



Statement

***Delivered by Ambassador Vesko Garčević,
Permanent Representative of Montenegro, on behalf of the delegations of
the SAP countries – Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia
At the Permanent Council Meeting No. 717TH
19 June 2008***

Mr Chairman,

Indeed, the beginning of this week produced a good piece of news for the EU-hopefuls in the Balkans. On Monday, Bosnia and Herzegovina made an important step on its way to becoming an EU member by signing the Stabilization and association agreement with EU. No doubt, the signing of the SAA "opens the door" for the country to join the EU and "leaves the past behind". It's not only as the EU enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn said "a milestone that marks a new stage in our relations" and "a gateway for [EU] candidacy": After weeks of delay, this was recognition of the attainments Bosnia and Herzegovina has made in the last several years. The delegations of the SAP countries – Albania, Croatia, Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro on whose behalf I am speaking, congratulate wholeheartedly Bosnia and Herzegovina for this important step on its way towards full membership to the EU. Certainly, our congratulations and appreciations are also extended to the EU in general and the Slovenian Presidency in particular, for their continuous engagement in our region.

Mr. Chairman,

Almost at the same time when the Irish citizens have said no to the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has accomplished the significant chapter of the Thessaloniki agenda with the SAP countries. Namely, in this moment all the states from the Western Balkans are in contractual relations with the EU. This will undoubtedly further strengthen regional stability, boost good neighborly relations and our endeavors aimed at improving prosperity and the well-

being of citizens living in this part of Europe. Therefore this process and the notion of accession to the EU enjoy wide popular support in our countries.

At the same time, we believe that the EU perspective for all of us will be equally clear as it was in Thessaloniki nearly five years ago. Integration processes would be enriched not only by geographical enlargement and structural deepening, but more importantly by a set of values, cultural heritage and ideals that we all share. Considering the integration concept in this moment, allow us to highlight that the history and culture of six of us represent an indivisible part of the European values and its history. We therefore see the current processes as a two-way street, working for the benefit of the EU and the peoples of our region, enriching all sides equally.

Having said that, allow us once again to call upon the EU to continue and accelerate the full integration of present candidate countries and advance the status of other states from the region by granting them the status of candidate countries.

Thank you.