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Visa Liberalization Resolution

The Balkan Case Challenge,

Aware of the Thessaloniki EU-Western Balkans summit,

Approving of EU's support for the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries,

Guided by the "Thessaloniki agenda" comprising measures drawn from the pre-accession process and a commitment to implement it jointly,

Noting with satisfaction that the June 2005 European Council reaffirmed its commitment to implement the Thessaloniki agenda whereby the progress of the countries of the Western Balkans depends on their efforts to comply with the Copenhagen criteria and the conditionality of the Stabilization and Association process (SAp),

Bearing in mind that the Western Balkans region has further stabilized and advanced towards the European Union in the three years after the Thessaloniki summit,

Recognizing that the European perspective provides a powerful incentive for political and economic reform and has encouraged reconciliation among the peoples of the region,

Noting with approval the efforts made by the Austrian Presidency to facilitate dialogue between the Western Balkan countries and EU member states,

Fully believing in the role that education plays in the development of a democratic, responsible and sustainable society,

Reaffirming the fact that Europe is but a mixture of cultures, influences and languages,

Noting further that the Lisbon Agenda aims at making the EU economy more competitive and knowledge based, promoting sustainable development and social cohesion and that its objectives are also relevant for the Western Balkans,

Affirming the Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998 which *inter alia* emphasizes the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development,

Further recalling the Bologna declaration of 19th of June 1999 which stresses the importance of education and educational co-operation in the development and strengthening of stable, peaceful and democratic societies,

Noting further that one of the key principles of the Bologna declaration is the promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement with particular attention to students, access to study and training opportunities and to related services,

Viewing with appreciation that special measures have been taken to promote exchanges of researchers and students as well as directives adopted that make it easier for students and researchers to obtain residence permits in the European Union,

Keeping in mind that in Thessaloniki the EU noted the importance that the peoples and governments in the Western Balkans attach to the perspective of liberalization of the visa regime,

1. Calls upon the Member States of the EU, particularly members of the Schengen visa regime, to immediately put forward initiatives for visa liberalization with the Western Balkan countries;
2. Solemnly affirms that the process of political and economic reform has encouraged reconciliation among the peoples of the region and is in the interest of the EU and that this process should be stepped up;
3. Reminds of the commitments made in the Sorbonne and Bologna declarations;
4. Expresses its hope that the EU Member States will recognize the benefits of increased youth and student mobility in terms of research, economic development, multiculturalism, and development of educated societies;
5. Recommends that the region be gradually involved in achieving the objectives of the Lisbon agenda;
6. Encourages further cooperation with Western Balkans in the areas of research and education and youth mobility;
7. Endorses the fact that the European Commission has designated 2007 as 'European Year of Equal Opportunities for All' as part of a concerted effort to promote equality and non-discrimination;
8. Draws the attention to the veracity that overall accessibility to the EU plays an important role in the development of cultural understandings and multiculturalism particularly for youth and students,
9. Trusts that the current Finish Presidency will recognize the value of this approach and will take immediate steps in facilitating a liberalized visa regime for the Western Balkan countries.