



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on Western Balkans

(2719th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting - Brussels, 20 March 2006)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

- "1. The Council welcomed the fruitful deliberations at the informal EU-Western Balkans Foreign Ministers meeting in Salzburg on 11 March 2006 as reflected in the Joint Press Statement.
2. The Council underlined its determination to fully implement the commitments given in the Thessaloniki agenda in order to master the challenges the region faces in 2006 and beyond.
3. It welcomed the Commission's Communication "The Western Balkans on the road to the EU: consolidating stability and raising prosperity" and expressed its intention to take forward its implementation.
4. The EU will continue to assist the Western Balkan countries on their way towards the EU through practical measures to make the European perspective more tangible. In this context, the Council encouraged regional cooperation, notably the creation of a regional free trade area based on CEFTA and is looking forward to the results of the high level meeting on 6 April in Bucharest. It also looks forward to the Commission's proposals on fostering people to people contacts, including through visa facilitation in line with the common approach, as well as on adequate financial assistance.
5. The Council welcomed the decision of the European Commission to prolong the European Charter for Small Enterprises for the Western Balkans. The Council also invited other Council formations to take work forward in the fields set out in the Communication.

P R E S S

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

1. The Council welcomed the political agreement reached on 18 March 2006 on constitutional reform. The agreement constitutes a significant step forward towards making Bosnia and Herzegovina's state institutions more functional and better able to meet European standards. The Council urged Bosnia and Herzegovina to ensure that the necessary legislative steps are taken in time for the agreement to take effect for the October 2006 elections.
2. The Council welcomed the progress made on the negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina since the opening of negotiations in November 2005. It encouraged the relevant authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, including the newly formed government of Republika Srpska, to ensure that the country is in a position to make swift progress in the negotiations. In this context, the Council recalled that the pace and conclusion of negotiations would depend in particular on Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress in developing its legislative framework and administrative capacity, in implementing police reform in compliance with the Agreement on Police Restructuring of October 2005, in adopting and implementing all necessary Public Broadcasting legislation, and in achieving full co-operation with the ICTY.

SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

1. The Council expressed its strong support for the Serbian people in their quest to come to terms with the legacy of the Milosevic regime. This will help them in moving forward towards the family of European nations, where they belong.
2. The Council recalled its conclusions of 27 February 2006 that full cooperation with the ICTY must be achieved to ensure that the SAA negotiations are not disrupted, and reiterated the urgent need for Serbia and Montenegro to take decisive action to ensure that all remaining fugitive ICTY indictees, notably Radovan Karadzic and Ratko Mladic, are brought to justice. Full cooperation with the ICTY is necessary to achieve lasting reconciliation in the region as well as an international legal obligation and a requirement to move closer toward the European Union. "

P R E S S
