



***Final Meeting of the Stability Pact's Regional Table and  
Inaugural Meeting of the Regional Co-operation Council***

**Sofia, 27 February 2008**

*Statement by the representative of the Council of Europe*

Excellences,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

On behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, I would like to convey congratulations and thanks to Erhard Busek for the great work that he and his staff have achieved in inspiring and co-ordinating the work of the Stability Pact during the past five years.

The Stability Pact was established in 1999 i.a. to enhance the democratic security of the Western Balkans region. This corresponded completely with the mandate of the Council of Europe to promote democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law as well as a common European consciousness throughout our continent. Therefore, we and the Stability Pact have been natural co-operation partners for eight years.

Two main themes developed during our partnership: The protection of vulnerable people in the Western Balkans and, necessarily linked to this, the development of

good governance. The Council of Europe was active in assisting to improve the Health systems of the region, strengthen the access to Social Rights, protect the rights of the Roma, as well as encourage the fight against trafficking in human beings. With regard to good governance, the Council of Europe co-ordinated regional initiatives concerning the fight against corruption. In 2006 the Council of Europe was charged by the Stability Pact to facilitate dialogue and co-operation regarding the development of local democracy in the region. Last but not least for some years the Council of Europe was involved in the controversial subject of history teaching in the Western Balkans

The Stability Pact is leaving a positive and impressive legacy for the region. As said before, the region is certainly much changed as compared with what it was in 1999. We are confident that the Regional Co-operation Council will continue and develop this “acquis”.

When Secretary General Biscevic paid a visit to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg last September, the Committee of Ministers expressed its support not only for the Council of Europe to continue the co-operation begun under the Stability Pact, but even broaden it. They also expressed their full support for the new and basic RCC principle to continue the work of the Stability Pact in the future under regional ownership.

We are aware that the passing of the baton from the Stability Pact to the Regional Co-operation Council comes at a delicate moment for the Western Balkans. For the protection of peace and stability there is practically no other alternative than co-operation among the countries of the region and their further European integration.

The success of the Regional Co-operation Council is a necessity not only for the people and the countries in the Western Balkans, but also for Europe as a whole.

On behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, I would like to wish Secretary General Biscevic every success in his efforts.

Thank you!