



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Council Conclusions on the Western Balkans

(2728th EXTERNAL RELATIONS Council meeting - Brussels, 15 May 2006)

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"Serbia and Montenegro / ICTY

1. The Council regretted that Serbia and Montenegro was still not fully cooperating with the ICTY and it therefore supported the Commission's decision to call off the negotiating round on a Stabilisation and Association Agreement scheduled for 11 May, in line with its conclusions of 3 October 2005 and 27 February 2006.
2. The Council reiterated its firm commitment to the European perspective of Serbia and Montenegro. In this context, the Council indicated its support to resume negotiations as soon as full cooperation with the ICTY is achieved. It once again urged the authorities in Belgrade to ensure that all remaining fugitive ICTY indictees, notably Ratko Mladic, are brought to justice without further delay.
3. If the necessary conditions are met and negotiations can resume rapidly, the Council underlines that a swift conclusion of the negotiations according to the timetable envisaged by the Commission¹ is still within reach.

¹ The Commission envisages end of 2006

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Serbia and Montenegro / Montenegro

4. The Council reiterated the importance of a fair and orderly referendum process in Montenegro. It called on both sides to comply with the referendum law and provisions, to refrain from unilateral actions during the further stages of the process and to accept the outcome of a legitimately conducted referendum. It further stressed the importance of ensuring that the voters in Montenegro can make a free and informed choice between distinct alternatives and can freely express their will, without any undue interference. Direct talks between Belgrade and Podgorica on the way ahead will be needed in the aftermath of the referendum, whatever the outcome.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

5. The Council expressed disappointment that the constitutional reform was not adopted by the BiH House of Representatives. The Council encouraged the BiH authorities to spare no effort to continue the path of constitutional reforms in order to give the citizens of BiH more functional state structures that are better able to meet European standards.
6. The Council indicated the Union's readiness in principle to reinforce its engagement in BiH in the context of the envisaged closure of the OHR, provided that there will be sufficient progress and without prejudice to the PIC Steering Board decision in this regard. It invited the High Representative/Secretary-General, with the Commission, and in close consultation with the Presidency, to begin consultations to that end with the PIC Steering Board, the High Representative/EU Special Representative Mr Schwarz-Schilling, the BiH authorities and other stakeholders and to present a joint assessment to the Council.

Regional co-operation

7. The Council recalled that regional cooperation is one of the cornerstones of the Stabilisation and Association process. It welcomed the outcome of the South-East European Co-operation Process (SEECP) Summit held in Thessaloniki on 4 May 2006 and took note of the constructive efforts of the Greek SEECP Chairmanship in this context, also welcoming the incoming SEECP Chairmanship of Croatia. The Council emphasised the importance of enhancing regional ownership and encouraged the SEECP to take concrete decisions on its role in the context of the ongoing discussions with the European Commission and the Stability Pact. The Council looks forward to decisions on the future set-up of regional cooperation at the upcoming meeting of the Regional Table of the Stability Pact in Belgrade on 30 May."

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