

Interview by Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, Hido Bišćević, to BiH News Agency FENA, Sarajevo, BiH, 15 January 2009

BIŠĆEVIĆ: THIS YEAR CAPACITY OF COUNTRIES IN REGION TO TAKE OVER OWN RESPONSIBILITIES CONSIDERED KEY

SARAJEVO, 15 January (FENA) – This year is considered a key one for South East Europe (SEE) because it will reveal the strategic direction in which relations in the region will further evolve as well as the destiny of the SEE countries – states Hido Bišćević, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), in an interview given to the FENA

He says that further approximation of the SEE countries to the EU is expected to be seen in the year 2009. However, it will be necessary for the countries to accelerate the implementation of reforms to that effect.

- I believe that this year, the capacity of the countries themselves and governments in the region to take over responsibilities in respect of seeking solutions to issues that are still pending from the processes that have occurred over the past two decades will be the key issue, and I am confident that the ownership will gradually emerge in lieu of the role that the international community has had in the period – says Bišćević.

As a last year's success in the area of Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries in the region, he sees the fact that all countries have become institutionally connected with the EU following B&H's and Serbia's signing the SAA. However, his message to the governments of the countries, particularly those of the former Yugoslav countries, is that they should start taking over responsibility for their own destiny and stop expecting that the international community will continue to shape their destiny forever.

In regard to the B&H's road to Europe, the RCC Secretary General points to an extremely important integrative role of Euro-Atlantic integration and holds that this year it will be necessary to pool the efforts and find a compromise to ensure a continuing constitutional arrangement of a self-sustainable B&H.

He argues that B&H has considerable potentials to use the regional cooperation and that it can benefit most from specific developmental projects to be implemented under the umbrella of the RCC and its Secretariat with a strong role of the European Commission (EC).

- The method of the implementation of such projects will enable B&H to network with the neighbouring countries in the course of the implementation itself.

He finds the first year of the RCC operations positive since the Council started working in circumstances heavily encumbered with a number of difficult issues between the member countries of the SEECF, where the RCC acts as the SEECF executive body.

- The political circumstance have been quite complex and intricate and I believe that the mere fact that the Council has been founded and started operating effectively under such circumstances can be viewed as a success per se – holds the RCC Secretary General.

He also states that the Council has carved a profile of a lead institution of the regional cooperation in this part of the world and has already been recognised as such by the EU, international institutions and all members of the Southeast European Cooperation Process.

Also, he points out that over the past year the RCC has initiated a number of specific activities, the major one being the networking with the European Commission, which now recognises the Secretariat of this institution as its key partner in all issues related to the development of key priority areas in SEE.

As Bišćević announces, a public presentation of the new strategic framework of EU actions for SEE will be held over the forthcoming months. It concerns the Multi-beneficiary Programme under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA), which provides for a developmental perspective of the South-Eastern Europe in the coming years. Governments in the region will be subsequently invited to propose joint developmental projects, adds Bišćević.

Once the implementation of this strategy has been initiated, an important role will be vested with the newly established RCC Liaison Office in Brussels, the task of which is to maintain direct and daily operative contacts with all EU institution. Projects to be forwarded by the countries will be evaluated in cooperation with the EU to set up priorities in their implementation.

An additional task of this Office, as Bišćević explains, is to maintain stable operative relations with international financial institutions, primarily European financial structures, where an important role will be that of the institution of the Special Envoy of the Secretary General for Relations with the EU Presidency.

One of the specific activities of the RCC the implementation of which will start within few months, as announced by Bišćević, is to finalise the project on establishing a Regional Disaster Insurance Facility and a Regional Fire-Fighting Centre.

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