



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

**10TH MEETING OF THE SOUTH EAST EUROPE INVESTMENT
COMMITTEE (SEEIC)**

SARAJEVO, 24 APRIL 2012

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

It gives me great pleasure to welcome you here today at the 10th meeting of the South East Europe Investment Committee and the first one to be held in Southeast Europe. I am happy to see that the months of our joint efforts with our colleagues in the European Commission and the OECD has bared fruit and that we are here to discuss about the region, in the region.

As you've seen from the agenda, we have a couple of busy days ahead of us, with decisions to be made in a number of areas, from simple housekeeping to more strategic directions that this body should take, but allow me a few moments to reflect briefly on the evolving role of the SEEIC and how we got here.

We have had a rough ride in the past couple of years. From a fastest growing region pre-crisis, the Western Balkans has become the 'sick-man' of Europe and the growth that has returned to most parts of our region, has been lacklustre, at best.

This is a wake-up call. It is becoming increasingly evident that there are no new growth models and no magic wands to dispel the gloomy picture in our economies. Instead, it seems we are turning back to the fundamentals - continuing and intensifying reforms to create better business environments, introducing prudent fiscal measures, stimulating productive, export-oriented industries and promoting wise long-term investments in education, innovation and entrepreneurship.

These were coincidentally also the main messages we saw in the Europe 2020 Strategy once we started paying attention back in early 2010 and started realizing the relevance for South East Europe.

First, the strategy communicates clearly Europe's long-term goals. For the enlargement countries that view EU accession as a constantly moving target, it helps anchor reforms and provides a strategic framework for action over a longer time period. Europe 2020's objectives obviously do not constitute part of the accession criteria. But accession and convergence is interrelated and the Europe 2020 strategy paints a clear road map for convergence.

Second, Europe 2020 mechanisms enable a coherent framework for reforms to take place in the Western Balkans economies, and a platform for cooperation and coordination on policy responses to issues that cross national borders. So it quickly became apparent that we need to pursue a regional variant of the strategy, the Southeast Europe 2020, which would be more adept to our specific needs.

At the same time, we were engaged in discussions on the transfer of the SEEIC to the Regional Cooperation Council, and it soon became evident that SEEIC could help our governments come together around a set of regional headline targets that the Investment Committee can help formulate and implement going forward. Which brings us to where we are today.

The Ministerial conference held in November last year set out a new mandate for the SEEIC, one that is firmly anchored in the SEE 2020 process. It has empowered SEEIC to become one of the first vehicles in the region to engage in the SEE 2020 Vision building and has taken political commitments that we intend to pursue going forward.

We have witnessed and supported the emergence of regional cooperation frameworks in areas such as free trade, electricity market, transport, investment, agriculture, health and numerous other important fields. The work done there is considerable, for it not only helps connect the fractured markets in the region, but has also enabled sharing of experience and knowledge.

South East Europe 2020 strategy now opens up a possibility for regional initiatives to associate their activities and governance structures more closely with the ongoing EU

actions. This is an excellent opportunity to deepen and strengthen cooperation, provide better insight into national level reforms and secure translation of policies.

Finally, South East Europe 2020 could also help provide a framework for intervention for the Multi-Beneficiary Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance as well as for other donors engaged in regional interventions. RCC will be counting on the support of regional initiatives in ensuring these interventions are aligned with the region's needs. We are hoping that the SEE2020 Vision would also provide a platform for donors to identify areas of common interest so as to be able to join forces in economic development initiatives, but also to benefit from the insight of regional initiatives, organizations and structures.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are meeting here with some answers and many questions. What policy areas and targets are the most relevant for our region? What governance structures would be appropriate? What support programmes are needed to reach those targets? We will be looking to you later today and tomorrow to help us define the best regional response and I am confident that we will reach most of the answers to the questions posed here.

With these words, I wish us a lot of success over the next two days.

Thank you.