

Check against delivery

**Meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs of the South-East
European Cooperation Process (SEECP)**

Chisinau, 4 June 2009

**Talking Points of Mr. Hido Biscevic,
Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC)**

Thank you Mister Deputy Prime Minister,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- At the beginning, allow me to thank our Moldovan hosts for providing me with the opportunity to address this important forum.
- We gathered today to take stock of the regional cooperation activities over the last year. In this light, I would like to commend the efforts of the SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office (C-i-O) by the Republic of Moldova and add that coordination between the RCC and the SEECP C-i-O was swift and effective.
- We also gathered to review the challenges facing our region and opportunities waiting to be explored, strongly believing that regional cooperation will bring us ahead. Here, I want to be very open.
- Looking back at the events since the Pomorie Summit, we can say that we witnessed coordinated efforts to implement the principle of regional ownership, to develop concrete regional projects and to coordinate activities in meeting the EU criteria. The region is also advancing by upgrading institutional links of all the countries with the EU.
- But, in the same time, we witness the adverse consequences of the current global economic and financial crisis reaching our region just as it is still evident that outstanding issues, of bilateral nature or

related to the status issues, still interfere with the development agenda and impede genuine cooperation.

- Furthermore, we witnessed that two SEECP Participating States joined NATO thus widening and strengthening the area of security and stability in Europe challenged so many times over the last two decades.
- In summarizing, it is evident that the region is at the crossroads as advancement is shadowed by unfinished business.
- All developments clearly indicate that the only way forward is to consolidate positive achievements, preserve the spirit of cooperation and regional solidarity, to promote the interests of the region and each of our countries by overcoming all kinds of protectionism, national self-centered policies and promoting mutual dialogue and good neighbourly accommodation.
- This is a critical choice.
- With these instrument and tools the region will continue to advance and make best of its rich resources, both natural and human.
- Without them, the region will stagnate.
- Let us be fully aware of the historical responsibility when making these strategic choices.
- Continuation of the reform processes in the context of the European and Euro-Atlantic integration agenda is of pivotal importance because aspiring countries simply have no time to lose. Not only in terms of reforms, but also in terms of resolving a variety of outstanding issues.
- The situation is even more demanding against the backdrop of the serious adverse effects of the current crisis, with economic and social perils adding to the concerns over the unresolved political issues.
- This brings me to the mission and role of the RCC.
- I am happy to note that the RCC has emerged as an important interlocutor for facilitating cooperation processes in the region thus contributing to the defining of concrete and targeted projects towards

reaching our common goal – accelerated economic and social development of the region.

- Following the establishment of the RCC Secretariat and its Liaison Office in Brussels, the RCC has worked persistently to establish and advance close working and strategic relationships with all relevant regional actors, in particular the EU, the international financial institutions and other partners.
- On this path, guidance provided by the RCC Board members was of particular importance and input by the RCC National Coordinators from RCC Members from the region was crucial for the contribution to the Multi-beneficiary IPA programming.
- I am glad that our partners recognized the significance of enhancing cooperation along the RCC priority areas and supported the establishment of the Southeastern and Central Europe Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility (SECE-CRIF) and South East European Firefighting Regional Centre (SEEFREC) projects, just to mention some of them. We are looking forward to even stronger engagement of all RCC members from South East Europe in these important regional projects in the future.
- Cooperation with the EU and its institutions, in particular with the current Czech and incoming Swedish Presidencies of the Council of the EU and the European Commission was particularly fruitful and conducive to exploring the emerging possibilities of cooperation.
- The conference scheduled for 9 December 2009 in Brussels, jointly organized by the incoming Swedish Presidency of the Council of the EU and the European Commission, with the active participation of the RCC is a part of our joint endeavors aimed at the development of South East Europe. The conference will aim to address the needs of the region and will explore possible measures to counter current economic and financial crisis and will also assess current situation in the context of the realization of the European perspective of the countries of Western Balkans.
- In other words, the Thessaloniki Agenda must be kept open, but also translated into tangible economic development strategies.
- I strongly believe that you will recognize the efforts of the RCC and lend us your support to continue with the activities by endorsing the

Strategic Work Program of the RCC for 2009-2010 as well as my Annual Report.

Dear colleagues,

- The RCC was launched to coordinate and support regional cooperation activities throughout the region and I would like to invoke the wording as well as the spirit of the Joint Declaration and the RCC Statute adopted by the entire RCC membership. Therefore, inclusiveness is inherent in the character of the RCC. Unfortunately, I have to note with great regret and dissatisfaction that one of the RCC members from the region, namely UNMIK/Kosovo, has not been in a position to participate at the RCC Annual Meeting, which took place earlier today. The RCC has done its utmost with the SEECP C-i-O regarding this issue.
- These situations must be avoided in the future, given the complexities of the region. Permanent solution in line with the RCC statutory framework must be secured.
- The stable and beneficial functioning of the RCC, on the basis of its constituent documents, is essential for consolidation of the regional cooperation and securing the balanced development throughout the region as a critical component of durable stability.
- Thus, we already may want to open a sincere debate on establishing a more stable environment for the work of the RCC in light of the possibly varying SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office policies and views, due to differing national positions, interests and priorities.
- I am confident, though, that our region can and will focus on overcoming obstacles on the path to development and pursue on its European future. In this light, a fresh infusion of flexibility, mutual understanding, accommodation and decoupling of bilateral issues from EU accession environment should, in my mind, be accepted by all in the region.
- A strategic change in attitudes toward the outstanding issues seems to be necessary not only to secure a way out of the perpetual quagmires and blockades but also to secure further promotion of European values and standards and providing for a stable environment that will enable the EU to pursue further the enlargement policy.

- The RCC stands ready to take its share of responsibility, with a reinvigorated energy and leverage, and with your support. We are looking forward to our cooperation with the incoming Turkish SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office.

Thank you!