

**Interview by Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Hido Bišćević, to BiH News Agency FENA**

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**BISCEVIC: ANARCHY OR WELL-ORGANISED BiH, MODERN ADMINISTRATION OR CRIME-SERVING BUREAUCRACY?**

**SARAJEVO, 4. November (FENA) – The most recent EU Progress Report for BiH, which testifies that there has been no progress whatsoever is especially concerning because of the lack of substantial progress in key areas - the rule of law, strengthening of administrative capacities and anti-corruption activities. All the more worrying is the fact that this falling behind actually testifies of the situation in the state and the society, it depicts a very serious, dramatic and gloomy landscape of this country – Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Hido Biscevic told in an interview for FENA.**

**Interviewed by: Bisera Dzidic**

With a remark that his mandate is approaching to an end, which allows him to be more straightforward than he perhaps should be, Bišćević stresses that this is not all, because the Commission's Report indirectly speaks about causes of such situation, reasons behind the sluggish fulfilment of the requirements openly points to political relations in the country after the last elections.

-This is even more concerning, especially if one reviews political circumstances over a longer period of time, during several past election cycles that were followed by initial progress and promising agreements, only to be replaced by halts and negative outcomes, in an almost obnoxious labyrinth of short-term coalitions and calculations that have maintained the status quo and social lethargy in the country for too long, causing it to fall behind in key areas – Biscevic told FENA.

When asked whether BiH was definitely at the rear, Biscevic says that it is not so much about anyone's position, as other countries also face problems.

- It is more about a thing which is in a way implied by your question as well. Namely, it implies a permanent state of grief, dissatisfaction and almost auto-destructive lethargy. People here almost always look for evidence of failure, inability, frustrations, lack of future. When I observe this and, on this occasion, relate it to the Commission's Report, potential deeper, not to say strategic and historical conclusions about possible outcomes of this situation are even more worrying, especially when we add another two parameters to such political circumstances – the economic crisis with dramatic social consequences and a change of the region's strategic image with the upcoming Croatia's accession to the EU. This is where different scenarios arise, mostly unfavourable for BiH. For this reason, any waste of time in agreeing on permanent and sustainable compromises – without the current "math" of two

against one – in reality only benefits the opinion mode that ties the future BiH architecture to the other outstanding and frustrating issues in the region, convinced that time works for such option, counting on broader European and global geostrategic outcomes – Biscevic warned.

He feels that these are the key issues of concern that can be read from the most recent EC Report through a serious analysis.

- From this I conclude that it is necessary to act and shape a policy that will step out into an active position. It is not only enough to lament over somebody's conviction that "BiH vanishes" and ask if "we really are at the rear". A well-developed strategy could define and bring together internal partners, establish a policy towards neighbouring countries and work on their constructive contributions, define and implement a policy towards external factors, from the EU and USA to Russia and Turkey, request establishment of a Group of Friends to help local leaders, take the EU requirements as the criteria for constitutional structure of the country and in this way, through an auto-screening, step out of the vicious political circle and develop a way and instruments required to act on spreading the dialogue and tolerance principles throughout the country – Biscevic suggests.

Reflecting on the warnings of possible abolishment of the visa-free regime for countries of the Balkans, Biscevic says that these and other, almost nervous recent debates, like the one on the alleged questionable status of Croatian membership testify of actual political situation in the overwhelming number of EU member states, their resistance towards further enlargement, which mirrors the general state of spirit and political opinions in those countries, in light of the multi-layered EU crisis. They also testify of a tendency towards closing.

- But if this is the case, only then things become serious for every candidate state because the EU will overcome its crises, but populist reactions and the anti-European mood will definitely help nobody in the region. Going back to BiH, only then will it need a developed strategy and an active response instead of a fruitless and barren daily "politics", which in return fosters and provides arguments for the nervous voices and debates in Europe. The other aspect is somehow related to the most recent EC Report – namely, it is about the rule of law and administrative abilities. When the visa-free regime was introduced, countries assumed certain obligations. They obviously either failed to fulfil them in many elements or, probably because of the way in which our administrations operate, allowed abuse of those obligations. This is exactly what the EU holds against countries and political elites from this area most, the easy acceptance of obligations, easily given promises, the lack of willingness to fulfil the assumed obligations and the given promises consistently and without hesitation, Biscevic says with a remark that this is exactly why a Bundestag representative can use the visa story to cry out against the enlargement.

He stresses that our choices are clear and simple – well-organised and serious countries or disorder and anarchy, modern administrations or parallel bureaucracies serving the organised crime; the EU or our political and mental "Balkans".

He warns that time is running out and that the region is no longer in the spotlight.

- Not a single minister wakes up thinking of the Balkan any longer. Therefore, options are clear – either to wake up, define strategic goals and persistently work on their achievement, or to linger in an extended state of stagnation, economic depression and social eruptions, and different forms of instability and insecurity, from football hooliganism to hot spots. It seems to me that the choice is clear – Biscevic concludes.

Concluding the discussion about resolving the outstanding issues between BiH and Croatia, Biscevic stresses that after the EU accession these issues become irrelevant.

- The Regional Cooperation Council is primarily focused on promoting dialogue policies and peaceful solutions for open issues, so that all countries can meet their proclaimed EU membership goals. Therefore, it is focused on assisting the countries to avoid the present paradoxes – everybody wants to join the EU, and they prevent one another from achieving this by imposing these open issues. I am talking about a paradox, because after the EU accession, almost all of these issues become irrelevant. As for Croatia's joining the EU, I think it should actually encourage BiH to resolve the issues of its internal structure in this context, to have its three nations satisfied, safe and protected, so that none of them, including Croats, do not have to seek safety across the border, because it would definitely change the BiH's strategic image and, I am sure, only bring new concerns and difficulties to its neighbours. I always say that BiH can only stand as a three-legged stool, as there is no chair that can stand on two legs only, the RCC Secretary General Hido Biscevic said at the end of the interview with FENA.

This Croatian diplomat came to Sarajevo to become the first Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council on 1 January 2008, having been appointed by Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Participating States on 10 May 2007 in Zagreb. He was reappointed on 22 June 2010 in a meeting of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of SEECP Participating States in Istanbul.

As of 1 January 2013, Goran Svilanovic will become the new RCC Secretary General. He will come to Sarajevo from Vienna, where he has been employed by the OSCE Mission as the Coordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities since 2008. Before that, he was Minister of Foreign Affairs of the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, following the overthrow of the Serbian President Slobodan Milosevic.

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. Its membership comprises 46 countries, organizations and international financial institutions.

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