

New Three-year Regional Cooperation Council Strategy

South East Europe Turns the Page

Our Platform Is a Reflection of EU's Wish to See South East Europe Potentials Utilized, said Biscevic

Potentials for cooperation in the region are vast if observed not only from national perspective but also as strategic value of the entire South East Europe that can be used to the benefit of each individual national economy.

This assessment was given recently by Hido Biscevic, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), at the presentation of organization's Strategy and Work Programme for the next three years in Sarajevo. Over the last two and a half years, RCC, as the successor of Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, has been fostering regional cooperation and supporting European and Euro-Atlantic integrations. Its work focuses on economic and social development, infrastructure and energy, justice and home affairs, security cooperation, building human capital, and parliamentary cooperation. The RCC is based in the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Biscevic's Deputy and Head of RCC's Expert Pool, Jelica Minic, believes that due to this fact, Sarajevo has become an important hub for development of regional cooperation.

Investment Committee

RCC's 2011-2013 Strategy and Work Programme were endorsed by the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP). They have been designed to respond to the needs of the region and add value to cooperation in South East Europe in the areas of joint interest. The Strategy was prepared in close cooperation with the European Commission and other 45 RCC members. Key activities, as stated by the Council, include: transfer of South East European Investment Committee from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) to the RCC by the end of next year; design of a feasibility study on development of air transport links for 2011-2014; realization of a Southeast and Central Europe Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility and establishment of a South East European Regional Fire-Fighting Centre Network; reshaping the Education Reform Initiative of South

Eastern Europe; and transfer of Ljubljana Process on cultural heritage from the European Commission and the Council of Europe to the RCC by early 2011.

In the area of economic and social development, Minic stressed the importance of transfer and management of South East European Investment Committee which should harmonize investment climate and legal framework in the region and make it attractive for doing business. Though this transfer to the RCC was announced for the end of this year, it has been moved for the end of 2011.

- We have received many suggestions from the region to establish new financial mechanisms from technology fund, which would stimulate innovations at the regional level, to proposal from BiH to establish a South East European development bank, and a special credit line for women entrepreneurs – she said.

The RCC supports the activities of Regional Organization for Migrations and capacity building. As Minic said, the focus shifts from migrations related to conflicts on the territory of former Yugoslavia to the issues of legal and illegal migrations.

- There is an important though not yet politically exposed dimension as regards the need for establishing a regional labour market. This is a topic which requires development of a legal framework. The market is operational but not regulated – said Minic.

Enormous results have also been achieved in the area of security cooperation in South East Europe.

- Today, citizens are told that defence intelligence services are to meet and that the follow-up meeting is arranged, but this was difficult to imagine before. Defence structures are cooperating very well and mechanisms to fight natural and man-made disasters are being developed. The cooperation is intensifying in this area in which we have large support by the European Union – said Minic.

The beginning of implementation of projects under the RCC's three-year Strategy comes when we are, as stated by Biscevic, "with no political naivety in the wider region, witnesses of the policy of rapprochement, approximation, opening dialogue, readiness for pragmatic solutions, deflection from frustrating positions, etc".

- Of course, the region still faces number of inherited, outstanding issues out of which some have or could have strategic impact on the overall perspective of the region. However, from the aspect of our Council and interest of all well meaning citizens from any country of this part of Europe, this policy of relaxation and dialogue opening,

coexistence of all those differences that exist, gives hope of facilitated negotiations about not only these open political issues but also about concrete economic cooperation to the benefit of all citizens – said RCC’s Secretary General.

Vast Potentials

The main philosophy of new RCC’s Strategy, according to Biscevic, is reflected in the syntagm which was for the first time heard at the EU-Western Balkans meeting in Sarajevo, on 2 June this year, when the closing statement proposed that countries from the region gather around regional reconstruction and economic development plan.

- Out platform is a reflection of such a wish on EU’s part to see vast economic, human and natural resources of South East Europe utilized which, due to political processes over the last two decades and all circumstances well known to all of us, remain largely underused or even untapped in some areas, said Biscevic.

Against Corruption

Over the last two and a half years, significant progress was made regarding regional cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs.

- Our colleagues in the RCC are engaged in development of a joint strategy – platform for development of justice and home affairs in South East Europe. This is a huge effort. Readiness for cooperation is clear on the part of all participating states as well as international partners and the existing regional structures. RCC plays a key coordination role in this, and in its three-year Strategy, it will continue to work on strengthening cooperation in the area of justice and home affairs. We support the existing anti-corruption initiatives. There are some important results in this area – said Minic.