



Written contribution of the Regional Cooperation Council at the 17th OSCE Ministerial Council

Athens, 1-2 December 2009

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) would like to thank the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe as well as the Greek Chairmanship of the Organization in 2009 for inviting it to attend the 17th OSCE Ministerial Council meeting.

The RCC highly values the interest in and the contribution of the OSCE to regional cooperation promoted and supported within the framework of the RCC. The RCC is intent on pursuing joint efforts with the OSCE aimed at moving South East Europe forward on its path to stability, prosperity and further democratization.

The cooperation between the two organizations has so far gathered around a number of topics which resulted in practical joint initiatives, be it in the area of justice and home affairs, police cooperation, education, joint history books projects, freedom of the media, parliamentary oversight of intelligence services or the latest regional workshop on combating drug trafficking. This fruitful and topical cooperation has relied over the past period on comparative advantages of the two organizations: the RCC brings into the equation its regional perspective and issue-specific regional expertise whereas the OSCE missions in the field provide country-specific knowledge supported by focused presence on the ground.

The focus and priorities of the OSCE and the RCC are complementary and our respective points of view can further be utilized to the benefit of the region of South East Europe. Furthermore, the experiences and the insight that the RCC has gained with regard to cooperative processes in South East Europe could be a model for other regions in which the OSCE is active.

Now, allow a few words on the RCC itself. The RCC was established two years ago as a regionally owned and led cooperation mechanism whose main goal is to sustain focused regional cooperation in South East Europe intended to support European and Euro-Atlantic integration of the region. Although the principle of regional ownership is the most important added value of the RCC, it is notable to observe that the 12 RCC members from South East Europe are supported in their efforts by the European Commission, a large donor community as well as international organizations and financial institutions, bringing the count to 45 members of the RCC in total.

Thus, the RCC has clearly profiled itself as a key partner of the international community for issues related to regional cooperation in South East Europe, acting under the political guidance of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP).

Since the launch of the RCC, the regional cooperation in South East Europe acquired new characteristics, becoming a genuine regionally-owned network of cooperation among the governments of South East Europe. It has been demonstrated that regional cooperation through an enhanced ownership principle and the European agenda are linked. The advancement of RCC members from South East Europe on the path of European and Euro-Atlantic integration has additionally developed potentials and readiness for regional cooperation and its further strengthening. The process also works in the reverse order, which means that genuine cooperation of the region is strengthening its capacities for European and Euro-Atlantic integration.

One of the main objectives and achievements of the RCC lies in perserving the principle of all-inclusiveness of regional cooperation. It is of the utmost importance that all the RCC members from South East Europe participate actively in all regional activities as well as in stretegic deliberations on the future of regional cooperation processes and the region as a whole.

The region of South East Europe is filled with complexities and sometimes daunting challenges. The RCC Secretary General, Hido Bišćević has welcomed the renewed engagement of the international community regarding the most challenging remaining issues in South East Europe expressing hope that it would create a favourable environment for establishing a lasting peace and enhancing stability in the region. A great deal of responsibility for making deep-cutting reforms and addressing open issues with moderation, constraint and mutual acceptance lies with the governments of the region. Also, a great deal of responsibility lies with the EU to embrace this region whose future is evidently in the European family.

In these circumstances, the Regional Cooperation Council is doing its utmost to assist the region of South East Europe to achieve accelerated economic development and to step up its European and Euro-Atlantic integration. The RCC has a clear set of priorities, including Economic and Social Development, Justice and Home Affairs, Energy and Infrastructure, Security Cooperation and Building Human Capital and Cross-Cutting Issues. These priorities are complementary to the Stabilisation and Association Process as well as to the priorities of the donor community. They are also intended to support the national efforts of individual members.

By fostering a propitious climate of dialogue and cooperation among countries sometimes burdened with remaining open issues, the RCC can be understood as a vehicle promoting stability of the region of South East Europe, fitting into the wider context of security and cooperation in Europe under the overall umbrella of the OSCE.

The OSCE remains one of the important partners of South East Europe in the framework of the RCC. The RCC looks forward to strengthening cooperation in areas of mutual concern and interest and especially to the input from the OSCE on the occasion of the Annual Meeting of the RCC. The Annual Meeting will be held next year in June back-to-back with the Meeting of the SEECP Heads of State and Government organized under the Turkish SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office and will be deciding on the strategic course of regional cooperation in South East Europe in the period to come.

Thank you.