

„Bucharest Process“

Sofia Conclusions

Second Ministerial Conference
on Employment
in South Eastern Europe

21st October 2005
Sofia

We, the Ministers and Heads of Delegations responsible for employment and labour market policies of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, “the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, as well as the Representative of UNMIK, acting on behalf of the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government,

meeting at a Ministerial conference chaired by Ms. Emilia Maslarova, Minister of Labour and Social Policy of Bulgaria, at the invitation of the Government of Bulgaria and at the invitation of the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation and the Belgian Federal Public Service of Employment, Labour and Social Dialogue, under the auspices of the Initiative for Social Cohesion of the Stability Pact for South East Europe,

recalling the Bucharest Declaration adopted on 31 October 2003 which laid the foundations for the very successful Bucharest Process,

recalling the need for increased cooperation among countries in South East Europe to continue the transformation of their labour markets and social systems,

recalling the need for combined and coordinated efforts of all international organisations active in the region to maximise the use of available resources and avoid duplication of efforts,

considering that the effective functioning of labour markets is essential for economic growth, access to social rights, in particular for vulnerable groups, and social cohesion in general,

meeting again for the first time since the Bucharest Conference and reaffirming our commitment to the Bucharest Process,

approve unanimously the following:

„Sofia Conclusions“

We appreciate the commitment shown by the countries participating actively in the Bucharest Process over the last two years.

We commend the role taken by the International Organization of Employers and European Trade Union Confederation and their contribution to the process, as well as the efforts made by national social partners.

We thank the Belgian Federal Government for its continued support.

We appreciate the commitment of the Council of Europe, the International Labour Organisation and the Initiative of Social Cohesion of the Stability Pact for South East Europe.

We are grateful to the Governments of Romania and Bulgaria for their specific contribution to the process.

We gladly acknowledge progress made in the implementation of the „Bucharest Declaration“ over the last 2 years, in particular through

- The establishment of a work methodology;
- The work done by the Permanent High Level Committee meeting in Brussels, Strasbourg, Sarajevo and Budapest;
- Two full annual cycles of Country Reviews on Employment Policies (Albania, Croatia, Moldova, Serbia);
- Two full annual cycles of peer reviews (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Moldova, Montenegro and Serbia, with a lead role of Bulgaria and Romania);
- Two national tripartite conferences (Albania and Croatia).

We acknowledge the usefulness of bilateral technical cooperation between countries participating in the Bucharest Process.

Due to the commitment and the efforts of all partners involved, the Bucharest Process has become a significant reference point for employment policy developments in South East Europe.

Directions for the forthcoming work

Taking into account all those achievements and bearing in mind the changes to the process environment during the last two years, these „Sofia Conclusions“ aim to provide the following directions to the Bucharest Process:

Priorities

Based on a critical assessment of the work done, we commit ourselves

- *to implement the recommendations of the policy reviews;*
- to seek to further improve the national employment policies, in order to pursue economic growth, social cohesion and regional stability with high and productive employment;
- to promote adaptability and employability in the labour market through active and passive labour market policies. Special attention should be given to facilitating access to employment by vulnerable groups;
- to promote gender equality in national employment strategies and to use specific policies targeting labour market gender inequality and gender mainstreaming as strategies to achieve this goal;
- to seek further improvement in the effectiveness and coverage of public employment services, drawing on the experience of the region and best practices of the Member States of the European Union.

Having analysed the progress of the Bucharest Process in Sofia today, we now reaffirm the employment policy mandate adopted in Bucharest in 2003 and commit ourselves to continue with cooperation in the development, implementation and monitoring of our national employment policies. To that end, we call on the Council of Europe and the International Labour Organisation and on the Initiative for Social Cohesion of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe for their continued support.

Support activities

Having reviewed and reaffirmed the “Bucharest Process” in Sofia today, we also wish to highlight the great attention we give to the following additional labour market issues:

- We invite the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, in addition to the coordination of employment policies, to address labour inspection and health and safety at work, as an important element of the quality of employment and as a prominent part of social dialogue, in accordance with standards laid down in the respective ILO Conventions and EU Directives, and
- We call on the ILO, with its experience and mandate in that field to take a leadership role in improving labour inspection services and to promote health and safety at work. This will include awareness-raising and capacity-building of the Governments, the employers' and the workers' organisations for the improvement of occupational safety and health at the national and workplace level.

Policy coherence

The need for an integration of social and economic policies has become more urgent as globalisation has intensified. We stress the importance of a strongly enhanced coherence between financial and economic policies on the one hand, and employment, labour market and social policies on the other hand.

Improved policy coherence should contribute to reaching the key objectives of fairness, equal opportunities and employment. The ILO's Global Employment Agenda, the European Union's Lisbon Strategy and the Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion of the Council of Europe highlight the need for macro-economic policies to be designed so as to maximise the creation of jobs.

In order to support the efforts of national governments, we call on the international organisations to upgrade the quality of policy coordination by taking into account the employment and social dimensions in their advice to Governments in the region.

Social dialogue

We strongly stress the need to improve social dialogue, another key concern of the European Union, the Council of Europe and the International Labour Organisation, and to support autonomous social partners in strengthening their technical capacity to contribute to all stages of the Bucharest Process.

Social dialogue is indispensable for formulating and implementing effective employment policy and is crucial to ensure a sustainable implementation of the recommendations developed under the Bucharest Process.

For this purpose, we encourage the establishment of national coordinating structures (should such not yet exist), with the cooperation of social partners and

all relevant Government offices in the design, implementation and monitoring of national employment and labour market policies.

Moreover, we advocate regular tripartite national conferences on the outcomes of the employment policy reviews carried out under the Bucharest Process.

Looking ahead

The following activities also will help to implement the recommendations stemming from the policy reviews and to foster and support employment cooperation in South Eastern Europe in the forthcoming period:

- Completion of the cycle of policy reviews in the remaining countries;
- Bilateral technical cooperation, based on coordinated fundraising;
- Further development of comparable indicators and improvement of the statistical capacity of countries;
- Further expert training on peer review methodology, focusing particularly on the European Employment Strategy;
- Awareness raising on the Bucharest Process at national and local level.

We reiterate our appreciation to the Council of Europe and the International Labour Organisation for the work done and request their continued guidance and support for the implementation of these “Sofia Conclusions”, under the auspices of the Initiative for Social Cohesion of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

We agree to meet again in 2007 to evaluate the implementation of the above conclusions.

Done in Sofia, on 21 October 2005.

Mr. Koço BARKA

Minister of Labour, Social Affairs
and Equal Opportunities
Republic of Albania

Mr. Sefik RIZVANOVIC

Advisor to the Minister of Civil Affairs
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Mrs. Emiliya MASLAROVA

Minister of Labour and Social Policy
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Mr. Branko VUKELIĆ

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Mr. Sergiu SAINCIUC

Deputy Minister of Economy and Trade
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Mr. Gheorghe BARBU

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Mr. Slobodan LALOVIC

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Mr. Slavoljub STIJEPOVIC

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Mr. Stevco JAKIMOVSKI

Minister of Labour and Social Policy
“The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”

Mrs. Carlotta MERCANTE

United Nations Interim Administration
Mission in Kosovo, acting on behalf of the
Provisional Institutions of Self-Government

We, the representatives of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, the Council of Europe and the International Labour Organisation, commit ourselves to ensure the follow-up to this conference:

Mr. Michael MOZUR

Deputy Special Co-ordinator
Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

Mrs. Miet SMET

Chair of the Initiative for Social Cohesion
Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe

Mr. Alexander VLADYCHENKO

Director General of Social Cohesion
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Mr. Friedrich BUTTLER

Regional Director for Europe
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