



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on Western Balkans

*2865th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Luxembourg, 29 April 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"SERBIA

The Council welcomes the signature of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) and of the Interim Agreement with Serbia as an important step on the country's path towards the EU. It looked forward to intensifying co-operation with Serbia through the comprehensive framework offered by these agreements and the other mechanisms of the Stabilisation and Association Process.

The Council recalled articles 2, 4 and 133 of the SAA and articles 1 and 54 of the Interim Agreement and stated that full co-operation with the ICTY, including all possible efforts to arrest and transfer indictees, is an essential element of these Agreements.

Accordingly, Ministers agreed to submit the SAA to their parliaments for ratification and the Community decided to implement the Interim Agreement as soon as the Council decides that Serbia fully co-operates with the ICTY.

The Council and the Commission will regularly monitor that Serbia continues to fully co-operate with the ICTY. The EU and its Member States will assist Serbia in this respect.

P R E S S

Rue de la Loi 175 B - 1048 BRUSSELS Tel.: +32 (0)2 281 8239 / 6319 Fax: +32 (0)2 281 8026
press.office@consilium.europa.eu <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/Newsroom>

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council welcomed the conclusion of the first phase of the police reform by the recent adoption of the two police laws. The Council recalled that agreement on police reform in line with the EU's three principles is one of the necessary conditions for further progress towards the conclusion of the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA).

The Council acknowledged BiH's progress on all the four conditions for the signing of the SAA as set out in the Council conclusions of 12 December 2005. While Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to undertake further efforts to address reforms, the Council expressed its readiness to sign the SAA. Technical preparations are underway.

The Council highlighted the importance of the future SAA as the essential framework of the relations between EU and BiH, as well as an important element to ensure stability and strengthen dialogue within BiH. Therefore it encouraged all the political forces of BiH to unite their efforts to pursue with strong determination its reform agenda including the priorities set out in the European Partnership.

Recalling its Conclusion of 10 March 2008, the Council called on the European Commission to launch a visa dialogue with BiH as soon as possible.

COMMISSION COMMUNICATION ON WESTERN BALKANS

The Council welcomed the Commission's Communication: "Western Balkans: enhancing the European perspective" as a basis for the discussions held at the informal EU Foreign Ministers Meeting (Gymnich) and the EU-Western Balkans Forum in Brdo on 29 March 2008.

Progress achieved in the recent years through the Stabilisation and Association Process must be sustained and made irreversible. The European perspective needs to be tangible and more visible to the people across the Western Balkans.

To this end, the Council welcomed the launch of the dialogue on visa liberalisation and looked forward to discuss roadmaps for all the countries in the region. It welcomed the Commission's intention to further increase the number of scholarships granted to students from the Western Balkans to study in the EU, initiative to step up support to civil society and to enhance coordination with international financial institutions and with bilateral donors in order to support socio-economic development in the region. It expressed support to the proposed enhanced cooperation on disaster prevention, preparedness and response in the region and called for further participation of the Western Balkans in Community programmes and agencies, as well as for the development of the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) into a fully fledged school as of early 2009.

The Council is committed to support the full implementation of these measures. The Council also invited other Council formations to take the work forward in the fields such as transport and energy, as set out in the Communication.