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**“Regional Co-operation in South Eastern Europe – Prospects  
and Challenges for the Regional Co-operation Council”**

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**Session III - Regional Co-operation, European Integration,  
and the Role of the Regional Co-operation Council**

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The third session of the international workshop “Regional Co-operation in South Eastern Europe – Prospects and Challenges for the Regional Co-operation Council,” entitled “Regional Co-operation, European Integration, and the Role of the Regional Co-operation Council,” opened with a brief overview over some of the possible limitations of regional co-operation as made evident through the experience of the Stability Pact.

The Chair, Mr. Wim van Meurs, noted the following:

- Diverging contractual relationships with the EU of countries in SEE possibly imposing restrictions on certain forms of cooperation among SEE neighbors
- The limited capacity of certain countries to immediately adopt EU standards in the context of regional cooperation

It was, nonetheless, acknowledged by the Deputy Director of the EC’s DG Enlargement, Mr. Jan Truszczyński, that regional co-operation forms an integral part of the European integration process, with ample opportunities for more advanced SEE countries to assist their neighbors. In this context, the RCC would be an indispensable interlocutor with the EC, particularly in terms of providing input to the Commission’s multi-beneficiary indicative planning and programming. The RCC would thus need to become acquainted with these cycles.

Participants posed a number of general questions concerning the future role and perception of the RCC, such as to which extent the new institution ought to focus its resources on developing new vs. nurturing existing initiatives. The need to both manage and deliver on expectations was also stressed – both on a national and regional level, as well as vis-à-vis the EU. It was deemed important that the RCC establishes itself through concrete future projects.

The question of problematic bilateral relations among some SEE countries was a prominent one. Participants discussed to what extent these could hamper regional cooperation, and what the role of the EU should be therein, especially when obstruction was perceived to be coming from EU member states in SEE. Mr. Truszczynski pointed out that the EU could only play but a mediating role and facilitate communication, having no decision-making power with regard to issues falling outside the scope of European Community legislation.

The role of patience in the RCC's future endeavors was also discussed at length, albeit a crucial distinction was made between patience as an indeterminate timeframe and patience as a method of work – in favor of the latter.

In closing, the rapporteur encouraged all present national coordinators to promote their government's active involvement in regional cooperation processes, stressing that the mere passing of time – as some authorities appear to believe – would not ensure the region's eventual integration into the EU.

The Secretary General of the RCC concluded by noting that the RCC would neither serve as a substitute for government policy nor for EU planning, nor would the process of regional cooperation serve as a waiting room for the EU. Rather, he stressed that the RCC would strive to facilitate Euro-Atlantic integration by acting as an interlocutor between the EC and SEE, by promoting regional dialogue and trust, generating worthy projects, and, ultimately, curating the delivery process itself.