



**ADDRESS BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION
COUNCIL (RCC), HIDO BIŠČEVIĆ, AT THE**

SEMINAR ON RAILWAY REFORM IN SOUTH EAST EUROPE AND TURKEY

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Thank you for the opportunity to address you at this very important presentation from the viewpoint of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

As you know, the RCC is a leading platform for advancing cooperation in South East Europe (SEE), by supporting the European integrations of the countries from the region and by working on number of concrete projects in areas of development priorities.

Now, there is no doubt that this part of Europe is critically in the need of accelerated development.

Yes, the EU integration is political priority as it brings by itself the transformation of many transition countries and it brings so vitally important democratic stability.

But, in the same time, the EU integration must be followed and complemented by the *development integration* of the region with the Europe – that is, by economic and social recovery and development.

The current crisis is taking a very harsh toll on the countries from the region.

In addition, we are talking about the part of Europe still beset by many unresolved issues, unfunctional institutions, distorted and frustrated societies, plethora of burning social issues, from unemployment to refugees, etc.

To contrast this picture, the countries are advancing towards the EU, as the latest results by Croatia indicate and as, I hope, in the coming months we will have other good news too.

Thus, the EU enlargement persistency remains critically important.

But, the underlining issues of economic development and social stability must be addressed simultaneously in order to avoid prolonged status quo or decline leading to uncertainties and instabilities.

After all, the North Africa is not too far away from the Balkans.

One way of addressing the issue of accelerated development, as indispensable segment of political and social stability, is to look for trans-regional projects in the priority areas.

One of them is certainly the transportation sector, in particular the railways in the region.

They are in a desperate need of comprehensive rehabilitation and reconstruction.

They are in a desperate need of modernization in order to better integrate the regional railway potentials into the European and wider network.

This is why the RCC is strongly advocating a regional approach to railway rehabilitation and modernization in SEE.

This is probably the best way to make the best use of the geographic and geo-economic position of the region situated between the large EU market and Turkey, Middle East, even China.

When the future Bosphorus under-sea railway tunnel becomes operational, it would be a strategic, even historical mistake of the countries of the region not to pool together and jointly speed up the reconstruction of the transportation routes across the Western Balkans.

In that sense, we are particularly appreciating the World Bank's study and the evident support of the European Commission.

From the RCC point, building on this presentation, we will use the forthcoming meetings of the Presidents and Prime Ministers of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECPP) countries to present the potentials indicated in this study and obtain political attention and will to ensure the follow up, that is a joint legislative work, completion of the Transportation Treaty, feasibility studies, full inclusion of the South-East Europe Transport Observatory (SEETO) expertise etc.

In a sense, one would hope that the railways rehabilitation and modernization in the western Balkans and wider South East Europe would become the much needed charger of rekindling of national economies, bearing the potentials to become the 'coal and steel' of the region in terms of development, cooperation and integration.

Let me end by somehow unavoidable metaphor – that part of Europe two decades ago missed the train of history and strayed down the wrong railways. Let us not miss this train.

Thank you.