

Mr. Secretary General,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, let me thank you for the invitation to take part in the panel discussion *Five years of the Regional Cooperation Council: Building on foundations and embracing new challenges* and the ceremony marking the 5th Anniversary of the Regional Cooperation Council.

The regional initiatives are the frameworks where we aim to meet the goal of establishing lasting peace and prosperity for the peoples in the region of South-East Europe. In the first five years since its inception, RCC has become one of the key regional players and an indispensable partner in the overall regional cooperation processes.

By implementing the RCC Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) 2011-2013, a range of specific targets in each of the priority areas has been reached. Progress was, also, made in building the capacity of the countries from the region to take a common stance in formulating regionally attainable goals and in strengthening synergy in their regional activities. An effective cooperation and coordination with the Chair-in-Office (CiO) of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECp) and in the process of streamlining the regional initiatives and task forces in SEE has been noticeable.

At this point, let me re-emphasize once again the increased level of synergy and cooperation achieved between the Serbian CiO of SEECp and the RCC that, I firmly believe, contributed, with added qualities, both to further improving relations among our countries and the relations between the region and the European Union.

I am convinced that the RCC will continue to work towards increasing its role in regional cooperation, thus promoting issues of importance to the entire region. I firmly believe that in the future, as it did in the past, the RCC will be engaged in promoting a comprehensive and sustainable regional cooperation, with the aim of contributing to the overall security and stability, economic and social development, respect of the rule of law, efficient use of resources and good governance in SEE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As you all know, the Republic of Serbia recognizes importance of cooperation among the countries for the region's economic development, its security and stability, as well as for the European integration process of all countries aspiring to it. Simply putting it, regional cooperation is one of the cornerstones of Serbia's foreign policy.

By assessing the past engagement of the RCC as an active and important positive change in the image of the region, the Republic of Serbia remains fully committed to furthering cooperation within the RCC on the implementation and promotion of projects in areas of common regional interest.

We believe that the project-oriented regional cooperation is a key mechanism for the effective implementation of political and economic priorities of all countries in the region.

Energy, infrastructure, and transportation are vital to each country. More and more projects and programs in this domain are of regional character. For all of them to be marked with true success, for the benefit of the citizens of the region, we strongly support the coordinating role of the RCC.

The Republic of Serbia is interested in improving the investment climate in the region. We strongly support the regional cooperation in other areas within the RCC. Of course, among the priorities there are: fight against organized crime and corruption, as well as security cooperation, which is the basis for creating stable, modern democracies of the present-day world and, indeed so, for planning for the future.

Particular attention is focused on the strengthening of human resources, promotion of the principles of the knowledge-based economy and the application of modern information technologies. To our great pleasure, the seat of the Secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe will be located in Serbia.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to take this opportunity to compliment, once again, the valuable efforts of the former RCC Secretary General, Mr. Hido Bišćević and his team members in achieving the above mentioned results, as well as the role of the Deputy RCC Secretary General, Ms. Jelica Minić and the Expert Pool in organizing important events and promoting Regional Initiatives and Task Forces.

We hereby reaffirm our full support to Mr. Goran Svilanović, the new RCC Secretary General. His appointment as the new RCC Secretary General has been seen as the opportunity to further upgrade the role of the RCC and to build upon the results it has achieved thus far. We encourage him in carrying out his demanding mission for which we wish him the best of luck.

We look forward to the European Union continuing to work together with us towards the strengthening of European values and accelerating and streamlining the integration process of this region into the European family where it rightly belongs. Rest assured that Serbia will remain a reliable and proactive partner on this journey.

RCC, happy 5th Anniversary!