



SPECIAL CO-ORDINATOR OF THE
STABILITY PACT
FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

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“Reconciling for the Future” Initiative launched — Stability Pact Workshop in Thessaloniki Defines Main Patterns

Six topical priorities were identified as key to actively promote reconciliation in SEE, across borders as well as within the societies involved: education & youth, media, human rights & justice, gender, consensus building activities, such as interreligious dialogue or ombudspersons, and arts&culture. This is the result of a broad discussion with the active participation of and under the guidance of Stability Pact Special Co-ordinator Erhard Busek and the recently appointed Chair of the Human Rights and Democracy Working Table, Elisabeth Rehn.

More than sixty leaders and activists of the NGO community from the Western Balkans and some 30 guests from the International Community met in Thessaloniki (4-6 April) for a brainstorming workshop that is part of a new initiative of the Stability Pact called “Reconciling for the Future.” The participants largely consisted of youth from the ex-Yugoslavia countries and from Albania, who discussed how they can work together constructively to design a better future for themselves.

An Internet Forum, launched in January 2003, led up to the Workshop, feeding into its contents. While not excluding the establishment of an institute on reconciliation at a future stage, it was stressed that more information and consultation is necessary before deciding whether new structures are needed. Instead it was felt that it might be more appropriate for the Initiative to act as a catalyst to encourage closer networking amongst existing activities and institutions. Apart from gaining a more complete picture of activities related to reconciliation, some requirements regarding best practice and a range of activities with a high success potential for reconciliation activities emerged. The following two patterns were adopted to guide the initiative as basic terms of reference. First, only the combined top-down and bottom-up approach to reconciliation will create the critical mass of mind-change in a society divided by inimical post-conflict sentiments and second, the main addressees and implementers have to be youth and younger generation people.

Accordingly, the Thessaloniki workshop agreed on a set of recommendations to governments, which was complemented by a similar list of suggested

activities for civil society, especially NGOs (see attachments below). One prominent activity will be to raise awareness and actively promote public acknowledgments of past injustices by imminent individuals and governments of countries involved in hostilities. Notably, the participants supported an initiative that highlights and memorialises the thousands of acts of goodness across the ethnic divide that occurred during the wars of the 1990's. Awareness of such activities counteracts the prevailing negative stereotypes of "the other" within the region, and also helps to deconstruct the negative image of the Balkans that exists outside of the region.

The "Reconciling for the Future" Initiative of the Pact will be chaired by Elisabeth Rehn. The Thessaloniki Workshop was organized by the Thessaloniki based Centre for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe. The Initiative is conducted under the auspices of the Hellenic EU Presidency and the Stability Pact for SEE. The Greek, Norwegian, Swedish and Canadian Governments are its main sponsors.

Annexes:

- [Speech of Special Co-ordinator Erhard Busek](#)
- [Speech of Working Table I Chair Elisabeth Rehn](#)
- [Speech of Director Nenad Sebek](#)
- [Recommendations for Civil Society](#)
- [Recommendations for Governments](#)
- [Programme of the workshop, Thessaloniki 4-6 April 2003](#)
- For the Internet Forum, click: www.reconcilingforthefuture.org

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