

Joint Declaration

On the Establishment of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC)

Representatives of the Participating States of the South East European Co-operation Process (SEECP), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on behalf of Kosovo in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, the European Union (EU), represented by the Troika, consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat, as well as those donor countries, international organisations and international financial institutions substantially and actively engaged in support of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe and represented at the meeting in Sofia on 27 February 2008 (ref. Annex I)

reaffirm that regional co-operation is an important tool for promoting stability, security and social and economic development in South Eastern Europe and that regional co-operation processes should continue and grow to the benefit of the region;

acknowledge the importance of regional co-operation as a means to address the common challenges faced by the countries of South Eastern Europe and a facilitator of further European and Euro-Atlantic integration;

recognise the contribution to date of the international community to enhancing regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe and the continued willingness to provide political, technical and financial support;

recognise the positive developments in South Eastern Europe in the past decade and the valuable role and contribution of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe in fostering stability, development and co-operation in the region;

underline the need to safeguard the significant achievements of the Stability Pact including the instigation and development of various co-operation processes in the fields of democracy, economic development, justice and home affairs and security;

note the successful co-operation of the countries of the region within the framework of the SEECP and their commitment to enhance its role in regional co-operation processes;

underline the importance of a structure dedicated to regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe to ensure the strategic co-ordination and development of regional processes in support of the SEECP as well as in co-ordination with the EU, NATO, international donors and financial institutions;

recall the decisions taken by the Stability Pact's Regional Tables in Belgrade (May 2006) and Bucharest (November 2006), the SEECP Summit and the Regional Table in Zagreb (May 2007) on the transformation of the Stability Pact into more regionally owned and led co-operation framework;

welcome the signing of the agreement on the host country arrangements in Plovdiv on 14 September 2007, providing the legal basis for the Secretariat of the Regional Co-operation Council;

declare their commitment to support the newly established Regional Co-operation Council in its activities and express their common understanding that

1. the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) is intended to sustain focused regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe through a regionally owned and led framework that also supports European and Euro-Atlantic integration;

2. the Statute of the RCC (ref. Annex II) is intended to be the foundation of its operations;

3. as specified in the RCC Statute, the RCC Board will provide operational guidance and supervision and the Board will consist of those RCC Members contributing to the budget of the RCC Secretariat as well as the EU represented by the Troika consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat.

4. the RCC will function as a focal point for regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe and will provide political guidance to and receive substantive input from relevant regional task forces and initiatives active in specific thematic areas of regional co-operation;

5. the RCC, supported by the Secretary General, its Secretariat based in Sarajevo and its Liaison Office in Brussels, will provide the SEECP with operational capacities as well as act as a forum for the continued involvement of those members of the international donor community engaged in the region; and that

6. the RCC should focus its activities on the priority areas outlined in the statute – namely Economic and Social Development; Infrastructure; Justice and Home Affairs; Security Co-operation; Building Human Capital; as well as Parliamentary Co-operation as an overarching theme – and should maintain close working relations with all actors of relevance in these areas, e.g. governments, international organisations, international financial institutions, regional organisations, civil society and the private sector.

Adopted in Sofia, 27 February 2008.

ANNEX I - Participants of the Regional Co-operation Council

- Albania;
- Austria;
- Bosnia and Herzegovina;
- Bulgaria;
- Canada;
- Council of Europe;
- Council of Europe Development Bank;
- Croatia;
- Czech Republic;
- Denmark;
- European Bank for Reconstruction and Development;
- European Investment Bank;
- European Union (EU), represented by the Troika, consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat, as well as the European Parliament;
- Federal Republic of Germany;
- Finland;
- France;
- Greece;
- Ireland;
- Italy;
- Hungary;
- Latvia;
- Moldova;
- Montenegro;
- North Atlantic Treaty Organisation;
- Norway;
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development;
- Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe;
- Poland;
- Serbia;
- Slovakia;
- Slovenia;
- South East European Co-operative Initiative;
- Spain;
- Sweden;
- Switzerland;
- Romania;
- The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia;
- Turkey;
- United Kingdom;
- United Nations;
- United Nations Economic Commission for Europe;
- United Nations Development Programme;
- United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on behalf of Kosovo in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244;
- United States of America;
- World Bank.

ANNEX II

Statute of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC)

INTRODUCTION

1. The positive developments in South Eastern Europe (SEE) in the past decade and the need to safeguard the significant achievements of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe necessitate the development of a more regionally owned and led co-operation framework with continued support of the international community.
2. Based on decisions taken by the Stability Pact Regional Table in Belgrade (May 2006) and Bucharest (November 2006), the Summit of the South East European Co-operation Process (SEECP) and the Regional Table in Zagreb (May 2007) thus jointly decide to transform the Stability Pact for SEE into a Regional Co-operation Council (RCC). The final meeting of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact shall take place back-to-back with the first meeting of the RCC no later than February 2008.

TASKS OF THE RCC

3. The tasks of the RCC are defined as follows: to sustain focused regional co-operation in SEE through a regionally-owned and led framework; to provide political guidance to and receive substantive input from relevant task forces and initiatives active in specific thematic areas of regional co-operation; to promote European and Euro-Atlantic integration; and to provide guidance to the Secretariat of the RCC and its Secretary General.
4. The RCC should provide the SEECP with operational capacities through its Secretariat and task forces as well as act as a forum for the continued involvement of those members of the international donor community engaged in SEE.

Priority Areas for Co-operation in the framework of the RCC

5. Priority areas for co-operation in the framework of the RCC are as follows:
 - a. Economic and Social Development.
 - b. Infrastructure
 - c. Justice and Home Affairs
 - d. Security Co-operation
 - e. Building Human Capital
 - f. as well as Parliamentary Co-operation as an overarching theme
6. In the context of these priority areas, gender mainstreaming, social cohesion and the involvement of civil society actors will be important factors.

7. The RCC on recommendation of the Secretary General as well as in accordance with political guidelines of the SEECP Summit may decide to adapt these priority areas depending on developments in the region.

MEETING FORMAT OF THE RCC

8. The membership of the RCC consists of the participating states of the SEECP, the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) on behalf of Kosovo in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244, the European Union, represented by the Troika, consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat, as well as those donor countries, international organisations and international financial institutions *actively and substantially engaged* in support of regional co-operation in SEE.¹ Requests for membership of the RCC require the consent of the existing members.
9. The Annual Meeting of the RCC is held back to back with the SEECP Summit. The Annual Meeting of the RCC is co-chaired by the *Secretary General* and the Foreign Minister of the SEECP Chairmanship in Office (CiO), hosted by the SEECP CiO and prepared by the Secretary General in co-ordination with the SEECP CiO. The Annual Meeting of the RCC meets at the level of Senior Civil Servants or above. It shall ensure the strategic co-ordination and development of the regional co-operation processes, review and endorse the Secretary General's *Annual Report* on regional co-operation in SEE as well as the *Strategic Work Programme* for the following year. The RCC Annual Meeting is open to other countries, international organisations and partners as guests upon request to and/or the initiative of the Secretary General following the consent of the members of the RCC Board.
10. In between Annual Meetings of the RCC operational guidance and supervision of the RCC is provided by the *RCC Board*. The Board accepts the Annual Report of the Secretary General and adopts the Strategic Work Programme for the following year, supports the Secretary General in its implementation and reviews progress in the course of the year. The Board consists of those RCC members contributing to the budget of the RCC Secretariat as well as the European Union, represented by the Troika, consisting of the EU Presidency, the European Commission and the Council Secretariat.² The RCC Board meets quarterly and is chaired by the Secretary General. RCC Board meetings are convened and prepared by the Secretary General in co-ordination with the SEECP CiO. The RCC Board meets at the level of RCC *National Co-ordinators*, which are Senior Civil Servants in each RCC member responsible for co-ordination of RCC relevant issues within their respective national administration.

¹ Based on these criteria, Stability Pact partners actively and substantially engaged in support of regional co-operation in SEE are requested to indicate their interest to become a member of the RCC to the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact by 15 November 2007. The Special Co-ordinator, after consultation with the Secretary General, will then make a proposal outlining the membership of the future RCC for endorsement at the final meeting of the Regional Table in February 2008.

² For membership of the RCC Board, a minimum contribution of 50.000 Euro to the budget of the RCC Secretariat is required. Contributions for SEECP participating states and UNMIK/Kosovo are regulated in a separate document.

11. The host of any particular meeting will bear all costs in connection with holding meetings unless otherwise decided or organised at the seat of the RCC Secretariat itself, while other participants will cover their expenses relating to travel and stay of their respective delegations.
12. Decisions of the RCC will be taken by consensus, which is understood as absence of objection.

STRUCTURES OF THE RCC

13. The Secretary General shall be a strong political figure from the region, with the ability to interact with donor states and international organisations and to work with governments in the region at the highest appropriate level, and shall have a record of successful engagement in regional co-operation. The mandate of the *Secretary General* shall be to:
 - a. Promote and facilitate the achievement of the RCC's objectives, in particular to foster regional co-operation, to follow and co-ordinate regional co-operation activities and initiatives in SEE and to support European and Euro-Atlantic integration;
 - b. Chair the RCC Board's quarterly meetings and co-chair the RCC's Annual meeting with the SEECP CiO Minister of Foreign Affairs;
 - c. Head the RCC Secretariat, having executive authority with regard to staff operations, including personnel recruitment and management;
 - d. Maintain close, co-operative contacts with all members and partners of the RCC, and in particular with the participating states of the SEECP, as well as with relevant regional initiatives and organisations;
 - e. Provide support to the SEECP and its CiO through the RCC Secretariat, including by preparing meetings and conferences;
 - f. Take part in meetings of the SEECP at all levels;
 - g. Submit an Annual Report on regional co-operation in SEE and an Annual Strategic Work Plan to the RCC for review and endorsement;
 - h. Present the strategic aspects of this Annual Report to the SEECP Summit thus contributing to the elaboration of the political guidelines of the SEECP;
 - i. Co-operate closely with all institutions of the EU and its Member States in order to support the EU integration process of SEE and to contribute to the full complementarity of regional co-operation activities with the EU integration process;
 - j. Work closely with other international institutions and organisations, including international financial institutions, and the private sector in promoting regional co-operation in SEE, and support the involvement of civil society actors in regional co-operation processes;
 - k. Ensure that the RCC focuses on priority areas for regional co-operation.
 - l. Facilitate efforts to secure funding for regional co-operation activities under the auspices of the RCC.

14. The process of nominating a Secretary General is as follows:
 - a. SEECP Participating States can propose one suitable candidate each to the SEECP CiO, according to the terms of reference outlined in the mandate of the Secretary General no later than 6 weeks before the SEECP Summit and through the SEECP CiO immediately consult with the RCC Board members and the SEECP Participating States on these candidates.
 - b. Consultations are concluded 3 weeks before the SEECP Summit.
 - c. The SEECP Committee of Political Directors makes a nomination proposal, taking into account those consultations no later than 2 weeks before the SEECP Summit.
 - d. The nomination proposal is forwarded to the RCC Board for consideration and endorsement at the Annual Meeting the day before the SEECP Summit.
 - e. Following the endorsement of the RCC Annual Meeting, the Secretary General is appointed by SEECP Foreign Ministers a day before the SEECP Summit.
 - f. The SEECP Summit approves the appointment.
15. The Secretary General is appointed for 3 years with the possibility to extend his/her term by 2 years.
16. The mandate of the Secretary General can be discontinued by decision of the RCC Board based on the terms of his/her contract. The procedure for the dismissal of the Secretary General can be launched on request of at least two members of the RCC Board and requires a decision by *consensus minus one* of the RCC Board. It becomes effective subject to a written procedure among SEECP Participating States.
17. In case of incapacity or dismissal of the Secretary General, the RCC Board can take decisions necessary to ensure the functioning of the RCC Secretariat, including the appointment of an acting Secretary General until a formal decision on the succession is taken in accordance with article 14.
18. The Secretary General is responsible to the *RCC Board* for the appropriate use of funds made available to the budget of the RCC Secretariat. The administration and financial management procedures governing the budget of the RCC Secretariat, including an independent audit, are outlined in a separate document, based on agreement of the RCC Board.
19. The *Secretariat* of the RCC is directed by the Secretary General and supports the RCC as well as the SEECP in fulfilling their tasks by working towards the preparation and implementation of decisions of the RCC Annual Meeting and Board as well as decisions of SEECP Summits and/or Ministerial meetings. The Secretariat provides technical, organisational and analytical support to the Secretary General, the RCC Annual Meeting and Board as well as operational support – if required – in preparing SEECP Ministerial meetings and Summits. It provides a co-ordination framework for regional co-operation activities within SEE and acts as an information and focal point for such activities.

20. The Secretariat's staff, with the exception of the Secretary General, should be recruited on a competitive basis in accordance with the competencies required, while taking into account gender and geographical balance as appropriate. In addition, the Secretary General may accept staff secondments for specific assignments.
21. The Secretary General shall designate, in consultation with the members of the RCC Board, a deputy from among the senior staff of the Secretariat to act on his behalf as necessary.
22. The Secretariat is located in Sarajevo and the host country agrees to provide it with the necessary legal basis.
23. The RCC Secretariat shall establish a Liaison Office in Brussels with European and Euro-Atlantic institutions, providing support to the SEECP consistent with article 4.
24. The working language of RCC meetings as well as of the Secretariat is English.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE RCC AND INDIVIDUAL TASK FORCES AND INITIATIVES

25. In order to pursue its goals in the specific priority areas, the RCC will monitor and where necessary facilitate the work of relevant regional co-operation taskforces and initiatives in SEE. In particular, the RCC will assist the taskforces/initiatives in gaining access to regional and international political, technical and financial support required to fulfil their objectives. Appropriate relationships will be established between the RCC and current and future individual taskforces/initiatives to ensure that their respective efforts are mutually reinforcing and avoid unnecessary overlap.