



Regional Cooperation Council

The Regional Cooperation Council promotes 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 Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) was officially launched on 27 February 2008, as the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The RCC is an operational arm of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) and functions as a focal point for regional co-operation. It acts also as a forum for the continued involvement of the international community engaged in the region.

The RCC focuses on regional cooperation in South East Europe (SEE) through a regionally owned and led framework that also supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The key RCC role is to generate and coordinate developmental projects and create a political climate that will enable overall economic and social advancement in SEE, to the benefit of the people in the region.

The work of the RCC focuses on five priority areas:

- economic and social development
- infrastructure and energy
- justice and home affairs
- security cooperation
- building human capital and parliamentary cooperation

The organization maintains close working relations with all actors of relevance in these areas, such as governments, international organizations, international financial institutions, regional organizations, private sector and civil society.

The RCC membership consists of 45 countries, organizations and international financial institutions. The RCC has a Secretariat based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, headed by the Secretary General Hido Bišćević. Apart from the Sarajevo headquarters, the Secretariat has a Liaison Office in Brussels with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions.

The RCC meeting format consists of the Annual Meeting and meetings of the RCC Board, held quarterly. The RCC Board provides operational guidance and supervision to the organization. It comprises of those RCC members contributing to the budget of the RCC Secretariat as well as the European Union (EU), represented by the Troika consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council's Secretariat General.

Decisions of the RCC are taken by consensus. The working language of RCC meetings as well as of the Secretariat is English.

The Secretariat provides technical, analytical and organizational support to the RCC Secretary General and the organization as such, as well as to the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office. It serves as a coordination framework for regional cooperation activities within SEE and acts as an information and focal point for such activities.

The RCC Secretariat employs 38 staff from SEE, 32 in Sarajevo and 6 in Brussels, among them 20 experts and analysts. Its budget is set at 3 million euro annually – 1/3 being the contribution by the RCC members from South East Europe, 1/3 by the European Commission and 1/3 by other RCC members.



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Economic and social development

The RCC recognizes that the development of prosperous market economies underpinned by adequate social systems represents a cornerstone of peace and stability in South East Europe.

To this end, the RCC coordinates, facilitates and provides political support to a number of regional social and economic initiatives aimed at investment facilitation, Small and Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs) development, trade liberalization, public health improvement, social dialogue, and employment policy reform. The RCC pays special attention to fostering dialogue between inter-dependent regional endeavors.

Key initiatives in the realm of economic development comprise free trade, including support to the Central European Free Trade Agreement 2006 (CEFTA); the OECD Investment Compact for South East Europe which supports the development of a positive climate for investment and SMEs; and the Business Advisory Council which facilitates dialogue with the private sector.

In the realm of social development, the RCC builds upon the work of the Bucharest Employment Process which aims at improving and streamlining national employment policies across the region and is also engaged in promoting social dialogue between workers and employers' associations.

Issues of public health are addressed in the context of the South East European Health Network, an initiative that strives to improve regional public health services.

An overarching theme is borne by the Electronic South East Europe (eSEE) Initiative which promotes the introduction of information and communication technologies across the diverse sectors of government, commerce, education, and public life. The initiative was recently reinforced with the creation of a Centre for eGovernance Development in Ljubljana – a public-private partnership that will serve as a single coordination point for eGovernance capacity building throughout the region.



Energy and infrastructure are prerequisites for regional economic growth and social stability.

Infrastructure and energy

Energy and infrastructure, as prerequisites for the overall economic, social and environmentally sustainable development, stability and prosperity, are of particular RCC focus.

The RCC supports implementation of the Treaty establishing the Energy Community. It promotes sustainable energy development in the region and transfer of knowledge from EU member States on the sustainable energy projects preparation, development, financing scheme and implementation.

Due attention is paid to support the South East Europe Transport Observatory Permanent Secretariat in the foreseen process of negotiation of a Treaty establishing the Transport Community based on the existing Memorandum of Understanding on the Development of the South East Europe Core Regional Transport Network. The RCC contributes to creating and implementing the South East European Railway Transport Area based on the recently signed Addendum to the mentioned Memorandum.

The RCC encourages SEE countries in coordinating efforts to better use the support available for regional cooperation, primarily through the EU's Multi-beneficiary Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA).

Participation in the International Financial Institutions (IFI) Advisory Group and its technical working groups

enables the RCC to serve as an interface between policy-makers, the IFIs, business community and social partners. The RCC plays an important role in identifying projects eligible for the Infrastructure Projects Facility support, launched by the European Commission's Directorate General for Enlargement, and its subsequent implementation.

The success of the reforms will highly depend on the comprehensive support and general acceptance. The RCC fosters the dialogue with social partners and civil society and facilitates the adoption of social action plans linked to infrastructure restructuring and its products and services affordability.

Due to huge potentials of Danube and Sava rivers, the RCC supports the Danube Cooperation Process and the International Sava River Basin Commission. It also works with the Regional Environmental Centre and the Regional Environment Reconstruction Programme Secretariat.

Justice and home affairs

Fight against organised crime and corruption, reform of police, law enforcement and judicial system, combating illegal migration, visa facilitation and liberalisation, and strengthening border management, are of particular importance to the South East European countries and their European and Euro-Atlantic agenda and, as such, form a core RCC priority.

RCC supports, promotes and co-ordinates the work of relevant regional initiatives active in the field of justice and home affairs throughout SEE, ensuring that their efforts are mutually reinforcing and not overlapping, and complementary to the region's EU integration goals.

The strategic objectives include:

- combating trans-border organized crime, in particular through the South East European Cooperation Initiative (SECI) Centre for Combating Trans-Border Crime and the South East European Prosecutors Advisory Group (SEEPAG);
- supporting implementation of the Convention on Police Cooperation through the Southeast Europe Police Chief Association (SEPCA);
- facilitating, with SEPCA, projects on Organized Crime Training Network, the Bled Process for Stolen

Vehicles, the Interpol I24/7 IT system connecting border control points, the creation of crime analysis units in SEE countries, and national and regional exchange of data on organized crime;

- anti-corruption activities, including cooperation with the Regional Anti Corruption Initiative (RAI);
- migration and asylum related activities, including work with Migration, Asylum and Refugee Regional Initiative (MARRI) and observation of related EU developments.

A close liaison with relevant partners, ministries, institutions, research institutes and non-governmental organizations is maintained. The RCC has worked on a system of direct, quick and constant circulation of information to coordinate and integrate the national and regional responses in criminal cases.

The RCC Secretariat supports harmonization of national criminal law legislations, and synchronized use of European and international tools of criminal procedure. It works to translate the best practices and lessons learned into governmental decisions and legislation, and to gain support from the general public, international organizations, donors, civil society and business environment for these efforts.

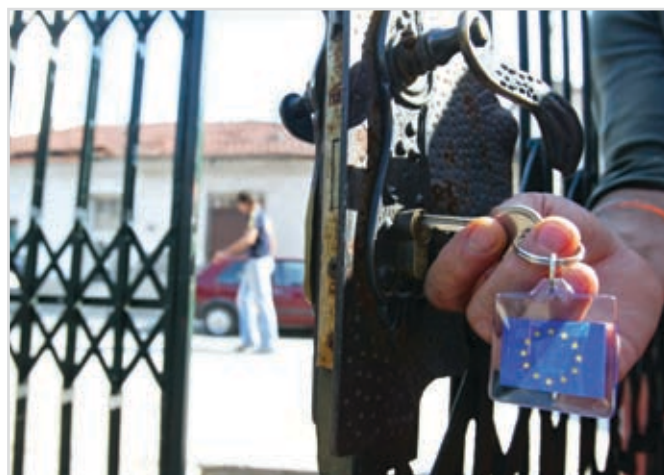
Security cooperation

In the security sector, the RCC is engaged in identifying the remaining and emerging challenges and finding ways to address them through cooperation at regional level to make responses more effective.

Parliamentary dimension of cooperation in the security sector is of specific importance to the RCC. Strengthening legislative scrutiny and the oversight function is needed in armed forces and security services.

Several initiatives and task forces are working successfully under the auspices of the RCC. The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SEESAC) and the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI) have proven their effectiveness and have full support of regional countries. The RCC role is one of coordination and further enhancement of their activities for a better response to the region's needs, and of bringing synergy among all SEE initiatives and task forces. The ultimate aim is to achieve a full regional ownership. The RCC also actively cooperates with the Center for Security Cooperation (RACVIAC).

Development of a comprehensive South East European Security Sector Reform (SSR) strategy aims at specifying the functional division of needs for an easier approach to donor community. It should help identify gaps in the range of existing activities and be used as a prompt for 'stock-taking' initiatives by the EU and NATO. The RCC promotes local owner-



Opening the gates to European standards on justice and security in South East Europe is an RCC priority. (Photo Maja Zlatevska)

ship and building of governmental coordination capacities. Given its potential for a comprehensive regional approach to the SSR, the RCC actively contributes to the enhancement of the coordination process with other international and bilateral actors and non-governmental organizations.

Enhanced EU and NATO support to confidence-building measures in the region, backed by sustained investment of resources, are essential for reinforcing the still fragile but quickly strengthening process of regional cooperation in the security sector.

Building human capital and parliamentary cooperation

The RCC works to implement projects that will renew and strengthen human potential of South East Europe. Building human capital is recognized by the RCC as a key precondition for accomplishment of started and envisaged reforms in different areas, as well as for the accelerated resolution of many of residual patterns and stereotypes hampering regional cooperation.

The RCC advocates that the SEE countries set education and vocational training as a national priority, to benefit from the funding available for education through



The RCC sees building human capital essential for the overall development and cooperation in South East Europe.

specific national and Multi-beneficiary Programmes of the European Commission (IPA, FP7, Tempus, Erasmus Mundus).

The RCC supports harmonization of educational reform within the SEE and with the EU, assists RCC members from the region to participate in the EU's Integrated Community Programme for Lifelong Learning, cooperates with university networks, supports mobility and student exchanges, and promotes the objectives of the EU's European Qualification Framework. The RCC backs the establishment of a Regional Research Strategy for the Western Balkans and the Regional School for Public Administration.

Promotion of the ideas of Trust Based Societies, aimed at relaxing social relations in the region and positive profiling of SEE as a place of tolerance and rich human capital, is an RCC priority. Particular attention is given to civil society development and dialogue, and active involvement of youth in this respect. Development of cultural cooperation and gender mainstreaming projects is of great importance for long-lasting stability in the region.

Parliamentary cooperation

The main RCC partner for parliamentary cooperation in SEE is the Sofia-based Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Cooperation in South East Europe. Jointly with the Regional Secretariat, the RCC works on intensifying parliamentary cooperation at all levels and acts as information network between and for parliaments of the region.

RCC members

Albania*
Austria*
Bosnia and Herzegovina*
Bulgaria*
Canada
Council of Europe
Council of Europe Development Bank
Croatia*
Czech Republic*
Denmark
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
European Investment Bank
European Union (EU), represented by the Troika, consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat, as well as the European Parliament*
Federal Republic of Germany*
Finland*
France*
Greece*
Hungary*
Ireland*
Italy*
Latvia*
Moldova*
Montenegro*

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
Norway*
Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
Poland*
Romania*
Serbia*
Slovakia
Slovenia*
South East European Co-operative Initiative
Spain*
Sweden*
Switzerland*
The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*
Turkey*
United Kingdom
United Nations
United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
United Nations Development Programme
United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on behalf of Kosovo in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244*
United States of America*
World Bank

**members of RCC Board*