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Interview: Jelica Minic, Deputy Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council

## It Is Good That Serbia Is Very Active

**During this year, political cooperation started catching up with economic cooperation and even supporting it**

“Cooperation of countries in this region has never been better according to many reviews” said Jelica Minic, Deputy Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council, with its Headquarters in Sarajevo.

In the interview for *Politika*, Mrs. Minic, who was Secretary General of the European Movement in Serbia and former Assistant Minister of Foreign Affairs of Serbia, reminded that addresses of many statesmen from the region delivered at the Summit of South-East European Cooperation Process, held in Istanbul, on 23 June this year, stated that since 1991, level of multilateral cooperation had never been at a higher level than it was presently.

“Improved context of European integration has undoubtedly contributed to this (application for candidate status of the new group of Balkan countries, with successful outcome for Montenegro; visa liberalisation for five Balkan countries in this year; June EU-Western Balkans Conference in Sarajevo; etc.),” she said and added that it was also assessed that, since its establishment 14 years ago, SEE Cooperation Process had obtained an important role in strengthening multilateral cooperation in the region with large contribution by the Regional Cooperation Council as effective coordination mechanism.

“One of the proofs of such statements is Slovenian joining the SEE Cooperation Process at the June Summit, thus increasing the membership of this initiative to total of 12 countries. And so, regional cooperation in South East Europe is increasing and attracting new participants,” underlined Ms. Minic.

**Just over a year ago, you had pointed out that political cooperation had been lagging behind economic cooperation. Is this the case today?**

It could be said that luckily, during this year, political cooperation started catching up with economic cooperation and even supporting it. Economic topics carry increasingly much weight in bilateral meetings in the region and we are witnessing this every day. It is sufficient just to take a look at the contents of President Tadic’s visit to Croatia and messages exchanged at the highest level.

**How large is the role of Serbia in reconstruction of regional cooperation?**

Serbia is the biggest country in Western Balkans and its role is inevitably important. It is good that the country has been very active latterly as this automatically provides a better image of the entire region. Some of these assessments can be found in the Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011, published by the European Commission on 9 November.

**European Commission insists on resolving the customs seal issue between Belgrade and Pristina. In your opinion, is the solution possible if we know that Serbia wants the seal to read “Unimk-Kosovo” while Pristina insists that the seal read “Republika Kosovo”?**

Regardless of the status, Kosovo is an independent customs territory today and this is nothing new in the World Trade Organisation. Sooner or later, the actual situation will be formalised and economy and citizens will have the largest benefits of this while black marketers and organised crime will suffer the largest damages.

**What else needs to be done to arrange mutual relations among the former Yugoslav countries?**

A chance should be given to the natural need of citizens, business people, artists, scientists and other to cooperate and exchange. Common European future leads us in this direction as well as numerous newly emerged regional structures which were established due to the need to cooperate in the region – around 47 active regional initiatives, task forces, networks, centres. They cover wide areas from trade, energy, transport, environmental protection, rural development, public health improvement, prevention and protection against natural and other disasters, to joint projects in the area of research and development, improvement of high education reform, public administration training, etc.

The above mentioned does not include networks of civil society organisations that were the forerunners of regional cooperation. The mere numbers demonstrate that life goes on. This just has to be recognized and supported by official politics. I would also add that regional cooperation has just recently become fashionable in the regional media space. Should I add anything else to this?

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