

# **Interview of the Secretary General of Regional Cooperation Council, Hido Biscevic, for BETA News Agency**

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SARAJEVO, 29 October 2008 (Beta) – European Commission is preparing a new strategy for Southeast of Europe which is based on transnational projects, said Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Hido Biscevic.

“This strategy would give the room to the governments of our countries to, on multilateral basis, propose concrete development projects in the areas of energy, infrastructure and other priority areas of development of this part of Europe,” said Biscevic in the interview to Beta news agency.

Regional Cooperation Council is a successor of the Stability Pact for Southeastern Europe working on regional networking and cooperation, assisting reform processes, supporting European and Euro-Atlantic integrations and inciting EU and other donor’s engagement in the region. The Council has 45 members, among which Serbia as well.

Biscevic said that the key for development of the region is a “multilateral basis” for development projects which European Commission is prepared to support. He stressed that the financial framework is “already completed and we are talking about around half a billion Euro” and the next thing is development of projects.

“I do think that a series of transnational projects would open a completely new process, new dynamism in the region and that we would free ourselves of thus far burdening legacy where unresolved issues blocked economic development and thus created a vicious circle of twenty years as much as major part of European Southeast lags behind the rest of the continent,” said Biscevic.

He added that it would be advisable that, regardless of the gravity of specific issues, political leaders recognize that cooperation is necessary to prevent further lagging.

He assessed that so far work of the Council confirmed readiness on the part of Southeast European countries to for the first time establish such a body and engage themselves in its work.

“The Council fully overtook the best parts of Pact’s legacy what at the same time gave room for new initiatives,” said Biscevic.

He also stressed that Regional Cooperation Council succeeded in undergoing the delicate initial phase of establishments and setting up the political and working platform “in circumstances which are still marked by sensitive open issues in this region.”

Asked as to the real impact of the Regional Cooperation Council, Biscevic said that “RCC is recognized as key partner and interlocutor in official EU documents.”

“What the Council can and should do and what it does is designing and coordination of initiatives and projects which can accelerate economic and social development, improve standards of the entire region and strengthen regional cooperation which is an important part of criteria for achieving EU membership.”

Asked about the status of Kosovo within the Council, Biscevic said that “Kosovo participates in the work of the Regional Cooperation Council in accordance with the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, and according to its status in former Stability Pact.”

“By the nature of things, in order for it to fulfil its task and Mission, the Council must remain neutral with respect to all open issues in the region. The Council is not a political body, it is an operational body of the Southeast European Cooperation Process (SEECP),” said Secretary General.

He added that “with regard to this sensitive issue, the Council is statutory neutral,” since it would otherwise become part of the problem and make itself unable to fulfil its fundamental mission – regional cooperation.

“I had talks with Minister Vuk Jeremic and Serbian officials; I had talks in Pristina, in Brussels, wherever it was necessary. The Council observes UNMIK reconfiguration and acts in line with the applicable international-law situation,” said Biscevic.

At the end of the interview given to Beta news agency, Secretary General of the Council expressed his belief that it was, “from Serbia’s viewpoint and Serbian perspective of the legal and political situation too, important to maintain relations which will also enable development on Kosovo.”

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