



WORKING TABLES' MEETINGS OPENING REMARKS

- Today's and tomorrow's Working Tables' meetings provide the opportunity to take stock of more than 8 years of Stability Pact activities in South Eastern Europe and to measure achievements, review lessons learnt and identify remaining challenges.
- First of all, we have to remark how significantly the background of our activities changed, and for the better, throughout this period. South Eastern Europe is today a more stable, economically viable and secure region. Challenges remain- no doubt about this-starting with decisions on the future of Kosovo, slow progress of reform efforts in Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc., - nevertheless, there is a clear improvement compared to when the Stability Pact started its work.
- This increased maturity of the region was the rationale behind the process of transformation of the Stability Pact into a regionally owned and led framework, the Regional Co-operation Council.
- Stability Pact activities contributed to normalising the situation in South Eastern Europe, and in turn, improved conditions and better relations among SEE countries allowed significant progress in regional co-operation.



- To mention just a few achievements under the three Working Tables
 - Parliaments of the region today co-operate as never before, led by a Regional Secretariat based in the Bulgarian National Assembly. This co-operation will be further institutionalised through a Memorandum of Understanding to be initialled here, today. This will strengthen networking, information exchange and training of parliamentary staff, improving the law making process and the ability of parliaments to supervise the activities of their governments. In short, it will help to improve the quality of democracy.
 - Thanks to the entry into force of CEFTA 2006, South Eastern Europe is becoming a single, large free trade area, regulated by modern rules that provide the basis for an increase in intra-regional trade levels, but also make the region far more attractive for investors. Negotiations and ratification of the new agreement moved very quickly, and demonstrated an improved maturity by SEE countries. Beside its merits as a trade agreement, the new CEFTA will certainly help the countries of the region to start thinking of themselves as part of a common market, anticipating their future as members of the EU.
 - Other items of the regional economic co-operation agenda are also in place: the Energy Community Treaty,



the SEE Investment Committee, the co-ordination of social policies and the electronic SEE Agenda plus, promoting e-governance and information and communication technology development throughout the region. When you combine all these elements you have the basis for a more harmonious social and economic development of the region.

- In the field of disaster prevention and preparedness, an area where regional co-operation is key to an efficient and co-ordinated response, and to save human lives, SEE countries have agreed to assume more technical and financial responsibilities by signing a MoU on the Institutional Framework of the Disaster Preparedness and Prevention Initiative for SEE (DPPI-SEE).
- As for the lessons learnt during these eight years, a general one concerns the value of regional co-operation as a recipe for addressing common challenges but also as a tool to advance on the way to the EU, a goal shared by all SEE countries.
- In terms of future challenges, in each and every field there's room for further progress and advancement as you will discuss over these two days. I would like to stress that the main challenge is now the implementation of the decisions taken so far, both at the level of individual initiatives and of the general framework supporting regional co-operation, the RCC.



- All these decisions constitute the hardware of a regionally owned co-operation agenda. Implementation will provide the software of regional co-operation and will be crucial to confirm the level of maturity reached by the region. It will also allow you to exploit the benefits that lie in such co-operation.
- A sound and effective implementation of this focussed agenda will also send a strong signal to the EU, showing the ability of counties of the region to work together to address common challenges, and their readiness to join a wider, and more challenging scheme of regional co-operation, the EU itself.
- This is my message to you for today and for the years to come: let us draw our lessons today and tomorrow from the achievements (and drawbacks) of the Stability Pact and use them for future work. Progress on concrete and day-to-day issues will provide a basis for further improvement of the overall situation in the region and can be used as the best argument for further advancement on the path to the EU.