

Overview of Key Activities of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) Secretariat

February 2009

1

RCC Secretary General met Director - General for Enlargement in the European Commission Michael Leigh and handed over letter for the Member of the European Commission responsible for Enlargement Olli Rehn, on 10 February 2009 in Brussels

Secretary General Biscevic handed Director-General Leigh a letter for the Member of the European Commission responsible for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, outlining concrete proposals for countering the spill-over effects of economic recession and financial crisis on South East Europe. In his letter of 10 February 2009 to the Member of the European Commission Olli Rehn, the RCC Secretary General invited the European Commission to consider the advancement of the target dates for the realization of activities envisaged under the Multi-beneficiary Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (MB IPA) for 2009, speed up the disbursement and contracting of the remaining MB IPA funds, to ensure that guarantees for the operation of the EU banks active in South East Europe are brought in line with those of the Eurozone, to accelerate the establishment of the Western Balkan Investment Framework as well as to consider the idea of holding an International Financial Institutions Advisory Group high-level meeting alongside the forthcoming Meeting of the Heads of State and Government of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) Participating States in early June 2009 in Chisinau.

On this occasion, Secretary General Biscevic stressed that in times of economic crisis, a key strategic interest of South East Europe is to ensure that the regional market, as one of the most dynamic emerging markets in the world, is preserved and economic activities enhanced. In this context, he underlined a vital role of application of coherent, strategic and common policies by the European Union and other international partners, including international financial institutions combined with the joint activities of the countries of region. He invited the EU to consider maximizing access to its funds by the South East European countries. Director Leigh confirmed the European Commission's continued support to the region and the work of the

RCC, and in this context also recalled the Commission's Crisis Response Package and allocation of 120 million euro under the 2009 MB IPA. It is hoped that these funds would generate additional financial support of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Council of Europe Development Bank and other leading European banking institutions. During the visit to Brussels, Secretary General Biscevic also held a briefing at the European Policy Centre on the present situation in South East Europe, and the role, achievements and challenges facing the RCC. He pointed out the critical importance of the upcoming period when political leaderships in South East Europe will be called for additional level of responsibility and urgency in dealing with EU oriented reforms and in addressing remaining open issues.

2

RCC Secretary General held talks with Prime Minister of The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia Nikola Gruevski in Skopje on 11 February 2009

RCC Secretary General Hido Biscevic invited the authorities of The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to propose projects to be implemented under the MB IPA Programme and take full advantage of cooperation links the RCC has built with EU institutions for this purpose. Secretary General reminded that the current world financial crisis has reinforced the need for the countries of South East Europe to work together to create and maintain a stable political and economic climate susceptible to further investment and development of the region. Prime Minister Gruevski confirmed his country's strong commitment to regional cooperation and fully supported RCC efforts in this respect. Both officials agreed that reform processes and positive trends in regional cooperation should be continued. Secretary General Biscevic also emphasized the need to address the remaining open issues in South East Europe in a spirit of good neighbourly relations and in a result oriented manner, decoupling them at the same time from EU integration processes. While in Skopje, the RCC Secretary General also met with a number of relevant ministers and other high officials of The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, including the Minister of Economy Fatmir Besimi, Minister of Transport and Communications Mile Janakieski, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Zoran Petrov and President of Economic Chamber Branko Azeski.

3

RCC Secretary General held talks with Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt on 17 February 2009 in Stockholm

Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt underlined the utmost importance of the role of the RCC for cooperation in South East Europe and completion of the region's EU integration processes. In this light, Secretary General Biscevic stressed the importance of keeping EU focus on the Western Balkans and South East Europe in order to ensure that the region avoids potentially serious spill over effects of the world economic and financial crisis. Secretary General added RCC is working with its members from South East Europe on identifying large-scale projects which would ensure regional development, complement EU integration, and utilize to a

maximum extent the funds available under the MB IPA Programme and through international financial institutions. RCC Secretary General highlighted a need to separate resolution of remaining bilateral issues in South East Europe from European integration, as this may hamper implementation of the EU enlargement strategy. The two officials also discussed possible joint activities during the Swedish EU Presidency in the second half of 2009, which are to be finalized in the coming months. At a meeting with the Deputy Director General of the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), Magnus Lindell, Secretary General Biscevic invited SIDA to consider cooperation with the RCC on regional projects. Consequently, it was agreed that experts of the two institutions meet to come up with possible cooperation options. Secretary General Biscevic also met with a delegation of the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by Lars Wahlund, Director of the Department for EU, and a delegation of the Ministry of Justice, led by Ola Henrikson, Director General for Migration Affairs.

4

RCC National Coordinators from South Eastern Europe met in Sarajevo on 19 February 2009

National Coordinators from RCC members from South East Europe held their first meeting in 2009 to discuss the possibilities for enhancing concrete project cooperation. RCC Secretary General Hido Biscevic informed the coordinators about his contacts with the EU and the European Commission in particular in light of the current economic and financial situation and possible implications for South East Europe. The need for a more coherent and coordinated approach to the crisis was strongly emphasized. The Coordinators reviewed future steps in the process of networking between the RCC members from South East Europe and the RCC Secretariat, with the participation of the European Commission and relevant international financial institutions, aimed at identifying and developing possible concrete cooperation projects in the five priority areas of RCC activities. They also continued talks on regional cooperation priorities and the level of harmonization of national activities and strategies with the RCC Strategic Work Programme 2008-2009 as well as with the EU's MB IPA Programme priorities. The coordinators worked to identify possible specific cooperation areas and to develop concrete projects within the RCC framework, including regional responses to the international financial crisis and a proposal for establishing South East Europe Investment Bank (SEEIB).

5

RCC held a presentation in Tirana on 24 February 2009

Following a successfully string of presentations in RCC members from South Eastern Europe, RCC experts, lead by RCC Deputy Secretary General and Head of Expert Pool Jelica Minic, held a presentation in Tirana organized by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Albania. The presentation was attended by a number of representatives of ministries and institutions and offered a valuable opportunity for exchanging views on the achievements of the RCC in the last year, the way ahead and possibilities of participation of Albania in concrete regional projects.

Regional Cooperation Council marked its first anniversary on 27 February 2009 in Sarajevo

The Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), launched on 27 February 2008 in Sofia, marked its first anniversary. The programme of the event comprised of a panel discussion “One Year of Regional Cooperation Council: Achievements and Way Forward”, to be followed by a concert of the South East Europe Symphony Orchestra string quartet, and a cocktail reception. The panellists - Hido Biscevic, RCC Secretary General, Srdjan Dizdarevic, President of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Jovan Teokarevic, Director of the Belgrade Centre for European Integration, and Erhan Turbedar, Senior Expert at the Research Foundation for Economic Policies of Turkey - reviewed RCC accomplishments and explored the way ahead.

Sarajevo, 11 March 2009