



RegionalCooperationCouncil

SOUTH-EAST EUROPEAN COOPERATION PROCESS SUMMIT

**ADDRESS
BY THE SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE REGIONAL COOPERATION COUNCIL**

CHISINAU, 5 JUNE 2009

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Excellencies,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is indeed an honour and privilege to address this Summit meeting at this particular moment, here in Chisinau, by thanking at the outset our Moldovan hosts and Acting President Voronin personally for a warm hospitality extended to us, but also for the commendable contribution of the Republic of Moldova during their Chairmanship-in-Office of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP).

At this point in time, allow me to share with you a short balance sheet of the situation in our part of Europe from the perspective of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC).

I believe it is important to share a common insight into the strategic environment of South East Europe in order to assess objectively where the region stands,

what are the priorities and against what broader European and international agenda these priorities should be pursued.

The RCC is now fully operational arm of the SEECP, having taken upon itself the task to translate genuine cooperative dedication of the SEECP Participating States into a tangible and concrete development-oriented initiatives and projects.

I want to thank all SEECP Participating States for their sustained assistance and contribution during this initial formative stage of the RCC work.

Our gratitude also goes to the European Union (EU) and its institutions as their support constitutes a vital platform for the RCC in further promoting European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries of the region.

Through their active cooperation and support within the RCC framework, other most important international stakeholders have certainly added their invaluable contribution in what has by now been recognized as a unique cooperative endeavour of no precedence in our part of Europe.

In this light, it is even more important that the RCC has succeeded in profiling itself, in relation to the international community and within the region and being fully accepted as a key partner and interlocutor for the development of regional cooperation in South East Europe.

In just a little over one year of the RCC's existence, it is an achievement in itself. The same period was characterized by many difficult, demanding, sensitive and challenging issues in our part of Europe. But, due to the general maturity and growing self-responsibility in the region, despite these status related issues, issues of bilateral nature and issues of self-sustainability, governance and democratic standards – just to name the most pressing and challenging remaining issues in the region – South East Europe is steadily advancing toward the realization of shared goals.

The fact that by now all our countries are, in a different ways, institutionally linked to the EU is of historical importance. In a comparatively short period of time after the years of wars and tensions that swept through parts of the region, these achievements must be sustained, consolidated and pursued further, by individual efforts and by genuine cooperation, in the spirit of solidarity. Recent advancement of two SEECP Participating States that became NATO members additionally consolidates our part of Europe as a zone of stability and shared values of free democratic community of nations.

At this point in time, in particular given the challenges of remaining issues that are still present on the region's agenda and, in addition, taking into account the adverse effects of the current economic and financial crisis, all efforts should be joined to consolidate these achievement as a basis for further progress.

I am certain that the documents proposed for your adoption, the Chisinau Declaration and the Joint Statement, calling for enhanced partnership of our countries to realize strategic goals and address longstanding and new economic and social needs of our region, provide for a much needed platform aimed at forging stability and integration through accelerated development.

At this point, keeping the European perspective open and continuing the reform processes, it is precisely the accelerated development that our part of Europe needs to fullfil the call of this moment in history of South East Europe – that is, to finish the peace, to complete transition, to establish a durable security and stability and to ensure economic and social prosperity.

We need to find ways and invent tools to continue to move the region forward in order to avoid stagnation or sliding back due to the current economic difficulties or remaining outstanding issues.

South East Europe must continue to deliver, on individual basis but also through enhanced cooperation and genuine solidarity.

I am personally convinced that this goal must be a guiding line of each and every particular segment of relations within the region.

There simply cannot be a room for double standards. The nature of regional relations will remain a litmus test for the maturity and preparedness of each and every of our countries to participate responsibly and in line with the European values and standards within the broader European family.

Any national, political or economic, least certainly social protectionism, self-centered attitude or inwardness simply cannot be part and parcel of the proclaimed European visions and goals that all South East European countries share.

Remaining issues need to be resolved with the added urgency and self-responsibility in order to complete the architecture of stability and security as a platform for development and EU or NATO membership.

Mutual understanding is essential. Compromises are not to be seen as treason, just as mutual appeasements should lead to mutual benefits.

We have two avenues for the advancement of the region – EU enlargement policy and genuine regional cooperation based on solidarity and mutual accommodation over the remaining outstanding issues. They are complementary. They need to be pursued by all.

On this basis, I am convinced that the evident openness and support of the EU will be reflected within the enlargement process, but also in further assisting South East Europe to address pressing economic and development needs.

Energy security, infrastructural shortcomings in many parts of the region, insufficient or inadequate use of many of natural resources and potentials of the region, lack of resolute strategic approach to transboundary development, fragmentation which is decreasing competitiveness, economic policies and markets still overdependant on political particularism or interests – these are just a few critical bottlenecks of much needed accelerated development.

Time has come to start thinking in larger terms. Time has come for a regional development multilateralism to the benefit of each and every of the countries of the region. Time has come to define development priorities that will support national economies, that will be complementary to the EU strategies and policies and, at the same time, serve as a tangible impetus to the EU related reforms.

As the current crisis is additionally burdening our economies, with foreseeable social consequences and against the backdrop of remaining political issues, it is indeed a high noon for bold, new, innovative ideas and common action.

In this view, I am confident that the forthcoming conference on the Western Balkans organized by the incoming Swedish EU Presidency and the European Commission, with the participation of the RCC, envisaged to take place in December 2009 in Brussels, will provide us with the additional opportunity and platform for our discussions about possible actions related to combating adverse effects of economic and financial crisis as well as about the development of South East Europe. The RCC stands ready to continue to provide platform for action and activities in this respect.

Our appreciation should also go to the International Financial Institutions as they recognize the rationale of the current economic and social moment in our

region and continue to consider the preservation of this dynamic emerging market as part of their own strategies and policies.

In addition, the programming and implementation of the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme remains also of vital importance and I would urge you to call upon your administrations to increase their capacities and coordination in order to be more efficient in developing and submitting regional projects to be possibly financed under this important pre-accession instrument.

In this light it will also be important to find optimal solution to pooling resources, simplifying procedures and secure coordinated, transparent, targeted and efficient use of financial assistance and funds.

The RCC will continue also to work and complete all individual projects and initiatives developed so far, in particular the Southeastern and Central Europe Catastrophe Risk Insurance Facility, the South East Europe Firefighting Regional Centre and others. I would, in particular, call you to join these initiatives having in mind their benefit for the whole region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

South East Europe may continue to advance and forge stability through development only by consolidating cooperation, further enhancement of solidarity and by abiding to the principle of inclusiveness.

Challenges and sensitive issues call for openness and pragmatism. Our corner of Europe is historically marked by controversies and complexities. Unfortunately, they were too often addressed in adverse ways. Recent unfortunate history is telling lessons. The processes of establishment of new and durable stability architecture are irreversible. Thus, we need to recognize the values of diversities, we need to rediscover the values of coexistence, the moral imperatives of tolerance and political benefits of dialogue and pragmatism. These are the fundaments of Europe we all want to be part of.

The RCC will continue to work for the all-inclusiveness of regional cooperation in South East Europe as a ground rule and it is indeed regrettable that one of the RCC members from the region, notably UNMIK/Kosovo, has not been in a position to attend the RCC Annual Meeting, which took place yesterday. The more so as it is evident that balanced development throughout the region is

essential component of the overall security and stability. Exclusions are always the invitations to imbalance, imbalances are always an invitation to instabilities. We need to agree to keep the bilateral issues out of the RCC framework.

Allow me at this point to indicate that from the RCC perspective there might already be a need to open a comprehensive discussion on how to strategically position the RCC in the future, in order to consolidate and increase its role and mandate in the light of possible varying SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office policies and views due to differing national positions, interests and priorities. Should the RCC continue to serve as a facilitator of cooperation or should it develop a mandate to provide for cooperation or should it be profiled in some other direction? The way the SEECP Participating States would address these questions and the way other stakeholders would also respond will certainly influence the future strategic position and role of the RCC.

Allow me, at the end, to call upon you to endorse the proposed Strategic Working Programme of the RCC for the period 2009-2010. This will be a key roadmap for our work in the coming year. I am confident that the RCC will enjoy full support of the incoming Turkish Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP in realizing demanding yet much needed objectives and programmes.

Thank you for your attention.