



**TALKING POINTS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL  
COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC), MR. HIDO BIŠČEVIĆ**

**13<sup>th</sup> BLED FORUM ON EUROPE FORESIGHT CONFERENCE: EUROPE  
BEYOND SMART – INCLUSIVE – SUSTAINABLE THROUGHOUT CLOUD  
COMPUTING DECADE**

**BLED, 29-30 MARCH 2012**

Dear Chairman of Bled Forum Mr. Golob,

Dear State Secretary Dr. Cerar,

Dear colleagues,

- Let me expressed my gratitude for the kind invitation to participate in this year's Forum.
- The objectives of this event will certainly augment our understanding of the challenges Europe and its regions are facing in 2012. It is on the latter, that my utterance is focused, with the aim to contribute to a better understanding of the challenges facing one of Europe's important regions, South East Europe (SEE).
- What indeed is a current state of play in the region of SEE?
- As we congratulate the incoming Croatia's full EU membership and the recent Serbia's status of EU candidate country, our strong wish and hope is that these successes will stimulate other aspiring countries from the region to rekindle their efforts and energy in order to overcome the remaining obstacles on their way towards European and Euro-Atlantic integrations.

- In this sense, I strongly believe in the potential of the region to take a strategic long-term outlook at the remaining obstacles. Without the resolution of open issues, at times when the international agenda is moving the region down the list of its priorities and attention, we may be faced with a prolonged status quo and detrimental political lethargy.
- Now a word on the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).
- The RCC became a pivotal platform for guiding and monitoring regional cooperation, whilst building on the genuine regional ownership and input from the region itself, with the support of European and international partners. Under the umbrella of the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECPP), the RCC focuses on developing the project-oriented aspect of regional cooperation in all priority areas as a status neutral and all-inclusive cooperative platform aimed at assisting countries from the region in their European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.
- In this context, the results of RCC's work in 2011 are important.
- Let me just mention the transfer of SEE Investment Committee (SEEIC) from the OECD, the implementation of the Regional Strategic Document 2011-2013 and the Action Plan in the area of Justice and Home Affairs, the establishment of the Task Force on Culture and Society, closer cooperation in the area of Security and other, are contributions pertinent for the development of SEE.
- The impact of the recession has been felt strongly in SEE. It led to a rapid reduction of capital flows, including foreign direct investment, remittances, and foreign assistance. It depressed foreign trade, domestic demand, employment, and business opportunities.
- Here, I want come back to one valuable tool – the SEE Investment Committee which now operates under the auspices of RCC. It promotes continued economic reforms and should provide supporting platform for regional development.
- In addition, eight SEE stock exchanges (from Banja Luka, Belgrade, Ljubljana, Podgorica, Sarajevo, Skopje, Tirana and Zagreb) have signed, two days ago, the Platform for Joint Action under the auspices of the RCC Secretariat, which is expected to enhance cooperation among the securities exchanges and improve access to finance in the region, a key prerequisite for private sector growth.
- In addition, the RCC has also initiated a dialogue at the regional level on important social issues in the Western Balkans. In its Social Agenda 2020 for the

Western Balkans, the RCC is promoting discussions on topics of long-term importance for the social development of the region.

- The development of information society is also one of a key priority. The establishment of a single and inclusive information space in SEE, as well as strengthened innovation and investment in ICT research and education are fundamental to the rapid development of the SEE countries. The RCC works closely with national governments, with regional centers, such as the Center for eGovernance, and international partners like UNDP to advance the development of information society and its contribution to economic and social development in SEE.
- As important for economic development is cooperation in the field of science and effective higher education structural reform, where the RCC has been actively engaged through the Regional Strategy for Research and Development for Innovation for the Western Balkans and Building Capacity for Structural Reform in Higher Education of Western Balkans respectively.
- In conclusion, as the countries of SEE will, hopefully, continue to advance towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integrations – one would expect a growing readiness for greater regional responsibility for regional cooperation in our part of Europe.

Thank you for your attention.