

HIDAJET HIDO BISCEVIC, SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL

RCC Is the Key Partner of the European Commission in the Region

Vanja Lazarevski 06/06/2009 12:54

Podgorica – Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) works on strengthening institutional links between the region and EU, and, presently, the RCC is considered as the key interlocutor of the European Commission with regard to development issues in South East Europe, stated Secretary General of the Council, **Hidajet Hido Bišćević**.



In the interview to "Evropski reporter", Bišćević said that regional energy security is the priority of Council's activities.

Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) was officially launched on 27 February 2008, as the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, and is presently managed by the countries from the region. The Pact was managed by Brussels.

The Council is operational body of the Southeast Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP). .

RCC is the successor of Stability Pact. How big the work is this in fact?

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) is a regionally owned and led international organization. Its mission is to promote mutual cooperation and European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East Europe in order to inspire development in the region to the benefit of its people.

The RCC is centrally involved in mobilizing the potentials and talents that exist in our region, especially at a time when South East Europe is again at crossroads, faced with additional challenges posed by the global financial and economic crisis.

However, I am confident that with trust in the potentials of the region and determination, the crisis can be turned into new opportunities for implementing reforms and projects needed for

growth of the region. These opportunities primarily relate to infrastructure, energy, transport, building human capital and strengthening the rule of law.

What has been done so far under the RCC leadership in the area of strengthening institutional relations of the region and the EU? Which projects are, in this sense, regarded as crucial and which are on the horizon?

During the first year of its operation, the RCC positioned itself as the main cooperation forum in South East Europe. Political consultations held with prime ministers, ministers of foreign affairs and other high-level officials of the RCC members from South East Europe, together with the meetings between national and RCC experts, paved the way to exploring and identifying the methods and mechanisms of cooperation within the RCC framework.

The RCC is today regarded as the key interlocutor of the European Commission when it comes to development issues in South East Europe. We have been working on establishing a permanent cooperation mechanism among the RCC Secretariat, RCC National Coordinators from South East Europe, European Commission and relevant international financial institutions, aimed at stimulating development in the region.

In order to maintain a quick and constant open communication with all the Brussels-based European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, the RCC Secretariat has a Liaison Office in Brussels. A Special Envoy of the RCC Secretary General is also active with the mandate to maintain the relations between the RCC and Presidency of the EU Council.

Council's work focuses on six priority areas: economic and social development, energy and infrastructure, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital, and parliamentary cooperation.

What is your opinion about energy potentials and needs of South East Europe?

Energy security is a priority area of utmost importance for our region. This was demonstrated during January 2009 when gas supplies were halted as a consequence of dispute that occurred outside our region, causing natural gas shortages during the coldest time of the year. I did write to the parties involved in the dispute, reflecting on the consequences of the cuts for the peoples and economies of South East Europe.

Potentials for energy saving in the region are huge and are estimated to range from 20 to 60 percent depending on the country and the sector of energy consumption.

Bearing in mind the fact that energy projects have transboundary impacts, the role assigned to the RCC is to ensure that overlapping and duplications are avoided and the projects promoted and facilitated.

What is the status of cooperation between the RCC and governments of its member countries?

The RCC has permanent contact and cooperation with its members in its priority areas of cooperation: economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital and parliamentary cooperation.



With the involvement of RCC Secretariat, the RCC members directly contribute to identifying specific activities while implementation of concrete projects is to start soon after their approval at the RCC Annual Meeting.

45 countries expressed readiness to financially and politically support development of South East Europe. What does this support mean exactly?

Out of 45 RCC members, 29 contribute to RCC Secretariat's budget, including all members from South East Europe. These 29 members also

constitute the Board of the Council, while the budget is used for financing activities of the Secretariat, and not the projects.

The projects are financed by international financial institutions keen to do this and by donors through other funds.

The most frequent projects implemented jointly by the countries in the region are said to be energy and infrastructure projects, and recently also projects in the area of social infrastructure and building human capital. What is your opinion of the ReSpa, recently opened Regional School of Public Administration, located in Danilovgrad?

Building a knowledge-based society is a challenge we are facing in the region. This is why the RCC shows great interest in the newly established Regional School for Public Administration which will play a crucial role in training public officials from Western Balkan countries, members of the RCC.

The European Commission and other international partners are actively involved in developing its curricula. The signing of a Memorandum on Cooperation between the RCC and the Danilovgrad School, as well as the membership of the RCC in the Board of the School, is envisaged.

The Ministerial Conference, co-organized by the RCC and the Czech Presidency of the Council of EU, held on 24 April 2009 in Sarajevo, initiated development of a Regional Research and Development Strategy for the Western Balkans aimed at establishing a framework for

communication and cooperation among scientific and research communities in the Western Balkans.

CEFTA Has to Be Maintained

Due to economic crises, Sarajevo has recently announced increasing tariff rates what puts CEFTA at risk. What is your comment on this?

The global financial and economic crisis has severe consequences on the region, but the countries of the region should adhere to the existing free trade agreements which are important for protecting the rights of all nations.

Trade is an important source of both the economic growth and poverty. If protectionism becomes the norm, there will be no winners in the end.

CEFTA has to be maintained as it would be irresponsible and most certainly paradoxical to open “trade wars” during the times of economic crises.

It is impossible to expect countries to strive to standards of a common European market and at the same time create joint markets in the region.

In your opinion, what is the perspective of SEE in this challenging time of facing economic and energy crisis? Is the solution entering the “Rescue Programme”, and can you explain mechanisms of this programme?

It is difficult to isolate energy issues from global economic crisis. Definitely, on the energy front, better energy infrastructure leading to better energy interlinkages, coupled with increased efficiency in utilization of the present hydro-carbon energy resources and development of renewable energy resources, will provide us with more affordable energy prices. Such a progress would be crucial in alleviating the pressures of high energy prices on global economy.

Together with the EU Presidency and European Commission, the RCC is presently actively working on ensuring involvement of the South East Europe in a wider European economic recovery strategy in order to provide additional funds and begin the process of harmonization of all large-scale development projects.



The initiative for establishment of the SEE Development Bank is the consequence of crisis, or does it have another connotation?

The suggestion on the creation of the South East European Development Bank arose based on the fact that the only European transition countries not being members of sub-regional

development banks or financial institutions are the countries of the Central Europe region and the ex-Yugoslav Republics.

The idea is to create an institution that will provide affordable long-term financing to those areas not adequately serviced by the public and private sector sources.

The RCC is currently examining the views of all stakeholders and potential partners to this initiative.

The author is correspondent to the “Evropski reporter”