



**Regional Cooperation Council**

**ADDRESS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL  
COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC),**

**MR. HIDO BISCEVIC**

**MEETING OF THE SEECP MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS  
29 JUNE 2011, BUDVA**

Thank you Minister Roćen, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honoured to address this esteemed meeting and I wish to thank the Montenegrin Chairmanship-in-Office and Minister Roćen and his team for the devoted leadership and guidance that helped us to lift the cooperation in our region to a new level.

The pursuit of this noble goal is ever more important for our countries and peoples to harvest the benefits of socio-economic well being, political stability and cultural richness, building on the notions of rapprochement, reconciliation, pragmatism and moderation that are increasingly taking root in the region.

These notions become particularly important in a period of rapid changes of the international agenda and current upheavals, as shown by the events in Middle East and North Africa, including potential uncertainties that can still occur in our part of Europe, with a number of remaining unresolved issues still looming over. This wider context makes the resolution of the residual issues a political and historical urgency.

But, at this point and in general, one could conclude that the developments in the region are positive, both on part of the countries from the region and on side of the EU.

As Croatia is passing the crossing line to a full EU membership, I want to join in extending wholehearted congratulations. After all, Croatia will be the first new Member State of the EU from the region following the inception of the RCC – for all of the enlargement countries in the region this can only be taken as a proof that efforts pay off,

inspiring vigorous endeavours to meet the necessary requirements and make the best use of the enlargement opportunities in the coming period.

Alongside these positive developments, one also should not forget that the consequences of the economic and financial crisis still reverberate throughout the region, followed by harsh economic and social effects that also take political toll. Our democracies remain stable and firm, as several elections since our last meeting proved, but they may well be challenged by negative effects of the current economic crisis.

This is why, in my mind, we need to turn our full attention to an accelerated development and we should jointly seek the most suitable chargers for regional recovery and development that would rekindle national economies.

It seems to me that time is ripe to pool together, on the sectorial and functional basis, around critically needed projects of a wider regional character in vital areas such as energy, infrastructure and transport.

We should join forces and make best use of vast natural and human potentials of the region. We should reach out and pool our energies around a number of strategically focused and forward moving projects of trans-regional nature. Why not rehabilitate and reconstruct the railway axis throughout the region to provide much needed link between EU market and Turkey, Middle East and even China so that our economies can benefit, so that we tackle high unemployment rates, so that we give a concrete impetus to private-public partnership, so that we give new opportunities to small and medium-sized business? Why should our goods and passengers travel 75 hours from Ljubljana to Istanbul in an era of fast trains running across Europe? Why not rehabilitate a waterway route from Zagreb to Belgrade, with unperceived multiplying effects on our economies, agriculture and tourism? Why not join forces and create a joint product in tourism, for the European and global markets? Why not make sensible use of the fact that 24 percent of all European airfields are located in our region? Why not create South East Europe Energy Exchange? And, indeed one could enlist a number of projects of this nature.

In short, functional regional cooperation as a charger of the accelerated economic development seems to me a call of the day for all our national economies.

It is about the political integration with the EU, but it is also about the economic and infrastructural integration. They should go hand in hand. And they would certainly contribute to social modernization.

In the same context, let us try also to make the best use of the EU Europe 2020 Strategy.

What we need in this sense is a clear political will based on the long term vision of the region. SEECF is the best format to ensure that will.

It goes without saying that this comprehensive approach should rely also on genuine, all-inclusive cooperation at all-levels and with all stakeholders.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I believe you share my conviction that the RCC has proven to be a valuable and regionally owned framework for cooperation, and that it is profiled by now as a key forum for guiding and monitoring cooperation in the region.

Since our last meeting, the RCC went on to vigorously implement the Strategy and Work Programme for 2011 – 2013 and I am certain that you have noted tangible results in a number of priority areas, as they are included in my Annual Report.

Thus, a year after our last meeting, the RCC's list of deliverables is a proof of the hard work and invaluable contribution from our members in the region, from the EU institutions and other international partners.

I do believe in the continuity of this support, and from the RCC side, we will continue to work together with all of our members, partners and stakeholders in meeting the challenges ahead of us, relying strongly on the incoming Serbian Chairmanship-in-Office.

Thank you.