

**Written Contribution on behalf of the Croatian SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office to the
Fourteenth Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council
Brussels, 4 and 5 December 2006**

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

The SEECP is an important framework for regional co-operation that contributes to strengthening of good neighbourly relations, stability, security and co-operation in South Eastern Europe. Now that, having overcome the consequences of war and under-development, the countries of Southeastern Europe have made significant progress with regard to their Euro Atlantic aspirations and mutual cooperation, the role of the SEECP in building the new architecture of regional cooperation, with special emphasis on enhancing regional ownership, is becoming increasingly important.

The SEECP will play a significant role in the phasing out process of the Stability Pact which is in the process of streamlining and transforming into the Regional Cooperation Council (RCC). We believe that it is very important for regional cooperation and ownership that all the stakeholders which participate in the SP, namely the SEECP Participating States, the international community and especially the EU and the donor states should be represented in the Regional Cooperation Council.

In that context, the SEECP should have an active approach and take the leading role in providing political guidance for the future cooperation in Southeastern Europe.

The Republic of Croatia took over the Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP at the SEECP Summit on 4 May 2006 in Thessaloniki. The activities of the Croatian Chairmanship-in-Office are focused on strengthening of the regional voice, promoting the European dimension of the region and enhancing the operational capabilities of regional cooperation and co-operation in the fields of traffic, energy, economy, human dimension and parliamentary co-operation.

The Republic of Croatia, as the SEECP Chairman-in-Office, will continue to promote the common vision of a united Europe and to pursue a strong European profile and EU perspective of South Eastern Europe in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda.

Within the framework of its SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office, Croatia has so far organised a number of activities and is determined to keep the momentum of effective and operative regional cooperation. In this regard, we are organising an informal meeting of the SEECP Ministers of Foreign Affairs on 8 and 9 December. The Ministers are expected to exchange ideas on the situation in South Eastern Europe as well as on enhancing the future cooperation architecture among our countries. The meeting of the SEECP Heads of States and Governments which is to be organised back to back with the Round Table of the Stability Pact is envisaged for mid-May 2007.

Croatia is also going to organise a number of high-level sectorial meetings, such as meetings of ministers of economy, transport, justice and home affairs, education, parliament speakers, as well as conferences on energy and human capital.

In order to set up the agenda of SEECP activities in relation to regional political issues and developments and to find the best ways to increase and enhance the operational capabilities of the SEECP, the Croatian CiO is encouraging discussion on various presented ideas and initiatives regarding the operability of the SEECP and also the transformation of the existing regional cooperation structures, namely the Stability Pact.

In this light, Croatia strongly supports cooperation of SEECP with the Stability Pact and EU/EC during the SP transition and reshaping period and in further advancement of cooperation, stability and development in SEE.

Croatia has initiated discussions on the operational aspect of RCC mandate among the SEECP members and with the European Commission and other members of international community, in order to have appropriate decisions regarding the future relationship between the SEECP and the RCC, the Seat of a Secretariat as well the future Secretary General, agreed upon until the forthcoming SEECP Summit.

The first results in this process have already been achieved. At its meeting in Bucharest on 16 November, the Regional Table of the Stability Pact endorsed the agreement by the countries of the region, among which are SEECP participating countries, on the division of the regional financial contribution to the RCC Secretariat's budget, which is set for one million euro per year for an initial period of three years from 2008. This confirms the strong political commitment of the region to the increased regional ownership of their cooperation.