



## Media advisory

Brussels, 19 February 2008

### **14<sup>th</sup> and Final Regional Table Meeting and Inaugural Meeting of the Regional Co-operation Council**

**Date:** 27 February 2008

**Venue:** Kempinski Zografski Hotel, 100, James Bourchier Blvd., 1407 Sofia, Bulgaria. Tel: +359 (2) 9692222. Fax: +359 (2) 9692223

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Background on the meeting can be found at [www.stabilitypact.org/rt](http://www.stabilitypact.org/rt)

**The final meeting of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the inaugural meeting of its successor organisation, the Regional Co-operation Council, will take place on 27 February in the Kempinski Zografski Hotel in Sofia, Bulgaria hosted by the current Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office of the South East European Co-operation Process.**

**This meeting will mark the final step in the transformation of the Stability Pact into the new regionally owned co-operation framework, the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC). The Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the RCC will be adopted as part of the meeting, which will mark the formal handover from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe to the Regional Co-operation Council.**

## Programme

- 14:00-16:00      Session I: Chaired by Erhard BUSEK, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe
- Opening of the Meeting by Erhard BUSEK, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact
  - Special Opening Speech by H.E. Ivailo KALFIN, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria
  - Speech by Erhard BUSEK, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact
  - Special Address by H.E. Mr Dimitrij RUPEL, Foreign Minister of Slovenia on behalf of the European Union
- Other high-level participants and Discussion
- 16:00-16:45      Coffee Break // Family Photo and Press Conference
- 16:45-18:30      Session II: Chaired by Hido BISCEVIC, Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council
- Special Address by Hido BISCEVIC; Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC)
  - Other high-level participants and Discussion
- 18:30-19:00      Closing Session: Jointly Chaired by Erhard BUSEK, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact and Hido BISCEVIC, Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council
- Adoption of Conclusions of the Final Meeting of the Regional Table
  - Adoption of the Joint Declaration on the Establishment of the Regional Co-operation Council
- 19:45              Transfer from Hotel Kempinski to Dinner Venue (TBC)

## **Background**

Launched in 1999, the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe is the first comprehensive conflict-prevention strategy of the international community, aimed at strengthening the efforts of the countries of South Eastern Europe in fostering peace, democracy, respect for human rights, economic prosperity and security. Over the years, the focus of the Stability Pact has shifted from confidence building among the countries torn by a decade of fighting as well as rebuilding the infrastructure destroyed by the conflicts, to a framework for regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe. Moreover, the Pact has taken on the role of supporting the integration of these countries into European and Euro-Atlantic structures by helping the countries of the region in meeting EU and NATO membership criteria.

The focus of the Stability Pact has been on the issues of democratisation, economic reconstruction, co-operation and development as well as on security issues. With its Secretariat in Brussels, it has provided an important link between the countries of South Eastern Europe and the EU and NATO institutions. Specifically, it became

known as a proven framework that fosters one of the criteria for membership in the EU and NATO: regional co-operation and good-neighbourly relations.

Over the years, the Stability Pact has been responsible for several “success stories”. Parliamentary co-operation is now institutionalised, with the establishing of a Regional Secretariat in the National Assembly of Bulgaria. Thanks to the entry into force of CEFTA 2006, South Eastern Europe is becoming a single, large free trade area, regulated by modern rules that provide the basis for an increase in intra-regional trade and make the region more attractive to investors. Other important elements of the regional co-operation are in place – the Energy Community Treaty, the SEE Investment Committee, the co-ordination of social policies and the electronic SEE Agenda plus, promoting e-governance and information and communication technology development through the region. Four countries have formed the Sava River Commission to manage the economic and environmental issues of this important basin. There is now a common approach to addressing difficult issues such as the fight against organised crime and corruption. Best practices in the area of migration are being exchanged. Ever closer co-operation among the local authorities along the borders of SEE countries which are today being protected almost exclusively by police and not military any more. Furthermore SEE countries have agreed to assume more technical and financial responsibilities in the field of disaster preparedness and prevention.

These are examples of some of the positive developments that have taken place in SEE over the past almost 9 years. There is no doubt that the region is much more mature today. Therefore, it can – and must – take greater ownership of its own affairs. Bearing this in mind, a transformation and streamlining process was launched in 2005 with the final aim of having the new framework for regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe in place by 2008. Following a wide consultation process with countries of South Eastern Europe in 2005 and 2006, the Stability Pact’s highest decision-making body – the Regional Table - took far reaching decisions in Belgrade in May 2006 on the transformation of the Stability Pact into a more regionally-owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation framework in South Eastern Europe. The main task of such a framework is to be a facilitator of regional co-operation and support the European and Euro-Atlantic integration, while ensuring continued involvement of the donor community, thus preserving the legacy of the Pact.

It was agreed that the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) and its Secretariat should focus its activities on six areas which the countries of the region have already identified as those where regional co-operation will be beneficial to all: Economic and social development; Infrastructure and Energy; Justice and Home Affairs; Security Co-operation and Building Human Capital with Parliamentary Co-operation being an overarching theme that is linked with each of the other areas. These processes constitute the backbone of regional co-operation.

Parallel discussions on several levels took place following the Belgrade meeting of the Regional Table in order to progress towards the agreement reached that the new Regional Co-operation Council would be fully operational by early 2008. Most importantly, the representatives of the region (who met under the framework of the Financial Working Group) met under the leadership of the Croatian Chairmanship-in-Office of the South Eastern European Co-operation Process (SEECOP) and the Stability Pact reached consensus on a refined cost-sharing proposal to cover €1 million, the agreed annual contribution by the region to the RCC Secretariat. The financial commitments made for the initial period of three years is based on dividing the countries in four sub-groups according to their economic size, and assigning different shares to each sub-group. This progress was an important sign of the political commitment of the SEE countries to the process. After the regional governments

having agreed on their financial contribution to the future RCC Secretariat, the European Commission and bilateral donors have also agreed to financially support the RCC.

The Regional Table in Zagreb on 10 May 2007 took the process further. It endorsed the nominations of the RCC's first Secretary General and the seat of the RCC Secretariat, and adopted the RCC Statute. The next day the Summit of the heads of State and Government of the SEECP Participating States approved the nominations of Mr Hido Biscevic, then State Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Croatia, to be the RCC's first Secretary General, and of Sarajevo as host of the RCC Secretariat. The Host Country Agreement between Bosnia and Herzegovina, SEECP countries and UNMIK/Kosovo was signed in Plovdiv on 14 September 2007. RCC staff is being recruited from throughout the region with the aim of having the new structure in place fully operational in early 2008.

The final meeting of the three Working Tables of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe – Democracy, Economy and Security - took place on 3-4 December 2007 in Tirana. Each meeting gave special attention to past achievements, lessons learnt and remaining challenges for the RCC with regards to the Stability Pact's various initiatives and task forces. Thanks to a disciplined effort by each Working Table to streamline and rationalise the legacy of the Stability Pact, the region will take ownership of a set of consistent and self-sustainable task forces and initiatives, which, taken together, represent an impressive and sustainable regional co-operation program. Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact Erhard Busek as well as incoming Secretary General of the RCC Hido Biscevic presented the next steps on "The Road Ahead -Reinforcing the Regional Co-operation Agenda".

Ultimately, it needs to be underlined that this phased evolution of the Stability Pact into a regionally owned framework should not be interpreted as the international community withdrawing its support or leaving the region on its own. On the contrary, many of Stability Pact's international partners have assured us that they will stay engaged, but want to see the countries of the region gradually taking more ownership of the process – politically, financially and also personnel-wise.

It is in all parties' interest to ensure the sustainability of the co-operation processes initiated within the Pact and thus safeguard its legacy for South East Europe. There are two pre-conditions for this to be successful: enhanced regional ownership and continued international support in the transition phase. By increasingly working together to tackle and resolve common problems, the countries of South East Europe are paving their way to a credible and closer Euro-Atlantic future. The South Eastern European countries, the SEECP and the international community – must now ensure full implementation of the decisions taken so far to ensure a successful RCC.

**Press Conference:** A Press conference will be held on 27 February from 16.45, with the participation of the Bulgarian Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivailo Kalin, Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact Erhard Busek and Secretary General of the Regional Co-operation Council Hido Biscevic.

**Accreditation:** Media accreditation is handled by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria. Access to the working premises will be extended only for the registered journalists. Please send your accreditation form by February 22 at the latest. The accreditation form is attached. It should be sent to the Spokesperson of

the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria Mr. Dimitar Tsantchev (see contact details above).

### **Visa requirements**

Journalists coming from countries that require entry visas for Bulgaria should contact the Bulgarian Embassies as soon as possible.

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