



**COUNCIL OF  
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



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## **Joint Press Statement**

### **EU-Western Balkans Forum Second Foreign Ministers meeting 22 November 2004**

Today, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the European Union, the candidate states, the Western Balkan Countries as potential candidates, the Secretary General of the Council/High Representative and the European Commission, in the presence of the EU Special Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, UNMIK and the Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe met for the second time at the occasion of the EU-Western Balkans Forum, as established by the Thessaloniki Summit in June 2003.

# **P R E S S**

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The EU reaffirmed its unequivocal support to the European Perspective of the Western Balkans countries whose future is in the European Union. All participants underlined that progress towards the EU would depend on individual merits in meeting the Copenhagen criteria and the conditions set for the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP). The SAP would remain the framework for the European course of the Western Balkan countries, all the way to their future accession.

The signing of the Agreements – opening up Community Programmes to all Western Balkan countries – was welcomed as another milestone in bringing the Western Balkan countries closer to the European Union. The participants commended the EU on the thorough implementation of the Thessaloniki Agenda. The leaders of the region reaffirmed their political will to contribute to the full implementation of the Thessaloniki Agenda by fulfilling their commitments.

They drew encouragement from the successful reforms of the ten countries that joined the Union in 2004. The new member States expressed their readiness to share their experiences from the EU integration process with the countries of the Western Balkans. The EU recognised the advances in EU integration made by countries in the region and stressed that ultimately political will was key. The countries of the region endeavoured to persist with the necessary reforms for closer EU integration, as laid out in the European Partnerships.

In the overall context of strengthening and improving regional co-operation as one of the core objectives of the Thessaloniki Agenda, the EU welcomed the achievements of the SAP-countries, also through the Stability Pact and other regional initiatives, in forging new confidence and good neighbourly relations in the region. In this context it was noted that Croatia became a participating country of the SEECP. All participants agreed on the need for finding mutually acceptable solutions and concluding agreements on outstanding issues with neighbouring countries.

The EU called on all states to render all necessary assistance to the ICTY, particularly to bring Ratko Mladic, Radovan Karadzic and Ante Gotovina, and all other fugitive indictees to the ICTY without delay. The Western Balkan countries reaffirmed their June 2003 pledge of full and unequivocal co-operation with the ICTY.

The Western Balkan countries reiterated the importance they attached to the perspective of liberalisation of the EU's visa regime. All participants recognised that progress was dependent on implementing major reforms in areas such as the strengthening of the rule of law, combating organised crime, corruption and illegal migration, and strengthening administrative capacity in border control and security of documents. They looked forward to accelerating these reforms.

The Western Balkan countries confirmed their intention to further liberalise trade amongst each other. Referring to the Thessaloniki Agenda, they requested that they be included in the pan-european system of diagonal cumulation, which would benefit trade and economic development.

The Ministers welcomed continued ministerial dialogue between the EU and the Western Balkan countries as a sign of ever-closer rapprochement and looked forward to the following EU-Western Balkans Forum (JHA Council), 3 December 2004.

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