



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council conclusions on the Western Balkans

*2951st EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting
Luxembourg, 15 Juin 2009*

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"VISA LIBERALISATION

The Council restates its support for the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, based on the roadmaps containing clear and realistic benchmarks and on a country-by-country assessment. The Council recalls that the countries concerned should continue to focus on full implementation of these benchmarks.

In this regard, the Council welcomes the updated assessment reports presented by the European Commission on the progress in the visa liberalisation dialogues with these countries. The reports reflect the clear progress made by these countries in meeting the benchmarks set out in the visa liberalisation roadmaps. In this context, the Council encourages the European Commission to present as soon as possible a legislative proposal amending Regulation 539/2001, as it applies to the Member States, in order to achieve a visa free regime ideally by the end of 2009 with those countries that will have met all the benchmarks.

P R E S S

Acknowledging the significance of visa liberalisation for the Western Balkans region, the Council underlines the importance of all the countries concerned achieving a visa free regime by their own merits. Therefore, the Council welcomes the progress achieved so far and calls for the countries in the region to further accelerate and implement reforms to fulfill soon the necessary benchmarks.

REGIONAL COOPERATION

The EU remains committed to supporting regional co-operation in South East Europe. Reinforced cooperation among the countries of the region will contribute to consolidating stability, enhancing good neighbourly relations, promoting reforms and addressing economic and social needs through accelerated development, as well as to strengthening the rule of law, promoting reconciliation, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities.

In this context, the Council welcomed the successful start of the RCC and its goal to become a platform for effective co-operation of all regional stakeholders. The Council also appreciated the RCC Secretariat's efforts to promote regional co-operation, in line with the RCC's priority areas and the concept of regional ownership and under the political umbrella of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), as was confirmed in the last RCC Annual meeting and SEECP Summit in Chisinau on 4/5 June 2009.

The Council encouraged the countries in the region to further enhance the cooperation and to focus on targeted and result-oriented activities, including streamlining of the various initiatives, in line with agreed priorities and the principle of regional ownership. It reaffirmed the key role of the RCC in this endeavour. The Council strongly encourages all concerned parties in the region to adopt a pragmatic and constructive attitude in order to ensure the inclusive character of regional co-operation.

Regional co-operation remains important for the European perspective of the Western Balkans.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Council welcomed the recent joint visit of SG/HR Solana and US Vice President Biden to Bosnia and Herzegovina and fully supported the common political message delivered at this occasion. The Council expressed its continuing full support for HR/EUSR Valentin Inzko, took note of his report to the United Nations Security Council, and welcomed his continued efforts to facilitate progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina, both on the Stabilisation and Association Process and on the five objectives and two conditions.

The Council exchanged views on the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the light of the upcoming PIC Steering Board meeting on 29 and 30 June 2009. The Council remained fully committed to the transition from the OHR to a reinforced EU presence as soon as the fulfillment of the five objectives and two conditions set by the Peace Implementation Council is complete and stressed that the transition could be within reach in the months ahead. It urged the BiH authorities to achieve concrete results before the June PIC Steering Board meeting.

The Council reconfirmed its full support for the European perspective of Bosnia and Herzegovina and stressed that increased willingness to reform and readiness to compromise are of pivotal importance on Bosnia and Herzegovina's way towards the European Union.

The Council reiterated its full support for the Prud/Odžak process and called upon the relevant political leaders to continue their endeavour and expand the process.

The Council expressed concern at the unconstructive political atmosphere and the recent actions challenging the Dayton Peace Agreement. The Council called upon all the political leaders in Bosnia and Herzegovina to refrain from nationalist rhetoric, and genuinely focus on bringing forward the necessary reform agenda in the general interest of the country and its citizens.

The Council welcomed the adoption of the Brčko constitutional amendment on 26 March as an encouraging sign that substantial further progress should be possible if all political parties showed readiness to compromise."
