



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on Western Balkans

(Extract from the press release of the 2656th session of the EXTERNAL RELATIONS
Council meeting - Luxembourg, 25 April 2005)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

The Council welcomed the Commission's presentation of its communication on the state of preparations in Serbia and Montenegro for the negotiation of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the European Union, an agreement based on the dual approach as confirmed in the conclusions of 11 October 2004. It expressed its agreement with the Commission's conclusions. It recognised the substantial progress made by Serbia and Montenegro and invited the Commission to build on that dynamic with a view to submitting draft negotiating directives as quickly as possible.

The Council confirmed that the European Union wished to enter into negotiations as soon as possible with a view to concluding a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Serbia and Montenegro. The Council reaffirmed its commitment to a strengthened State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, based on the constitutional charter. It called on the State Union and its two Republics to pursue those negotiations without weakening their own preparations or the implementation of the necessary reforms, taking full account of the points raised in the Commission's communication. The Council also welcomed the political agreement on the constitutional amendments concerning the question of direct elections to the State Union Assembly, and called on the relevant parliaments to ratify that agreement without delay.

The Council welcomed the Commission's intention of intensifying discussions with the authorities of Serbia and Montenegro in the context of the enhanced permanent dialogue in order to support the current reform process and with a view to backing the efforts being made by Serbia and Montenegro before the formal opening of negotiations and throughout that process.

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The speed at which Serbia and Montenegro, like all the countries in the Western Balkans, will move closer to the European Union will depend on how quickly the Union and the two Republics adopt and implement the necessary reforms and conform to the Copenhagen criteria and to the requirements of the stabilisation and association process, including full cooperation with the ICTY.

The Council, mindful of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 1503 and 1534, expects the recent improvement in cooperation with the ICTY to continue and be strengthened until all those accused who continue to evade international justice are brought before the Tribunal.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO/KOSOVO

The Council took note of the Commission's communication on the European future of Kosovo. This communication, which constitutes an important contribution to the report which it had requested from the SG/HR and the Commission, in close cooperation with the Presidency, at its meeting on 21 February 2005, confirms Kosovo's long-term European prospects and the importance of implementing standards.

FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA

The Council noted the holding of local elections. It encouraged the elected municipal officials to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the important decentralisation reform.

While noting the largely peaceful conduct of the local elections, the Council nevertheless expressed disappointment at the irregularities observed by the ODIHR and other international observers in certain constituencies. The holding of free and democratic elections, in accordance with international standards, is an essential requirement for closer relations with the EU. The Council underlined the importance of pursuing and punishing those responsible for irregularities and taking the measures necessary to ensure that such irregularities do not recur in future elections, as the Government has stated to be its intention.

The Council noted recent developments concerning the dispute as to the name of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and, in particular, all of the ideas put forward by the Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, whose efforts it supports. The Council encouraged Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to intensify their efforts with a view to finding a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolutions 817/93 and 845/93 as quickly as possible."

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