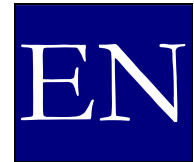




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



European Council Conclusions on the Western Balkans

*Extract from European Council conclusions
Brussels, 20 June 2008*

WESTERN BALKANS

52. The European Council reaffirms its full support for the European perspective of the Western Balkans, as set out in the Thessaloniki Agenda and the Salzburg Declaration. Recalling its conclusions of December 2006, the European Council stresses that by making solid progress in economic and political reform and by fulfilling the necessary conditions and requirements, the remaining potential candidates in the Western Balkans should achieve candidate status, according to their own merits, with EU membership as ultimate goal. The EU perspective remains essential for the stability, reconciliation and the future of the Western Balkans.
53. The Stabilisation and Association Process remains the framework for the European course of the Western Balkans. The progress achieved in recent years in this context, in particular through the conclusion of Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs), now needs to be further consolidated.
54. The European Council welcomes the significant progress in facilitating people-to-people contacts for the countries of the region. In this regard the European Council welcomes the successful launching of the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Serbia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, based on the roadmaps containing clear and realistic benchmarks. The European Council also endorses the Declaration on the Western Balkans as set out in the Annex.
55. The European Council stresses again the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. It welcomes the transition from the Stability Pact to the Regional Cooperation Council and encourages the region to further enhance regional ownership as discussed at the recent South-Eastern Europe Cooperation Process ministerial meeting in Sofia and summit meeting in Pomorie.

56. The European Council underlines that further steps by the **former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia** in its progress towards the EU are possible by the end of this year, provided that the conditions set out in the December 2005 European Council conclusions, the Copenhagen political criteria and the key priorities of the February 2008 accession partnership are met. In this context the European Council takes note of the conclusions of the GAERC of 16 June 2008. Maintaining good neighbourly relations, including a negotiated and mutually acceptable solution on the name issue, remains essential. The EU welcomes **Albania's** commitment to ensure the conditions for free, fair and democratic elections which must take place in 2009. Further efforts with regard to institutional capacities in public administration, the fight against corruption and organised crime as well as in the judiciary will be of similar importance. The European Council takes note of the progress **Montenegro** has made and encourages the country to further focus on building administrative capacity, pursuing the fight against corruption and organised crime, consolidating the institutions as well as reforms of the judiciary in accordance with the Constitution. To reach the next stage in their respective relations with the EU, Albania and Montenegro must also establish a convincing track record of successful SAA implementation. The European Council welcomes the recent signature of the SAA with **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, which constitutes an important step in that country's European course. Bosnia and Herzegovina must continue with the implementation of the reform process without delay, particularly with a view to fulfilling the objectives and conditions for the transition from the Office of the High Representative to the European Union Special Representative. The European Council looks forward to a new Government in Belgrade with a clear European agenda to push forward with necessary reforms. Building on the recent signature of a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU, **Serbia** can accelerate its progress towards the EU, including candidate status, as soon as all necessary conditions are met in accordance with the GAERC conclusions of 29 April 2008. Recalling the European Council's conclusions of December 2007 and the GAERC conclusions of 18 February 2008 the European Union remains committed to playing a leading role in ensuring the stability of **Kosovo**, also through EULEX Kosovo, EUSR and its contribution to an international civilian office as part of the international presences. The EU welcomes the UNSG's report on UNMIK and, as is described in his report, his intention to reconfigure the international civil presence in Kosovo.

This would facilitate the deployment of EULEX KOSOVO throughout Kosovo and allow for an enhanced operational role of the EU in the area of rule of law. The European Council also welcomes Kosovo commitment to the principles of democracy and equality of all its citizens, the protection of the Serb and other minorities, the protection of religious and cultural heritage as well as international presence. The European Council expresses its support to the forthcoming Donors' Conference and encourages bilateral and multilateral donors to pledge assistance. The EU recalls its willingness to assist the economic and political development of Kosovo through a clear European perspective, in line with the European perspective of the region.

DECLARATION ON THE WESTERN BALKANS

Considerable efforts have been made to render the European perspective of the Western Balkans more tangible and visible to the people across the region. With reference to the Commission's Communication "Western Balkans: Enhancing the European Perspective" the European Council underlines the importance of the following three areas:

1) Extending Community policies to the Western Balkans and enhancing regional cooperation

In order to deepen the ongoing cooperation between the EU and the region, which enjoys a European perspective, and to enhance regional cooperation, the European Council:

- calls for efforts to encourage the participation of the Western Balkans countries in **Community programmes and agencies**;
- looks forward to the launching of negotiations to establish a **Transport Community Treaty with the Western Balkans** as well as to their early conclusion;
- recognises the importance of effective implementation of the **Energy Community** in South East Europe;
- Stresses the importance of **cooperation and reforms in the field of freedom, security and justice**, sharing EU experiences in combating organised crime and terrorism and recommends the preparation of the first South East European organised crime threat assessment to be coordinated by the SECI Center in Bucharest;
- recognises the importance of promoting **judicial cooperation in civil and commercial matters**;
- welcomes progress made in associating the Western Balkans with the Community **Civil Protection Mechanism** and underlines the intention of the European Commission to further strengthen cooperation, including by launching a Disaster Risk Reduction Initiative;
- acknowledges the importance of the transition from the Stability Pact to the **Regional Cooperation Council** as well as of the cooperation undertaken through the **Central European Free Trade Agreement** and pledges full support to these forms of regionally owned co-operation.

2) Facilitation of people-to-people contacts and development of civil society

Promoting people-to-people contacts between the Western Balkans and the EU is of the utmost importance, as it facilitates a better mutual understanding and reconciliation and promotes the principles upon which the EU is founded. Therefore the European Council:

- welcomes the successful launching of the dialogue on **visa liberalisation** as mentioned in paragraph 54 of the European Council conclusions;
- supports the intention of the Commission to offer more **scholarships** for students from the Western Balkans under Erasmus Mundus;
- recognises the importance of the "**Steering platform on research for the Western Balkans**". It calls for the continuation of cooperation in the area of science and research;
- supports the establishment of a new Facility under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) to promote **civil society** development and dialogue in the Western Balkans, while strengthening partnership and networking with civil society counterparts from the EU.

3) Economic and social development and strengthening of good governance

The EU will continue to work closely with the Western Balkans to strengthen socio-economic development and good governance and will support further progress and reforms in the region. With this aim the European Council:

- welcomes the initiative to establish a comprehensive **Western Balkans Investment Framework** by 2010. It calls for swift implementation of the objectives mentioned in the ECOFIN Conclusions of 14 May 2008;
- acknowledges the work done by the **Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA)** and calls for its development into a fully fledged school;
- recognises the fundamental **contribution of cultural cooperation** in promoting European values and intercultural dialogue in the Western Balkans, and thus fostering democratisation, reconciliation and respect for human rights.

