



**ADDRESS OF THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL
COOPERATION COUNCIL (RCC), MR. HIDO BISCEVIC**

**RCC ANNIVERSARY: “*FROM OWNERSHIP TO RESPONSIBILITY: REGIONAL
COOPERATION IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE AND EU MEMBERSHIP*”**

14 March 2012, Sarajevo

Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a pleasure for me to welcome you at the fourth anniversary of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).
- I would like to welcome this impressive audience and our panellists today, whose participation I take as a symbol of their interest and support to our work. We very much look forward to their reflections.
- At this point, after 4 years of the RCC work and with so many lessons learned regarding the scope, meaning and goals of cooperation in our region one can ask about the most important conclusions and lessons learned. I think that the answer may be found in a need to move from regional ownership to regional responsibility. These are two mutually inclusive notions. They should go hand in hand. They should ensure that political commitments and declarations are translated into efficient follow-up. They should bring stability, continuity and consolidation to cooperation among our countries.
- Over the recent period, the region reached a point when crucial decisions were taken regarding its EU future, whilst crucial steps will still have to be taken within the region.
- With your permission, I would like to point to several points, which from RCC’s perspective I deem the most important ones.

- On the EU front, we take note with satisfaction of the incoming Croatia's EU membership, of recent Serbia's status of EU candidate country, of the recent arrangements between Belgrade and Prishtina.
- All these decisions have an undoubted importance for each individual party and for the overall stability and progress of our region.
- The enlargement momentum is preserved and this is the most important for the region.
- The other aspiring countries should be guided by these successes in the context of their efforts to overcome the remaining obstacles on the way towards European and Euro-Atlantic integrations (*maximizing each other's chances of success – an example of regional responsibility*).
- But, on the other side, the remaining unresolved issues in many parts of the region, accompanied by the effects of the hardest economic crisis in decades, produce an alarming combination, calling for a sense of common urgency and strategic political wisdom.
- A momentum for resolving these issue must be enhanced, because the last thing the region needs is a strategic imbalance a new dividing line or 'quarantine rings' around the core of the region. (*a common stance and translating intentions into concrete actions – another example of regional responsibility and there are many more*).
- In this sense, I strongly believe in the potential of the region to take a strategic long-term outlook at these issues. Simply, such an orientation is of an utmost importance in light of the fluctuating position of the region on the agenda of the international community.
- The way ahead, and a bold impetus, could only be seen through regional cooperation, by elaborating regional recovery and development plans and by building on the vast human and natural resources in the region, now fragmented and not put to a proper use, so as to provide answers to dramatic effects of current crisis.
- What we need at this point is for the SEE countries to assume a greater self-responsibility in providing political support in favor of large scale regional projects, in areas like infrastructure, transportation, waterways etc, and to

better translate commitments into concrete common administrative follow-up.

- The positive effects of implementing such an approach would be multifaceted – in terms of improving the overall bilateral relations and helping the resolution of the open issues, in terms of underpinning the economic and social development, in terms of speeding up the fulfillment of the criteria for EU membership.
- Along the same lines, as we are touching upon the future of regional cooperation in SEE and of SEECP, several principles could become inherent for the future: the stabilization and consolidation of regional cooperation in order to make it less depended from oscillating trends in political relations, possibly advancing from the current SEECPProcess to a SEECPartnership, having SEECP Summits on targeted topics, even closer aligning the RCC activities with the EU enlargement agenda, and other.
- The dialogue on these and other related topics, especially on the initiative to establish a Wise Men Group that was voiced at the Informal meeting of the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs in Belgrade, has already started and advanced.
- There are numerous reasons why it should be continued. I will mention just several of them:
 - First, regional cooperation is by now one of the key requirements within the EU enlargement strategy and thus must be sustained and consolidated.
 - Second, consolidation of the regional cooperation process is a pre-requisite to durable stability and even to the resolution of the open issues in the region. We need to find ways to enhance political dialogue within the region.
 - Third, there is a clear need to add an authentic regional responsibility for cooperation in the region – mere declaratory ownership is not enough at this point.
 - Last but not least, it is by now 16 years since the inception of the SEECP – time has come, given the overall developments in the region, to evaluate the lessons learned and elaborate the future course.

- Moreover, the RCC would also benefit from the debate about the forms and frameworks of regional cooperation.
- Changing political and socio-economic circumstances in SEE, four years of a prolific activity of the RCC and the results achieved in the first year of the implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) 2011-2013, articulate the need to look to the future and prepare the RCC for the period beyond 2013.
- These are some of the reflections on the current state of play in SEE, and I hope that our discussions today will capitalize on the achievements of the RCC during four years of our work.

Thank you!