

Overview of Key Activities of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat November 2008

1.

The RCC Secretary General held a presentation on “Sustainability Actions in South East Europe” at the Venice International University at San Servolo on 3 November 2008.

The lecture was organised by the Venice International University and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC) within the framework of the Course for Local Sustainability and Action. The RCC Secretary General gave a lecture on “Sustainability Actions in SEE” and presented the role and activities of the RCC within its priority area on Infrastructure and Energy.

2.

The RCC Secretary General briefed the European Parliament Working Group on Western Balkans in Brussels on 4 November 2008

The RCC Secretary General Hido Bišćević exchanged views with the European Parliament Working Group on the Western Balkans on the RCC activities as well as on political situation and developments in Southeast Europe (SEE). The meeting of the Working Group on Western Balkans discussed transition process from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe into the Regional Cooperation Council and new regional ownership over cooperation in SEE and was organized on the initiative of the Brussels Liaison Office of the RCC Secretariat.

3.

The RCC Secretary General exchanged views with the Deputy Director General for Enlargement in the European Commission in Brussels on 4 November 2008.

On 4 November 2008 Secretary General Bišćević had a working meeting with the Deputy Director-General in the Directorate General for Enlargement of the European Commission, Mr. Jan Truszczyński. The Secretary General and the Deputy Director General discussed further cooperation between the RCC and the European Commission, in particular in the context of the programming and implementation of the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme and the preparation of targeted and concrete projects of regional character in this respect.

4.

RCC Secretary General received a delegation of the CEI Executive Secretariat in the premises of the RCC Secretariat in Sarajevo on 5 November 2008.

On 5 November 2008, the RCC Secretariat received a visit of a delegation of the CEI Executive Secretariat (CEI ES) headed by Ambassador Pietro Ercole Ago, Secretary General of the CEI ES. It was an opportunity for the two delegations to consider activities and projects that could be carried out jointly in order to maximize their efficiency and visibility. On this occasion the CEI delegation handed a proposal for a

Memorandum of Understanding between the RCC Secretariat and the CEI. Meetings of experts from both secretariats will be set up with the aim to further discuss concrete cooperation and a list of projects for joint cooperation will be drawn up by both organisations for consideration and prioritisation.

5.

RCC Secretary General participated in the EU-Western Balkans Ministerial Forum on Justice and Home Affairs in Zagreb on 7 November 2008

The meeting, organized by the EU French Presidency, together with the European Commission and hosted by Croatia was attended, by the Vice President of the European Commission, Jacques Barrot, relevant justice and home affairs ministers from EU member states and Southeast Europe, and high level representatives from the incoming Czech and Swedish EU Presidencies. The Forum discussed the ways to strengthen the fight against corruption and trans-border crime, as well as migration, border and visa issues. Secretary General Bišćević stressed that the RCC supports implementation of the existing international and regional legal framework on police, law enforcement and judicial cooperation, streamlining of regional organizations, and harmonization of national legislations in the field of criminal law with the EU legal framework.

6.

Second Meeting of the Regional Cooperation Council National Coordinators from South East Europe held in Sarajevo on 7 November 2008

The RCC Secretary General convened the second Meeting of the Regional Cooperation Council National Coordinators from South East Europe (SEE) on 7 November 2008 in Sarajevo. The purpose of the meeting was to continue discussions started on 30 June 2008 as well as to present and discuss a concept document "Overview of Regional Cooperation Priorities – Level of Harmonization of National Activities and Strategies with the Strategic Work Programme of the RCC 2008 – 2009 as well as with the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme 2008 Priorities". The discussions focused on the establishment of a networking framework for the elaboration of regional and transnational project-oriented cooperation.

In order to achieve this goal, the representatives of the RCC members from South East Europe, the representatives of the European Commission and experts of the RCC Secretariat should meet on a regular basis. The purpose of their meetings should be to review and discuss concrete, relevant and targeted projects, proposed by the RCC members from South East Europe, putting focus on the RCC priority areas, priorities of the Multi-Beneficiary IPA Programme and priorities of other potential donors. It was decided to convene the next meeting in this format in the course of February 2009.

7.

First meeting of the Financial Sub-committee of the Regional Cooperation Council held on 10 November 2008 in Sarajevo

In the framework of the consolidation of the RCC Secretariat and elaboration of its financial procedures, the first meeting of the Financial Sub-Committee of the RCC Board was held in Sarajevo on 10 November 2008. The aim of the meeting was to discuss the draft Financial Management Manual with a view to formulating a recommendation to the RCC Board as to its adoption. The participants of the meeting were also informed on the preparation of the Draft Budget for the RCC Secretariat activities for the year 2009. The participants formulated preliminary guidelines on the procedures concerning the elaboration of subsequent budgets.

8.

RCC Secretary General participated in the 5th Vienna Economic Forum on 10 November 2008

The RCC Secretary General participated in the 5th Vienna Economic Forum which dealt with the subject of Financing of Investments, Assistance from the EU and International Financial Institutions. The Secretary General presented the RCC and its current and planned activities.

9.

RCC Secretary General held political consultations with officials of the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs on 11 November 2008

Within the process of holding political consultations with the stakeholders substantively engaged in the RCC, the RCC Secretary General met with Political Director and, Director General for Integration and Economic Policy Issues and EU Coordination of the Austrian Ministry of European and International Affairs. The Secretary General and the Austrian officials exchanged views on the development of regional cooperation within the RCC framework.

10.

RCC Secretary General met with the Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre on 11 November 2008 in Vienna

On 11 November 2008, Secretary General Biščević met Ambassador Herbert Salber, Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre. Ambassador Salber stressed that OSCE assesses very positively activities of the RCC and its Secretariat and looks for further strengthening of partnership between the two organizations. The OSCE considers the RCC activities in the field of justice and home affairs to be of particular importance for the region.

11.

The RCC hosted the first Ministerial Conference on Combating Climate Change in South East Europe on 13 and 14 November 2008 in Sarajevo

The conference represented an integral part of the framework program "Roadmap for Environmental Cooperation in South-Eastern Europe" and was jointly organized by the RCC and the Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe (REC).

The purpose of the Ministerial Conference was to agree upon modalities of environmental cooperation in SEE, to adopt the SEE Climate Change Framework Action Plan (CCFAP) and related Ministerial Statement, and to determine joint activities towards the UN Climate Change Conference – the 14th session of the Conference of the Parties, which is to be held in Poznań, Poland, in December 2008.

The Conference was opened by the RCC Secretary General, Hido Biščević, with introductory remarks delivered by the Bosnia-Herzegovina Minister of Foreign Trade and Economic Relations, Mladen Zirojević, the Montenegrin Minister of Tourism and Environment, Predrag Nenezić, the REC Executive Director, Marta Szigeti Bonifert, and the European Commission Director of Climate Policy Division, Arthur Runge-Metzger.

The environmental ministers from Albania, Serbia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, respectively, Lufter Xhuveli, Oliver Dulić and Nexhati Jakupi, and other high-level officials from SEE and European institutions also participated in the event. The Conference was preceded by a preparatory meeting of SEE, RCC and REC environmental experts.

12.

RCC Secretary General held political consultations with officials of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of the UK on 18 November 2008 in London

Continuing the round of political consultations with members of the RCC, Secretary General Bišćević met with Daniel Fearn, Director for Western Balkans Group at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). The FCO officials stressed full political support that the United Kingdom had provided for and would continue to provide to the RCC and its activities. The consultations also focused on the possibilities for development of regional cooperation in South East Europe in five priority areas of the RCC activities in light of the implementation of the RCC Strategic Work Programme 2008-2009.

13.

RCC Secretary General met Vice-President of the EBRD Horst Reichenbach on 19 November 2008 in London

The two officials stressed that SEE is a unique European region, with dynamic economic development, high growth and foreign direct investment rates, and thus it necessitates a maximum effort from international financial institutions (IFIs) to minimize the impact on SEE of the present financial turmoil or economic recession in Europe and the world.

Vice President Reichenbach confirmed the EBRD would stand by SEE and announced the Bank's readiness to join the transnational projects cooperation mechanism. He pointed out that the Bank would continue to work with other IFIs and donors on maintaining the positive investment climate in Southeast Europe, highlighting energy and infrastructure as development priorities for the region.

The EBRD Vice-President informed the Secretary General about the ongoing consultations in Brussels among main stakeholders (European Commission, EIB, EBRD, Council of Europe Development Bank) on the new infrastructure facility, which will be available for South East Europe. Vice-President Reichenbach expressed the view that RCC and its Secretariat could take an active role in the identification of possible infrastructure projects of regional character to be financed through mentioned facility.

14.

RCC Secretary General held political consultations with officials of the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland on 20 November 2008 in Dublin

In the framework of political consultations with members of the RCC, Secretary General Bišćević met Mr. James Hennessy, Deputy Director for Russia, Europe, OSCE and the Council of Europe at the Department of Foreign Affairs of Ireland. Development of cooperation within the RCC framework as well as participation of Ireland in the RCC activities was the main subject of the meeting.

15.

RCC Secretary General participated in the Balkan Economic Summit entitled "The New Investment Environment in the Balkans", Istanbul, 26 and 27 November 2008

The RCC Secretary General highlighted the need for key regional stakeholders to design and implement joint projects to rationalize regional resources, especially in view of the current world economic and financial crisis.

Secretary General Biščević informed the Summit participants of the RCC-designed mechanism of cooperation on regional developmental projects, comprising SEE authorities, the European Commission, the IFIs and RCC experts.

At a meeting with the Turkish Deputy Prime Minister Nazim Ekren, Secretary General Biščević emphasized the important role Turkey plays in Southeast Europe, both as a leading European economy and the incoming Chair of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECp).

16.

RCC Secretary General participated in the CEI Summit of Heads of Government on 28 November 2008 in Chisinau

The CEI summit participants discussed the latest developments in Central Europe and stressed the importance of enlargement and maintenance of EU perspective for all the countries of South East Europe.

Secretary General Biščević spoke about the ways of deepening cooperation and carrying out joint activities with the CEI Secretariat in the areas of energy, economy, social development, small and medium size enterprises (SMEs), human capital, education and youth.

The RCC Secretary General met with the Moldovan Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and European Integration Andrei Stratan to discuss planned activities of the Moldovan SEECp Chairmanship-in-Office. He fully supported Moldova's EU aspirations and an ambitious agreement with the EU, envisaged for the next year, which should provide for closer ties between the EU and Moldova.

17.

Regional presentations of the RCC and its activities in RCC Members from South East Europe

The Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat successfully carried out a number of presentations in the RCC members from South East Europe in order to present its priorities, projects and activities to over 500 representatives of governments, business sector and civil society. It was an important opportunity for networking between the RCC and national experts as well as raising public awareness through media coverage of the events. The tour was organised in close cooperation with the RCC members and witnessed intensive interaction of the participants highlighting many ideas and proposals. RCC experts from the five priority areas lead by Jelica Minic, Deputy Secretary General and Head of Expert Pool held presentations in Belgrade on 10 November, Podgorica on 12 November, Skopje on 17 November, Zagreb on 24 November and Athens on 26 November 2008. It is expected that the tour of presentations will end in January 2009 with the presentation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Host Country of the RCC Secretariat.

Sarajevo, 8 December 2008