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SVILANOVIĆ: PROTEST IN OTHER COUNTRIES OF THE REGION DUE TO HIGH LEVEL OF INEQUALITY SHOULD NOT COME AS A SURPRISE

SARAJEVO, 2 March (FENA) – In an interview for FENA, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Goran Svilanović, spoke about protests in BiH cities and the new EU approach towards the countries of the region.

At the beginning of the interview, Svilanović stresses that it is perfectly clear as to the reasons of protest of BIH citizens as he spoke of social tensions and discontent in the region 6 months ago, adding that this is not related to BiH alone but that there is a different level of discontent in all countries of the region due to the serious social situation.

He believes that, this time, it is a much different type of protests than were those in Serbia he himself was involved in as those then were classical political protests lead by political parties as part of the political game. Now, these protests are not lead by political parties though there are always attempts to orchestrate them.

- However, the nature of the protests lies in discontent which has nothing to do with political colours but with economic and social situation - believes Svilanović.

Talking about data from 2010, he said that the average GDP of the countries of the region was 1/3 of the average GDP in the EU States at that time. In other words, seven economies altogether developed as Portugal, which is not a major power in the EU.

He remained that the most important RCC projects is, therefore, the South East Europe (SEE) 2020 strategy which shifts the focus on economy and employment.

Over the past years, regional cooperation was seen in the context of reconciliation; however, though political topics are grave and not all wounds have been healed yet or issues overcome, it can be observed that the countries of the region can come together around economy as they share similar social and economic situation.

The aim of SEE 2020 is to have the region's GDP, excluding Croatia, at 45%-46% of what will then be the average GDP of the 28 EU Member States.

- Knowing these figures, it is clear as to what is happening on the streets of BiH; however, it should not come as a surprise if this continues over the coming months or years in other countries of the region since this is no longer a political process but a request for a new social contract. It is motivated by high level of inequality. A survey conducted in the U.S. showed that a few people manage major portion of the resources, i.e. the concentration of wealth lies within a

few percentages of people. It might be a good idea to research this for these countries too - said Svilanović.

He remained that 800,000 jobs have been wound up in the countries of the region since 2008 when the economic crisis hit. It is due to this that one of the objectives of the RCC strategy is to create one million jobs by 2020. These are not unrealistic expectations as the RCC uses this figure as a starting point wishing to return these people to work.

- When it comes to protest, there is not much room for politicians; however, they will have to agree on something and end this process through the election cycle. One should be aware that these protest are different, they are motivated by the situation in which this country is as well as countries in the region, and by the uncertainty as to the perspective - explained Svilanović.

He says that the fact a country will become EU Member in 5 or 15 years gives no answer to the people who lost their jobs and do not know what they will do until the end of the year, and not whether they will be in the EU or not by 2020.

However, young people should engage in politics as there is not a more creative job than the politics since it allows managing the processes in one's country, believes Svilanović, and in this context, invites participants in the protests to enter into politics as this is the way to voice their needs.

RCC Secretary General stresses that there will be changes in each of these countries, some new and different political parties will arise, and he believes that this will be the result of protests as finally "all this discontent and requests need to be channelled into a political process".

Responding to the question as to whether the politicians set the priorities wrongly, Svilanović says he does not believe so since, to him, the issue of implementation of the ruling of the European Court of Human Rights in the case of Sejdić and Finci is dramatically important issue of BiH, especially as it was decided not to allocate 45 million EUR to BiH due to reaching no agreement in this regard. He, thus, believes that the politicians are indeed dealing with important issues but that they were not successful in terms of reaching an agreement.

- I hope that people's pressure will lead to having this topic overcome more easily at some moment. These are 2 different topics but I'm linking them since the unresolved issue vis-à-vis the ruling resulted in withholding funds, and, thus, this is part of the answer as to why some people's life is harder than it should be - he explained.

He emphasized that these funds would not solve all the BiH's issues, but it would be easier for some people and this is where the responsibility of politicians for reaching an agreement lays. For Svilanović, this is where Sejdić-Finci issue and protests meet.

- I hope that the requests put forward to politicians will be responsibly heard and that they will seek a political solution as there is no other course open - he concluded.

He recently attended the event in London where European Commissioner for Enlargement and European Neighbourhood Policy Stefan Fule said that the EU would launch a new initiative focused on increasing economic governance in each of the countries in the accession process.

He said that this was not a new condition, reminding that the citizens of 28 EU Member States would vote for one of their politicians who would, at one point, decide on the entry of BiH or Serbia or Montenegro into the EU, i.e. this politician would be able to make a decision on joining only if he/she had support in his/her country, otherwise he/she would not be re-elected.

- The citizens will support this politician if, when presented the enlargement policy by the minister, they see us as similar to them. It is in this that I see the new approach, i.e. to clearly say that it is all related to the economic situation of the countries we live in. EU citizens have to see us as similar and as long as they see us as someone who is very poor and very distant, it is out of question that they will support the enlargement - said Svičanović.

Minister of 28 Member States meet to discuss economic issues of their countries and this is what the RCC intends to do in the region - have ministers of economy of the 6 countries of the region meeting and discussing their economies once a year.

We will seek to have each citizen able to see whether there was an increase in employment in Montenegro over the past year, where Serbia is, what is happening in BiH, and to compare them in all areas from education to employment.

He said that 145 million EUR worth Fund was established which should assist in reforming SMEs, and activities on economy and return to EU values are expected as regards observance of human rights and media freedom as well as fight against corruption on the basis of which the EU was founded.

- This is being heard on the streets of BiH by its citizens saying they want a country that is not corrupted and in which there is a responsibility of state officials for what is being said, and in terms of wages, to be closer to those of the EU citizens," said RCC Secretary General Goran Svičanović in the interview for FENA.