



TALKING POINTS
OF THE RCC SECRETARY GENERAL, HIDO BISCEVIC
INSTRUMENT FOR PRE-ACCESSION ASSISTANCE (IPA) MULTI-
BENEFICIARY PROGRAMME COORDINATION MEETING

15-16 NOVEMBER 2011, SARAJEVO

Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you at the premises of the RCC Secretariat for this introductory session of the IPA Multi-beneficiary (IPA MB) coordination meeting.
- I am confident that the discussions on the findings, conclusions and recommendations of the Enlargement Strategy 2011-2012, on the country progress reports and on other issues pertaining to IPA MB – programmes and programming 2012, will shape our efforts to identify regional solutions that will be highly important in addressing common problems in the region.
- The meeting that I held last week with, Stefan Fule, the Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighborhood Policy was an excellent opportunity to exchange views on the developments in the region, on the Enlargement Strategy, the state of regional cooperation and the role of RCC in this process, as well as the implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) 2011-2013.
- The encouraging messages of the Enlargement Strategy such as the acknowledgment of Croatia's preparedness for membership in mid-2013, recommendations to open accession negotiations with Montenegro and to grant candidate status to Serbia, will certainly serve as a strong incentive for the other to embrace a greater responsibility in continuing persistently to fulfill the necessary reforms and timely address and resolve the remaining issues.
- On this note, one needs to remain confident that dialogues on open issues will gain new momentum, in terms of dealing with fundamentally important constitutional

debate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, in terms of continuation of the well formatted Belgrade-Prishtina dialogue, in terms of finding a way forward in the ongoing dialogue between Skopje and Athens and, in general, in terms of preserving the overall regional cooperative spirit conducive to moderation, pragmatism and mutual appeasement and against sometimes frustrating domestic policy constraints.

- I do believe that the incoming December EU Council conclusions will confirm the recommendations of the EC Strategy regarding the enlargement countries and shall emphasize the role of RCC in the overall processes of regional cooperation and EU enlargement.
- As the Enlargement Strategy has rightly noted, the **regional cooperation** is one of the key challenges of the enlargement countries and I share the assessment that we should invest all our efforts in eliminating the negative effects of the issues stemming from past conflicts that continue to influence the stability in the Western Balkans.
- The RCC Secretariat, in the framework of its mandate given by SEECF and the appropriate conclusions within the RCC Board, is ready to be an active player in this regard.
- Let me underline that RCC, by pooling together all regional stakeholders around concrete projects and through intensive engagement in promoting a regionally owned, all-inclusive and project-targeted cooperation, contributes to the efforts of underpinning reconciliation and integration into the EU, of creating an environment conducive to political and socio-economic progress, as well as to the overall stability in the region.
- RCC is fully aware that much more needs to be done in the regional cooperation processes. By upgrading the regional ownership to enhanced regional responsibility, by delivering concrete and visible results to the benefit of the people of the region and by relying on the stimulating effects of the EU enlargement policy, we could produce the best *response strategy* to long-standing and new development needs of the countries from the region. This can become one of the effective long-lasting contributions in enhancing the positive developments in the region.
- In our own initial self-assessment, the successful first year of the implementation of the RCC Strategy and Work Programme 2011-2013 proved to be a very important avenue for increased and result-oriented regional cooperation.
- Here, it is noteworthy to point the significant degree of convergence between the objectives of the RCC SWP 2011-2013 and Enlargement Strategy findings, conclusions and recommendations.

- **Strengthening the rule of law**, in particular the regional cooperation in the fight against corruption and organized crime continues to be one of the key challenges for the enlargement countries. Exactly in this area RCC has developed and started to implement the Regional Strategic Document and Action Plan on Justice and Home Affairs 2011-2013, as the only European region with such a Strategy. At the beginning of the next month we shall have in place the Monitoring and Evaluation mechanism on regional cooperation in this area.
- In the field of **freedom of expression and the media** and in response to the May 2011 EC conference on this issue, RCC, in cooperation with EC, hosted yesterday, the international seminar “South East Europe 20 years on: Transformation from State to Public Broadcasting”. The event gathered representatives from all of SEE and international organizations and focused on the needs, modalities and future activities to boost freedom, independence and regional cooperation among public service media. In addition, I would like to point out the establishment, upon the RCC initiative, of the European Association of Public Service Media in SEE and the recent signature of the Protocol on Regional Cooperation in Education and Training among 12 members of the Association.
- Achieving **sustainable economic recovery and the Europe 2020 Strategy** are also important part of RCC activities and, again, very much in line with the Enlargement Strategy. The taking over by RCC of the SEE Investment Committee from the OECD later this month will hopefully not only convey increased regional ownership, but also set an ambitious agenda for our investment-related work. Recently we have launched the structured dialogue on the Western Balkan Social Agenda 2020 with the aim of developing a regional response to the Europe 2020 Strategy.
- In the area of **research and innovation**, RCC initiated and developed the project on the Regional Strategy for Research and Development for Innovation for the Western Balkans which will be officially launched next week.
- Moreover, in the areas of **transport and energy**, RCC is strongly advocating a regional approach in the realization of large-scale projects such as the railway rehabilitation and modernization, expanding air transport link within the region of SEE, establishing the Task Force of the Sustainable Energy Development Regional Initiative etc.
- Regarding the **financial assistance** EC is providing in different forms to RCC, I would like to express sincere gratitude and to stress that several of our important results were funded by the IPA MB and supported by the participation of the RCC Secretariat in the IPA MB Working Groups.

- Allow me to mention some of them: the establishment of the RCC Task Force on Culture and Society, the takeover of the SEE Investment Committee, the Regional Strategy for Research and Development for Innovation, the prospect of including parliamentary cooperation in Western Balkans and Turkey in the 2012 MB Programme.
- As you can see, the implementation of the RCC SWP 2011-2013 is a crucial exercise both for the RCC and the countries from the SEE region. However, its successful implementation could be jeopardized by the current financial situation in the budget of the RCC Secretariat due to the fact that several RCC members have not yet honored the committed yearly contributions.
- The RCC Secretariat will make a self-assessment of the first year of the implementation of its SWP 2011-2013 and will present it the RCC Board Meeting in March 2012 and subsequently to the Fourth RCC Annual Meeting and the SEECP Summit of the Serbian Chairmanship-in-Office in June 2012. This assessment shall also serve as the basis for the discussion on the future role of RCC – beyond 2013, including its funding.
- In light of the overall developments in our region and in the European Union as well, the relevance of discussing the future structure and institutional shape of regional cooperation and in this context the future role of RCC (and SEECP) is growing.
- I believe that the role of RCC beyond 2013 should reflect appropriately the acknowledgement of the SEE countries that regional cooperation, as one of the key requirements in the EU enlargement process, has to continue, to deepen and has to attain full stability and continuity.
- The RCC wants to work and benefit from positive potentials in the region. However, this task must be seen in a broader context of the future global and regional developments. But regardless of the form and content, the mission of the RCC could be built primarily on its delivered results in the implementation of the SWP 2011-2013. In a word, the analysis of the past experience will show the way ahead.
- I wish all of us a very fruitful meeting.

Thank you!