



**THE MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF
THE SOUTH EAST EUROPE COOPERATION PROCESS (SEECP)
PARTICIPATING STATES**

**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL
COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC),**

GORAN SVILANOVIC

OHRID, 31 MAY 2013

Thank you Mr. Chairman, distinguished Minister Poposki,

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to begin by expressing gratitude to our hosts for giving us the opportunity to convene in the beautiful and picturesque city of Ohrid.

At the very outset, I wish to thank the SEECP Chair-in-Office 2012 – 2013, Minister Poposki and his team for the leadership in strengthening regional cooperation, as well as for continuing to inspire good-neighbourliness, reconciliation, tolerance and progress in South East Europe (SEE). The motto “Solidarity in Action” clearly depicts the essence of your C-i-O, which has been successfully conducted in the course of the last twelve months.

We, at RCC, benefited enormously from the strategic synergy with the SEECP. It augmented RCC’s capacities to pursue its mission in the best interests of the SEE participants. In this sense, we look forward to continue cooperating prolifically with the incoming SEECP C-i-O.

This esteemed forum reminds me of the honour of being designated, exactly a year ago, as RCC Secretary General. This meeting is an excellent occasion to express my gratitude to all of you and to reaffirm that my professional and personal dedication to the development, prosperity and stability of the region will continue unabated.

One can only be reassured by the positive developments in SEE, especially in the Western Balkans, but also beyond it, in terms of nurturing reconciliation and tolerance, moving forward to solving some of the open and protracted issues and assuming a greater responsibility within the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

As Croatia prepares to become the 28th member state of the EU, I wish to join in extending wholehearted congratulations. After all, Croatia is the first country from the region to join the EU following the establishment of the RCC – a true success story. The other participants around the table are progressing on the European and Euro-Atlantic integration path as well, albeit in their own way, and hopefully will be greeted respectively.

The latest EC recommendations on the EU perspectives of Serbia and Kosovo* are very encouraging. They come following the recent agreements reached between Belgrade and Prishtina, in the context of the dialogue facilitated by the EU, and constitute a major step forward towards strengthening regional stability and confirms that each issue could be solved through dialogue.

Overall, this positive momentum reminds us about the shared purpose agreed 10 years ago, in 2003, at the Thessaloniki Summit. This is an anniversary worthy of observing. It should also focus our attention to the present duality in the region, whereby the struggle between going forward and lagging behind, absorbs the potential needed to ensure durable results in many vital sectors. The situation is exacerbated by different perceptions about what constitutes real and immediate problems.

This is why, in my mind, the conditions in the region should be conducive to stimulating economic growth and social stability, rekindling the infrastructure, upholding the rule of law and further aligning judicial systems and law enforcement mechanisms to EU and international standards, ensuring security and promoting freedom of expression. In other words, durable reforms and policies at the national levels should reinforce the role of the EU enlargement policy.

Regional cooperation is one of the means to facilitate this, by fostering genuine dialogue, reconciliation, stability and prosperity and, of course, it is an important EU membership pre-condition. At this point, we take note with satisfaction of the intended new Western Balkans initiative, aimed at promoting the concept of mutual relations among its participants, and recall in this respect the role of RCC as the all-inclusive and regionally owned- framework for coordinating the regional cooperation in SEE.

Excellencies,

The RCC celebrated its 5th anniversary this year, leaving behind a period marked by important achievements and results pertinent for the key formative period. It has now entered in a new phase of its mission.

I am certain that you have noted tangible results in a number of priority areas following the successful implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme for the period 2011 – 2013, as they are included in my Annual Report.

*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.

The RCC has proven to be a regionally-owned and all-inclusive cooperative framework, nurtured the spirit of cooperation and raised the awareness of the role that genuine dialogue has in the development of the region.

The decision of February 2013, allowing full respect of the principle of all-inclusiveness within the RCC, showed that the region can cooperate in an atmosphere of tolerance, mutual trust and respect.

In order to seize the positive momentum and turn the tides against the current multifaceted consequences of the economic crisis in SEE, the RCC focused on prioritizing its areas of work, displaying flexibility in its approach, increasing visibility for the general public and exhibiting a constant vision of the ultimate goal.

Together with the RCC participants from SEE and with the significant support of the European Commission, the RCC prepared its second Strategy and Programme covering the period 2014 – 2016, with the SEE 2020 - a Job-creating Growth and EU Integration Strategy as its central pillar.

The SEE 2020 Strategy has been designed on the basis of Europe 2020 flagship initiatives and amended to suit the needs and specific conditions of the region. It is based on five pillars: integrated, smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, underpinned by good governance. Let us try to make the best use of the SEE 2020 Strategy and its Action plan in order to address the region's economic development priorities and make it more competitive, thereby bringing it closer to the EU. A full political support of the governments concerned, naturally, would ensure the much needed steppingstone. We expect the documents to be adopted towards the end of 2013.

I am fully confident that the new RCC Strategy and Work Programme with SEE 2020 Strategy as its main pillar, endorsed yesterday by the RCC Annual Meeting, will represent a timely response to the consequences of the economic and financial crisis. Also, to make this happen, the national governments will have a key role in the implementation process.

In the period ahead, the RCC will continue to work vigorously, together with our participants, partners and stakeholders in meeting the targets set before us, relying strongly on the incoming SEECF Chair-in-Office.

Thank you.