

Interview by Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Goran Svilanović to Turkish Anadolu Agency

Svilanović: One Million Jobs by 2020 Is Not an Impossible Target

Over the past year and a half, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) completely shifted its activities from general discussions on peace, stability and confidence towards economy, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) said in an interview to Anadolu Agency (AA).

Svilanović feels that unemployment is the biggest problem plaguing citizens of BiH, Serbia and other countries in the region. He believes that protests in Sarajevo came from unsatisfied people, that they will certainly happen again in the region, as they happened in the past, even in the EU member states.

Protests of unsatisfied people

"The main topic that we are currently engaged on is to try and gather countries around the economy. These efforts resulted in the South East Europe 2020 strategy, SEE 2020, which I had the opportunity to present at the Sarajevo Business Forum. "Job" is the first word in this Strategy, followed by prosperity in the European perspective, on the accession path", Svilanović pointed out.

Value of mutual trade in the region in 2012 amounted to more than EUR 14 billion, Svilanović revealed, which accounts for 16 % of total trade of countries from the region with other countries around the world. When it comes to investments from one country in the region to another, they amount to over EUR 2.5 billion. Recent visit of the Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić to Sarajevo illustrates the importance of good neighbourly relations, it is a serious encouragement and an extended arm of friendship, which was accepted well, Svilanović said.

Svilanović underlined the importance of joint appearance of the economies from the region on third markets. SEE 2020 strategy is focused on economic and social themes and employment as the biggest problem.

"If you talk to prime minister and ministers of any country from the region, I believe that they will mention this as the first problem and the biggest challenge they are facing", Svilanović emphasized.

Svilanović reflected on the strategy adoption process, emphasizing that Brussels had very low expectations from BiH. He stressed that, by adopting the Strategy at the Council of Ministers, BiH showed that politicians were able to agree on difficult social and economic topics.

"It was a unanimous decision of the BiH Council of Ministers. They were unified and I was very grateful to them when they said that they all agreed about this, regardless of their ethnic background", Svilanović said.

One million jobs

SEE 2020 strategy specifies one million jobs to be created in the region by 2020. However, around 800 000 people lost jobs in the region since the onset of the crisis, Svilanović added.

"When I talk about one million jobs by 2020, I talk about those people getting their jobs back and maybe a few others finding jobs. This is not overly optimistic. I am very grateful to the Chairman of the BiH Presidency, Bakir Izetbegović, who publicly expressed his support for the Strategy at the opening of SBF 2014, emphasizing that this is what is meant to be achieved", Svilanović said.

It is impossible to be in power in BiH, but also in Serbia, Croatia and other countries from the region, if people do not see any progress in economic and social issues, Svilanović claims.

"I believe that the Strategy will be implemented and that everybody will do everything they can. What concerns me is not whether people who run this country and other surrounding countries will have the courage to deal with these topics, but whether Brussels and EU member states will follow them next year in an equally decisive way", Svilanović said, adding that the next step in the EU accession process of the countries in the region would largely depend on the economy.

"Political reasons will always be around us, and there will always be topics that need to be resolved. But, in order to address their citizens and tell them about their willingness to approve BiH's EU accession, ministers of EU member states must first convince the citizens who elected them. We will not get there overnight, in economic and social terms. SEE 2020 strategy will be a mechanism for serious improvement of economic management in the region. Although this is not the only topic in the region, it certainly is the biggest one", Svilanović concluded.