

*On the basis of*

- the guaranteed European perspective of the countries of South East Europe (SEE) as defined by the EU Thessaloniki Agenda from 2003,
- the unequivocal determination of the South East European countries to accelerate the European integration process and to become full-fledged members of the European Union in the shortest possible time,
- the necessity to further strengthen regional cooperation,
- acknowledging the different status that the countries of SEE have in their respective euro-integration processes,

*Bearing in mind* that regional cooperation is of utmost importance for stability and prosperity of the region as well as for the European perspective of the SEE countries,

*The representatives of the SEE countries' governments adopt a*

## **JOINT STATEMENT**

1. The participants agree that it is necessary to accelerate the European integration process of the SEE countries. Therefore, the participants call on the EU to address the following issues in the course of 2009:
  - the completion of the accession negotiations with Croatia,
  - the opening of the accession negotiations with Macedonia,
  - the consideration and the reply to the application of Montenegro for membership in the EU,
  - the receiving and subsequent consideration and reply to the expected applications of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia for membership in the EU.
2. The participants agree to enhance efforts aimed at improvement and strengthening of the regional political, economic, scientific, technical and cultural cooperation aimed at an efficient and a successful integration of the SEE countries into the EU. In that sense, further emphasis should be put on the work of the Regional Cooperation Council based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, on greater mobility of experts throughout the region and the successful commencement of the work of the Regional School for Public Administration based in Danilovgrad, Montenegro.
3. The participants emphasize the importance of the approach by which the preparedness of each of the SEE countries for EU membership is to be assessed on individual basis. In addition to that, they acknowledge that mutual support within the region is the basis for future cooperation once all the countries have become EU members.

4. The participants call on the EU to consider in 2009 the abolishment of the visa regime for all the SEE countries to which it is still applied. All SEE countries have been fully committed to the successful implementation of the visa facilitation and readmission agreements with the EU which were signed in 2007. The visa liberalisation process should be conducted on the basis of the individual merit of each country.
5. The participants agree that the world economic crisis in the course of 2009 should not negatively reflect on the completion of transition in the SEE countries, and should not affect the European integration process or the overall economic stability of the region.
6. Bearing in mind that all the SEE countries are economically strongly connected to the EU, the participants would like to call upon the EU to take their interest into consideration during the implementation of the *European Economic Recovery Plan*, which was initiated at the EU Summit in December 2008.
7. In relation to the SEE, the emphasis should be put on four major areas:
  - investments in infrastructure of national and international importance, especially in international road, river and railway corridors,
  - investments aimed at increasing energy efficiency, building of the energy infrastructure and the increasing of the production capacity in the region, with an emphasis on achieving regional energy security,
  - making available funding from the EU based banks present in the region,
  - building social solidarity in the time of the world economic crisis.
8. The participants welcome EU efforts to pursue with the implementation of the EU pre-accession assistance programmes, primarily through the new Instrument for the Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA) at a good pace, as well as through additional funding resources. It is important to accelerate disbursement of already approved funds.
9. The participants agreed that the next regional meeting will be hosted by Macedonia in August 2009.