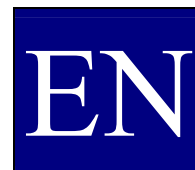




**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on Western Balkan

*2859th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Brussels, 10 March 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council noted the outcome of the last session of the Peace Implementation Council (PIC) Steering Board that took place in Brussels on 26-27 February 2008. The Council welcomed the PIC Steering Board's unanimous decision that the Office of the High Representative (OHR) will remain in place and continue to carry out its mandate under the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement until necessary objectives and conditions as set out in the PIC Steering Board Declaration are met. The Council shared the PIC Steering Board's concern over challenges to the Dayton/Paris Peace Agreement. The Council confirmed its agreement to the goals of transition and ownership and reiterated its readiness to continue its engagement.

The Council noted that Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) has made progress with regard to the Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA). It urged BiH authorities to make further efforts to ensure swift and effective fulfilment of all the four conditions necessary for signing the SAA. Furthermore, the Council noted that important underlying problems remain and called upon all parties in BiH to work together in order to overcome them as soon as possible.

The Council reiterated its full support to BiH's European perspective. Recalling its conclusions of 28 January 2008, the Council welcomed the intention of the European Commission to launch soon a visa dialogue with BiH.

STABILITY PACT/REGIONAL CO-OPERATION COUNCIL

The Council underlined the importance of regional co-operation in South Eastern Europe and welcomed the successful outcome of the joint meeting of the final Regional Table of the Stability

P R E S S

Pact for South Eastern Europe and the inaugural meeting of the Regional Co-operation Council (RCC) on 27 February 2008 in Sofia, which marked the formal handover from the Stability Pact to the RCC. The establishment of the RCC is proof of substantial progress in regional co-operation on democratic, economic and security issues.

The Stability Pact has generated broad acceptance of the view that regional co-operation is necessary and has created shared understanding and strategies for common issues, in particular in the fields of energy, trade, refugee return and border control. The RCC will build on these achievements as a more regionally owned, streamlined and effective regional co-operation framework. The RCC can play its full role only if the entire region is committed to regional co-operation and if all parts of the region take an active stand in its activities. Regional co-operation is important for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

The EU is committed to support the RCC, co-operating in the context of the SEECP (South-East European Co-operation Process), and looks forward to the RCC providing the framework for increased ownership and leadership by South Eastern European countries, while representing a forum for the continued involvement of the donor community.

The Council thanked Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact Dr Erhard Busek and expressed its support for the Secretary General of the RCC Mr Hido Bišćević and the future activities of the RCC."

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