

## **Svilanović: Citizens expect Serbia to look different**

BELGARDE, 21 July (*Tanjug*) – Goran Svilanović, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), said that the Government of Serbia made a huge step forward the moment the challenge it faced included obligations arising from the accession process but that the most important job still lies ahead given that Serbia is due for an important change in the accession negotiations.

“This change in Serbia is more important than the EU membership. Actually, if I were to allow myself to judge, I would say that the thing citizens expect from this Government, as they expected from previous ones as well, is not so much the accelerated membership as it is the cry for Serbia to look differently,” Svilanović said in the interview for *Tanjug*.

This “different” means jobs for everyone, stopping corruption, observing the order in the country, efficient work of police and courts, respect for knowledge and education, and people being able to plan their life and lives of their children, he added.

“From the moment negotiations open, EU ceases to be a political slogan and becomes everyday of state administration. EU accession process becomes the process of reforming the country,” Svilanović said.

One needs to prepare now for the negotiation, said Svilanović and expressed hope the process could be finalised in the next two election cycles.

Reminding that at the beginning of negotiations, Serbia opens Chapter 23 and Chapter 24 relating to the rule of law implementation and anti-corruption respectively, Svilanović said that at that point the EU will become “the best ally to the citizens”.

In the context of European integration, Serbia’s relations with neighbours, and Brussels and other European countries, are of extreme importance not only for Serbia but for the entire region as well, Svilanović said.

“It is difficult to imagine stable and prosperous region without stable and prosperous Serbia. Clear EU perspective brings stability to the region. It opens larger area for regional cooperation on concrete topics from economy, infrastructure and justice to education and cultural cooperation,” Svilanović stressed.

Progress towards the EU, Svilanović believes, will give Serbia the opportunity to strengthen alliances in wider European area and will enable it to, due to its geostrategic position, remain important link between North and South of Europe, European West and European East.

Brussels agreement, as any other, has to be sustainable, believes Svilanović and adds that the biggest difficulty will be to build greater trust amongst people “from both sides of the bridge”.

“Agreements need to be sustainable for people to be able to live with them even though they do not fully agree with them,” said Svilanović and added that mistrust is very deep due to which, as he said, both Governments will have to invest much efforts to explain to people what has been agreed and whether and to what extent this will change living conditions of both Serbs and Albanians from both sides of Ibar river.

This Government has made big efforts to achieve this level of understanding at least, Svilanović believes and hopes this will be the case in future and that everyone, Belgrade and Prishtina and Brussels, will get one step closer to the agreement on what is a tolerable and what is a sustainable solution.

“It would be easy to say that Serbs from North Kosovo\* cannot prevent implementation of the agreement. However, this is not entirely true. After all, each agreement is made to make people live in as much normal conditions as possible. The purpose of all agreements is to make life easier and simpler rather than making the conditions in which Serbs and Albanians live more difficult,” said Svilanović.

He believes that Serbian Government deserves special acknowledgement for being very restrained in April and for making particular effort to show respect to mayors of municipalities from the North and those that elected them even when the differences were large.

He added that the Government should continue being present in North Kosovo\* daily, to explain, to call for agreement, to be open and honest regarding all elements of the agreement.

“Serbs from the North and Serbs in other parts of Kosovo\* will then have more understanding for changes that will happen in their lives by implementation of all agreements”, he said.

Svilanović believes that the region is ready to move away from the events in the past and focus on joint interests and goals adding that this is already being observed.

“Despite different understanding of key political events at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century, over the last fifteen years, we observed important steps made in interlinking the economies in the region, continuously increasing cultural exchange, and cooperation in education, science and health,” noted Silanović.

In this context, the RCC has had an important role in the process over the past years and Svilanović added that he will make the effort to develop environment conducive to such trends in the future.

“Perhaps in the situation in which it is difficult to cooperate bilaterally due to an unresolved issue, the participation of a third and fourth party, participation of the entire region could provide for overcoming the crisis and distrust,” he said.

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*\*This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*