



**PES Conference on the Balkans  
Integrating Western Balkan in the EU. A progressive agenda for the people  
Belgrade, Serbia, 16 May 2007**

**Solidarity Pact for the Western Balkans**

2007 is a crucial year for the Balkan region. The Western Balkan countries face several key deadlines. The PES reiterates its determination to support the European ambitions on the Western Balkans as stated in the Thessaloniki Summit in 2003, and believes that integration within the region and within the EU remains the only way to achieve regional security, stability and economic prosperity. EU membership of the region is the challenge we promote as a social democratic family.

We recognize the importance of the current political moment in South Eastern Europe, a time of genuine shaping of the region's true European character, where countries are engaged in a difficult reform process that is deeply transforming their society.

We pledge to work together to shape the future of the region according to social democratic values. We want to guarantee that people of the Balkans benefit from decent jobs and economic growth, access to good education, social and health services. The Western Balkans need social democratic policies to tackle poverty and deprivation.

We, socialists and social democrats, sincerely believe that Europe will be stronger if it acts in unity to improve living and working standards – to ensure decent work and decent life for people throughout Europe.

We think it is time to start a new era of regional cooperation, with new and stronger relations between political parties and national authorities based on tolerance, dialogue and solidarity, and of a South Eastern Europe with a clear and determined European perspective.

The New Social Europe will create more wealth and inclusiveness through better competition between enterprises under fair and transparent conditions, through political cooperation between states and solidarity between the people. It is not a dream- it is political choice of Europe's socialist and social democratic family.

**EU integration and regional cooperation**

The progress in political and economic dialogue made in recent years gives the region an opportunity to be open and clear when outlining priorities and deciding actions needed to achieve sustainable economic development and good social policies to improve living conditions. Regional cooperation should not only focus on fighting corruption and environmental pollution but also on trade, infrastructure improvements, visa liberalisation, border regulations and energy supply.





The new Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA), which came into force on May 1 2007, should give new opportunities to those states that suffer from low levels of trade interaction, to those small and fragmented markets that have witnessed increasingly low growth rates. New trust and confidence in the region, at all levels, will enhance the credibility and perception of the region to the outside world. This is vital not only to attract investment but also to encourage tourism and foster economic progress. Regional integration should not be seen as a diversion from EU integration but as a parallel process which will enhance the prospects for EU integration and help achieve the stability and prosperity to which the people of the region aspire.

We support the clear commitments to achieve full cooperation with The Hague Tribunal without delay.

It is frequently stated that the questions of borders and national identity are an impediment to regional cooperation. Instead, this should provide a main incentive to cooperation. The free movement of labour has not been granted in the past. The prevailing visa-regimes, which have only recently witnessed partial lifting, limit the possibilities for travelling, but also impose restrictions on daily business life. Our political family supports the new visa liberalisation means for the region, which will facilitate travel opportunities especially for young people and students but we see this as a transitory step towards visa free regime.

We support local cross-border cooperation as well as civil society networking in order to overcome ethnic prejudices and facilitate friendly relations. The ambition of EU accession is widely supported in the Western Balkans countries. This shared ideal can unite individuals, communities, and states in the Western Balkans region, and can be the engine accelerating regional cooperation.

### **Modern Social democratic parties**

We, the PES, its member parties and partners from South-East Europe, commit ourselves to taking the lead in modernizing political life in the region. Our parties have shown to be forces of peace and tolerance, defenders of human rights, promoters of regional and subregional cooperation and enthusiastic supporters of European integration.

Loss of public confidence in political parties, as well as the challenges of political demagogy, populism and nationalism, must be addressed. We, social democrats, will promote the project of pluralist, multiethnic societies, in line with our political values and our commitments, to ensure a European future for the Balkans. To change the destiny of the region, our parties will fight against all forms of nationalism, ethno-centrism and intolerance. We are determined to build, on the foundations of our political values, democratic institutions and standards throughout the region.

We believe – and commit to work towards - speeding up the restructuring and the modernization of political parties and the opening of our parties to other sections of society. We declare our willingness to work to define and implement common rules on the financing of political parties, the fight against political corruption and the respect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights, as one of our contributions to achieving the conditions for EU membership. We are committed to present legislation for strict regulation of the financing of





political parties and election campaigns. The PES, its member parties and partners from South-East Europe support the implementation of strict internal party rules concerning moral and ethical conduct.

We, the PES; its member parties and partners from South-East Europe are committed to deeper and wider cooperation, expressed through: More contacts between parties at a local, regional, national and European level; better exchange of information; mutual support during electoral campaigns; shared education and training of members; and increased cooperation at a regional and EU level, including at Leaders level.

The Socialist Group in the European Parliament fully supports these aims and is ready to implement these principles in its work in the EP but also in its close cooperation with the Parliamentarians from the region.

We sign the Pact for Social Democracy, EU Integration and Regional Cooperation in the Balkans in order to promote a New Social Europe for all the citizens of the continent.

