

Speech by Josep M. Lloveras, Head of the EC Delegation

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Cultural Cooperation in Dayton Triangle

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Mr Chairman, President Marovic, President Mesic, Chairman of the Presidency of BiH Mr Borislav Paravac, honoured guests.

It is a great honour to have been asked to speak at this important event. I would like to thank the organisers and all those from civil society involved in its successful realisation.

The Igman Initiative is sending an important message. In a region which is still seeking to come to terms with its past, with all its pasts, the message of dialogue, confidence building and co-operation is a key one.

The signing of the Tripartite Declaration will pass a vital message not just for the citizens of the signatory states but more widely across the region that the three countries not only share a past but that they are also aiming at sharing a future based on European values.

The recent European Council has reaffirmed that the future of the Western Balkans lies in the EU. It has also recalled that each country's progress towards that goal depends on its own efforts. It has finally repeated that regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations remain essential.

The regional dimension has long been a key feature of the European Union's Stabilisation and Association process for the Western Balkans. Let me just remind some areas where the regional dimension is particularly important, like the environment, trade, transport, energy and refugee returns.

For The EU the regional dimension is not a piece of rhetoric; we are actively supporting and fostering it through a number of different mechanisms.

First there is dialogue. In the area of justice and home affairs there is now a well established ministerial dialogue between the EU and all the countries of the region on the fight against organised crime and integrated border management. The EU has also been the architect of the South East Europe Transport Observatory and the Regional Environmental Reconstruction Programme.

Second there is financial and technical support. Through the CARDS regional facility, assistance is being provided at the regional level in areas ranging from intellectual property rights through integrated border management to the police and the judiciary.

In the area of refugee returns we welcomed the Sarajevo ministerial declaration in January as an encouraging step towards an ultimate solution to this difficult, painful issue. However, we would now like the implementation of the declaration to move more rapidly.

The Dayton triangle has, unfortunately, too often been seen as a turbulent Bermuda triangle over the recent past.

I am firmly convinced that by implementing this tripartite view you will not only work directly for the benefit of your countries and its people but you will also turn this triangle into a positive magnet to speed your path towards the European Union.

You may indeed count on the full support of the European Commission in this effort.