



Dear friends,

On 27 February 2008 in Sofia, the Stability Pact transferred its mandate to the brand new Regional Co-operation Council, which will now oversee regional co-operation processes in South Eastern Europe.

As it closes, the Stability Pact is deemed to have accomplished what has been its main aim, to stabilise the region, to bring it closer to European and Euro-Atlantic integration and to make co-operation in South Eastern Europe an entirely regionally owned and led process. Nine years of Stability Pact have allowed all of us – international partners as well as countries of the region – to accumulate crucial experience, reach major goals and learn many lessons, from its successes as well as from its failures and mistakes.

I am sure the Regional Co-operation Council, under the wise leadership of my friend, Secretary General Hido Bišćević, will build on this legacy.

The Stability Pact's many achievements could not have materialized without the dedication and hard work of all those who were involved in its activities both in the region and among the wider international community. I would like to take this opportunity to pay particular tribute to those particularly involved in the Stability Pact, starting with my predecessor, Bodo Hombach, the successive Working Tables' Chairs and Directors and all those staff members who worked in our Secretariat in Brussels, the "invisible ones", whose contribution and support was key to our success.

A clearly defined and ambitious agenda for regional co-operation composed of inter related thematic processes in democracy, socio-economic development and security is now in place, reflecting the region's own priorities. It will take substantial political, human and financial resources to fully implement it and to ensure that the benefits inherent in regional co-operation flow to the people of South Eastern Europe.

I am confident that the region, guided by the Regional Co-operation Council and by its Secretary General, will be up to this ambitious task and I wish all of you every success.

Erhard Busek, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

8 years of regional co-operation under the Stability Pact come to an end...

The final Regional Table of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe took place on 27 February 2008 in Sofia. High-level participants from the region, the EU and the international community reflected that the Stability Pact through its activities since 1999 had significantly contributed to the stabilisation of South Eastern Europe. The overall socio-economic situation as well as security in the region has improved and the European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South East European countries is well on track. With a symbolic handshake, the Special Co-ordinator Erhard Busek handed over responsibility for regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe to the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) and its Secretary General Hido Bišćević. Accompanied by the applause of the representatives of the countries of the South East European Co-operation Process (SEECP) and of the international community, the final Regional Table meeting of the Stability Pact in Sofia transformed seamlessly into the first meeting of the RCC. "The future of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe starts here, today. Flexibility, adaptability, perseverance and tenacity have been prominent features of the Stability Pact's approach and success. I therefore encourage you to persevere and be tenacious in your efforts to continue on the path of co-operation and integration", Erhard Busek said.



Formal handover from SC Busek to SG Bišćević

... and the Regional Co-operation Council takes the lead

With the departure of the Stability Pact, a new chapter opens for South Eastern Europe. By adopting the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Regional Co-operation Council in Sofia on 27 February, a long list of partners - countries, international and regional organisations, international financial institutions, from Albania to the World Bank - mandated the RCC to sustain focused regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe. SEECP Foreign Ministers, meeting on 28 February, also endorsed this decision, providing full political support to the RCC and its Secretary General, Hido Bišćević. The RCC has assumed the key task of consolidating the achievements of the Stability Pact to date and making further progress in the different areas of co-operation. It will also continue to provide a platform for supporting further European and Euro-Atlantic integration of South Eastern Europe.



Regional Cooperation Council

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Upcoming Events

28 – 29 March 2008 | Brdo

EU Western Balkans Foreign Ministers Meeting & informal Gymnich meeting

3 – 4 April 2008 | Brussels

Last meeting of the Trade Working Group

8 April 2008 | Sofia

Regional Meeting of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention initiative (DPPI)

9 April 2008 | Sofia

Meeting of SEECP Ministers responsible for Disaster Preparedness

9 – 10 April 2008 | Chisinau

RACVIAC Multinational Advisory Group Meeting

14 April 2008 | Sofia

Meeting of SEECP Speakers of Parliament

14 – 15 April 2008 | Becici

Vienna Economic Forum-Montenegro Meeting

22 April 2008 | Stockholm

Governing Body of South East Europe Functional Airspace Blocks

19 – 21 May 2008 | Pomorie

SEECP Summit

23 May 2008 | Paris

Third Meeting of the South Eastern European Investment Committee

29 May 2008 | Chisinau

18th meeting of the SEE Health Network

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Working Table I: The Memorandum of Understanding on inter-parliamentary Co-operation in South Eastern Europe, which will be signed by the Speakers of SEECP Parliaments at their seventh meeting on 14 April 2008 in Sofia, aims to strengthen and enhance the commitment of SEECP Parliaments to a high level, effective and efficient inter-parliamentary co-operation in South Eastern Europe. Some of the key objectives of such co-operation include the co-ordination of efforts of national parliaments in support to the RCC and SEECP, promotion of further capacity building and institutional strengthening of Parliaments in different SEECP countries and promotion of exchange of information, experiences and best practices between national parliaments of the South East European countries at all levels (e.g. Speakers, Committees, parliamentary staff). In order to facilitate the attainment of these objectives, a Regional Secretariat for Parliamentary Co-operation has been established and is hosted by the National Assembly of Bulgaria. The Regional Secretariat maintains close operational contacts with the RCC Secretariat, the SEECP Chairmanship in Office, the SEECP Troika as well as with the designated national co-ordinators within the Parliaments and Parliamentary Chambers of the countries of South East Europe. The RSPC SEE will provide the necessary framework to support the parliamentary dimension of regional co-operation and will liaise closely with the RCC and other related initiatives.

Working Table II: One of the key elements of the socio-economic agenda in South Eastern Europe will be the focus of attention in early April as the final meeting of the Stability Pact's Trade Working Group will be held in Brussels on 3 and 4 April. Jointly organised by the Stability Pact and the European Commission - DG Trade, this event will bring together for the last time the senior trade officials from South Eastern Europe and from the wider international community. The Group devised and implemented the regional trade liberalisation strategy, starting with the network of bilateral free trade agreements in 2001 and culminating with the entry into force of Central European Free Trade Agreement 2006 (CEFTA) throughout the region in 2007. The SEE parties are now fully responsible for implementing regional trade policy through the CEFTA structures - Chair in Office, Joint Committee and sub-committees. They will be supported by a small secretariat that should be put in place by late spring. The international community continues to support regional trade in South Eastern Europe through technical and financial assistance to the secretariat and topics covered by the sub-committees - agriculture, customs and non-tariff barriers.

The South East European Health Network is in the process of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), setting out the objectives of future co-operation in the health sector, and outlining the rules and modalities of work of the Network including the establishment of a regional Secretariat. All members of the Network, the South East European Ministries of Health, agreed on the necessity of a co-ordination structure in the region to help the Network and its Presidencies perform their tasks once the World Health Organization and the Council of Europe withdraw from their current leadership and co-ordination roles. The members also agreed on the financing of the Secretariat, determining the exact volume of the contribution of each member country. The signing of the MoU will be formally marked at the next meeting of the Network, taking place in Chisinau on 29 May – 1 June, under the Presidency of Moldova.

Working Table III: In Sofia, on 9 April, Bulgaria, as the current holder of the SEECP Chairmanship, will host the next Ministerial meeting on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness. The objective of the meeting is to deepen regional co-operation in this critical area and in particular to take action in specific areas, within a defined time period, through the adoption of Ministerial Statement on Disaster Prevention and Preparedness. The Statement and decisions to be taken will be based on the commitments already taken by the countries of the region under the Memorandum of Understanding on the DPP Initiative of the Stability Pact. This meeting will also be an occasion for the Secretary General of the RCC to present this newly established regional structure and reiterate the commitment of the RCC to support regional initiatives such as the DPPI, after taking over responsibilities from the Stability Pact. The meeting is organised by the Bulgarian Ministry for State Policy for Disasters and Accidents in co-operation with the Stability Pact with the active involvement and support of the European Union, NATO, the World Bank and relevant United Nations agencies.