

**TALKING POINTS OF THE RCC SECRETARY GENERAL,**

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**WESTERN BALKANS REGIONAL RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY FOR INNOVATION MINISTERIAL MEETING**

**Zagreb, 25 October 2013**

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

* It is indeed an honour to welcome the Ministers and representatives of the RCC participants to the ministerial conference dedicated to the Western Balkans Regional Research and Development Strategy for Innovation. I want to thank all of you for being with us at this landmark event.
* Allow me to express my gratitude to the World Bank and the Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sports for the excellent organization of this event, to the representatives of the European Commission, who enabled the realization of the entire project, as well as to international organizations and partners.
* The developments in SEE are encouraging, especially in the W. Balkans, in terms of nurturing reconciliation and tolerance, moving forward in solving some of the open and protracted issues and assuming a greater responsibility in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration.
* Substantial progress has been made on the EU enlargement path. Croatia is the first country from the W. Balkans to join the EU – a true success story. The others are advancing as well, albeit in their own way, and hopefully will be greeted respectively.
* The EC’s Progress Reports, released on 16 October 2013, are of utmost importance for the region. The EC’s assessments of what each candidate/potential candidate has achieved over the last year and in particular its recommendations will further advance the EU accession process.
* In this respect, the momentum should be seized in order to move forward, especially when it comes to the need for economic and social development in the region.
* The participation of the Ministers responsible for science and research at this event is a testimony of the efforts invested by the region in the process of developing the Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation and confirms the commitment to embark on its implementation.
* Mentioning implementation, the Strategy and its Action Plan represents the basis for future joint actions in the field of science and research, as clearly outlined in the draft Declaration, which I believe will be adopted today.
* The Strategy Steering Committee, effectively coordinated by the World Bank, has done an excellent job in the past two years. The ensuing Strategy was developed in the best spirit of regional cooperation and to the benefit of science and research communities in the W. Balkans.
* At this point, I would like to refer briefly to the main aims of this important and comprehensive Strategy.
* First and foremost, the intention is to improve the research base and conditions for research excellence in the region, by investing in human capital and improving access to modern research facilities, thus slowing the brain drain and supporting the brain gain;
* Secondly, to promote Research-Industry Collaboration and Technology Transfer, by improving incentives for collaboration between research institutes and the private sector;
* Thirdly, to enable business investments in research and innovation through Early-Stage Start-up program;
* Fourthly, and certainly not less important, to strengthen the governance of national research and innovation policies with appropriate regional technical assistance facility, just to name some of the ideas in this ambitious venture.
* I would like to point out that regional cooperation has an important role in the field of research and innovation. It facilitates the participation of the W. Balkans in the related EU programs, such as the Innovation Union and Horizon 2020. By building capacities to join these programmes, we are directly building institutional capacities for EU accession processes.
* Moreover, regional cooperation in this field is a prerequisite for the overall development of SEE. Building a knowledge-based society is one of the fundaments of the accelerated and sustainable social and economic development of the region.
* This is why innovation is the cornerstone of the SEE 2020 Strategy: Jobs and Prosperity in a European Perspective, which has been at the center of the RCC’s attention in recent years. The Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation will be the stepping stone of the Smart Growth pillar of the SEE 2020 over the course of this decade.
* Innovation is a cross-cutting way of equipping all sectors of the economies from the region to be more competitive. Innovative economy is what the W. Balkans should aim to bring to the European community. It is indeed about turning new ideas into growth, prosperity, jobs and well-being of the citizens.
* Let me revert briefly to the SEE 2020. In order to assist governments in implementing their individual development strategies and EU accession related goals, the RCC intervened with a time bound strategy – the SEE 2020. The main goal is to boost prosperity and job creation, as well as underscore the European perspective of the region’s future.
* The SEE 2020 is a strategy for the region as a whole, but also for each and every country. It will bring about a switch from the consumption – led model of growth in the region to one led by investment and exports. The final draft of the SEE 2020 has been prepared and sent to the governments concerned. It is envisaged to be adopted at the SEEIC Ministerial meeting on 21 November in Sarajevo.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

* We are here today to inaugurate the finalization of one important programme and the commencement of an even more significant follow-up process. In building research capacities in the region, one should not expect results overnight, but rather a process that is steady and continuous.
* In this respect, the next step will be the creation of a regional mechanism, supported by a strong team of experts, leading to the implementation of the activities envisaged by the Strategy. It should be based on the principles of good neighborly relations and all-inclusiveness. The RCC and its Secretariat is ready to join efforts with all the participants from the region and international partners in order to establish a transparent and efficient mechanism, in accordance with best international practices.
* I believe that joint efforts will not only open opportunities for the implementation of the Regional R&D Strategy for Innovation and its Action Plan, but will also increase capacities to reach other available funds, attract investments, including those from the private sector.
* There are many challenges ahead, but I am confident that by joining strengths, concrete, tangible and sustainable results can be achieved.

Thank you for your attention.