



## **PES Balkan Conference: “Progressive societies in the Balkans”**

**Declaration adopted by the participants of the PES Balkan Conference  
Sarajevo, Bosnia Herzegovina  
30-31 March 2010**

### **Welcoming the pro - European mindset and efforts of the region**

We, the European Socialists and Social Democrats, believe that peace, security and stability in Western Balkan are of vital importance. While the tragic events of the recent past remain in our memories, the countries of the region affirm and assume their responsibility for building a peaceful and stable future for their people.

With the Lisbon Treaty entering into force, we want 2010 to mark a new beginning for Enlargement in the Western Balkans. In recent years, the region has made significant advancement towards EU accession showing the pro-European mindset of the countries in the Western Balkans. Serbia, Montenegro and the FYR of Macedonia have joined the EU free visa regime in late 2009. The remaining countries are making good progress towards the accession the visa liberalisation regime and the fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria. Albania as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina could join the visa liberalisation regime as soon as July 2010. Visa liberalisation remains an essential pillar for EU accession encouraging cosmopolitan intercultural understanding and a pro-European mindset in the region.

Human rights standards and judicial reforms have strongly improved, adherence to the rule of law has increased and the process of reconciliation has made major steps forward.

The PES welcomes these promising developments and will lead the efforts in ensuring EU citizens have a new forward looking image of the region, and leave the negative connotations in the past. They have to be harnessed to resolve the remaining challenges on the path towards EU membership. Common goals and further regional cooperation are essential.

### **Our vision: The region and Enlargement 2014**

A common vision is needed to inspire all actors to actively work towards EU membership of the Western Balkans. This vision for a new Europe is Enlargement 2014.

The PES, as the most committed European political family to European integration for the Balkans, strongly endorses the Enlargement 2014 vision. The year 2014 should be a milestone on the roadmap towards EU accession, bearing in mind that some countries may be EU members beforehand. This makes it a symbolic date, marking the centennial of the outbreak of the First World War. This date is ambitious, yet feasible and does imply



the fulfilment of all criteria set by the EU for membership. The roadmap for this vision is the Thessaloniki European Council declaration of 2003, which stipulates the EU's values and the continuation of Enlargement in the framework of the Stability and Association process (SAP). It calls for the resolution of pertaining disputes and humanitarian issues as well as highlighting the importance of regional cooperation and economic prosperity for regional stability.

The PES has been pro-actively involved in the Western Balkans since the mid-1990s and has built solid networks with socialist and social democratic political parties and movements. The recent election victories of socialist and social democratic parties in the Western Balkans underscore the modern social democratic mindset of the region and provide a promising political platform for the realization of Enlargement 2014. This development has to be supported and sustained. The PES, with the new memberships and upgrades of the PES congress of 2009, is even more committed to the region with a greater presence.

The PES assures the region of its solidarity and support. We gladly welcome the region's efforts towards EU membership. To resolve the remaining regional challenges ahead, several practical steps have to be taken. To be successful, our vision of Enlargement 2014 must be built on the following political pillars:

- a. Full cooperation of all member parties at local, regional, national and European level
- b. Clear rules for political parties, transparency and a determined fight against corruption
- c. Continuing full and transparent cooperation with the International Criminal Court for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY)
- d. A clear commitment to fundamental human rights, non discrimination and multi-ethnic policies
- e. The improvement of perspectives and the protection of fundamental rights of women. The youth dimension should be at the very core of strategies aimed at national and regional development and EU accession.
- f. A common and regional legislative harmonization with the EU Acquis to create legal systems based on these values.
- g. Networking and dialogue between the party political foundations

### **Western Balkans for fair and green growth, jobs and social justice**

This political strategy has to be supported by progressive social democratic policies for regional prosperity and with a view to the EU 2020 Agenda. The Member states of the European Union and the region have been hit by the global financial crisis. With people losing their jobs and social inequality rising, we want active measures to make the region ready for the challenges ahead. The Western Balkans will have to be fit to play an active role in the realization of the 2020 agenda.

Economic growth in the region must not be at the expense of the environment and sustainability. Therefore, we want policies that promote green growth. We want sustainable development and a fair share for the people. The currently weak trade unions have to be strengthened to ensure this as well as decent work standards. We want a related fight against corruption. The best base of support for these strategies remains the people, thus civil society. Therefore, civil society has to be empowered. Europe is not just a market place. The benefit of the people has to be at the centre of every political and economic consideration and decision.



EU funds for the Western Balkans are intended for economic restructuring, diminishing the regional development discrepancies and for the advancement of rural areas as well as the adoption various technical standards. In this context, it has to be assured that the people, their welfare and their opportunities in addition to environmental sustainability remain the central focus. The European Union can only profit from economies built on green innovation, sustainable development and well-trained workforces.

To this end, we need socially inclusive and sustainable development policies. We need job creation programs, public education, training and green innovation. The populations of the region have to be actively engaged in the political and economic processes through increased local ownership to create a strong, supportive and dynamic base for EU membership, green and fair prosperity and to face the challenges ahead. A sustainable development agenda is in the mutual interest of the region and can thus serve as common ground for regional cooperation, the resolution of existing differences and reconciliation.

For an economically fit, green and socially just Western Balkans, policies need to emphasize:

- a. Ensuring a strong social dimension combining employment policies with social protection policies and social inclusion policies, in order to support change, fight poverty and to reduce inequality
- b. Moving towards low carbon economies, while guaranteeing a fair transition for workers during this process
- c. Promoting innovation, research and lifelong learning as main engines for job creation
- d. Developing related indicators have to ensure the avoidance of strong regional discrepancies
- e. Strengthening trade unions for decent work standards
- f. Ensuring universal access to good quality public services
- g. Empowering civil society to attain these public goods

### **PES cooperation at the centre**

The PES has been a force for peace and tolerance in the region. As defenders of human rights, regional cooperation and the integration of the Western Balkans into the European Union by 2014, we gladly welcome the pro-European mindset of the region. We hereby assure the region of our fullest support, friendship and solidarity.

Here in Sarajevo, we sign this declaration.

