



**Address of the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC),
Hido Biscevic, at a ministerial conference**

***National Museums in South East Europe - Status, Management and
Partnerships***

Skopje, 13 November 2012

Honorable Chair – Minister Kanceska - Milevska,

Esteemed Ministers,

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- I am honoured to welcome you at this important regional event and to use the opportunity to thank the current Chairmanship-in-Office of the South Eastern European Cooperation Process, especially the Ministry of Culture of the host country, for excellent cooperation we have had in organising today's ministerial conference, the first during their SEECP Chairmanship.
- Allow me to briefly share with you, from the point of view of the Regional Cooperation Council, some observations on the current situation in the area of culture in the region, with some remarks to the status of national museums.
- First of all, I would like to stress the need of investing continuous efforts in fostering rapprochement, reconciliation and pragmatism particularly in the region

where the consequences of the economic and financial crisis still reverberate and where potential uncertainties could still surface.

- Every society in the region has, within its fundamental goals, the respect for cultural differences, traditions and customs and devotion to principles of non-discrimination and tolerance. Preserving and further improving multi-cultural harmony and inter-religious relations is of particular importance for the entire region and, in particular for the Western Balkans.
- In my mind, this approach can only complement the EU perspectives of the countries from the region. Moreover, as we are already witnessing progress on the EU accession path, with the incoming Croatia's full EU membership and Montenegro firmly in the membership negotiating process, 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 integration.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Let me express my appreciation for the support the RCC has received from the Ministers of Culture of South East Europe, to become the main coordinator of the Ljubljana Process, project aiming to foster rehabilitation and preservation of the built cultural heritage in our region. Today, year and a half after the First, Inaugural meeting of the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society, and official opening of its Secretariat, I feel both content and obliged to take this opportunity and look back on the achievements in the last period and current status of the Task Force main project - Ljubljana Process.
- The Ministers of Culture of SEE appointed their representatives as members of the TF; the TF Chair and Co-chair were appointed; the Permanent Secretariat of the TF was opened in Cetinje, Montenegro, the main statutory documents of the TF were adopted... In one word, the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society became fully operational and the transfer of the coordination of the "Ljubljana Process" to this regionally owned structure has been accomplished. Last meeting of the TF

was held here in Skopje, prior today's event, and I am happy to greet members of the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society who are with us here today.

- Apart from the core project implementation, the RCC Task Force received half of a million EUR EU grant in order to implement activities supplementary to the basic Action Plan. Furthermore, the European Commission is considering proposal to allocate additional EUR 3 mil for concrete works in restoring cultural heritage in the Western Balkans, under the framework of Ljubljana Process.
- Success of the Ljubljana Process depends not only of proclaimed political commitments but it heavily relies on active involvement of respective institutions of the countries from the region.

Dear ministers,

- Sharing a common European cultural identity and having existing strong professional cooperation, Southeast Europe as a whole is the logical market for many cultural products coming from the countries in the region. One of the perfect examples is the audio-visual sector. This has been recognized both by the experts and professionals in the field at the Regional Film Forum held in June in Sarajevo, and the main policy decision makers, also stated in the latest Declaration of the Council of Ministers of Culture of Southeast Europe, from April this year in Belgrade. RCC started coordination of activities towards improvement of the conditions for the film industry in SEE. Establishment of the Regional Film Fund would complement available funds on national and European level - EURO-IMAGE, with an aim to strengthen cross-border market for audio-visual works in SEE.
- Another area in which regional cooperation could bring strong benefits to involved parties is creation of the SEE Museums Network. Museums are best positioned to explain the present and portray the future by means of presenting specific objects and stories inherited from the past. Countries, peoples and their culture in SEE have had so many resemblances in the past. Institutions which have such a strong educational, social and economic dimension as museums need to open their programmes and capacities for cooperation with their neighbours.

- All the museums in the region unfortunately also share cutbacks from government and general social changes, therefore they should look to form alliances and develop cross-border cooperation between cultural operators and institutions, elaborate joint products and programmes etc.
- I sincerely hope that our joint efforts and Ministerial Joint Statement to be adopted today will open opportunities for deepening of cooperation in the field of culture, and particularly among the museums in the region. That we will increase our capacity to reach other available funds, attract investments, including those from private sector, and provide prerequisites for the continuing development of South East Europe. There are many challenges ahead, but I am confident that by joining our efforts we will achieve concrete and sustainable results.
- RCC Secretariat will be a strong and reliable partner to the SEE Ministers of Culture, under the umbrella of proposed new unified ministerial platform on culture and development in SEE, supported also by our colleagues from UNESCO, the Council of Europe and the EU. RCC Task Force on Culture and Society, in my view, for several reasons could be seen as the operational arm of such reinvigorated structure, and I believe that this strategic partnership is ready to be materialized into concrete actions.

Thank you for your attention.