



EU idea must not remain a 'game' of political class only

Hido Bisevic, secretary general of the Regional Cooperation Council

By RUDINA HOXHA

Hido Bisevic, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), a regional cooperative framework for Southeast Europe countries, stressed in an exclusive interview with *Tirana Times* that the South East Europe is at a historical crossroad while the accession of Croatia and the beginning of accession negotiations for Montenegro in June next year certainly keeps the EU perspective and dynamics open and rolling. According to him, EU integration should be explained to the whole society after a vibrant EU environment is created.

unfinished businesses in our region that the mission is far from over. I strongly believe that even when "everything is settled", there will be room to engage our countries in cooperative frameworks of different kinds. We share many cultural and societal similarities, much of a common history, our economies are largely inclined to each other. The RCC still has much to do in terms of its core mandate, which is assisting aspiring EU countries to achieve their goal and, also, promoting Euro-Atlantic integration in the region. As to the effects of the Eurozone crisis, of course they are harsh – after all, our economies are interlinked with the EU's economic and financial system.

T.T. Please, can you share with us any lessons which RCC has surfaced on the way for the aspiring countries, so they can surpass obstacles quicker and lose no time?

H. Bisevic: - The lessons learned along the way strongly indicate that in many areas of future EU negotiations countries share the same or similar insufficiencies. If one goes through the Progress Reports for the aspiring countries over the last several years, it is clear that they share the same challenges in meeting requirements in justice and home affairs sector, rule of law, administrative capacities, freedom of the media, etc. But, there are also other areas,

potential not only in terms of completing peace but also in terms of stability and security, not to mention the biggest danger - creation of a prolonged strategic imbalance in the region or even a strategic vacuum from the Euro-Atlantic viewpoint.

T.T. Being a journalist from Albania, I am curious to know where do you position Albania in the context of the SEE regional cooperation?

H. Bisevic: - I can say with great satisfaction that Albania is very active and supportive when it comes to regional cooperation. In many areas, from infrastructure to initiatives such as e-SEE, Tirana is among the leading members. And, if I may step into the area of political assessment, I think that Albania's political cooperation with neighbouring countries additionally helped preserve a favourable atmosphere at the times of great challenges.

T.T. To what extent, is the civil society involved in the regional activities?

H. Bisevic: - Civil society is particularly important. EU accession and general modernization of our societies is not and should not be a job only for politicians. That is why in the RCC we have recognized the importance of civil society cooperation. On two occasions already, we have brought together European Movements from the region, and their representative was also invited to the last South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP) Summit in Montenegro. At the same time, just a few days ago, we co-organized a conference of civil society organization networks in Western Balkans and Turkey, to discuss their greater participation in EU integration processes and in implementing the RCC Strategy and Work Programme.