



S E C R E T A R I A T

Talking Points
Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council
South East Europe Investment Committee Ministerial Conference
“Towards Convergence and Growth“

Tirana, 9 November 2012

Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- It gives me great pleasure to greet you all on behalf of the Regional Cooperation Council and say a few words on the important, or dare I say crucial, work awaiting us today. I ask you to bear with me for a few minutes as I attempt to summarize the process that brought us here and try to chart out some of the next steps.

Dear colleagues,

- For much of the past few years there has been an ongoing discussion in South East Europe on whether there is a need for a more coordinated, regional response to the ongoing crisis. In the EU that issue was settled early on – the block has developed a number of strategies in the past three years (Europe 2020, Danube region, Baltic Sea states) with differing geographical scope, but a constant ambition – higher but more sustainable growth, alleviated poverty, greater integration. South East Europe in general and the Western Balkans in particular have seemed content to pass upon this opportunity of having a more strategic approach to possible joint objectives and developing some common actions to reach those objectives. The past several months however have changed this for good.
- Regional Cooperation Council (RCC) has been engaging its partners and stakeholders in regional vision-building efforts as early as 2009. The original idea was to assess the current state of affairs in the economies in the region and map out a path of convergence with the European Union (EU), by utilizing the synergies that could be harvested over the long term. The impact of the economic crisis, which has pushed unemployment rates upwards throughout the region, ranging from 13% in Croatia to over 40% in Kosovo, has only hastened this process.

- Another important impetus for articulating a South East European strategy came from Europe 2020 that provided a possible anchor for regional strategic thinking; constant calls from outside the region to develop “a regional recovery and development strategy which should follow the main parameters of the EU 2020 strategy”, as the conclusions of the June 2010 High-Level Meeting on the Western Balkans noted, have helped the RCC and regional experts garner the necessary political support to rally around the subject.
- Finally, and most importantly, the region was engaged in discussions on the transfer of the South East Europe Investment Committee (SEEIC) from the OECD to the RCC Secretariat. It soon became apparent that Investment Committee could become vital to our governments in coming together around a set of regional strategic objectives. During 2011, these broad objectives were outlined in the South East Europe 2020 Vision that was endorsed by you at the SEEIC Ministerial conference last November.
- You have also set out a new mandate for the SEEIC, one that is firmly anchored in the SEE 2020 Vision and the accompanying process. The smart, sustainable and inclusive growth dimensions were enriched with two other, region-specific dimensions: integrated growth (aiming for greater integration of regional markets) and governance for growth (providing a framework for building administrative and institutional capacities and fighting corruption). The SEE 2020 process envisioned governments committing to a set of quantifiable regional political targets that are then transposed into policy objectives and measured through agreed indicators for signs of progress. A set of interventions would also be developed to guide the implementation of these objectives. SEEIC has thus become the first vehicle in the region to engage in the SEE 2020 Vision building and has taken political commitments that the RCC and its members intend to pursue going forward.
- And so, here we are today with a clear mission and a remarkable goal: adopt 11 joint regional targets that quantify our ambition in the areas of growth, trade, investment, education, productivity, employment, and governance and that will lead us through the end of this decade. But our work does not stop there – we want to make sure that we know not just where we want to be, but also how to get there. That is why the RCC intends to work closely with you and our regional partners to develop action plans and make sure that commitments being made will be met with adequate resources so we can all make good on our promises.

Ladies and gentleman,

- “The best way to predict the future is to create it“ [Peter Drucker], and that's what we're doing today. In the face of uncertainty you have decided to act.

- The ambition of this endeavour will be often judged by the ambition of the targets laid out here. Could we have targeted a few percent more? A few extra million? But I offer you another measure of ambition – your readiness to create these targets together and courage to put them forward. This, in my opinion, reflects far better the ambition of this endeavour than any number can ever provide. Who would have thought only a few years back that this would be possible?
- We've travelled a long way and RCC is honoured to have been on this journey with you. Your support and commitment to this process has been crucial and I thank you for that. South East Europe 2020 has ushered a new era of regional cooperation and we intend to see it through together with you.
- Finally, I want to extend my particular gratitude to the Government of Albania and the Deputy Prime Minister Haxhinasto. The leadership and tireless efforts put into this activity by him and his colleagues at the Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry are one of the main reasons why we are here today. We could have not had wished for a better and more active Co-chair in this crucial phase of SEE 2020 development.
- It is with these words that I pass the floor to Minister Haxhinasto to address the Ministerial meeting. Thank you.