

To the President of the EU
To the Governments of the EU Member States and Western Balkan countries
To the President of the European Commission

Your Excellencies,

We, the undersigned civil society organisations from the Western Balkans, strongly believe that the time has come to open a new chapter in relations between the EU and Western Balkan countries. The Sarajevo ministerial meeting is an excellent opportunity to create a **new impetus** to the process of accession of the Western Balkan countries to the EU, and define the road toward their full-fledged membership in the European Union.

During the past decade all the countries of the Western Balkans have advanced considerably in their reform agendas, and made notable progress in their pursuit of the priorities set by the Thessaloniki Agenda and the ensuing European Partnerships. The EU's commitment to the European future of the region has contributed to the fruitful development of regional cooperation, democratization and developmental processes in each of the countries concerned, as well as in bringing stability to the region.

The governments of the region have demonstrated that they can deliver if the conditions are clearly defined, transparent and measurable as in the case of visa liberalisation.

However, the Zagreb Declaration and Thessaloniki Agenda are not enough to further consolidate democracy in the Western Balkan countries, neither do they ensure implementation of reforms, enhancement of regional cooperation and preservation of the hard-won progress on peace and stability.

The Sarajevo ministerial meeting is a unique opportunity to revitalize a lagging process, by undertaking the following:

1. **Emphasize the importance of preserving stability in the region** and strengthening the prospects for its further democratic development and economic recovery; Reaffirm the commitment of the EU and countries of the Western Balkans to work together to accelerate the process of accession and condemn any further fragmentation and division along ethnic lines.

2. **Encourage the countries of the region to strive for the following goals:**

- candidate status for all the countries by the end of 2011, and
- opening of accession negotiations with Macedonia by the end of 2010 followed by other front-runners by the beginning of 2012 at the latest.

The EU should **define clear, transparent and measurable benchmarks**, which should serve a dual purpose:

- allow civil society organisations to monitor the progress their country has made and hold their governments accountable, and
- allow scrupulous in-country monitoring by the EU and CSOs which will facilitate holding the governments accountable for their progress.

3. **Reiterate that “bilateral issues should be resolved by the parties concerned and should not hold up the accession process”** as specified by the Commission's Enlargement Strategy and Main Challenges 2009-2010. Countries should undertake a binding commitment in that respect before joining the European Union.

4. **Give new impetus to the completion of the visa liberalisation process** for all Western Balkan countries, including Kosovo, and encourage national governments to enable visa-free travel in the region, so as to improve mutual communication and cooperation.

5. **Express readiness** of both the EU and Western Balkan countries **to establish and maintain regular dialogue with civil society organisations** involved in the processes of Europeanization of their respective countries and monitoring of the process of accession of the EU.

The countries of the Western Balkans will benefit from a reinvigorated and clarified policy towards EU accession. Equally, the current realities of economic instability and the internal reform prerogative for EU institutions and member states under the Lisbon Treaty will benefit from stable and committed partners in the enlargement process. We ask that the support and assistance to Western Balkan countries in preparing for their EU membership is a leading priority for the EU, just as it is integral to a stable, prosperous and cooperative future for the Western Balkan region.

Sarajevo, 1 June 2010