



**WRITTEN ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE
REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL, HIDO BIŠČEVIĆ**

EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE OSCE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL

Vilnius, 6-7 December 2011

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Colleagues,

At the outset, I would like to express my gratitude to the Lithuanian Chairmanship for the kind invitation to address this distinguished meeting and to commend the efforts and leadership of the Lithuanian Chairmanship for the work of the OSCE in the past year.

I am confident that this meeting shall further contribute to the implementation of the activities related to the OSCE main dimensions, thus further fostering comprehensive security, supporting the development of human rights, democracy and rule of law and addressing challenges within the OSCE and neighbouring regions.

As our experience shows, the two levels of cooperation: among countries within various regional fora and between organizations, proved to be a highly important exercise for successful realization of the objectives of these organizations.

OSCE, being a member of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), is providing a valuable contribution to its mission in South East Europe (SEE). Concomitantly, the regular exchange of views between the two organizations such as on the occasions of the OSCE Permanent Council in April 2011 and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in October 2011 have confirmed the excellent mutual relationships.

Having this in mind, allow me to share with you, from RCC's perspective, some observations related to the political and socio-economic landscape within the region of SEE.

Regardless of the oscillations driving the current political and socio-economic conditions, the SEE region continued to move forward. With these conditions increasingly shaping the foreign policy perspectives of the governments from the region, developing an all-inclusive regional responsibility over the existent regional cooperation process, including increased regional ownership, can become one of the effective long-lasting contributions to the overall developments in the region.

First, and one highly cherished for political, economic and cultural considerations, relates to the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkans countries.

Perceiving the advancement on this path as the most important for the region, the European Commission's Enlargement Package 2011-2012 and this December's EU Council decisions are strategically important.

Croatia's last step in the process of EU accession can only stimulate the momentum to vigorously continue moving the region forward.

However, we must keep high in our minds that this positive trend rests on a resourceful responsiveness to the work ahead, both in terms of accession related reforms and in terms of responsible and timely resolution of the open bilateral issues in the region that could gain new and undesirable developments at any moment. The latest developments in some parts of the region are just indication about the importance and fragility of the security situation and its possible implications not only for the individual countries, but for the region itself and even broader.

Those are just some of the most important reasons why we have to invest all our efforts in preserving the overall regional cooperative spirit conducive to moderation, pragmatism and mutual appeasement and against sometimes frustrating domestic constraints.

This point is of crucial importance. Should there be a prolonged status quo regarding these issues, it may impede the enlargement, thus creating unwanted strategic vacuum in the Western Balkans.

Working in such complex environment and under the umbrella of the South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECPP), the RCC focuses on developing a project-oriented regional cooperation in all priority areas as a status neutral and all-inclusive cooperative

platform aimed at assisting countries from the region in their European and Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The RCC, profiled by now as a key forum for guiding and monitoring cooperation in SEE region, is committed to work with and build on the positive potentials of the region, especially in a time when the regional cooperation platform looks forward to a greater regional responsibility.

The RCC started vigorously to implement its Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) for 2011-2013 by engaging in a wide range of activities that resonate perfectly with the needs of the region and have the potential to shape the regional development agenda. The initial assessments of the results attained so far are positive and encouraging.

Let me point out a few of our main achievements. Upon the RCC initiative the countries of SEE adopted Regional Strategic Document on Justice and Home Affairs and Action Plan covering fight against trans-border organized crime and corruption, migration, asylum, refugees, fundamental rights and cooperation in civil matters. Within our efforts aimed to strengthening of the independence of public service media in the region, 12 members of the European Association of Public Service Media in SEE signed a Protocol on Regional Cooperation in Education and Training. The establishment of the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society and its Secretariat in Cetinje, Montenegro has opened new avenues for enhancing the regional cooperation in these areas, thus underpinning the process of reconciliation. The management of the South East Europe Investment Committee (SEEIC) was transferred from OECD to the RCC, marking an important step forward in the RCC efforts of its investment-related work, in particular related to the ambitious agenda of a new regional vision and strategy for development – South East Europe 2020, consistent with the Europe 2020 Strategy.

In addition, I would like to stress that RCC is strongly advocating a regional approach to development of transport sector in SEE, especially railway rehabilitation and modernization that could become the charger of national economies in terms of development, cooperation and integration. The focus on the development projects should be the answer not only to the economic, but also to the political aspects of possible various frustrations and challenges.

Regional political conditions may vary, but the momentum of regional cooperation must be preserved. That's why the persistent and persevering implementation of the RCC SWP is and will continue to be the priority for the RCC.

Excellencies,

In the period ahead, the region may only benefit from complementing the EU oriented efforts with developing and implementing joint regional recovery and development projects in a myriad of sectors.

RCC, for its part, remains fully committed to regional cooperation where the countries of SEE have an invaluable framework to pursue common goals, particularly in present times when „*positive change*“ becomes a pre-requisite.

Thank you.