

Western Balkans and Europe 2020 – Supporting Convergence and Growth

Regional Coordination Conference, Brussels, March 31, 2011

During 2010, the European Union launched its new strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth - "Europe 2020". Five overarching objectives guide EU activities in this endeavour, namely promoting employment, improving the conditions for innovation and R&D, meeting climate change and energy challenges, improving education levels and promoting social inclusion.

The goals of Europe 2020 are equally valid for the Western Balkans countries, particularly in view of their preparations for future EU membership. This convergence with EU strategy is recognised by the European Commission who has actively encouraged the region to adopt Europe 2020 inspired goals to guide their future socio-economic development. Different Community Programmes have been opened up for Western Balkan states making possible to work alongside EU Member States on activities designed to facilitate achievement of Europe 2020 objectives.

Countries can (and some have already started to) emulate the strategy individually. Nevertheless, there is a strong need for a regional dimension in setting the targets and creating implementation mechanisms what would greatly facilitate the process. It would also allow the region to benchmark progress in the relevant areas. The value of such a regional approach is emphasised in the EC's Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2010-2011 report that called upon Western Balkans countries to pursue initiatives in regional groups and develop appropriate targets which respond to their societal and economic realities.

The RCC has been charged with facilitating the development of such a regional approach and this Regional Coordination Conference on March 31, 2011 represents an important contribution to this effort.

The Conference will provide regional initiatives with an opportunity to demonstrate the relevance of their activities in contributing to smart, sustainable and inclusive growth in the region. The interactive format will allow them to discuss, with all major partners of the region, including the European Commission, bilateral and multilateral donors and international financial institutions, some of the main challenges that must be addressed to achieve these goals.

A number of regional initiatives supported by the Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat already work along priorities of Europe 2020 and associating them further with this framework (in substance and in governance) could have a valuable impact. Increased effectiveness of the groups, better insight at the level of policy development, enhanced translation of regionally-agreed reforms to the national level, improved programming of IPA towards Europe 2020 goals are all possible outcomes of such an effort.

RCC has already started a reflection on Europe 2020 and the role of the Western Balkans in early 2010. The Secretariat has initiated a discussion on the main challenges of reorienting policies away from crisis management towards the introduction of longer-term reforms that promote growth and employment and ensure the sustainability of public finances. Regional Coordination Conference is a continuation of RCC's efforts, and a step forward in framing regional activities in a way most helpful to Western Balkans countries as they prepare for the obligations of future EU membership.

Western Balkans and Europe 2020 – Towards Convergence and Growth

Agenda of the Regional Coordination Meeting

Brussels, 30-31 March 2011

Wednesday, March 30, 2011

Venue: European Parliament, Espace Leopold, Brussels

18.30 – 20.00 Conference Opening and Reception

Participant Registration

Conference Opening

Hido Bišćević, Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat

Eduard Kukan, MEP, Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo

Michael Leigh, Director-General for Enlargement, European Commission

Cocktail reception

hosted by Mr. **Eduard Kukan**, MEP, Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro and Kosovo

Thursday, March 31, 2011

Venue: RCC Liaison Office, EFTA building, rue Joseph II, 12-16

09.00 - 09.15 Welcome Address: Europe 2020 and the Role of the RCC Secretariat

Jelica Minić, Deputy Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat

09.15-09.45 Keynote Address: Does the Western Balkans Need a New Growth Model?

Peter Sanfey, Lead Economist, EBRD

Bernard Snoy, Senior Expert, IFI Coordination Office

09.45-11.30 Panel 1: Smart Growth – Unleashing Competitiveness in the Western Balkans

Europe 2020 sets ambitious headline targets for the Member States. Translating these targets into the Western Balkans context will be a delicate endeavour, balancing investments in growth with the sustainability of public finances. Developing a framework for action that is relevant, realistic and compatible with Europe 2020 policy goals and governance mechanisms will require complementary efforts on both the national and regional level.

Moderated by: **Kori Udovički**, Assistant Secretary-General, Assistant Administrator of UNDP and Director of the Regional Bureau for Europe and Commonwealth of Independent States, UNDP

Panellists: **Renata Vitez**, Director, Central Europe Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) Secretariat
Vesna Arsić, Co-Chair, South East Europe Investment Committee (SEEIC)
Sandra Rončević, Project Manager, Southeast Europe Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning
Diana Šimić, Chairperson, e-SEE Initiative
Remus Pricopie, Chair, RCC Task Force on Building Human Capital

Discussion and Q&A

11.30 - 11.45 Coffee break

11.45 – 13.15 Panel 2: Infrastructure and Sustainable Growth

Appropriate infrastructure planning, development and utilization will greatly impact the overall development, stability and prosperity of the region. There is a need for an integrated planning model for strategic infrastructure - one that optimizes current resources and provides a framework to encourage private sector finance and enterprise.

Moderated by: **Jane Armitage**, Country Director, World Bank

Panellists: **Mate Gjorgjievski**, Transport Law Expert, Southeast Europe Transport Observatory Secretariat
Dejan Komatina, Secretary, International Sava River Basin Commission (ISRBC)
Kamilo Vrana, Southeast Europe Public-Private Partnership Network (SEEPN)
Marta Szigeti Bonifert, Executive Director, Regional Environmental Center
Boban Ilic, Secretary General, Standing Working Group for Regional Rural Development

Discussion and Q&A

13.15 – 14.15 Lunch

14.15 - 15.45 Panel 3: Governance for Growth

Good governance is a considerable challenge for the Western Balkans. Given its profound impact on all other aspects of society, the Western Balkans' take on the EU2020 would be incomplete without giving due attention to the governance dimension.

Moderated by: **Virgil Ivan Cucu**, Head of Justice and Home Affairs Unit, RCC Secretariat

Panellists: **Blerta Selenica**, Chair of the Governing Board, Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)
Blaž Golob, Director, Centre for eGovernance Development (CeGD)
Vesna Ratković, Chairperson, Regional Anti-corruption initiative (RAI)
Kelmend Zajazi, Executive Director, Secretariat of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of Southeast Europe (NALAS)

Discussion and Q&A

15.45– 16.00 Coffee break

16.00 - 17.30 Regional Programmes: Complementing and Adding Value to National Efforts

Moderated by: **Jelica Minić**, Deputy Secretary General, Regional Cooperation Council Secretariat

EC Regional Programmes and the Coordination Architecture

Yngve Engström, Head of Unit, Regional Programmes, DG ELARG, European Commission

Region's Contribution to National Competitiveness - OECD Investment Compact for SEE

Anthony O'Sullivan, Head, Private Sector Development Division, OECD

Current Coordination Tools for Investment, TA and Support Programmes

Mary O'Mahony, IFI Coordination Office

South East Europe Cooperation Process (SEECP) - Montenegrin Chairmanship in Office

Veselin Šuković, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration of Montenegro

Discussion and Conclusions