



## European Security and Defence Assembly Assembly of Western European Union

### **Address by Piero Fassino at the 58th session of the Assembly on his report “The EU and the western Balkans”**

*Paris, 16 June 2010*

Two weeks ago, on June 2, in Sarajevo, the European Union in the Conference on the Western Balkans has once again reiterated that the European integration of countries of the region is a strategic priority for the EU. It is not ritual or formal statement but it's consistent with the commitment that the EU has made in the Balkans over the past fifteen years, from Dayton to today. On the other hand, the European Council in Thessaloniki in 2003 to today there have been gradually repeated occasions on which the EU has committed itself to integrating the Western Balkans.

This statement to be credible needs a concrete strategy that sets out the steps, methods, timing of the integration process. Fifteen years have passed since the Dayton Peace Agreement, and ten years after the Kosovo crisis. In recent years the Balkans have seen a stabilization process with direct involvement of the international community through the military presence of NATO and the WEU, with civilian missions - the last in order of time EULEX in Kosovo - that have helped the institutional stability of these countries; the appointment of High Representatives have ensured a continuous link between the international community and the region, and finally with a NATO strategy that gradually opened the inclusion of the Balkans. And especially with the commitment of the EU and its major countries.

The conference in Zagreb in 2000, the European Council in Thessaloniki in 2003, the European Councils, which have gradually succeeded to the conference in Sarajevo, the European Union has articulated a progressive rapprochement of the Balkans. A path that has been clocked by concrete action: preferential trade regimes in order to promote a relationship of openness between the Balkans and the European market, the Stabilization and Association Agreement to establish a direct relationship between structural and the European Union and the Balkans ; the EU accession of Slovenia, a country that is now fully sharing both the euro and the Schengen area of movement; the opening of negotiations with Croatia, which are in the final phase; the recent agreement between European Union and countries in the region for the abolition of visas for citizens of the Balkans in the Schengen area. These steps have been made more robust by the fact that all the countries of the region have applied for EU membership and the relationships between each of these countries and have come growing over time.

This effort has produced significant results: more than a decade in the Balkans no longer know those wars marked by the horrors of ethnic cleansing, mass rapes by, a number of unspeakable suffering and mourning that affected millions of people. The conflicts and disputes among the major countries of the region have gradually reduced and there have been significant acts of peace, as the declaration of the Serbian parliament for acceptance of responsibility of the Serbian militias of Mladic in Srebrenica massacre, or as the recent agreement between Croatia and Slovenia to give the contentious border between the two countries shared a solution. And there was a consolidation of democratic institutions, market economy and the rule of law. All this would not be possible if the European Union and the international community had not chosen strategically to deal with the Balkans and to anchor a daily basis these countries to their own rules and standards.



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Despite these results, there are of course reasons for concern. It's a matter of concern the fragility of Bosnia and Herzegovina, which continues to live in the imbalance between the strength of the two entities that make up the Bosnian state and the fragility and the weakness of state institutions. Naturally it's a matter of concern also the situation in Kosovo which declared unilateral independence - recognized by most European countries and some seventy countries around the world - but not recognized by Serbia. The problem remains a solution that is shared by both parties and can bring stability to that part of the Western Balkans. It's a matter of concern that in the region is still not solved the problem of refugees and their return to native lands, as it cannot be ignored the acute corruption, trafficking, the presence of organized crime that undermine regional stability by exposing it at constant risk.

For all these reasons - and this is the heart of the Reports and Resolutions - is crucial to accelerate the European integration of the Balkans. The European Union has reiterated constantly, but now concrete acts are necessary because there is nothing riskier than evoking continuously a goal without putting into operation all that is necessary to pursue and realize.

This is why the Report insists that the EU should adopt a "road map" to say clearly what are the steps and time of the road map to integrate the Western Balkans. Conclude by 2010 negotiations with Croatia as soon as possible and set the date of accession of that country to the Union. Open negotiations with Macedonia, which has already concluded the burden of inquiry, as stated by the European Commission. Give the course and implement the Stabilization and Association Agreements signed with other countries, including Serbia. Extend the abolition of visas taken to Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia, also Albania and Bosnia, as recently announced by the EU rotating President, the Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos. Recognize Serbia, Montenegro and Albania candidate status in order to activate the procedures for opening negotiations. Strengthen state institutions in Bosnia, rebalancing the relationship between state institutions and authorities and institutions of the entities of Bosnia and Herzegovina, because without this strengthening of state institutions cannot transfer them those powers are exercised today, as we know, by the High European Representative and High Representative OHR.

In this way the process of integration of the Balkans can proceed step by step, giving it credibility and demonstrating to public opinion in those countries that we want to actually bring the European Union and at the same time, urging countries to implement reforms needed to adapt their economic standards, social, political and legal parameters to Europe.

Of course, to achieve this process, even the actors of the region must do their part. Therefore, the Report and Resolution are also addressed to them: we ask the authorities of Serbia and the Kosovo institutions to resume bilateral talks, as in any case the ruling of the International Court of Justice will not solve the political problem of relations between Belgrade and Pristina, which must be resolved on the basis of an agreement between the parties. We ask both the Kosovo authorities to ensure the rights of Serbs and the rights of the Orthodox Church.

We call on the Bosnian entity of leaving behind an attitude of distrust and prejudice against the institutions of their own State and urge to make constitutional reforms essential to give the State of Bosnia Herzegovina power and authority necessary. We call to Greece and FYROM to reach agreement on the name that should take the Macedonian state. I appeal especially to Greece, which in recent weeks has a great solidarity and great support from the European Union, and I ask the President Papandreu - we all appreciate his courage



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and foresight - to contribute to a solution to unlock a situation that is now stalled. We call on the Albanian political forces to overcome the opposition front that now paralyze institutions of that country.

Here, these are the proposals we make. And we do so with the awareness that the transition that lies ahead is a test of particular significance for the European Union. Fifty years ago, at its constitution, the EU was formed to overcome centuries of wars that had bloodied the continent. In the '80s, with the inclusion of Spain, Portugal and Greece, the EU countries brought out from the night of dictatorship. Dawn of the new century, with the eastward enlargement, we brought democracy and the market where there was dictatorship and poverty. Today, with the Balkans, Europe has a great responsibility to create conditions so that countries and peoples, who have historically been in conflict with each other, and have always thought each one against the near future, can finally think about their future with neighbour.

In conclusion: the integration of Western Balkan is an essential step. The European integration of the Balkans is not a gracious concession to those countries and peoples. Nor is it a prize. Their stability is our stability, stability in the Balkans to the stability of Europe. We have a duty to not disappoint and frustrate their expectations but to accept them, integrate them and build our common future. The integration into European institutions, as in Euro-Atlantic institutions, is today the necessary just and irreversibly road with which we can definitely provide stability, security, peace and prosperity to the Balkans.