



RCC ANNIVERSARY 2011

Sarajevo, 7 March 2011

Welcome by Hido Biscevic, Secretary General Regional Cooperation Council

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear friends,

It is really an honour and pleasure to address you on the occasion of marking the third anniversary of the Regional Cooperation Council.

I dare believe that this impressive audience reflects your interest in the work of the RCC, but even more our joint wish that the main mission of the RCC – promoting, guiding and monitoring cooperation among countries and peoples in our part of Europe – is deeply and irrevocably rooted in our communities.

This is, as we all know, a complex corner of Europe. Burdened by history, troubled by recent tragedies, shadowed by building of new national identities, striving to move away from past to the future, South East Europe is therefore truly in the need of a new opening, of a new political culture, of a new paradigm, of new values and standards.

Getting beyond the historical stereotypes, persistent perceptions, multiplying animosities and moving the entire region towards the horizon of a new united Europe, free and democratic, that is, in a nutshell what the RCC is all about.

Looking back over the last three years, I need to ask myself: have we mattered? Has the RCC contributed to the advancement of the region?

Others will judge and assess, you may wish later to come with your comments.

But, if allowed, I would say that the answer is – Yes. Yes, with our members from the region and international friends and partners, we can look back with satisfaction. The RCC has mattered.

Of course, it would not be possible without genuine participation, guidance and support – first and foremost by our Members from the region, as their particular focus on the RCC activities was and remains instrumental.

My highest appreciation and gratitude goes also to the European Union, especially the European Commission, as well as the Council of Europe and our other European partners, from financial institutions to academia and from parliamentarians and donors to media. Needless to say that we profited much from the support by all other RCC Board Members, relying in particular on Euro-Atlantic component of driving the region forward. Of course, over the last years the RCC benefited fully from the guidance and coordination with the consecutive Bulgarian, Moldovan, Turkish and current Montenegrin Chairmanship-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process, our 'political umbrella'. Last but certainly not least, our gratitude goes to our Host Country Bosnia and Herzegovina – seated here in Sarajevo, with the mission to assist the region to move towards Euro-Atlantic integration, we would also hope that in this country the essentials of our mission – that is, cooperation, tolerance, compromises and dialogue – is also heard and followed.

All these joint efforts were and continue to be indispensable platform for the RCC to deliver – to deliver in ensuring that regional cooperation is perceived not only as a formal political criteria for the EU accession but as a genuine need of our nations and communities, to deliver in terms of contributing to the economic and social advancement of the region and to deliver in terms of assisting the region to move up to the European standards, from infrastructure to education, from energy to social behaviour.

With the recently adopted Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013 we have a very elaborated and targeted project-oriented period ahead. And it's all about the persistent, hard work. There are no spectaculars to be expected. But, brick by brick, project by project, initiative by initiative we must continue to reprofile the concept of cooperation in our region by bringing European standards into each and every area.

Of course, in order to do so, we need to be attentive of the political environment. Cooperation is dependable very much on political relations. Political relations are dependable very much on the EU enlargement perspective. Two sides of one coin – with quite a number of remaining and unresolved issues the region needs to show historical responsibility to resolve them in order to allow the receptiveness of the enlargement policy within the EU and general public to keep hold. The RCC will continue to advocate this argument, as a status neutral and all-inclusive forum.

In closing, I will look back again. Since its establishment, three years ago, the RCC has gone through the initial 'set up' period, through the period of profiling itself with the regional and international partners and by now the RCC is certainly the hub organization for guiding and

monitoring cooperation in South East Europe. And, not without professional pride, I need to say that the RCC contributed to the dynamics of cooperation in the region over the period that was marked by significant challenges to the overall security and stability in South East Europe. In my mind, that also proves the maturity of the region. This political maturity, in line with EU and Euro-Atlantic aspirations that we all share, must help us to overcome the remaining bilateral issues, to marginalize the effects of other issues that occasionally still burden relations, and to deal with the different domestic issues and interests that may want to hamper the strategic goals.

After all, we all share the same goals. Anchors of all of our countries are, by now, in Brussels. In a different ways, but they are all in Brussels. From the broader perspective, it is a high noon to complete the peace in the heart of the region, in the Balkans. Completion of peace is a key to EU and Euro-Atlantic integration. This integration is key to security and development. The rest is all about insecurity and regression. The rest is all about the status quo and stagnation.

In my mind, for the region, and for our citizens, the choices are clear. They are political. But they need to be sustained by concrete cooperation in many areas of high priority for our countries. This is where the RCC will continue to play its role and provide guidance.

Thank you.