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INTERVIEW Hidajet Biscevic, Secretary General of the RCC

Crises jeopardizes region's stability

There could not have been the worst moment for economic shock in South East Europe • BiH is an unfinished story • Role of Croatia and Serbia

By: Tarik LAZOVIC

Global economic crises could not have happened in a worse moment for the South East Europe region, said Hido Biscevic, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) in the interview for "Dnevni avaz" daily newspapers. This regional body has already warned the European Union that the consequences of economic crisis, if not stopped, could cause a deeper political crisis and destabilization of the region.

Investments at Risk

- The region has just begun coming out of a war and post war zone and started strengthening peace consolidation process and building state institutions, and now it is in for a crisis impact – says Biscevic.

† **What are your estimates as to the strength to which the global financial crisis will be reflected in countries of the region and as to the way the countries decided to fight this?**

- Economic crisis will undoubtedly overspill to our part of the continent too. No one is an isolated island for itself. Crisis impact cannot be confronted solely at the state level. The most difficult of all is the moment of crisis outbreak. The region has just begun coming out of a war and post war zone. I emphasize – has only begun. We live an unfinished peace, unfinished transition, unfinished building of freestanding countries, and unfinished social stabilization. The crisis impact comes in a moment in which the key lies in economic growth and vigorous impetus of national economies, and thus it puts investments and energy security at risk, i.e. the very fundamental interests of the countries from the region.

Photo - Biscevic: Constitutional changes in BiH are crucial

† EU decided to assist in this as well as the international financial institutions, but will this be enough?

- EU continues to have the region on its agenda, and this is most important. Member States are preoccupied with their own efforts to face the crisis. However, region's political stability depends on not allowing economic activities to cease. EU remains devoted to enlargement policy and this is important. But, I repeat, the responsibility is mutual as presently the message from Brussels is simple – accelerate reforms, resolve open issues. Otherwise you will provide an argument to those not entirely enthusiastic about the enlargement.

Other Topics

† Can BiH political situation, or better yet, political problems, destabilize the region, i.e. cause “intervention” of other countries from the region, Serbia and Croatia, about which American media wrote recently?

- BiH is the key to finalize the new, lasting security infrastructure of this part of Europe. BiH is the middle house whose room arrangement and structure is for the time being an unfinished story, but I wish to believe that messages saying that there is no time to spare as global focus turns to other topics and regions, will increase awareness on the historic responsibility of this generation of politicians. The key is to speedup agreements on the lasting constitutional structure of the country as everything else is a road to stagnation and lagging behind. I do not dare to even imagine more than this. As long as there are opinion leaders who believe in some other scenarios, wherever they be, vibrations of uncertainty will remain existent.

† Do Croatia and Serbia have a constructive or some other role in this?

- For the two key neighbouring countries, Croatia and Serbia, lasting stability of the region is, of course, their permanent interest. No one could dare believe that someone could have some other goals and interests in the current international setting, with this crises breathing down our neck and Euro-Atlantic aspirations, could not they? Therefore, I believe that the level of readiness on the part of Belgrade and Zagreb to support efforts which lead to stabilization and permanent solution in BiH could be the key to getting closer to the EU.

Visas the Introduction to a Social Bomb

† How do you see progress of countries from the region, which still have no visa-free regime, to meeting the criteria set by the European Union?

- In the economic and social environment the existing regime is objectively an introduction to explosion of a social bomb. To live a crises and have no access has psychological and even a political side of the problem. Certain slowness and unwillingness is noted on the part of the EU. Where a minister of foreign affairs recognizes the importance of this issue, a minister of interior needs to be consulted too, and he/she measures some other kind of sensitivity.