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South East Europe - from crisis zone to peaceful European region

Report on panel III of the Vienna summit

In introducing the panel, Alexander van der Bellen declared the title to be an objective. He reminded the audience that peace in the Balkans should not be taken for granted and that the very different economic and social situations mean a universal to the region is not possible. He called for a greater focus on countries which have not yet started the accession process.

Ifranka Pasagic, Director of Tuzlanska Amica Srebrenica, highlighted the situation of returned refugees who meet the very war criminals responsible for their personal drama. Some of the former refugees feel like hostages - it is one thing to live with people who destroyed your car, it is altogether another thing to live with people who destroyed your family. Other problems she highlighted included social insecurity, high unemployment (which is almost 50% among young people), the lack of infrastructure and the lack of capital.

Petr Stepanek, a consultant working mainly with local governments, addressed the problem of the lack of experienced politicians. Under Tito the development of a political elite was suppressed and this problem has been accentuated by the recent conflict: despite the emergence of political leaders, there is a lack of experience. Another major issue that is linked to the first one is the vast corruption and widespread organised crime. In addition, gangs are very strong in countries like Montenegro and Albania, and people expect aid to be distributed according through the gangs. Even honest politicians cannot gain promotion if they are not linked to the gangs.

Gisela Kallenbach highlighted the connection between past and future. She expressed the opinion that a stable future is not possible unless the past is debated in a transparent way. For this reason, she called for 'truth and reconciliation commissions' to be set up. Other priorities are to build up independent and democratic institutions, to promote economic development and to make visas available to the population - 70% of Serbian youths have never left the country. She also warned that euro-scepticism is growing. All these factors necessitate the development of a strategy for preparing the Balkans for EU entry. Mrs Kallenbach criticised the past tendency of some EU Member States to finance military intervention, at the expense of peaceful intervention.

Ulrike Lunacek criticised the Austrian Presidency for failing to prioritise the issue of visas for the Balkans. The European Union must avoid the creation of a Balkan ghetto. She also underlined the need to focus on women victims of human trafficking. Angelika Beer agreed that the EU should offer young people in the Balkans a possibility to see another part of the world. She argued that the EU must avoid the creation of a special status for Western Balkans as an alternative to full membership. The integration of the Balkans is a vital step for the reunification of Europe.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit called for the promotion of regional cooperation and highlighted that Bosnia will

require a change to the constitution, which is currently based along ethnic lines, in order to join the EU. Pierre Jockheer pointed out that, given the existing dysfunctions within the EU-25, it is hypocritical to propose EU membership as the only solution for the Western Balkans. He called for the EU to solve its internal and institutional problems (including the constitution) and to support the reforms of the Balkan states without linking them to membership. Petr Stepanek referred to the Cyprus experience and noted that membership might not solve all the problems.

Alexander van der Bellen concluded the conference by stating that the Balkans will become part of the EU and that the European governments must begin to prepare for their membership.

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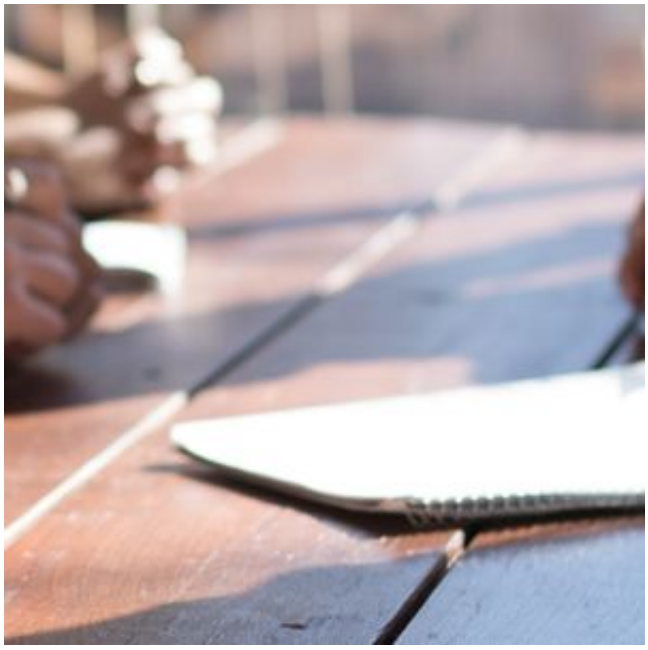
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