



**Address
of the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council
Mr Hido Biscevic**

Meeting of the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs

Pomorie, 20 May 2008

Thank you Chairman,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to participate in this meeting of the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs, last one under the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office. I join those of you having praised the achievements of our Bulgarian colleagues who have carried out a comprehensive and ambitious programme, strengthening the role of the SEECP as a genuine voice of the region.

The Chairmanship's vigour and responsibility was instrumental in implementing the decisions of the Zagreb SEECP Summit last May on the process of transition from the Stability Pact to the Regional Cooperation Council.

This process is now complete.

We have attained full regional ownership of the new structures of regional cooperation architecture. Furthermore, all the partners involved have maintained their commitment, thus keeping the process firmly on tracks.

I wish to thank the SEECP Participating States in particular for this achievement. I also want to point out the active and supportive role of representatives of the European Union, European Commission and the Slovenian EU Presidency. I also wish to thank to all the donor and partner countries and institutions for maintaining a keen interest in the developments in South East Europe.

Special thanks certainly go to Dr Busek and his Stability Pact team for their invaluable contribution to the transition process.

The RCC will continue to count on your support and dedication. Only with joint efforts of all the stakeholders - from the region, European Union or wider international area - can we fully

realize main objectives: that is to modernize South East Europe, ensure its prosperity, stability, good neighbourliness and dialogue and to integrate it within European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

When talking about these goals, it is evident that in the course of the past year there has been a steady and persistent progress. In general, South East Europe is advancing politically and institutionally. South East Europe is now profiling itself as a region of peace, democracy and solid economies. It is also strongly profiling itself as part of Europe where differences or outstanding issues are dealt with only by political means and with mutual respect.

In comparison with the recent past, this in itself is a contribution to the stability and security not only of the region, but more extensively also of Europe. In that sense it is of the fundamental importance to look at the resolution of the remaining outstanding issues in South East Europe as part of the completion of the European enlargement process.

This forward-looking approach should be maintained in view of the inherited and existing complexities, concerns and challenges. We must not allow the region to slip back into stagnation or protracted uncertainty. South East Europe must seize the moment, as citizens of our countries clearly voice their expectations.

In particular now we have the RCC as an instrument of the region to additionally motivate reforms, change and modernization under the political guidance of the SEECP.

At today's meeting of the RCC Board, the participants discussed and endorsed the RCC Strategic Work Programme 2008 – 2009, as a basis of our future work and activities. The Report of the Secretary General on the activities of the RCC Secretariat was also discussed. The Strategic Work Programme has been distributed to you by our host and I would appreciate your approval.

Allow me to acquaint you with the current state of play in the process of the formation of the RCC.

The RCC Secretariat is by now registered with the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, acquiring legal status, personality and contractual capacity.

The Headquarters Agreement with Belgium on the status of the Liaison Office in Brussels has been agreed upon and I expect to sign it in June.

To date, I have made the appointments for 23 positions in the RCC Secretariat. Here, I would use this opportunity to introduce Ms Jelica Minic as my newly appointed Deputy.

In making decisions on the appointments I have been guided by the competencies of the candidates taking into account also the geographical balance as appropriate.

In consultations with the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office, I have initiated the succeeding rotational principle between the Head and Deputy Head of Liaison Office in Brussels in order to ensure efficiency, full coverage of the Office's work areas and continuity of its relations both with the RCC and European Commission.

I have also established the position of the Special Envoy of the RCC Secretary General for Relations with the Presidency of the EU Council with the aim to keep South East Europe Agenda in full focus of the EU Presidencies` Agendas.

All the appointments are included in my Report to the RCC Board and will be made public after your approval.

The budget pooling process is going on and I would like to thank the countries that have already contributed to the RCC budget, inviting others to follow. The European commission will also contribute very soon.

Finally, the realization of the RCC`s tasks and goals will of course depend on the engagement of the RCC Secretariat and its staff. But, desired results can only be achieved through synergetic and coordinated efforts of us all. Support of the SEECP countries in this process is indispensable. I will be counting on full engagement of your Governments and thank you for your kind words.

Thanking the Bulgarian hosts and wishing all the success to the Moldovan friends, I thank you for your attention.