

Belgrade, April 14, 2005

Dear Mr. Rehn,

We are encouraged by the renewed efforts by the Government in Belgrade and the Commission to bring the country closer to the European Union. Yet, we address you with a genuine concern regarding the emerging gap between the Union and those Western Balkan countries that remain outside the pre-accession process.

As the lessons from the previous enlargement process have clearly shown, the power of Europeanisation does not come only with formal membership of the Union. More importantly, it comes with the profound transformation of the societies in the process. While the process engulfed the rest of Europe, the peoples of the Western Balkans experienced a dramatically different reality. The present policy instruments of the EU were created to reflect that reality, as they were built around the goal of post-conflict reconstruction and stabilisation. They have greatly helped to push the threat of ethnic conflict into the background, making the region a far more promising place than it was five years ago.

However, our concern is that the current instruments are rather exhausted and are no longer potent enough to address the immense challenges ahead both for the Union and our country. We have moved long away from the danger of renewed conflict, but are braced for a development trap unless the proposed assistance structure from the EU is changed. The proclaimed goal of stabilisation and approximation of the country to the EU cannot be reached with the current instruments in place. Indeed, there is a danger that the region will find itself increasingly isolated from the developments unfolding all around it, from Slovenia, through Hungary, Croatia, Romania and Bulgaria, and south to Greece and Turkey. Unless the "potential candidates" are given access to all the five aid instruments (IPA, 2007-2013 budget), in stead of catching up and convergence, there is a growing risk of creation of a dark periphery in the heart of Europe. In addition, it will put at jeopardy many of the EU's most important interests in the region. Europe has made an enormous investment of resources to stabilise the Western Balkans. We are convinced that it does not want to see the emergence of new sources of instability and new walls of division on its territory.

This appeal must not be read as our call on EU to lower standards for beginning membership negotiations. The Copenhagen criteria must continue to be applied equally to all potential members, and there can be no short-cuts. Equally important, co-operation with the Hague Tribunal must remain a non-negotiable precondition of progress.

We strongly believe that both EU and our country are in a much better place to avert this process than we both were five years ago and we invite you to support our efforts.

We assure you of our continued commitment to the European values.

Sincerely,

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