

## Spanish Presidency of the European Union

**OSCE Special Permanent Council No. 816**  
**Vienna, 21<sup>st</sup> June 2010**

### **EU statement on the Western Balkans**

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The European Union would like to draw the attention of the Permanent Council to the conclusions on the Western Balkans adopted in Luxembourg, on 14<sup>th</sup> June, by the Foreign Affairs Council.

The conclusions refer to three issues:

- The High-Level Meeting on the Western Balkans, which took place on 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2010 in Sarajevo
- Serbia and
- Albania

The text of the conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council, as well as the text of the statement by the Chair of the High-Level Meeting on the Western Balkans, will be circulated attached to this statement.



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**

## **Council conclusions on the Western Balkans**

### ***3023rd FOREIGN AFFAIRS Council meeting Luxembourg, 14 June 2010***

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

#### **"THE SARAJEVO MEETING**

The Council welcomes the outcome of the High Level Meeting on the Western Balkans, organised by the Council Presidency and chaired by the Foreign Minister of Spain, Mr Moratinos, which took place on 2 June 2010 in Sarajevo to mark the 10th anniversary of the Zagreb summit and appreciates the participation of all partners. The Council looks forward to appropriate follow up to the meeting.

Recalling its conclusions of 7/8 December 2009, the Council reaffirms the EU's unequivocal commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries in line with the Thessaloniki Agenda and in accordance with the renewed consensus on enlargement and looks forward to moving to the next stages of the process. The Council reiterates that each country's progress towards the European Union depends on its individual efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The Council welcomes the commitment of the Western Balkans to intensify the pace of reform in key areas. It stresses the importance of addressing the challenges ahead, in particular related to the rule of law, including the fight against corruption and organised crime.

The Council welcomes the commitment of the Western Balkans to further strengthen regional cooperation on the basis of the principles of inclusiveness and regional ownership. It welcomes recent commendable initiatives regarding reconciliation and encourages further efforts to this effect. The Council recalls the importance of regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations and encourages all parties concerned to address outstanding issues with neighbouring countries.

Recalling its previous conclusions according to which the EU strongly supports the goal of the abolishment of the visa regime for all the countries of the Western Balkans, as

well as the joint statement of the European Parliament and the Council of 30 November 2009, the Council welcomes the progress achieved by Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina in reaching the criteria of visa liberalisation, as stressed in the Commission proposal of 27 May 2010 for a European Parliament and Council decision to amend Regulation 539/2001, as it applies to Member States. The Council and the European Parliament will take a decision as soon as the Commission assesses that all the outstanding benchmarks are met and in the light of such assessment.

## **SERBIA**

Following the latest report of the Prosecutor of the ICTY, the Council notes that Serbia has maintained its cooperation with the Tribunal with a view to delivering further positive results.

The Council encourages Serbia to follow the recommendations of the Prosecutor.

Recalling the Council conclusions of 29 April 2008 and 7/8 December 2009, Ministers agreed to submit the Stabilisation and Association Agreement to their parliaments for ratification.

The Council underlines that full cooperation with the ICTY remains an essential element of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement.

The Council took note that Serbia applied for membership of the European Union on 22 December 2009 and welcomed Serbia's commitment to EU integration. The Council decided to return to the membership application.

## **ALBANIA**

The Council continues to be concerned about the political situation in Albania following the general elections on 28 June 2009. It welcomes the return of the opposition to the parliament in connection with the facilitation initiative by MEPs Daul and Schulz, on behalf of their political groups, which was supported by the High Representative and by Commissioner Füle. It is high time to find a solution to the current crisis on a basis which will stand the test of time.

The Council regrets, however, that the facilitation initiative has not yet found sufficient support to enable the Albanian Government and the opposition to overcome their differences. The Council reiterates that it is the responsibility of the Government of Albania together with the opposition to promptly find, in a transparent manner and in full respect of the Albanian constitution, solutions and ways forward which will be required for the country on its EU path.

The Council encourages Albania to actively continue with the necessary reforms for the smooth and timely implementation of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement, taking into account the European Partnership priorities, and it reiterates its support for the European perspective for the country.

The Council recalls that Albania's application for EU membership, submitted in April 2009, will be assessed according to the principles set out in the EU Treaty and the criteria defined by the Copenhagen European Council in 1993, as well as the December

2006 European Council conclusions on the renewed consensus for enlargement. The Council agrees to return to the matter when the Commission has presented its opinion."

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## News briefs

### 50. STATEMENT BY THE CHAIR OF THE HIGH-LEVEL MEETING ON THE WESTERN BALKANS SARAJEVO, 2ND JUNE 2010

A high-level meeting on the Western Balkans, chaired by the Spanish rotating Presidency of the Council of the EU, took place in Sarajevo on 2nd June 2010 to mark the 10th anniversary of the Zagreb summit which offered the European perspective to the Western Balkans, as sealed in the Thessaloniki Agenda in 2003.

The meeting noted the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty which represents a new stage in the process of European construction and provides the instruments and means to strengthen its role as a global actor. The EU reiterated its unequivocal commitment to the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries, which remains essential for the stability and development of the region. The future of the Western Balkans lies in the European Union.

The EU reaffirmed the need for fair and rigorous conditionality in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association process and in accordance with the renewed consensus on enlargement approved by the European Council on December 2006.

Important progress in economic and political reform has been made by the countries of the region as demonstrated by ongoing accession negotiations, the preparation of Opinions on membership applications and the establishment of a network of Stabilisation and Association Agreements. Being now firmly anchored in the EU's enlargement process, the Western Balkans must intensify their efforts to fulfil the necessary established criteria and agreed conditions on their path towards EU membership. The progress of each country will depend on its own merits.

In particular, the Western Balkans continue to face major challenges related to the rule of law, such as administrative and judicial reforms, the fight against corruption and organised crime. These issues are key for a functioning democracy and economy and largely condition the EU accession process.

Completing the process of sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons remains a priority. Problems affecting the freedom of expression and the media need to be tackled as a matter of urgency. The Western Balkan participants committed themselves to intensify their efforts to address these issues.

The establishment of the Regional Cooperation Council represents a significant step towards inclusiveness and regional ownership. The RCC now needs to improve its efficiency by implementing a result-oriented strategy which will set clear priority lines of action and will provide the basis for streamlining the various initiatives in the region. The endorsement of such a strategy by the Heads of State and Government of the member countries of the SEECP at its Summit in Istanbul on June 23rd will strengthen the political link between both organizations. Consolidating and further developing CEFTA is one of the strategic priorities.

Regional cooperation contributes to fostering reconciliation, good neighbourly relations as well as a climate conducive to addressing open bilateral issues. The participants encouraged parties concerned to invest their best efforts in addressing open bilateral issues in a European spirit.

The participants stressed the outstanding priority of completing the process of reconciliation in the Western Balkans. Participants welcomed recent commendable initiatives to this effect. These efforts must be made at all levels - governments, judiciary, and civil society. The participants commended the role of NGOs to work towards reconciliation through establishing a regional commission for truth-seeking and truth-telling.

The participants welcomed the European Union's intention to extend visa liberalisation to all the people of the Western Balkans, once conditions are met. In this context, they welcomed the Commission's proposal to extend the visa free regime to the citizens of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The meeting was held against the background of the global economic recession which has also affected the Western Balkans and of efforts of the region to apply macroeconomic and financial policies designed to prevent future crises and foster balanced and sustainable global economic growth. The EU will continue to help them to alleviate the impact of the crisis and prepare for sound recovery. The implementation of EU-related reforms underpins the efforts of these countries in this regard.

In this respect, a regional recovery and development strategy which should follow the main parameters of the EU 2020 strategy, based on knowledge and innovation, and take into account the specific characteristics of Western Balkan countries, could be defined and actively pursued.

The EU reiterated its full support for the Western Balkans in their endeavours to intensify the pace of reforms. The EU looked forward to the

Western Balkans moving to the next stages of the accession process, on the basis of established criteria and agreed conditions. EU membership of all the Western Balkans remains our shared objective.