

BIŠĆEVIĆ: IT IS ONLY IN OUR REGION THAT ELECTIONS ARE WON BY RAISING A HUE AND CRY AGAINST THE NEIGHBOURS!

SARAJEVO, 5 July (FENA) – Regional cooperation in South East Europe and former Yugoslav countries’ entry into the EU are processes that, by the obvious logics, should be heading in the same direction. However, when it comes to the Balkans, as a rule, everything is different.

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has been established to foster these processes and for this reason we turned to it to find the answer to the issue of Euro-Balkans phenomenon.

- The fact alone that the history of EU enlargement does not know of the example of two simultaneous opposite processes – enlargement and post-conflict stabilisation processes – clearly speaks of the specificities of the region. Never has Europe been faced with such a challenge: working on opening itself for new members and working on their mutual post-conflict reconciliation and normalisation all at the same time. Hence the understandable hesitation or reluctance amongst the EU members, though it cannot be denied that the EU and its institutions maintain constant and open membership perspective to everyone in the region – RCC Secretary General Hido Bišćević commented the Balkans Story in the contexts of EU in his statement to *Fena* agency.

He emphasized that EU enlargement policy and perspective alone have enormous transformational power – not only regarding the in-country reforms which are changing the character of societies in the region but also even more as regards the impact of this transformational power on the overall relations in the region, and hence on the regional cooperation.

- The character of mutual relations and the consequences of the blood-covered recent past are still very much part of the political and social everyday life in this part of the world and even more so that, to be realistic and open, it is doubtful to what extent the authentic regional cooperation would have been developed today if it had not been for the transformational power of anticipated EU membership. There is also the main issue and challenge for regional cooperation: 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 – said Bišćević.

He further explained that post-transitional straying, economic crisis, social frustrations – not to mention outstanding bilateral issues – still influence the self-containment of our countries and societies, strong urges to “live within one’s society” while weak or lack of public influence, lack of educational public discussions and media trivialisation additionally contribute to maintaining this trend of isolation, separation from the world, and self-absorption. Political elites are most often trapped by the same syndrome.

- Hence the lack of interest for “others”, especially neighbours, what is, of course, just the first step in the persistent and renewed trend of maintaining mutual stereotypes, disbeliefs and old mutually accusing slogans. It is sufficient just to observe how even verbal readiness to regional cooperation lessens with approaching elections and we are the only region in Europe where the easiest way to secure winning the elections is to raise a hue and cry against the neighbours! – Bišćević said.

He believes this to be the moment to reconsider the way to consolidate regional cooperation, the way to provide mechanisms that would eliminate its constant oscillating – depending on the internal state of play in individual countries or on bilateral issues – while at the same time eliminating institutionalisation of any kind as it is historically impossible.

- The Balkans is neither Baltic nor Central Europe; the relations here are much more complicated and though regional cooperation incentives came from different reasons there – security in post-Soviet period or accelerating jointly towards the post-Communism Europe through Baltic Council or Vysehrad Group – there is no such a common “internal” authentically regional denominator in our region. Hence, I am referring back to the transformational power of EU membership – as it was in Europe after the Second World War, here too, after these four unfortunate wars the region experienced in a single decade, the idea of Europe will have to provide reconciliation, normalisation and on this based genuine regional cooperation – said RCC Secretary General.

Everything else would be yet another failure of history, creation of some gray zones of “frozen conflicts” or even recognition of the new division lines, warns Bišćević adding that in this part of Europe, we need and can seek our own “steel and coal”, something to start with, something we all share and of which we could all have benefits.

- It is clear, I am speaking of economic, natural and human potential the region is abundant in and which could be fully valorised only through joint transnational large-scale projects – RCC Secretary General Hido Bišćević said at the end of the interview.