



**INFORMAL MEETING OF
THE SEECP MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

Budva, 28 January 2011

Address by Hido Biscevic, Regional Cooperation Council Secretary General

Mr. Chairman, Distinguished Ministers, Dear colleagues,

Let me join you in thanking our host for the opportunity to gather here, for the first time at this level since Montenegro assumed EU candidate status that we all welcome and appreciate as an encouraging sign for the entire enlargement dynamic of our region.

Let me also express my appreciation for Montenegrin dedication in executing responsible and challenging duty of SEECP Chair-in-Office. Indeed, we have succeeded to deliver much needed synergy between the SEECP and the RCC. Moreover, by now we have a fully operational mechanism of regular coordination between the SEECP Troika, the RCC and the EU, which I consider essentially important for enhancing regional ownership of cooperation alongside with the EU enlargement policy.

Allow me also to share with you some observations on the current situation in the region from the RCC point of view.

In general, the region is on the positive move.

In general, we witness and we create an enhanced spirit of rapprochement, reconciliation, moderation and pragmatism.

These are encouraging signs. They help as not only to realize the EU aspirations of the enlargement countries from the region, but they are key pillars of long lasting positive profiling of our region, deeply reformed and irreversibly anchored with the EU and Euro-Atlantic integrations.

But, in order to remain on this path, there is a clear need to translate this new climate into a comprehensive and broad process that will ensure genuine, all inclusive cooperation at all levels and among all relevant participants, ranging from political leaders, parliament to media and civil society, from regional business communities to our international friends and partners.

In a word, trends need to be translated into durable and sustainable policies.

In addition, they need to be an additional charge for reinvigorated regional recovery and development approach that would result in pooling together, on the sectorial and functional basis, critically needed regional projects in the areas where underdevelopment is evident, namely energy, infrastructure and transport.

In my mind, this approach would only be complementary to the EU membership of the enlargement countries in the region.

Now, on the enlargement side, the trend is also positive, both on part of the countries from the region and the EU. I am confident that the finalization of the accession negotiations by one of our Members, hopeful further advancement by others during this year, will be of paramount importance to keep the momentum and ensure that the entire South East Europe is mapped within the EU.

EU Council Conclusions from December 2010 confirms the EU commitments, but also indicates that much work is still ahead, both in terms of accession related reforms and in terms of responsible and timely resolution of the remaining issues in the region.

Now, on this note, one need to remain confident that these issues will gain new momentum this year, in terms of dealing with fundamentally important constitutional debate in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in terms of carefully formatted Belgrade – Prishtina dialogue, in terms of finding a way forward in the ongoing dialogue between Skopje and Athens and, in general, preserving the overall

regional cooperative spirit conducive to moderation, pragmatism and mutual appeasement.

There is no doubt that each and every of our Members would benefit from the commitment to resolve these issues and there is no doubt about the appreciative recognition on part of our EU and Euro-Atlantic partners.

In my mind, this is why we all need to be guided by a broader picture and strategic goals, not to be distracted by issues that may, from time to time, reflect internal agendas, but cloud foreign policy goals.

Regional Cooperation Council at this point wants to work and benefit from these positive trends in the region.

Profiled by now as a key forum for guiding and monitoring cooperation in the region, the RCC started vigorously to implement the Strategy and Work Programme for 2011 – 2013.

Initial assessments from our EU and international partners are positive and encouraging. But, in the same time, as this Work Programme is also a reflection of the needs and initiatives coming from the region, I pledge you to ensure within your Administration continued, full and operational commitment to the RCC work.

This is the only way to ensure that the RCC will deliver.

And, at this point, the RCC Secretariat is engaged in a wide range of activities related to the Work Programme.

Later in the afternoon, we will sign with Montenegro the Agreement on hosting the future Task Force for Culture and Society. By doing so, we will take over from the Council of Europe the entire responsibility for the project of restoration of cultural heritage and monuments in the region. I intend to twin this project with the initiative to establish a regional restoration center and launching of multinational restoration teams.

In line with the need for the region to take over its own responsibility for crucially important sectors of development, the RCC will take over from the OECD the SEE

Investment Committee, later in the year. Needless to emphasize, is the importance of this step for the region.

In addition, the RCC is by now fully engaged with the European Commission in the context of Multi-beneficiary IPA programming.

At this point, the RCC is heavily engaged in the concrete work - from developing a Public Private Partnership Network to preparing a Regional Strategy for fighting organized crime and corruption, from implementation of the Single Sky agreement to ensuring cooperation among defence and intelligence sector in the region, from bringing together universities in the region around the students exchange programmes to bringing together public broadcaster in the region around shared European editorial standards and assistance in the digitalization process etc.

This brief outline also indicates the mission of the RCC – build on the positive political trends in the region to insert concrete initiatives and projects that will ensure irreversibility of the process and bring us together around shared needs in so many sectors, to the individual benefit of every Member.

This a painstaking work. There will be no spectacular overnight successes. We need to progress steadily in order to preserve what we have achieved.

Last but not least, we need to adopt the notion of moderation, pragmatism, flexibility and I dare say also inventiveness in order to deal with some aspects of regional cooperation, in particular related to regional trade, regional transport, regional disaster preparedness and some others.

In the period ahead, the region may only benefit from complementing the EU oriented efforts with developing and implementing joint regional recovery and development projects in the myriad of sectors.

The RCC remains ready to guide and monitor this process, relying fully on the support of your authorities.

Thank you.