

Interview by the Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Hido Biscevic, to Serbian news agency BETA

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Biscevic: Economic Crisis Can Destabilize the Region

SARAJEVO, 31 March 2009 – Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Hido Biscevic, drew attention of the European Union to a possibility that "the economic crisis consequences, if not stopped, could produce a deep political crisis and destabilization of the region".

In an interview to Beta news agency Biscevic said that the EU's confirmation it won't give up the enlargement policy, is important and added that the countries in the region "should, in return to that stand, accelerate reform processes and resolve open issues".

Biscevic assessed that the financial crisis couldn't have struck the region in a more difficult time, because the countries started to overcome the war and post war circumstances, in the course of which economic development has a crucial role.

"We in the region are objectively living in a situation of an unfinished peace establishment, incomplete transition and processes of building up the state and its institutions," Biscevic stated, highlighting the fact that SEE cannot be left aside, but on the contrary, it has to be kept in the focus of political and financial attention and support.

"After 1990s, Europe has a third and perhaps the last chance to confirm its responsibility and prevent history from repeating again," Biscevic stated.

He said that the economic crisis can serve as a positive encouragement to answer the question: in which segment does the region lag behind?

"We are lagging behind in development of infrastructure and energy sector," said Biscevic, adding that the RCC, in coordination with the regional countries and EU officials launched an initiative to discuss and agree upon the grand developmental infrastructural projects which would give an impetus to economic development.

"The time has come for grand and bold ideas. The time has come for the region, with the help of international community, to turn to construction of road corridors, reconstruction and modernization of railroad network, building of canals, utilization of water streams, port modernization and better utilization of the country's geo-economic position for energy transport and thus strengthen its own energy security," Biscevic stated.

Asked about how much RCC members are ready to mutually cooperate without the mediation of the international community, he replied that today "the status of regional cooperation is much better than the total bilateral cooperation present in this part of Europe".

He expressed satisfaction due to realization of considerable progress in terms of cooperation between RCC members in one year time from RCC's establishment, "which can directly aid to creation of a good atmosphere in approaching the existing, sensitive, open bilateral issues".

Answering the question on whether the RCC can influence on providing donor funds for countries in the region, Biscevic said that financial assistance is coming from the European Commission, European banks and other partners.

He reminded that the Commission just recently approved 150 million Euros as intervention funds necessary for facing the global economic crisis, primarily intended for small and medium entrepreneurships, expressing his belief that the accelerated distribution of financial funds from the Pre-Accession funds is about to take place.

He added that the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank and leading private banks conducting their business in the region, will continue with their activities and that they confirmed that they won't withdraw their investments.

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