

Bišćević: Where there is no EU, someone else will take its place

SARAJEVO, 24 June (*FENA*) - At the Summit of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the states participating in the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) in Belgrade, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Hido Biscevic pointed out very clearly to the need for solving open issues in the region. After returning from Belgrade, in the interview for *FENA* new agency, Mr. Biscevic talked about the issues in the region and current political and economic situation that additionally affects the (in)stability of South East Europe.

***FENA*: In Belgrade, you warned of the urgency to resolve open issues and create conditions for mitigating current economic and social crisis, thus possibly providing the best formula to avoid delays in achieving the final goal of the region – accession to European and Euro-Atlantic community. What open issues are you referring to?**

BIŠĆEVIĆ: Yes, I spoke very clearly in Belgrade about the need to accelerate resolving the remaining open issues as it is quite clear that in the current situation where several unresolved issues maintain the state of uncertainty, or even instability, and make regional cooperation difficult, it is hard to expect faster progress towards the EU or NATO.

Of course, first of all I was referring to the issue of permanent constitutional structure and self-sustainability of Bosnia and Herzegovina as the key state for the overall and permanent regional stability. I was also referring to the issue which has been destabilising for the region lately and that is the Belgrade-Pristina relations, and, finally, in a seemingly invisible way connected to all of this, the need of finding a solution for dispute concerning the name of [The Former Yugoslav Republic of] Macedonia.

Along with series of bilateral challenges and other relatively smaller issues, these are the three key issues to complete peace in South East Europe. Looking at the broader picture, these are the states and region which is already surrounded by Euro-integrations and it is thus clear that non-resolving of these issues makes it difficult for EU and NATO to expand.

***FENA*: You said that peace and stability have not been fully secured in the very complex political and socioeconomic circumstances in this part of Europe. Is instability of the region a permanent perspective which makes the severity of economic crisis in Eurozone even more complex?**

BIŠČEVIĆ: I would dare to say, almost as a continuation of the answer to your previous question, that from the aspect of historical interest of each state and each people from this region, the political imperative is permanent stabilisation and resolution of the open issues. That is why certain “easiness of delay” of political elites to earnestly face and commit to these issues is incomprehensible, and it has already turned into a "regular state", prolonging this unacceptable climate of political lethargy which finds excuses for its lack of activity in national slogans. So we are going around in circles, every now and then rewriting the history, while the readiness to dialogue with the neighbours dries up with every new election in this or that country. This is how the time is being wasted and, of course, danger of geopolitical vacuum or status quo in the context of Euro-Atlantic integrations is being created.

Add dramatic consequences of economic crisis to that, with its equally dramatic social consequences – is maintaining tensions as regards these unresolved issues a way towards development or towards restoration of tensions? I do not believe that, in a long-run, a way out of the crisis could be found by responding to the alarming unemployment statistic with maintenance of the tensions around these outstanding issues. That is, I dare say, rather a way towards instability, media wars, occasional bomb along this or that border, sleeping or awoken terrorism, violence, extremism of all kinds, juvenile delinquency and of course keeping regional “octopus” of crime and corruption alive.

In addition to that, everything that is happening or not happening in the region today needs to be considered in a wider international context. Balkans is no longer in the centre of attention of global players. However, because of that, especially when there are indications of restoration of polarisation and tensions in Europe, all possible efforts should be urgently undertaken so that the Balkans does not become a place of conflicts and divisions again. Here, I see enormous responsibility of governments from the region, but also of the EU – if there is no EU, someone else will try to take its place.

FENA: Newly elected Secretary General of the RCC Goran Svilanovic said that they were a step away from adopting the Political Declaration in Belgrade. What are “the details” that are not irrelevant and that need to be worked on to reach agreement?

BIŠČEVIĆ: Declaration is a common document adopted at the Summit of Heads of States and Government of the South-East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP) by general agreement. Unfortunately, this time there was no consensus, due to the differences of Belgrade and Pristina’s interpretation of the recent agreement on Kosovo’s representation in regional cooperation institutions. It seems to me that the case is illuminating from two aspects. Firstly, it warns of the lack of regional dimension, and even regional responsibility concerning the debatable bilateral issues – the issue is left to the disputing parties while the rest of the region remains aside; there is no regional political dialogue on the issues despite the region being the one to largely feel the

consequences of these disputes. Secondly, the lack of political agreements, through adoption of this declaration, block the launch of implementation of some concrete projects which were stated in the Draft Declaration – for example, reconstruction and modernisation of rail network in our part of Europe. This is an example as to the extent to which certain unresolved political issues slow down or block economic progress.

FENA: What will you advise Mr. Svilanovic, as your “successor”, coming to Sarajevo to take over the duty of the RCC Secretary General on 1 January next year?

BIŠČEVIĆ: Mr. Svilanovic is an experienced diplomat, he was the Minister of Foreign Affairs and also largely dealt with the region, especially in the area of economy, while working for the OSCE, so I am sure that his professional experience and knowledge of the region, along with the respect he enjoys in European institutions, will be useful for the RCC to continuously carry on and expand its operations. As far as references are concerned, maybe it is worth mentioning the biggest challenge for me – to convince political elites from the region that declarative support to a project must be turned into elaborated administrative implementation. I am certain Mr. Svilanovic will deal with this issue with full dedication.

FENA: What about your engagement after 1 January 2013?

BIŠČEVIĆ: Maybe it is too soon to say, although I believe that accumulated professional knowledge, knowledge about the region and international relations in wider sense can open many and different doors.

A Croatian diplomat, Mr. Biscevic previously served as the State Secretary for Political Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia (2003-2007), Ambassador to the Russian Federation (1997-2002), Assistant Minister for Foreign Affairs (1995-1997), Ambassador to the Republic of Turkey, accredited to the Republic of Kazakhstan and the Republic of Uzbekistan (1993-1995), Ambassador and Adviser to the Foreign Minister (1992), and Head of Department for Asian and Arab Countries (1992). Before joining the diplomatic service, Mr. Biscevic was the Editor-in-Chief of the Vjesnik daily (1990-1992) and Foreign Affairs Editor at the same newspaper (1985-1989). Hido Biscevic took office as the first Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council on 1 January 2008, following the appointment by the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Foreign Ministers in Zagreb on 10 May 2007. He was reappointed to the post on 22 June 2010 at the Istanbul meeting of the SEECP Foreign Ministers.

Goran Svilanović will come to Sarajevo from Vienna where he has been the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities since 2008. He previously served as the Minister

of Foreign Affairs of the Former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, after Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic was removed from his post.

As the successor of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the RCC fosters regional cooperation and supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration in South East Europe. Its work focuses on economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital, parliamentary cooperation, and media development. The RCC is based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its membership comprises 46 countries, organisations and international financial institutions.

(Fena)zl

www.fena.ba