



## South East European (Balkans) Cluster meeting

The UN Resident Coordinators/UNDP Resident Representatives and UNDP Deputy Resident Representatives of 8 South East European (SEE) countries (Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Serbia & Montenegro and Romania) participated in the Balkans cluster meeting, hosted by UNDP Romania in Bucharest on 21-22 March 2005. Guest speakers from the Stability Pact, Center for European Policy Studies (CEPES), Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies (WIIW) also attended the event. Ms Soknan Han Jung, UN RC/UNDP RR, welcomed the guests and said, 'It is a privilege to host this meeting here as Romania has been playing a proactive role in the regional policies and is an anchor for stability and cooperation in the region.'

The Cluster meeting was an occasion for reflection and review of UNDP development support strategy in the sub-region. The participants discussed the political, socio-economic growth and stability of these countries. The meeting centered on assessing the progress of UNDP in combating poverty and other development challenges in the SEE region, out of their socialist path towards European Integration, in a nutshell the enhancement of the national Millennium Development Goals.

The region that was affected by communist rule is now moving towards Euro-Atlantic integration. Even though these countries have made tremendous improvement in the areas of socio-economic growth, foreign direct investment and trade, human development remains a key area of concern. Poverty in the region remains extremely high and national income disparities are growing. UNDP as a strategic partner to these countries is assisting them in their transition towards EU membership.

In his opening remarks, Romanian Vice-Prime Minister Bela Marko said, 'UNDP, a knowledge-based organization through an impressive network of experts, plays the role of an exceptional facilitator and contributed to strengthening democratic reforms, improving governance, promoting economic growth, supporting social equity principles in this region'. UNDP Regional Director of the region, Mr. Kalman Mizsei, chaired the meeting. He said, 'Let me stress the role of UNDP in South East Europe is to support the priority of Euro-atlantic Integration and consequently three core business areas: 1. Support to local government 2. Support for local economic development/job creation and 3. Human Security (collection, destruction, small arms and removal of land mines).'

"The meeting was an opportunity to review some of the major challenges in South East Europe, relations with key partners and to assess UNDP responses in the coming 12 months. The meeting provided above all an opportunity to reflect on strengthening UNDP sub regional programming. Beyond current initiatives in the areas of Youth, Aid Coordination/Harmonization, Assessments of Free Trade agreements, employment and job creation, the meeting also concluded the aim of pursuing an informal sector initiative as well as expressed an interest in the area of local governance", said Moises Venacio, Head of the Regional Bureau for Europe and CIS.

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*In the center: Soknan Han Jung, UN RC/UNDP RR; Bela Marko, Romanian Vice-Prime Minister; Kalman Mizsei, UNDP Regional Director for RBEC; Moises Venacio, RBEC NY.*



*Participants from SEE region*