



COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION



**Council Conclusions on
a Western Balkans Investment Framework:
strengthening the coherence of existing financing instruments
for the region to underpin growth and stability**

*2866th ECONOMIC and FINANCIAL AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 14 May 2008*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"The Council notes the progress that has been made in the Western Balkans countries in achieving transition, catching up and integration of their economies. The further anchoring of macro-economic growth and stability in the Western Balkans, underpinned by private and public investment, is a shared interest of the EU. In June 2006, the European Council welcomed *"the intention of the Commission to extend and to intensify its cooperation with the European Investment Bank and other international financial institutions in the Western Balkans with a view to taking appropriate measures aiming at a finance facility for the Western Balkans."*

P R E S S

The Council underlines that closer coordination is vital to ensure complementarity, coherence, effectiveness, and efficiency of assistance in the Western Balkans. The Council in this regard welcomes the initiative by the Commission in its Communication of 5 March 2008, together with the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Council of Europe Development Bank to establish a comprehensive Western Balkans Investment Framework to enhance harmonisation and co-operation in investments for socio-economic development in the region. The Council stresses the need to streamline the existing facilities in the context of the Investment Framework which should be rapidly implemented. The funding of the facilities included in the framework is based on existing commitments under Community pre-accession assistance and additional funds that may be granted by participating institutions and bilateral donors (Member States) are subject to appropriate decisions of their governing bodies or Member States concerned.

The Council welcomes the setting up of a steering group between the Commission, the EIB, the EBRD and the CEB and representatives of the Member States actively involved in the region. This Group should immediately start working to review existing instruments and define possible synergies for co-operation and harmonisation as regards investment projects in priority infrastructure and other socio-economic development areas.

The Council invites the Commission and the partner IFIs to take swift action for the implementation of the objectives mentioned above, and in this context considers the following concrete steps as a matter of priority:

- a pooling of grant resources, possibly through a joint trust fund, to help to better link and mobilise existing grant resources for priority infrastructure projects from the Commission, the partner IFIs, the Member States and other EU multilateral donors.
- the rapid establishment of a common website in 2008 providing a channel for external communication and giving potential beneficiaries an overview of the existing facilities of the participating institutions on the basis of a comprehensive inventory;
- the Council calls on the steering group to explore by the end of 2008 the possible modalities of creating a single contact point for beneficiaries, (a one stop-shop), where they could transmit their request for financial support and receive co-ordinated advice on the availability of financing instruments;
- the steering group should also investigate the scope for stepping up efforts in the co-ordination and harmonisation process of the various grant and loan instruments including with regard to the extension of the pooling of resources to other areas than infrastructure and in particular SMEs and for merging instruments of similar rationale;
- the steering group should ensure that best practice standards on monitoring and evaluation of the impact of funding are maintained;

The Council calls on the Commission, the EIB, the EBRD the CEB and Member States to co-operate closely in pursuing the above objectives and swiftly deliver on the above steps. It invites the Commission to report at least annually up to 2010 to the Council from the steering group on progress made, with the first report by the end of 2008 including more concrete milestones and a roadmap identifying persisting obstacles to the further realisation of the Western Balkans Investment Framework by 2010."
