

**Association of Balkan Chambers
General Assembly
Tirana, March 12, 2009
Branko Azeski, President
Economic Chamber of Macedonia**

**INTERBALKANIK COOPERATION, CRUCIAL FACTOR ON EU
INTEGRATION, THE ROLE OF CHAMBERS**

Distinguished colleagues,

This topic we constantly discuss and its importance is being numerous times absolved. Therefore, today, I will present concrete proposals for concrete activities, based on one segment of cooperation and that is the implementation of the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme.

A month ago, on February 12, 2009 in the Economic Chamber of Macedonia, on our initiative, I have a meeting with Mr. Hido Biscevic, Secretary General of the Regional Cooperation Council - successor of Stability Pact. In this occasion and in the context of the topic I would like to share the attitudes of the talk and to propose concrete activities:

Stabilization and Association process has its own matrix which flows but it should be followed with concrete activities, bilateral or multilateral, activities with common interest, and the essence being the approaching to the EU standards. Region, especially now in the situation of a crisis, needs some kind of a New Deal for the Balkans, common activities which will join energy and resources of two or more states around one project. In these moments of crisis, the countries of the South East Europe should work together to create and maintain a stable economic and political climate susceptible to further development of the Region. With Mr. Biscevic we agreed that in the Region we have many common interests, especially railway transport in the region, energy supply and human environment protection, as topics we should unite for. Chambers, respectively the private sector should have initiative, should lobby in the governments, but also to propose and to strive for private-public partnerships as development instruments.

In that context, Mr. Biscevic especially emphasized the importance of active inclusion in current domestic debates; on issues for building up of priorities, which will be found in the recent Regional Strategy for the South East Europe (2009-2011). It concerns the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme, which will enable financial support of joint infrastructures, energy supply and projects in the environmental area, whose bearers will be two or more governments- states in the region. In order to follow the dynamics of the implementation of the strategy and projects, trilateral body of the representatives from the Regional Cooperation Council, European Commission and national coordinators of the Council will be established. For 2009, the European Commission plans to allocate 120 million euro, but these funds would generate additional financial support of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development but also of other financial institutions such as European Investment Bank, and other European banks.

Although the strategy should be completed until May, I consider that ABC Chambers should start with concrete initiatives immediately. Regional Cooperation Council hasn't established direct connection with the private sector yet, as that by the Stability Pact, and I consider that it is a key of successfulness - creation of activities in accordance with the real needs of the economic development of the region and private and public sectors real capacities. In that context I propose the following activities:

- ABC should offer signing of Declaration for cooperation with the Regional Cooperation Council;
Competence: Union of the Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania to prepare the text of the Declaration
Term: Declaration to be signed on the next ABC General Assembly
- Chambers should establish immediately direct cooperation with the national coordinators of the Regional Cooperation Council, as locators of private sector's interests and initiatives and their articulation in front of the Council;
Term: till the end of March 2009
- Chambers should reestablish the direct communication with the Business Advisory Council (BAC) i.e. with the national members in BAC. On December 10th, 2002 in merging of the SECI Business Council and Stability Pact in one business council, a decision was adopted that ABC should have a permanent representative in BAC and that it should be the President of the Chamber that has the Presidency with ABC.

Competence: Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania to send a letter to BAC in order to actualize the ABC presence in BAC

Term: till the end of March 2009

- On ABC level a list should be established of necessary and possible projects which should be realized within the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme. Deponent of the list should be the Chamber current ABC Chairman and it should be transparent on the ABC member-chambers sites, on ABC Infos site and on the Regional Cooperation Council site;

Competence: Chambers should submit draft projects which should be realized within the Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme to the Union of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of Albania. The Regional Cooperation Council and the national coordinators should be informed about that.

Term: till the end of March 2009

- Chambers, which will initiate the multi-beneficiary project, will undertake coordinated activities for lobbying in front of national coordinators of the Regional Cooperation Council as mediators in relation to Governments, but also directly in front of the governments as authorized to apply for projects

For the end, as example, I will indicate the reconstruction of the bridge over Bojana River in Republic of Albania, problem stated by the Chambers of Montenegro, Macedonia and Albania; problem about which we addressed in written the Stability Pact in 2005, and we never get an answer, for which in January this year colleague Mijushkovic address me with a letter initiating a meeting on this issue between the ministries of transport from the three countries. Now when the legal and financial frame with the name Multi-beneficiary IPA Programme is completed, finally an opportunity is opened to act targeted and coordinated. We should not let the challenge to slip by.