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Perspectives – Keynote address

Chairman, Ministers, Excellencies, Colleagues, Ladies and
Gentlemen,

I would like to start by stressing once more the huge transformation of the political landscape that has taken place in Europe – and not least in South East Europe - since our last conference in Kiev in 2003. The countries of south-eastern Europe that were a major focus of capacity building under EfE from Dobris and until Kiev are now all either full members of the EU (RO, BU), candidates for membership (Croatia and FYRoM), or potential candidates for EU membership (Serbia, Montenegro, Albania and Bosnia Herzegovina).

All the Western Balkans countries have a clear prospect of joining the EU as reiterated in the conclusions of Thessaloniki European Council of June 2003- The December European Council of 2006 confirmed that the EU keeps its doors open to the countries of the Western Balkans. The EU is looking forward to these countries to

be ready to walk through that door, once each one of them meets the accession criteria.

Preparation for future EU membership in the field of environment is a major challenge for all candidate and potential candidate countries. It requires new approaches to environmental questions and – what is even more difficult- a gradual integration of environmental aspects into other policies.

Implementation and enforcement of environmental legislation mean the need to reinforce administrative capacities at national , regional and local level and this is why of course capacity building remains high on the agenda in the SEE region ;

EfE played a key role from Dobris onwards contributing to better environment in SEE. At the Kiev conference, however, a consensus took place to adapt the EfE process to the new European landscape = “the shift to the East”;

REC CEE (with a staff of about 200) remains an instrument of key importance for developing capacities in countries aiming at joining the EU, as confirmed in its strategy for 2006/2010;

- the EU remains highly committed to provide support to CCs and potential CCs;

- The current Financial framework of the EU for the period 2007/2013 has new financial instruments: IPA replaces the full range of previous instruments ISPA/PHARE/CARDS/SAPARD;

IPA will benefit to both CCs and potential CCs to support institution building and cross border cooperation ;

- IPA budget for 2007/2009 only will reach more than 3.9 bn € ;
Ministries of Environment have to compete with other sectors to push their projects ! pro active attitude essential !

The EU also attaches much importance to the regional dimension of environmental cooperation with these countries.

A joint effort is required to effectively manage natural resources and to preserve them for future generations.

The Energy treaty concluded between the EU and SEE countries is an illustration of closer links in an area of great importance for both economy and environment;

SEE countries are also taking part in a variety of cooperations which can be described as success stories , such as ECENA or ReRep

On the subject of combating climate change I would like to pay tribute to the progress made in the region. Since the Kiev conference, Croatia, fYRoM, Montenegro and recently Serbia,

have all ratified the Kyoto protocol. As we look towards new agreements post-Kyoto it is vital that the candidates and potential candidates move in harness with the EU.

The Eu remains fully committed to support the efforts of the SEE countries in their path