



**MEETING OF THE MINISTERS OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF THE SOUTH
EAST EUROPE COOPERATION PROCESS (SEECF)**

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

BELGRADE, 14 JUNE 2012

Thank you Minister Jeremić,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a pleasure to participate at this distinguished forum and share some observations on the current state of play of regional cooperation in South East Europe (SEE), from the standpoint of the RCC.

But, allow me to start by extending gratitude to the Serbian SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office (C-i-O) for excellent cooperation we have had in the course of the past twelve months.

Our synergy has been invaluable in promoting and enhancing regional cooperation in SEE.

And let me also congratulate Minister Jeremić on assuming the duty of President of the UN 67. General Assembly, as it is his great personal and professional achievement, but also a recognition of wider merits in our region.

As many of you know, the RCC already established itself as a pivotal platform for guiding and monitoring cooperation in SEE. It builds on a genuine regional ownership and draws on the input from the region itself and from our European and international partners in fulfilling its mission and mandate.

The importance of this mission should be measured against the backdrop of the political and socio-economic conditions in this part of Europe – the RCC has been persistent in working on regional cooperation even against many odds in the region. And we all know their main features – durable peace and stability are still not fully ensured, self-sustainability, credibility and effectiveness of cooperation is yet to be consolidated and European standards and values still need to take irreversible roots .

With another successful year behind the RCC, one could conclude that ways will have to be devised to further ensure a solid, uninterrupted cooperation based on a greater regional responsibility, a genuine political commitment and an effective capacity in the RCC members from SEE to implement the commitments made at the regional level.

In a word, time has come to build upon the achievements reached so far and move our cooperation to a new level. If we are to endure the test of time, five years after the inception of the RCC and over 15 years after the formation of the SEECP, we need to engage in a serious evaluation on how to consolidate regional cooperation in the region, how to ensure greater and sustained inputs from governmental levels throughout the region, how to move forward to a full-fledge substantial cooperation and how to translate it into an political, economic and social agenda that will prove effective and beneficial to our countries, economies and citizens.

And it is not only about the EU accession requirements. It is more about our common readiness to find ways and means to stabilize and consolidate cooperation in an environment of unresolved issues and divergent viewpoints.

In that respect, we should be satisfied - SEE countries are moving, in accordance with their individual merits, towards European and Euro-Atlantic integration, and in so doing they embrace dialogue and cooperation as principles inherent for the materialization of the much needed reforms.

I would say that, on balance, the developments in this respect are highly encouraging.

By way of illustration, as we look to individual successes of the countries around this table achieved in the process of EU accession, we are being recurrently reminded of the importance that regional cooperation has for genuine dialogue, mutual understanding and accommodation. These are principles without which EU integration and regional cooperation as one of the key requirements in this respect cannot be consistently pursued.

The success of one country should be followed by a proper atmosphere to stimulate the others. Therefore, the continuation of the EU enlargement policy, accompanied by concrete progress on part of each aspiring country, would ensure that the overall positive dynamics in the region is sustained and supported. This would benefit the safeguarding of a long-standing peace and stability of our part of Europe.

One should, certainly, be fully aware of the challenges and difficulties currently shaping not only European and international agendas, but the regional one too. The latter agenda will continue to oscillate between a positive momentum and a strategic limbo so long as the current economic and financial crisis looms over SEE, and to no lesser degree as the current open issues remain unsolved and staunchly immune to the positive perspectives in the region.

Dealing urgently with the open issues and creating a climate conducive to alleviating some of the detrimental effects of the current economic and social crisis, can produce the best formula to avoid delaying the region's ultimate goal to join the European and Euro-Atlantic community.

However, one would also need to recall that a greater rapprochement, reconciliation and pragmatism in the region rest on a stable socio-economic environment, driven by trans-regional development projects. These should be focused on the immediate concerns in socio-economic and infrastructural sectors, and based on durable mechanisms in justice and home affairs and security areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

My Annual Report, endorsed by the RCC Annual Meeting, proves that the RCC has delivered in all the key priority areas, in line with the RCC Strategy and Work Programme (SWP) for 2011 –

2013. Illustrative examples of this assessment are the transfer of the South East Europe Investment Committee from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development to the RCC, establishment of the Task Force for Culture and Society and assuming responsibility for cooperation in this vitally important area, increasing and solidifying cooperation in the security, defence and intelligence sectors, setting up of a regional strategy to fight organised crime and corruption, enhancing cooperation in education, health, research and media.

Together with a plethora of other projects and initiatives, these concrete achievements clearly confirm the ability of the RCC to ensure a result-oriented cooperation in SEE, against the backdrop of many remaining challenges, difficulties and differences.

Overall, the completion of the implementation of the first phase of the RCC SWP 2011 – 2013 and RCC Secretariat's Self-assessment report revealed that most of the RCC SWP 2011 – 2013 activities are directly or indirectly linked with the European integration agendas of the countries from the region.

Needless to say, RCC is ready to continue vigorously to fulfil its mission, sparing no efforts to ensure all-inclusiveness as its ground rule in the interest of all members.

The discussions within the SEECP on future forms and scope of cooperation in our region come at a right moment and I do believe that the outcome will provide us with new avenues for further strengthening our cooperation. It will also have an impact on future strategic goals and work platform of the RCC beyond 2013, by enhancing its role within the EU enlargement process.

In my mind, this only indicates that RCC, as an operational arm of the SEECP, needs to preserve its status neutral and all-inclusive character, with a stronger alignment with the EU enlargement strategy, just as it should be attributed stronger implementation tools in order to enhance its ability to respond effectively to the emerging socio-economic challenges in SEE.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In all sincerity, I would like to express my assessment that the way the RCC was led since its establishment received a genuine and full support of the whole RCC membership and, in particular of the SEECP participating states.

If so, I take it as a proof that in our region, despite all the diversities and differences, the mission of the RCC to promote tolerance, respect, dialogue and coexistence is a success.

Thank you.