prominently, in Serbia and Kosovo\*. Unresolved inter-ethnic and border issues are indeed strong disincentives for regional cooperation. The power of the EU has been extremely limited especially in solving the issue of Kosovo\* sovereignty with Serbia, with five EU countries not having recognized Kosovo\*'s independence. Importantly, true reconciliation is still not achieved in the ex-Yugoslav space. Some politicians have made substantial steps in that direction (like the acting Croatian and the former Serbian president), unfortunately followed by backward-oriented rhetoric by others (namely the newly elected Serbian president). Whereas transitional justice has been partly achieved through pressure from outside, reconciliation has to go a long way as long as war criminals are considered national heroes by a substantial part of the populace. At least, civil society initiatives like Coalition for Reconciliation Commission (REKOM) do a great job in reconciliation within the post-Yugoslav space.

While the "stick" of EU conditionality is still enhancing institutional change and the rule of law, recent autocratic tendencies in some – partly new – EU countries are anything but an example of good democratic conduct to be followed, including good neighborly relations. Economic crisis and social decline provide a fertile ground for populism and nationalist rhetoric and stand against approaches of cooperation and reconciliation.

The situation being as it is, there is little hope for regional leaders in SEE – except from some exceptions – transforming into powerful "engines" of regional cooperation. But, we should demand (and the EU has some power to do so) that the political actors in the region do not obstruct cooperation, that they adhere to pragmatic and flexible solutions. When the "Kosovo\*" arrangement was reached within the EU-facilitated dialogue between Belgrade and Prishtina, everyone was hoping that this would be the breakthrough that would enable delegates from Serbia and Kosovo\* to participate in regional meetings. It was the reading-design of the name-plates that prevented the parties from convening at one table – a sad example of narrow-mindedness winning over good will and pragmatism.

Regional cooperation needs the tireless work of an institution like the RCC. Yet, there is much room for a more serious, pragmatic and genuine commitment and responsibility of the RCC / South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) member states. Ways and levers to enhance this commitment have to be found. The continuous engagement of the EU with its conditionality complemented by pressure from the domestic civil society organizations, are key to this goal.

*Dr. Hansjörg Brey, (German national, born 1956) is Executive Director of Southeast Europe Association (Südosteuropa-Gesellschaft / SOG) in Munich, Germany. He is also Editor-in-Chief of the SOG's renowned bi-monthly journal "Südosteuropa Mitteilungen". As a forum for communication and exchange of information the SOG assembles more than 800 members from politics, business, academia and media and is a unique hub of expertise in the German speaking area. The SOG organises international conferences, lectures and workshops addressing various issues regarding Southeast Europe countries, including regional cooperation.*

[\[1\] Commentary by Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Hido Bišćević, to BiH News Agency FFNA, Sarajevo, BiH, 5 July 2012](#)

\* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.

## ACTIVITIES IN BRIEF

### **SEECP Heads of State and Governments praise RCC achievements over the past year, approve of the organization's new Secretary General**

The 4th Regional Cooperation Council's (RCC) Annual Meeting and meetings of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the states participating in the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and of the SEECP Heads of State and Government were held in Belgrade, Serbia on 13-15 June 2012, respectively.

Goran Svilanović has been appointed the new Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) by the ministers of foreign affairs, while the SEECP Heads of State and Government consecutively approved the appointment. As of January 2013, Goran Svilanovic is to succeed Hido Bišćević, the first RCC Secretary General in two mandates since 1 January 2008.

The SEECP Heads of State and Government, Foreign Ministers and RCC members praised the RCC Secretariat for the successful job performed thus far. They also expressed gratitude for the valuable efforts of the first and outgoing RCC Secretary General Hido Bišćević in organizing the new RCC structure, ensuring political and financial support in times of crisis, and advocating for the region's interest, thus making the RCC the effective operational arm of the SEECP.

Participants of all three meetings welcomed the results achieved by the RCC in the implementation of the Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013 and the RCC Secretariat's Self-assessment Report on the implementation of the first year (2011) of the Work Programme. They voiced support to RCC activities and approved the 2011-2012 Annual Report of the RCC Secretary General on regional cooperation in South East Europe.

The Heads of State and Government stressed the need to use the institutional backbone provided by the RCC to transform political declarations and decisions into concrete projects and programmes to the benefit of the citizens in South East Europe. The leaders called upon the EU to continue firmly its enlargement policy provided that conditions are met and requirements are fulfilled on individual merit.

Addressing the SEECP Heads of State and Government, RCC Secretary General Hido Biscevic thanked them for a continuous support to the RCC and stressed that the positive momentum in South East Europe must be preserved and further capitalized.

"A continuous development and advancement of our region has to be consistently pursued as we bear in mind the enormity of the consequences of a perpetuated instability. This must be seen as an impulse to a greater regional self-responsibility. No one has the luxury of time when stagnation, lethargy, prolonged strategic vacuums and other forms of regional anachronisms are still looming."

"Regional cooperation with a targeted regional approach is and would certainly be one of the most effective platforms for economic growth and social development as well as for rekindling other under-developed sectors shared by the countries of South East Europe."

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### **1st media law academy in South East Europe held in Zagreb, Croatia**

A set of recommendations on enhancing the public service media remit, media pluralism and responsibility was issued at the end of the first Academy on Media Law in South East Europe (SEE), held in Zagreb, Croatia, on 3-8 June 2012.

The five-day event was held under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), with support of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, and the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina. The project was implemented by ARTICLE 19: Global Campaign for Free Expression and the European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe.

The participants were media professionals – media lawyers, legislators, members of media regulators and self-regulatory bodies, and academics – from all of the South East European countries, as well as international experts.

The opening speeches of Hido Biscevic, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council; Josip Popovac, President of the European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe/Director General of the Croatian Radio-Television; and Nina Suomalainen, Deputy Head of the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as other relevant information on the Academy, are available at the RCC website [\[1\]](#).

The Academy on Media Law was a unique regional event. Against the backdrop of the European standards, the participants shared professional experience in the area of public service media remit, media pluralism, and media law and responsibility. They made recommendations based on the best media law and policy practices in the region.

The participants made a set of recommendations in relation to funding, governance and remit on the public service media, calling on relevant actors to ensure the financial and editorial independence of public service media, clearly define their mission and keep the public well informed of it.

On the importance of media pluralism, the experts recommended that the legislation introduce mechanisms for the assessment of media concentration, transparency of media ownership, political and cultural diversity of opinion, as well as strengthen the efforts by the media regulatory bodies to safeguard media pluralism in practice.

With regards to media law and responsibility, the participants commended the trend to decriminalize defamation in the region, and recommended that the legislation include specific defences for journalists and the media in line with the European Convention of Human Rights practice in defamation cases.

The Academy sought to enhance cooperation in the development and the implementation of progressive media legislation in South East Europe in line with international and European media standards. Its aim was to safeguard media freedoms and the right to freedom of expression by sharing and learning from the best legal national frameworks and practices in the enforcement of media standards in the region. It provided a unique opportunity for media experts from Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Greece, Kosovo\*, Montenegro, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey to meet, exchange ideas and seek solutions to common issues concerning freedom of expression and media freedom.

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[1] <http://www.rcc.int/press/0/188/first-academy-on-media-law-in-south-east-europe-to-kick-off-in-zagreb> and <http://www.rcc.int/press/0/189/1st-media-law-academy-in-see-ends-in-zagreb-makes-recommendations-on-public-service-media-remit-media-pluralism-and-professionalism>

\* *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence*

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## South East European experts prepare conventions on criminal, civil and commercial matters

Over 70 South-East European (SEE) experts in justice and home affairs discussed regional conventions on criminal and on civil and commercial matters at the meeting in Bucharest, Romania, held under the auspices of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat on 30 May 2012.

The two-day event was co-organized with the *Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit* (GIZ) Open Regional Fund for South East Europe – Legal Reform, with support of the Ministries of Justice of Romania, Serbia and Slovenia.

The conference gathered heads of central judicial authorities of the SEE countries, experts within the ministries of justice and of interior, public prosecutors' offices and magistrate councils, heads of regional organizations and initiatives in SEE active in the area of justice and home affairs, relevant representatives of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEEC) Chairmanship-in-Office as well as professional associations and international experts.

The convention on regional assistance in cooperation in criminal matters is to be designed to regulate a number of legal procedures for issues such as the regional arrest warrant, extradition, victim rights and procedures regarding witness protection. Once adopted, it will replace several bilateral agreements between the countries in South East Europe.

The second convention, on cooperation in civil and commercial matters, would regulate throughout the region a variety of legal issues referring to labour permits, registration of vehicles and businesses, etc.

Virgil Ivan Cucu, Senior Expert on Justice and Home Affairs of the RCC Secretariat, in his remarks at the event recalled the long path that the region has passed in developing judicial cooperation, expressing hope that the new chapter will provide a more efficient cooperation model that will enable the accession countries to implement advanced EU legal instruments.

“Mutual trust between national authorities and services, the decision-makers and EU judicial agencies is the basis for efficient cooperation. Ensuring trust and finding new ways to increase reliance on and mutual understanding between different legal systems are the main challenges for the future.”

The South East European experts in justice and home affairs will continue to work on the finalization of both conventions during this year. The documents are expected to be adopted at the ministerial meeting planned to take place in the course of 2013.

The meeting is part of implementation of the most relevant regional conclusions and recommendations adopted by the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs of the South East European countries in the Regional Strategic Document 2011-2013.

## Regional access to finance forum held under RCC, USAID and Sida auspices

A regional access to finance forum titled *SEEnovate: Supporting Intelligent Growth*, showcasing the most up-to-date investment and business opportunities in South East Europe and bringing over 30 equity investors, was held in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on 19 June 2012.

The event was co-organized by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). It gathered over 150 representatives of innovative small and medium enterprises (SMEs), investors and policy makers from the region.

The conference was an opportunity to raise the awareness of SMEs on the availability of equity investment in the region as well as the requirements of equity investors; provide information to investors on the prospective supply of high-growth SMEs in the Western Balkans; and recommend business environment improvements for equity investment. Matchmaking sessions between companies and investors were organized during the conference.

Instruments for financing innovative SMEs, such as the Enterprise Development and Innovation Facility (EDIF), a new, 145 million Euro instrument to support innovative SMEs in the Western Balkans, and the 100 million Euro Venture Capital Investment Programme for early and growth stage companies operating in technology sectors, were presented at the event.

Increasing access to finance in South East Europe is a key priority of the RCC Secretariat's work, contained in the organization's Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013.

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## Conference on investigative journalism and data protection held in Pula, Croatia

A conference devoted to promotion of investigative journalism and journalistic independence with respect to data protection principles in South East Europe was held in Pula, Croatia, on 29-31 May 2012.

The event was co-organized by the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat, the RACVIAC – Centre for Security Cooperation, the European Association of Public Service Media in South East Europe, and the Croatian Radio-Television.

The two-day event was an opportunity to analyze the relationship between public service media and security institutions, explore media role in crisis management, discuss data protection principles, promote freedom of expression standards, foster media pluralism, and support cooperation between regional public service media and state institutions.

Participants explored the modalities to increase regional cooperation through dialogue and transfer of knowledge, views and ideas, and build a more open, transparent and stable environment in South East Europe.

The event was a follow-up activity to the conference on public media and security in South East Europe, held at the RACVIAC Centre in Zagreb, Croatia, in November 2011.

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## Reinforced protection of cultural heritage in South East Europe agreed at the RC Task Force on Culture and Society meeting

The Third Meeting of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Task Force on Culture and Society (TFCS) was held in Prčanj, Montenegro on 27-28 June 2012. Participants agreed to finalize the establishment of the Ljubljana Process national task forces, necessary for implementing the project 'Sustaining the Rehabilitation of Cultural Heritage in the Western Balkans'.

It is expected that the 500,000 EUR worth project contract will be concluded between the European Commission and the RCC Secretariat in a month.

The two-day meeting adopted the Narrative Report of the TFCS Secretariat for the period April-June 2012 and endorsed the Needs Assessment Report: Political Sustainability of the Ljubljana Process, prepared by the project's Expert Board.

The Task Force website (<http://tfcs.rcc.int>) was presented at the meeting during which the participants discussed possibilities for improving the visibility of the Ljubljana Process, including development of printed brochures and electronic presentations of rehabilitation projects.

The RCC Task Force on Culture and Society promotes regional cultural cooperation in South East Europe by creating a platform for dialogue among relevant stakeholders. It was established in June 2011, with the seat in Cetinje, Montenegro.

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## EVENTS CALENDAR

### CULTURAL EVENTS IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE

18.07.2012 - 22.07.2012

#### **International Folklore Festival, Zagreb, Croatia**

Zagreb's International Folklore Festival is a unique folklore manifestation that has been established in 1966. The 46th International Folklore Festival is dedicated to children, that is, to the folklore heritage learned and presented by children: through games, dances, songs, and customs. [More information available at the website of the Zagreb folklore festival.](#)

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08.08.2012 - 24.08.2012

#### **Bodrum International Ballet Festival, Bodrum, Turkey**

Bodrum International Ballet Festival celebrates its 10th edition this year. It is traditionally organized by the Directorate General of the State Opera and Ballet. The Festival brings famous international ballet productions to the 15th-century Bodrum Castle. [More information available at the festival's official website.](#)

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05.07.2012 - 07.09.2012

#### **Gumusluk International Classical Music Festival, Gumusluk, Turkey**

The 9th Gumusluk International Classical Music Festival will be opened at the Bodrum Castle by Bilkent Symphony Orchestra with soloist Gulsin Onay. The festival began in 2004 as a series of concerts and has grown to be a meeting place for internationally renowned and promising music performers. [More information available at the Gumusluk festival's website.](#)

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07.07.2012 - 20.07.2012

#### **International Istanbul Opera Festival, Istanbul, Turkey**

Istanbul Opera Festival hosts world famous opera soloists and companies at Istanbul's most outstanding historical venues throughout July. The festival also presents the country's most prominent state opera and ballet companies. This year it is the Festival's 3rd edition. [More information available at the official opera festival website.](#)

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20.06.2012 - 13.09.2012

#### **Ljubljana Festival, Ljubljana, Slovenia**

Ljubljana Festival every year continues its mission – organising cultural events in the summer months: operas, musicals and many concerts of chamber and symphony orchestras under the trademark The Ljubljana Festival. Beside the Summer Festival's events, the Ljubljana Festival every year prepares or takes part in the preparation of many other events which significantly contribute to the cultural atmosphere in the capital. [More information available at the Ljubljana festival website.](#)

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16.08.2012 - 19.07.2012

#### **Nisville International Jazz Festival, Nis, Serbia**

Nisville Jazz Festival is an annual music event devoted to jazz performers and lovers from around the world. [More information available at the official Nisville website.](#)

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05.08.2012

### **FINA Open Water Grand Prix - International Swimming Marathon, Sabac, Serbia**

International swimming marathon Jarak-Sabac is well known under the name of "Peace race". It has been in International Swimming Federation's (FINA) calendar since 1984. It is held on the River Sava and the race covers 18.8 km. The competition is accompanied by an entertainment programme including cultural events and fish soup contests. [More information available at the website of the swimming marathon.](#)

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20.07.2012 - 29.07.2012

### **Sighisoara Medieval Festival, Sighisoara, Romania**

This year the Sighisoara Medieval Festival celebrates its 20th edition. It will be thematically devoted to 600 years of love and fight: Joan D'Arc. This biggest medieval festival in the country is staged in the ancient medieval citadel and in the town's plazas, where audience get to see performers dressed in old-fashioned costumes performing theatre plays, concerts and other artists show to exhibit their work. [More information available at the official website of the Festival.](#)

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06.08.2012 - 12.08.2012

### **ANONIMUL International Independent Film Festival, Sfantu Gheorghe, Romania**

ANONIMUL International Independent Film Festival is a unique film festival held on sand. Its 9th edition will traditionally be held in Sfantu Gheorghe in the Danube Delta. This festival features competitions in two categories: Feature and Fiction & Animation Short. [More information available at Anonimul's website.](#)

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27.08.2012 - 31.08.2012

### **Limba Noastra celebration, Chisinau, Moldova**

At the end of the summer, two Moldovan holidays are celebrated at once: they are the Independence Day on August 27 and "Limba Noastra" (Our Language) or the Day of National Language - August 31. [More information available at the website presenting Moldova.](#)

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01.07.2012 - 15.08.2012

### **International KotorART Festival, Kotor, Montenegro**

During the 45 Festival days, the town will host over 1,500 artists and children-artists from 25 countries, who will take part in 107 artistic performances. [More information available at KotorART festival website.](#)

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01.08.2012 - 06.08.2012

### **International Summer Carnival of Kotor, Kotor, Montenegro**

The 11th International Summer Kotor's Carnival is one of the most popular summer carnivals in the region. The host of the Carnival is Montenegrin small coastal town of Kotor, which has been a member of FECC (Foundation of European Carnival Cities) since 2000. It attracts thousands of tourists to the town. [More information available at Kotor's website.](#)

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12.07.2012 - 20.08.2012

### **Ohrid Summer Festival, Ohrid, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Mace**

Through the past 50 years, The Ohrid Summer Festival gained its affirmation as one of the most important cultural manifestations in the country. This year, the Festival is marking its way to its goal which is: accomplishing and realizing the most qualitative edition. [More information available at the official Festival's website.](#)

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23.08.2012 - 26.08.2012

### **The Struga Poetry Evenings, Struga, The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia**

The Struga Poetry Evenings is an international as well as traditional festival of poetry and celebration of the written word held in Struga at the end of August every year. This year it is the 51st edition of this renowned cultural event. [More information available at the Struga Poetry Evenings website.](#)

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23.07.2012 - 31.07.2012

### **DOKUFEST, Prizren**

DOKUFEST, the International Documentary and Short Film Festival, is annually organized festival, at which films are screened twice a day in three open air cinemas as well as in two regular cinemas. The Festival is organized in August in the picturesque and historical town of Prizren, which attracts numerous international and regional artists. [More information available at the official website of the festival.](#)

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27.08.2012 - 05.09.2012

### **Renaissance Festival of Rethymnon, Rethymnon, Greece**

Since 2008 the Rethymnon Renaissance Festival has undergone a metamorphosis. For a short period Rethymnon gets transformed into a medieval Venetian town and plays host to world-class renaissance musicians. The programme also includes some theatrical performances of plays from the Renaissance era. [More information available at the Rethymnon's festival website.](#)

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01.07.2012 - 30.07.2012

### **Athens & Epidaurus Festival, Athens, Greece**

Athens & [Epidaurus Festival](#) in its previous 57 years has hosted some of the leading international performers of theatre, music, fine arts and dance. This world-renowned classical festival takes place every summer in the Greek capital at various venues throughout the city. [More information available at the website of the festivals.](#)

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05.08.2012 - 07.08.2012

### **Alka Tilters Tournament, Sinj, Croatia**

The three-day Alka Festival (also known as the Tilters Tournament) takes place in the town of Sinj every August. The event dates back to 1715 and has been included in the list of the world's non-material cultural heritage by UNESCO since 2010. [More information available at the Dalmatia information website.](#)

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28.07.2012 - 01.08.2012

### **Motovun Film Festival, Motovun, Croatia**

Motovun Film Festival is entirely dedicated to films made in small cinematographies and independent productions that broke out through their innovation, ideas, and the power of their stories. Special guest of this year's edition is a renowned British film director Terence Davies. [More information available at the official Motovun film festival.](#)

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15.09.2012 - 22.09.2012

**International Festival of New Film, Split, Croatia**

This year it is the 17th edition of the International Festival of New Film held in Croatian coastal town of Split. The festival is open to all new, innovative, personal, experimental, radical, subversive etc. work (film, video, new media) of all genres and lengths, preferably from outside the mainstream. [More information available at the official Split New Film Festival.](#)

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04.09.2012 - 09.09.2012

**PIF - International Puppet Theatre Festival, Zagreb, Croatia**

PIF is an international puppet festival for professional puppet theatre groups but it is also a festival for any puppeteer or theatrician who uses puppetry as a means of artistic expression. In previous 44 festival's editions, over 450 theatres from all continents have taken part in the Festival. [More information available at the festival's website.](#)

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19.07.2012 - 23.07.2012

**International Folklore Festival, Sofia, Bulgaria**

The 5th edition of Sofia's International Folklore Festival welcomes groups from Europe, Asia, Africa and Latin America. Hundreds of dancers, musicians, singers become a part of a magic international power - the big love for folklore created by their ancestors during the centuries. [More information available at the official website of the folklore festival.](#)

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01.07.2012 - 31.07.2012

**International Festival Bascarsijske noci (Bascarsija nights), Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The Festival is being held every year, for the whole month of July, with the performances held both on the central stage, located opposite to the Town Hall as well as on many open air stages of the capital. This year it is the Festival's 17<sup>th</sup> edition. [More information available at the official website of the Bascarsijske noci Festival.](#)

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12.09.2012 - 16.09.2012

**10th "BEE-FEST" International fair of bees and honey producers, Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The 10th edition of the International fair of bees and honey industry will be held in Sarajevo. The festival promotes beekeeping, production of honey and other bee products. The aim of the fair is to make bee-keeping more popular and to present the values of honey. [More information available at the official website of the fair.](#)

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01.07.2012 - 31.08.2012

**Banja Luka Summer Games, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The Banja Luka Summer Games are held every year in the city's Kastel fortress, attracting artists, singers, actors and musicians from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and the neighbouring countries. This year the Summer games will be held in July only. [More information available at the Banja Luka city website.](#)

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20.08.2012 - 25.08.2012

**Mediterranean film festival-MFF, Široki Brijeg, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

The 13th edition of Mediterranean Film Festival in Široki Brijeg will continue its tradition and present the most interesting documentaries of this and the previous year world's production as well as the new feature films from the region, the retrospectives and the works of the local authors. The Festival also includes School of Film Culture and other accompanying contents. [More information available at the Festival website.](#)

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26.07.2012 - 28.07.2012

#### **Jelen Demofest festival, Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina**

*Jelen* Demofest is an annual event that takes place at Banjaluka's "Kastel" fortress every July. It features music bands new to the scene but also provides other kind of cultural stimulation: screenings of movies, exhibitions of photography and other art works, workshops for the bands and the after-parties. This year, 39 bands will take part in the festival. [More information available at the Festival website.](#)

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14.07.2012 - 22.07.2012

#### **International Festival of Theatre Butrint 200, Butrint, Albania**

International festival of Theatre "Butrinti 2000" during its earlier 11 editions has hosted professional troupes from numerous countries like Switzerland, England, Italy, France, Greece, USA, Poland, Rumania, Bulgaria, Croatia, Serbia, Ukraine, Spain, Hungary, Netherland, Sweden, Germany, etc. The Festival takes place every year at the ancient Albanian city of Butrint. [More information available at the Festival's website.](#)

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15.07.2012 - 29.07.2012

#### **International Folklore Festival, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria**

International Folklore Festival Veliko Tarnovo is an annual folklore event that became significant and traditional part of the cultural life of the country. Fifteen years in a row, Veliko Tarnovo, the former capital of Bulgaria, hosts concerts, ethnic dancing, shows and conferences, renewing the cultural traditions of the region. [More information available at the folklore festival website.](#)

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