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COMMENTS AND ANALYSES

"There is no progress if we are to write new history every so often"

Bosnia and Herzegovina finds itself facing a serious issue as regards accession to the EU, says Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Hidajet Bišćević. In the interview for DW, Bišćević speaks of cooperation and considers Nikolić's statements.

In the light of the latest statements by Serbian President Tomislav Nikolić as regards Srebrenica and Vukovar, Bišćević said for Deutsche Welle that regional cooperation was subject to oscillations and that it was high time for its improvement. There is no progress, Bišćević is categorical, if the new history is being written every few years.

DW: Over the past months, and some would say even years, there has been, to put it mildly, a standstill in Bosnia and Herzegovina as regards its Euro-Atlantic integration process. How serious is this standstill having in mind the EU accession process of the countries from the region?

Bišćević: "It is a very serious problem for BiH, especially looking at the development of institutional relations with the EU: Croatia is practically at the membership doors, then there is Serbia which obtained candidate status and Montenegro which is likely to commence negotiations within couple of weeks. The institutional progress is evident in the BiH neighbourhood and thus BiH's standstill is becoming even more of a strategic issue for the country's future."

BiH is not likely to remain the grey zone

DW: Do you believe there is some model to accelerate BiH progress and generally, how to unblock the process?

Bišćević: “It is difficult to talk about a model or recommendation as this is, I would dare say, about a political lethargy that has been there for number of years now and that leads to the imbroglio where relations wander in circles and where various formulas are adopted but the way out is by no means found. This creates status quo which is strategically dangerous for Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially within the wider region. It is in fact difficult to imagine future in three, five or ten years where BiH neighbours would be members of EU and NATO and BiH would remain a gray, undefined zone.”

Nationalist rhetoric prevails

DW: As regards regional cooperation, it is obvious that the entire region of former Yugoslav countries has the opportunity to accelerate their path towards the EU with the help of neighbours. In this context, do you believe that something will change with the latest development on the Serbian political scene and Tomislav Nikolić’s election for President?

Bišćević: “I am not in a position to comment on persons or events in the region as Regional Cooperation Council has to work in a way to facilitate communication with all parties in the region. However, what I have been worried about for quite some time now, regardless of whether we are talking about elections in Serbia, Croatia or [The Former Yugoslav Republic of] Macedonia, is the fact that regional cooperation is still excessively prone to oscillations and that its functional temperature is too dependent on parliamentarian, local or other elections in any of the countries. I believe it is high time the region devotes itself to seeking mechanisms to strengthen regional cooperation for the benefit of each individual country and in a manner that will not allow regional cooperation to be put into question over any elections. Unfortunately, over the past period we have been witnessing that the elections and voters’ preference in various parts of the region are again being won based on nationalist rhetoric thus covering up the real issue the country has. It seems unbelievable that at the times when dramatic economic and social crisis is ravaging the region, when uncertainties around the essential issues of the future of our countries are so large, we have disputes imposed over the competence over the cities, borders, etc.”

DW: How dangerous the latest Srebrenica-related statements by Mr. Nikolić when he said that there was never genocide there or his statement about Vukovar being a “Serb city” could be for the relations in the region? Or how much could they damage regional cooperation that was on a good track, especially after electing Ivo Josipović as Croatian President?

Bišćević: “Societies in our region are obviously at different stages of development. Some of these societies have the need to re-examine themselves while in some other there is still the struggle for this or that interpretation or this or that identity. What seems the most important to me, and what the EU also said lately, is that there is no progress if we are to rewrite the history of this region every few years.

Progress to be achieved only through hard work

DW: Regional Cooperation Council was established in 2008. In your opinion, was the trend of cooperation on the upswing or downward during this period?

Bišćević: “On Monday, 06 June, I attend opening of the first Regional Conference on Organ Donation and Transplantation and it suddenly seem to me, if I may be metaphoric, that at the time the RCC was established, we lived at the times when we remembered some other ways of treating organs in this region. Five or six years later we are already discussing regional cooperation in this very important and sensitive area. I give this as one of the examples as, regardless of the dissatisfaction feeling we all have because things are not moving forward faster, generally seen, the progress has been evident over these 7-8 years not only in the sense of institutional relations but also in many other areas where we also record progress. Unfortunately, the progress in this sensitive part of Europe burdened by history is not something that can happen in a sensational or spectacular manner. This involves persistent, patient and permanent development of relations and cooperation in as many areas as possible.”

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