

## **Speech of Doris Pack, Member of the European Parliament, meeting of Regional Table of the Stability Pact and the Regional Co-operation Council, 27 February 2008 in Sofia**

The European Parliament has from the early beginning actively supported the regional cooperation in the Western Balkans as the way to achieve lasting peace and prosperity in the region.

We are very happy to see that the region is committed to taking ownership of this process, which has resulted in transferring the Stability Pact into Regional Co-operation Council (RCC).

We also warmly welcome the fact that parliamentary cooperation – which started only when Dr Busek became the coordinator - has been declared one of the priorities of the new Council. The European Parliament is strongly committed to the process of strengthening parliaments in the countries of the Western Balkans. Efficient parliaments, fulfilling their role of legislators and carrying out oversight of governments' activities, are a foundation of democracy. We welcome the creation of the new Focal Point for parliamentary cooperation, based in the Bulgarian Assembly in Sofia and we have asked the European Commission to use the funds from the Instrument for Pre-Accession to assist the Focal Point financially.

The European Parliament has regular and intensive relations with the European integration committees in various countries of the South-East Europe. In addition, we hold regular meetings with the Members of Parliaments from South-East Europe and their staff in our institution. Through this dialogue, they have the possibility to get acquainted with the ways, in which they could influence the executive and how their requests can be implemented, to improve the efficiency of the national politics.

I would like to stress that it is vital that the MPs urge their governments to make use of the existing European programmes in the fields of education, culture and youth. To name only “Comenius” and “Erasmus” - these are the programmes, which allow the new generation get an understanding of the European vision.

Already in 2002 the European Parliament voted for the inclusion of a special objective “education” in the then CARDS programme; however, nothing important has been done. I am confident that now the European Commission will strengthen the efforts in the field of education in South-East Europe.

One example of a great achievement of the work of the Stability Pact is the “History Book of the South-East Europe”, which I had the honour to present last Monday in the EP. This book, prepared by the historians from the region, cannot be praised enough - it will contribute to helping the young generation understand the feelings and background of each other.

The European Parliament has taken the decision to become a member of the Regional Co-operation Council and I can assure you that we will continue to assist in the strengthening of the cooperation among the countries of the Western Balkans.

Working in and for the region since 1989, I am really happy that the Regional Co-operation Council will now be in the hands of the region itself. I would like to thank Erhard Busek for his outstanding work and wish his successor, Mr Bišćević, continuous success in bringing the region even closer to the European Union. The EU will be on your side.