

**Interview by Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Hido Biscevic, to Montenegrin News Agency MINA, 23 November 2008**

POLITICS – RCC – COOPERATION

## **Governments from the Region Not to Give Up on Reforms**

Sarajevo (MINA) – Governments of the countries from the region should take the responsibility they have seriously and not give up on reforms as the next year will be crucial for Western Balkans and its European future, said Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Hido Biscevic.

He said to MINA agency that Montenegro recognized that it was important to make efforts to meet the criteria and achieve progress on the Euro-Atlantic road, as well as the importance and the role of RCC in shortening the time for crossing this road.

“Montenegro successfully contributes to RCC’s functioning,” said Biscevic.

In his words, after nearly ten years of existence of the Stability Pact whose successor is the RCC, it is clear that countries of the Western Balkans, due to the progress they achieved in implementing reforms and economic results, can take on the responsibility for regional cooperation and thus influence their future and achieving the goal of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the entire region.

“All countries of the Western Balkans have their European prospects and institutionalized relations with the European Union (EU), and according to the latest report of the European Commission, they progress on their road to European integrations. It is, of course, necessary to complete many reforms so as to meet the conditions for accession,” said Biscevic.

He explained that the role of RCC is important in this process because strengthening and promoting regional cooperation, good neighbourly relations and dialogue creates prerequisites for expanding stability and cooperation climate where open issues can be discussed and their solutions sought.

“On the other hand, RCC will incite its members from this part of Europe to implement development projects they find important which also fit the RCC’s priority areas of cooperation. By inciting economic and social development of the region, its perception will also change which is unfortunately still within the old frames and stereotypes,” said Biscevic.

He said that each country from the region had a different level of relations with the EU and NATO.

“A significant progress has been made in almost all areas, from free market to strengthening democratic structures, rule of law and security. Countries of the Western Balkans are at large progressing on their road to EU and NATO. In fact, strengthened cooperation and mutual understanding among the countries proved to be an irreplaceable platform for progress,” said Biscevic.

He said that it was necessary to admit that certain open issues hinder faster progress what greatly depended on the readiness of each individual country to come to grips with difficult and far-reaching reforms. “In this sense, the following year will be crucial for the countries of Western Balkans and their European future.”

Biscevic said that events within the EU related to experiences with the latest enlargement and institutional issues had an important role in the entire process.

“Also, in the light of recent new constellation on the international scene and priority the financial crisis is having in political activities around the world, there is a realistic possibility that the international community will be greatly focused on other areas and deal with other problems,” he warned.

Biscevic believes that it is important in such a situation that governments from the region take their responsibility seriously and do not grow weary on reforms ahead of them.

“In this sense, RCC has an important role in providing opportunities, through working on concrete development projects, to accomplish positive results specifically in the areas which the EU too sees as priorities for the region,” he said.

Biscevic said that the most important elements in implementing reforms relevant to the RCC’s priority areas are persistency and will.

“Strengthening administrative capacities is surely one of the challenges at the moment. If we fail to deal seriously with the issue of establishing the rule of law and reforming judicature, it will be difficult to accomplish the strengthening of administrative capacity which will be crucial for progressing towards the EU and NATO,” he said.

Biscevic also said that development of infrastructure and energy sector was a prerequisite for accelerating economic and social development, stating that it was important that governments of the countries from the region seriously come to grips with these issues.

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