

JOINT STATEMENT

Adopted at the III Conference of Parliamentary Committees on European Integrations/Issues of countries participants in the Stabilization and Association Process in South-Eastern Europe

Skopje, 13-14 December 2006

The Third Conference of Parliamentary Committees on European Integrations/Issues of countries participants in the Stabilization and Association Process of South-Eastern Europe (COSAP), organized by the Committee on European Issues, was held in Skopje. Mr. Ljubisa Georgievski, President of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia welcomed the participants.

Representatives of the Parliaments of Bulgaria, Finland, and Slovenia, the European Commission, Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe, the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, the Assembly of Kosovo¹, as well as the European Movement of the Republic of Macedonia also participated at the Conference as special guests.

The participant countries have unanimously agreed that the National Parliament of Montenegro becomes a fully-fledged member of COSAP and welcomed the democratic achievement of the country's independence.

In the function of regular exchange of attitudes concerning issues related to the Process of Stabilization and Association (SAP), the participants of the Third III COSAP Conference in Skopje:

- Express full consent and support to the assessments in the Strategic Document of the European Commission on the EU Enlargement, which states that it is of crucial importance for the European integration to overcome divisions and to contribute to a peaceful union of the continent as the best way to respond to the main challenges related to consolidation of democracy, human rights and sustainable development in Europe;
- Welcome the clear and encouraging signal by the EU to continue with the enlargement process with the countries from the South Eastern Europe in the next period, having in mind the importance of this process for the security and stability of the region and Europe in general;
- Expressed their attitude that the future enlargements should be realized based on the established criteria, and that each country should be assessed individually, according to its own merits;

¹ In accordance with the Resolution 1244 of the UN Security Council.

- Welcome the efforts to overcome the delay in the institutional development of the European Union and the proposed constitutional changes, which should strengthen the institutional capacity of the Union for enlargement;
- Support the determination for the enlargement policy to be based on the fulfillment of the necessary criteria and provision of support by the citizens of the European Union, which at the same time shall contribute to the countries of the Stabilization and Association Process to intensify their reforms and to prepare to fulfill their obligations;
- Expressed their satisfaction for the incoming membership of Bulgaria and Romania in the EU, by which the inclusion of the countries from the Stabilization and Association Process in the European family of nations in near future will become reality;
- Encourage the parliamentarians from the member countries and the members of the European Parliament, to develop in continuity the dialogue and cooperation with the parliamentarians of the countries in the region, and to strengthen the communication with the electorate for the future EU enlargement;
- Encourage all the participants in the Stabilization and Association Process to continue with the progress in the process of Euro-integration and carry out the necessary reforms, by civil and business sector - wide mobilization, and implement measures that will strengthen the democratic and institutional capacity in their countries, as well as the functioning of their market economies;
- Emphasize the need for an increased mutual cooperation and support, aimed at establishment of a sound rule of law and a decisive combat against corruption and other forms of organized crime;
- Support the establishment of the new instrument IPA for financial support to the fulfillment of the EU membership criteria, which integrates all previous mechanisms for EU financial assistance of the countries from the Stabilization and Association Process, and express assurance that it shall give an important impetus for promotion, modernization and reforms in accordance with the *acquis*;
- Point to the need for the EU institutions to re-examine the Trans-European Network - Transport concept for building of the basic European corridors until 2020 and to integrate the area of the SAP member countries taking into consideration in particular not only the vertical, but also the horizontal integration of the region in the European transversals;

- Confirm their readiness for increased engagement in the regional cooperation process, primarily through establishment of a Regional Cooperation Council as a regionally owned forum for cooperation, as well as a free trade zone by expanding and amending the existing CEFTA Agreement, with the entering into force of the Energy Community Treaty, the Agreement on a European Common Aviation Area and other forms of cooperation according to their common interest;
- Mindful of the need for an increased administrative capacity of the member countries of the SAP and for promotion of cooperation with relevant EU institutions, point to the importance of establishment of a Regional School of Administration;
- Supporting the transformation of the regional initiatives and processes for cooperation, underline in particular the place and the role of the parliamentary dimension, and support the initiative for establishment of a Secretariat for regional parliamentary cooperation/focal point, which will secure further development of the regional parliamentary cooperation;
- Welcome the commitment of the European Union to start negotiations for facilitation of the visa regime as a first step towards its full liberalization, which will provide the citizens of the countries from the Stabilization and Association Process with the opportunity, in the shortest possible time, to make direct contacts with the citizens of the European Union;
- Positively assess the Austrian and Finnish Presidency with the European Union, primarily for the strengthening and expansion of the relations between the European Parliament and the national parliaments, the dialogue on the future of Europe, which includes the candidate countries, and commit themselves that this process includes all the other parliaments in the region;
- Expressed their gratitude to the host country, the Republic of Macedonia, for the organization of the III Conference of Parliamentary Committees on European Integrations/Issues of countries participants in the Stabilization and Association Process in South-Eastern Europe, and its contribution in the work of the Conference;