

Interview by Hido Bišćević, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, to BiH weekly Slobodna Bosna

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Croatian diplomat Hido Bišćević, Secretary General of the RCC, successor of the Stability Pact for South East Europe, in an interview for our magazine talks about the South East Europe perspectives, role of the RCC in the development of the countries in the region, and concrete projects which will be, together with the EU, supported by this organization.

HIDO BIŠĆEVIĆ

Journalist, European diplomat, Bosnian

Our priorities are accelerated development of energy and infrastructure in this area

Danka Savić, journalist

“We will try to be very concrete. I do not see the work of this council through the endless regional or international conferences, but through the agreement on concrete projects. South East Europe does not have any more time for conferences”, said Croatian diplomat Hido Bišćević, Secretary General of the RCC (successor of the Stability Pact for South East Europe) for Slobodna Bosna (SB). With the establishment of RCC, member countries should show their readiness and willingness for mutual cooperation, without the interference of the international community.

IN SERVICE OF MUTUAL REGIONAL INTERESTS

Croatian diplomat, Hido Bišćević, was born in Sarajevo. He is professional diplomat since 1992. He was chief editor of Croatian daily newspapers *Vijesnik*, and is also an author of several books. He was Croatian ambassador in Turkey and Russia. In 2002 he became deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Croatia, and the function of the RCC Secretary General he officially took beginning this year.

“We expect series of projects for construction of new oil and gas pipelines in this part of Europe, then projects of infrastructure, railway roads, water roads, etc..”, adds Bišćević.

RCC gathered all Balkan states from Turkey to Croatia, from Moldavia to Albania. In the interview for SB, Bišćević talks about the role of the RCC as a body that will support the development of the southeast European countries, and about the possibilities for this body to

become, after recognition of Balkan countries to EU, an institution that will take care about the interest of the countries in the region; similar as other regional organizations like Nordic or Baltic council.

RCC took over all responsibilities of the Stability Pact. What are at all positive accomplishments of the Pact?

I am aware, that in a way, in the great deal of public in the southeast of Europe, especially in ex-Yu countries, exists some kind of a gap and doubt, what was the Stability Pact and how successful was its mission. If anything, Stability Pact succeeded to “clean” the field for the opening of countries towards the stronger cooperation. If you remember political relations in the whole region, and political relations between some countries, and compare it with the status today, the difference is nevertheless huge.

The RCC is, so to speak, an child of EC and reflection of the political will of southeast European countries to have, for the first time in the history, such an organization, with the headquarters in Sarajevo, through which they will demonstrate their readiness for mutual cooperation.

NEGOTIATIONS ON TRANSPORT COOPERATIONS

Key activities of the RCC are regional social and economic cooperation, progress in the construction of infrastructure and regional trade?

Countries of the southeast Europe recognized today the most important priorities of its development, and that is accelerated economic and social development, which is something that EC considers as the most important in this region, and the basic mission of this Council is to help accelerated development. This part of Europe lost a lot in the past 20 years by the ill-starred politics, 4 wars, incomplete transitions, and other problems. It would probably take more time for countries of this region to compensate the loss with the standard development tempo. On the basis of political orientations and with the help of international community, and EU in the first place, it is RCC's task to make this progress faster. Priorities are these, new ones, about which I have started to talk about: accelerated energy and infrastructure sector development in this area, accelerated realization of all planned corridors in the perspective of infrastructure and traffic, strengthening of the economic cooperation, application of CEFTA and other instruments. We are in the preparation process of negotiations about the transport cooperation, and also expert conversations about the more flexible labor force market.

RCC, KEY EU PARTNER IN SOUTHEAST EUROPE

Does the RCC become key EU partner when talking about the development of Southeast Europe?

Officially, in the European Council, Council of Ministers and EC documents, for the past 6 months RCC has been formally identified as a key partner and collaborator of EC, for issues related to

the development of South East Europe. The RCC is not the collaborator of the commission, or of the governments in this region which have some unsolved political issues. Our task is to strengthen the cooperation between governments in the developmental projects, and to bind stronger that cooperation by funds of the EC and other financial international institutions.

What is the role of RCC in that sense?

EU funds will be given to governments once they present adequate projects, and the EC will especially value the RCC's opinion on particular transnational projects. Governments will be stimulated to propose priority projects together with certain number of neighboring countries, because in that way, they will get more money. Of course, that will not be replacement for individual projects. At this moment we are, together with the EC and national government coordinators, in the process of identification of such projects. It is hard to speak about the concrete ideas in the public, because EC strategic document is in the final phase. Once that document is published, governments will be summoned to propose their projects, and I know many governments prepared their project proposals, so some time in September the process of the harmonization of countries in this part of Europe, EC and international institutions, will begin, so we could create a mechanism here in Sarajevo, through the work of our Council, to follow up and stimulate those projects.

We are structured in 5 departments: Infrastructure and energy, Economic and social development, Justice and home affairs, Security cooperation, Building human capital and cross-cutting issues. At the same time, those 5 areas were recognized by the EC as priorities for the development of South East Europe in the future period. Department for human resources will continue some of the tasks of the Stability Pact in the area of democracy, health, rule of law, etc. That will be necessary because those areas are not covered by the EU negotiations, and we will have to stimulate those areas in particular. I hope for RCC to become a regular body, because when all countries become members of EU and NATO, a need for regional cooperation will still be necessary. Baltic and Black Sea Council still exist. I think that the final goal would be to help this region to rise on the level of the rest of the Europe.

The World Bank and European Development bank are ready to help regional cooperation

“RCC became fully operational, and in the future period coordination process with the governments from the region will be more intensive,” said Bišćević.

By proposing projects Governments of the region will participate in the financing, and international institutions recognize need to help southeastern governments in their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The World Bank and European Bank for reconstruction and development, in the cooperation with the European Investment Bank, are preparing to establish a mutual coordination body that will be monitoring and financing those projects.