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## **BiH Will Not Remain Balkan's Black Hole**

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- **Can BiH meet conditions for abolishment of visa regime by the end of year?**

- This would imply high degree of political agreement among the main players in BiH on meeting the conditions after which technical part must be done as it was done by all other countries which will now get a new visa treatment with the EU. Therefore, in principle, it is possible.

- **Countries from the region left BiH behind on the European path. Will BiH remain Balkan's black hole or will it succeed in catching up with them?**

- I believe it will not remain a black hole because, regardless of whether we want it or not, we are all mutually very much connected and in some perceptions, the region is seen as a whole. Each country has bilateral relations with the EU, and at the same time we have the same negotiation package. The role the Regional Cooperation Council plays is one of stimulating integration processes at regional level. In addition to bilateral relations with the EU, regional dimension is very important, which in a way protects BiH from gaining the status of a black hole. We are again increasingly economically connected. Countries from our immediate neighbourhood are more and more involved in these very close economic links. There are great material interests in finances and economy of the countries such are Austria, Slovenia, Greece and Italy, while Hungarian interest is also increasing. In a way, all this packages us as a region and we should utilize this fact. We should work out the cooperation because if you read business news every day, you can see some arrangement, flow of commodities, capital, buyout of companies. Not a day goes by without some joint endeavours at regional level. Of course, much effort would be needed to fully shut out BiH from all this.

### **Joint Issues**

- **Does that mean that economy will overpower political divisions?**

- It would be very fortunate for the entire region as there are still number of issues which we share. They are demonstrated in different ways, but we are all influenced by the world economic

crisis. We all have the same task – European integration. We are all still fixing the relations that 1990s left as their legacy. Thus, some basic package, coordination system, is more or less the same in all countries of the region. However, BiH, of course, is in a specific situation. There is also the responsibility of neighbouring countries to assist in resolving the situation in BiH and on Kosovo in the best possible way.

**• In which areas South East European countries cooperate in European integration process and through the Regional Cooperation Council?**

- At the Council, we have attempted to identify the interest of the countries from the region as well as instrumental values of regional cooperation for European integration process. On the other hand, we have tried to identify where the largest interest of the EU itself lies. EU interest is primarily that the situation in our region is stable, that there is peace and that we make no big problems. On the other hand, there is the EU interest that the entire region, since we are transit are, is connected in transport and energy networks that already exist in Europe. There is also large interest that countries are more and more involved in combating organized crime. These are roughly the areas in which functional integration of the region will be faster than in many others. The evidence of this is establishment of the South East Europe Energy Community. It is expected that the South East Europe Transport Community will be established by the end of the year. Police, prosecutors and judiciary cooperation in general in the region and with the EU is especially dynamic and intensive. These are main areas, including, of course, trade, into which they want to include us as soon as possible. Hence, there are unilateral measures of the EU liberalising the market for our products. With CEFTA and liberalization of trade within the region, we are now in the phase when through Stabilization and Association Agreement we should be opening to the EU and liberalizing our trade.

**Taking an Upturn**

**• How does it look like when ministers from countries that were just recently the warring sides meet?**

- In principle, when sitting at the table and resolving some issue, communication is very good. Bottom line, these issues of the past are left aside, and those that are relevant for the future are resolved. In this sense, cooperation is really good. Sectoral cooperation has an exponential tendency if you are to try and demonstrate this in a diagram, but bilateral, political cooperation has serious oscillations. However, at the Council, we try to keep this sectoral cooperation, which is promising, in upswing. The police, prosecutors and military structures in the region have excellent cooperation. There are around 40 active regional initiatives with which the Council established a joint network.

**Modalities for Former Yugoslavia**

**• Is it possible that some joint country is again created on the territory of former Yugoslavia, as written and spoken about in Western media more often recently?**

- Hypothetically, this is possible only within the EU once we are all member states. It is possible in a way that it is happening among Nordic countries, Visegrad Group or Central European countries. Nordic countries are closely cooperating within the EU. They are all, except Norway, EU members; but even with Norway they have networks of cooperation that tie them quite closely. Economic and financial links, fight against crime, joint presentation, creation of some fine structures among themselves is something realistic and can be our perspective. We are located one next to the other, most of us speak the language the others can understand, people will be increasingly looking for jobs in neighbouring countries if they cannot find one in their own and there are also family ties. It is an area that was violently devastated, but was not fully destroyed. All these links, in particular economic, will most likely strengthen over time. In addition to this, there are these mechanisms that stimulate cooperation through the Regional Cooperation Council and many EU programmes. We have already held the second meeting on development of joint Strategy for Research and Development in the region as this is one of the main prerequisites for competitiveness of the entire region; and common language was easily found. We have excellent cooperation which then encourages European institutions as well as the World Bank, UNESCO and UNDP to support us in this project.