



Dear friends,

It gives me great pleasure to address a few words to you as the appointed Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council. I am writing these lines following the landmark Summit of the SEECP Heads of State and Govern-

-ments and of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact, both in Zagreb last May. The decisions endorsed by these two meetings have laid foundations for further advancement of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe.

In short, with these decisions South Eastern Europe has decided to take upon itself the ownership of regional co-operation and to continue to build upon the heritage and successes of the Stability Pact. The countries of the region have manifested strong determination to foster more regionally owned co-operation with the overarching goal of achieving Euro-Atlantic integration of each individual country.

The support of the international community is very important for the successful outcome of this process, which should lead to a stable and prosperous South Eastern Europe, fully integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. In order to ensure continuity, the remarkable legacy of the Stability Pact will be taken up by the new Regional Co-operation Council and further developed and streamlined to suit the needs of the region.

As far as my next steps are concerned, I intend to present jointly with Dr. Busek the results of the consultations on the structure and functioning of the Regional Co-operation Council Secretariat to the upcoming Informal Meeting of the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs to be held on 13 and 14 September in Plovdiv. They will provide a basis for discussion of our SEECP and other RCC friends. With the ministers endorsing the structure and budget of the RCC Secretariat and signing the Host Country Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina we shall be able to proceed with the steps aimed at having the RCC Secretariat operational already by February 2008. To achieve this ambitious plan, it is of the utmost importance to keep the momentum and continue with the planned roadmap of implementing the decisions.

On a more personal note, I look forward to tackling the challenges ahead and working closely and fruitfully with all the stakeholders of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe.

**Hido Biscevic, Appointed Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council**

## RCC Host Country Agreement to be signed in Plovdiv

**On September 14, in Plovdiv, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the other SEECP participating States, as well as UNMIK on behalf of Kosovo will sign the agreement establishing the secretariat of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) in Sarajevo. The Host Country agreement (HCA) will provide a sound legal basis for the RCC Secretariat to start its work as planned by the end of February 2008. The HCA allows also the Secretariat to conclude a Headquarters Agreement with Belgium to establish the RCC Liaison Office in Brussels.**



The RCC secretariat will be based at the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of this building in Sarajevo

This small liaison office will assist the RCC, securing the daily interface with the European and Euro-Atlantic institutions in Brussels. Bosnia and Herzegovina is providing the headquarters of the RCC at no fee. Now the next step is the ratification of the Host Country Agreement by the signatory States. According to the decisions taken by the countries of the region, the RCC will take over the activities of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The role of the Secretariat will be to streamline the work as decided by the countries of the region in the five priority areas of the RCC:

- a. Economic and Social Development; b. Infrastructure; c. Justice and Home Affairs; d. Security Co-operation; e. Building Human Capital; f. as well as Parliamentary Co-operation as an overarching theme.

In order to handover to the RCC a coherent and sustainable set of co-operation processes in priority areas, the Stability Pact is continuing the process of streamlining and building ownership in the Stability Pact's task forces and initiatives.

## WORKING TABLE II: CEFTA 2006 enters into force in South Eastern Europe

The newly enlarged and modernised Central European Free Trade Agreement known as CEFTA 2006 entered into force during the summer. Five Parties – Albania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Moldova and UNMIK/Kosovo completed the formal ratification processes by 26 July. By 22 August, Croatia had joined them. As we go to press, the House of Representatives in Bosnia and Herzegovina has just approved CEFTA 2006 and it is now with the House of People. The Agreement is also on the agenda of the Parliament in Serbia this week. It is expected that all Parties will have ratified the agreement in advance of the first ministerial meeting of the CEFTA 2006 Joint Committee that will take place in Ohrid on 28 September where a number of key decisions regarding the efficient and effective implementation of this important economic Agreement will be taken.



## Staff changes at the Stability Pact Secretariat:

**Björn Kühne**, formerly the Senior Political Adviser has taken up the position of Head of Cabinet, following the departure of Gregor Kössler to the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

**Mary O'Mahony**, formerly the Senior Economic Adviser is now the Director of Working Table II

**Jiri Kalasnikov**, formerly the Expert on Security and Defence has been appointed Director of Working Table III

**Martina Delphin-Schubert**, a diplomat from the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has been appointed Deputy Head of Cabinet

**Georgi Gotev**, a former deputy editor of Standart Daily, Bulgaria, has been appointed Spokesperson of the Stability Pact.

## WORKING TABLE I Parliamentary Co-operation Focal point for Regional Parliamentary co-operation to open in Sofia.

Considerable progress has been achieved in the last weeks to establish in Sofia the Focal Point for Parliamentary Co-operation in the Stability Pact region. This is part of the regional ownership process, since the Focal Point for Parliamentary Co-operation, hosted by the National Assembly of Bulgaria, will gradually undertake the activities previously organised by the Parliamentary Cooperation Task Force of the Stability Pact and will expand them further. The Zagreb Regional Table meeting in May 2007 confirmed that parliamentary co-operation would be a priority and an overarching theme for the Regional Co-operation Council, as stated in its Statute. At the same meeting SEECP Parliaments endorsed the decision to have the National Assembly of Bulgaria host the Focal point for Parliamentary Co-operation. The Stability Pact is now working with the relevant officials in Sofia to ensure that the office becomes operational as soon as possible and the relevant information and knowledge is transferred. The aim of the Parliamentary Co-operation initiative is to strengthen the efficiency of parliaments in SEE, as well as to promote bilateral and multilateral co-operation amongst parliaments in the region, to share experience and best practices and to contribute to bringing all the countries and their parlia-

-ments closer to the EU. Moreover, the Focal Point will serve as an information network for the Parliaments of the region, the donor community and the interested parties.



*The Bulgarian Parliament*

## Upcoming Events

**24-25 SEPTEMBER 2007 | Zagreb**  
DPPI Regional Meeting

**25 SEPTEMBER 2007 | Ljubljana**  
Business Advisory Council Meeting

**28 SEPTEMBER 2007 | Ohrid**  
1ST Joint Committee meeting of CEFTA 2006

**28-30 SEPTEMBER 2007 | Portoroz**  
OSCE Parliamentary Assembly Stability Pact  
Parliamentary Troika Meeting

**4-5 OCTOBER 2007 | Brdo**  
Western Balkans JHA Ministerial

**4-5 OCTOBER 2007 | Zagreb**  
RACVIAC MAG Meeting

**9 OCTOBER 2007 | Sarajevo**  
Inauguration of RCC Headquarters

**22-23 OCTOBER 2007 | Podgorica**  
HUMI Vienna Declaration Review Meeting

**25-27 OCTOBER 2007 | Budva**  
3rd Ministerial Conference on Employment in  
SEE

**28-29 OCTOBER 2007 | Sarajevo**  
eSEE Ministerial Meeting

**29-31 OCTOBER 2007 | Dubrovnik**  
Ministerial Conference on Higher Education

## WORKING TABLE III: Forest fires highlight the importance of DPPI

Recent forest fires in SEE countries this year as well as the floods of recent years have highlighted the importance of the work of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative (DPPI). Established as a cooperative framework among the Stability Pact beneficiary countries, plus Greece, Hungary, Slovenia and Turkey, since 2002 DPPI has been focusing on capacity building for disaster preparedness. It has a small secretariat based in Sarajevo.



So far DPPI's main focus has been on organizing the Disaster Management Training Program. Other program activities under development are related to preparing for cross-border fire fighting, preparing for regional co-operation on disaster mitigation in cases of river floods, and capacity building regarding seismic events. NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme has supported seismic mapping for the DPPI. The EC and the World Bank are also planning to increase their activities assisting the initiative. The future activities, financing and structure of DPPI are to be agreed in a Memorandum of Understanding that should be signed this September. SEE countries are expected to assume more technical and financial responsibilities.

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