



**THE FIFTH ANNUAL MEETING OF THE REGIONAL
COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC)**

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

MR. GORAN SVILANOVIC

OHRID, 30 MAY 2013

Dear Nikola,

Distinguished participants and esteemed guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure and honour to address you all here today on the occasion of the fifth Annual Meeting of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), together with our host and C-i-O of the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Minister Poposki.

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the SEECP C-i-O, to Minister Poposki and his team, for the excellent cooperation and synergy with the RCC Secretariat in the course of the last twelve months. We look forward to continue the cooperation in the same spirit with the incoming SEECP C-i-O.

Our meeting today, is a unique window of opportunity to take stock of the developments in the region, in particular related to the regional cooperation, and contribute to the efforts directed at addressing important issues such as the consequences of the economic and financial crisis.

We note with utmost satisfaction the positive developments in SEE with regard to improving bilateral relations, regional cooperation and progress of the SEE aspirants on their way to the EU. Among the participants of the RCC some are already preparing to join the EU and I would like to sincerely congratulate Croatia for becoming an EU member very soon. This is a major success story of the region, which confirms that pursuing reforms and meeting the necessary EU accession criteria, in the end, is greeted accordingly. The others as well have been receiving recognition for progress made on the path of EU integration. The signs are positive, results are visible but important work is still ahead.

The latest EC recommendations on the EU perspectives of Serbia and Kosovo* are also very encouraging. Less than a month away from the conclusions of the European Council, I dare to say that profound and strategically important decisions are on the horizon. The recent agreements reached between Belgrade and Prishtina are major step forward towards strengthening regional stability and confirms that each issue could be solved through dialogue.

One may think that the difficult socio-economic environment and political challenges have dissuaded the region from pursuing key reforms. The latter are indispensable for advancing in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration. However, the progress SEE achieved over the last period indicates a far different reality, one in which it did not succumb.

*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

At the same time, while the EU continues to be the strongest anchor of stabilization and reforms, a key role in promoting and strengthening regional cooperation is played by the SEECF - as the most relevant regionally-owned and governed political forum and the RCC - as its operational arm.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On the occasion of marking the RCC's 5th anniversary this year, one of the apparent conclusions has been that persistent and tireless work, supported by a measured and pragmatic approach, in the end brings significant results.

Allow me to refer to some of the latest activities and, more importantly, on what the RCC is planning to do in the future.

The RCC has continued to be actively engaged in promoting cooperation based on a greater regional responsibility and a genuine political dedication by its participants in implementing the commitments made at the regional level. In this respect, the signs are commendable in the region. We are witnessing a growing awareness that further progress on the European integration path increasingly calls for responsibility and readiness to address the most pressing of issues. Some of them relate to the socio-economic area, justice and home affairs, energy, building human capita, security, an independent media, etc. In these and many others fields, RCC invested all its efforts and capacity towards enhancing of the regional cooperation.

Taking into account the interests and commitments made at the regional level and by integrating efforts from the governmental, non-profit and private sectors, the RCC successfully implemented its Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) 2011-2013. Illustrative examples of this assessment, inter alia, is the increased focus on reforms in energy, transport and environmental sectors; the first tangible results obtained in the implementation of the Monitoring and Evaluation Mechanism in the area of Justice and Home Affairs; establishing and strengthening cooperation mechanisms in security, intelligence and defense sectors and enhancing cooperation in education, research, health and media.

One of the RCC's most important achievements is certainly the decision of February 2013 allowing full respect of its principle of all-inclusiveness. This shows that the region is able to create a durable climate for overall progress in the spirit of tolerance and cooperation.

The RCC's constant cooperation and communication with the EU institutions, in particular with the EC, proved its added value. It actively supported the successful implementation of the RCC SWP 2011-2013 and will continue to support key and concrete aspects of RCC's future vision. A regular and enhanced dialogue with the EU institutions will have an important role in aligning closer RCC's activities with the EU

enlargement agenda, thereby addressing effectively the needs of the RCC participants from SEE related to EU accession reforms.

By now, RCC has already translated its vision for the future into a second Strategy and Work Programme for the period 2014-2016, which was adopted at the RCC Board meeting of 25 April 2013. The document was developed on the basis of the achievements attained, an in-depth knowledge of the region and its needs, as well as in accordance with the EU accession requirements.

The central pillar of the document or, in more precise terms, of RCC's future work is the SEE 2020 - a Job-creating Growth and EU integration Strategy. Having in mind that we will touch upon the SEE 2020 in the context of our discussion on the RCC SWP 204-2016 under the Agenda item No. 4, allow me just to underline one very important aspect.

Given the overarching nature of the SEE 2020 Strategy, this document and its Action Plan should strongly benefit from the full support of the governments concerned and of the Prime-Ministers. This will provide a basis pertinent to addressing effectively the region's economic development priorities and to make the region more competitive, while bringing it closer to EU.

In this final sprint to the SEECP high-level events, I believe that RCC's vision would strongly benefit from a clear commitment and support by all the stakeholders actively engaged in making SEE a stable and prosperous region.

Let me conclude by extending gratitude, on behalf of the RCC Secretariat and in my personal name, to all RCC participants for their contribution and readiness to enhance, through the RCC, the regional cooperation process in SEE.

Thank you for your attention.