



**STATEMENT BY
H.E. MR. DANIEL MITOV, MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA**

**AT THE PERMANENT COUNCIL OF THE OSCE
29TH OCTOBER 2015
VIENNA, AUSTRIA**

**Your Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,**

First allow me to cordially thank my colleague H.E. Ivica Dačić, Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, for the invitation and the valuable opportunity to present the priorities of the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP before our partners at the Permanent Council of the OSCE today. Undoubtedly, successful regional cooperation is a fundamental element to an effective multilateral cooperation, which enables us to counter all politico-military, economic and social challenges. Respectively, the priorities that Bulgaria has set out for its current Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP correspond to numerous subjects from the OSCE wide spectrum of activities, and thus we hope to contribute to a safer and more prosperous regional, European and global environment.

On the 1st July 2015 the Republic of Bulgaria assumed the responsible task to chair the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP) for one year. We took over the Chairmanship determined to contribute to the process of enhancing regional cooperation in various fields and deliver substantive results, for the benefit of the citizens in this region. Under the motto **“SEECP – 20 years key to regional cooperation”** we have set out the ambition to further enhance the efficiency and visibility of the Process, and thus improve the attractiveness of the region for foreign investors and tourists.

Significantly, our C-i-O coincides with the **20th Anniversary** of the Process, initially founded in Sofia in 1996. Two decades of partnership is a clear sign that the SEECP has proved itself as a leading political format in Southeastern Europe, and is a prerequisite for strengthening regional cooperation henceforth. In this regard, I am pleased to inform you that

on this occasion we have envisaged to convene a representative exhibition, named “20 Years SEECP” within the concluding Summit. It aims to provide a historical retrospective on regional cooperation and remind us on the numerous achievements reached so far. Additionally, and announcing it on a preliminary basis, Bulgaria intends to propose a Declaration in honour of the 20th Anniversary of the Process.

Let me now briefly outline the goals that the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP has set out to accomplish within the next months:

Based on extensive analysis of the current and prospective situation of the region, our government has identified **three main priority areas** having direct effect on sectoral cooperation among the SEECP participants, whereby most of our efforts would be concentrated on addressing those:

First, enhancing **connectivity** among SEE countries which proved to be the topic of fundamental importance for the region. Accordingly, implementing projects in the field of **transport and energy infrastructure** has become one of our leading goals. This area entails much added value for the region as it gives strong impetus to competitiveness and economic growth, which would further contribute to strengthening connectivity among the SEE countries. Due to limited financial resources, we will initiate a process to seek alternative methods of financing of those projects based on public-private partnership. So far we have launched a series of events towards this end: two conferences on the topic of energy security and energy infrastructure in Southeastern Europe have already taken place in June and September 2015. Another High-level meeting on the “Stabilization of the Energy Infrastructure of the region” is envisaged for April 2016. Bulgaria puts special emphasis on the infrastructural dimension of regional cooperation in Southeastern Europe and will continue working towards launching several other events within the framework of its C-i-O, in view of enabling more fruitful cooperation, particularly in the field of energy. The idea of setting up **an integrated energy market** by the end of the Bulgarian Chairmanship ranks high on our agenda.

Second, promoting **media freedom and freedom of expression**, which is part and parcel of social progress and a prerequisite for successful European integration, is another essential issue for our region. Bulgaria promotes those values through the development of diverse, independent and sustainable media environment. Concrete steps will be taken with regard to the creation of an **online regional media platform**, as well as ensuring the access of citizens to a wider spectrum of information sources. A platform for the discussion of those issues would be given during the media conference, which will be held in April 2016 and which will gather primary media from the entire region.

As a third and currently most discussed topic, we particularly welcome the latest attempts of the OSCE in addressing the challenges arising from the migratory waves, as it corresponds with the last one of our C-i-O priorities. In light of recent developments in the Middle East our region has been seriously affected by migratory waves. Therefore, tackling **migration and overcoming the challenges, related to the refugee flows** is brought to the forth on our agenda. Common efforts to address the increased migratory pressure should be pursued through the adoption of an efficient regional policy. In order to enhance security and the rule of law in Southeastern Europe, while demonstrating actual solidarity with the affected countries. Moreover, having common visions regionally is a step forward to adopting a comprehensive European mechanism to address the current situation in an adequate manner.

This objective will require assistance of all regional and international institutions. An opportunity to exchange ideas and consolidate a common position would be provided at a special conference on the topic of "Migration policy" and one on "Facing Demographic challenges in the SEECP participants" - both to be held in the first quarter of 2016.

In view of the migratory waves that have strongly affected our region and the growing threat of terrorism, radicalization and the entrance of foreign terrorist fighters in SEE, the Bulgarian C-i-O has already held **consultations with the RCC Secretariat** on the creation of a regional platform for cooperation in the fight against radicalization on the 25th June 2015. The final draft of the project was later presented by the Secretary General at the First Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in New York on the 30th of September 2015, which was part of the Bulgarian C-i-O agenda.

Overall, the Bulgarian C-i-O will put a special focus on promoting the economic growth of the region by establishing a sustainable business environment in line with the good practices of environmental protection and regional sustainability. We will also highlight the **cultural heritage of the region**, as a means of transforming it into a popular tourist destination by assembling together an exhibition of masterpieces from the entire region. Last but not least, I am proud to announce that youth competitions and sporting events will be initiated to affirm the diversified opportunities that Southeastern Europe can offer to our young generations. We will also be honoured to welcome you to visit the first **Center for children with autism** which was opened this month in Sofia.

Certain events from our calendar have already been successfully completed such as the **First Informal Meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs in New York**. It provided opportunity to the Foreign Ministers from the SEECP participants and representatives from the EU to raise their interests and concerns in a fruitful discussion. However, further opportunities are still ahead during the **Second Informal Ministerial Meeting**, which will be held in February 2016, the Final Meeting of the Ministers and the Summit - both to be held by the end of the Chairmanship in June 2016. The latest announcements and upcoming events you could also find on the official webpage of the CiO, the FB-site and from our Secretariat, which would be at your disposal.

Dear Colleagues,

When defining the priorities of the Bulgarian SEECP Chairmanship-in-Office, we acknowledge the need to streamline the Process as a reliable, consistent and predictable initiative, unconditionally guided by fundamental human rights, the rule of law and the principles of democracy. I would like again to reaffirm that for Bulgaria **the integration of the Western Balkans countries to the EU** has no alternative and in our capacity as the current Chairmanship-in-Office of the SEECP will continue to support them on their path towards EU Membership.

To this end, the constructive dialogue among regional mechanisms and international bodies is of utmost importance for identifying mutual priorities and determining the direction, which our region and Europe will take in the context of global politics. Therefore, we consider the interaction between the SEECP and the European institutions, as well as the interaction with other international organizations like OSCE, UN, our "operational arm" – the RCC as a key to accomplishing the goals we have set out.

Especially in these hard times for Europe and the world, I am certain that this meeting will provide another opportunity for constructive discussions, exchange of opinions and new ideas to coordinate our activities for the benefit of our people.

Thank you.