



COMMISSION OF THE EUROPEAN COMMUNITIES

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Proposal for a

COUNCIL REGULATION

**on the establishment of European Partnerships in the framework of the Stabilisation
and Association process**

(presented by the Commission)

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

The European Council, which met in Feira in June 2000, concluded that its objective is the fullest possible integration of the countries of the Western Balkans into the political and economic mainstream of Europe and recognised the countries as potential candidates for EU membership. The Copenhagen European Council in December 2002 reaffirmed this perspective, while the Brussels European Council in March 2003 concluded that “the future of the Western Balkans is within the EU”.

The Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 reiterated its determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries and stated that “the Western Balkans countries will become an integral part of the EU, once they meet the established criteria”. It endorsed the Council’s Conclusions of 16 June 2003 on the Western Balkans including the annex “The Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans: moving towards European integration”, which aims at further intensifying the relations between the European Union and the Western Balkans, building also on practices used in the enlargement process, inter alia through the introduction of European Partnerships.

Inspired by the Accession Partnerships for the candidate countries, European Partnerships will be drawn up for the countries participating in the Stabilisation and Association process (SAP), Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo as defined by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999. The priorities of the European Partnerships will be based on the Commission’s political, economic and strategic priorities in the light of the assessments in the Annual Reports, with due consideration to the criteria defined by the European Council and to issues particular to the Western Balkans. The European Partnerships will identify priorities for action in supporting efforts to move closer to the European Union and serve as a checklist against which to measure progress. They will reflect the particular stage of development of each country, be tailored to their specific needs and be drawn up following contacts with the countries concerned. The Commission has been invited to submit the first set of European Partnerships to Council for approval with the next SAP Annual Reports (end of March 2004), following the procedure established for the Accession Partnerships.

The countries would be expected to respond to the European Partnerships by preparing and implementing plans with a timetable and details of how they intend to address the European Partnership’s priorities in terms of financial and human resources. The progress in implementing the priorities will be monitored regularly by the Commission, notably in the Annual Reports and through the structures set up under the SAP.

This proposal establishes the legal base to draw up European Partnerships for the countries of the Western Balkans to be adopted by the Council by qualified majority. The priorities of the European Partnerships will also be adopted by the Council by qualified majority. The proposed framework regulation has no financial implications. Community assistance will continue to be the assistance provided for under existing financial instrument(s), in particular Council Regulation (EC) No 2666/2000 of 5 December 2000 (CARDS).

Proposal for a

COUNCIL REGULATION

on the establishment of European Partnerships in the framework of the Stabilisation and Association process

THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular the first sentence of Article 181a (2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission¹,

Having regard to the opinion of the European Parliament²,

Whereas:

- (1) The Feira European Council on 19 and 20 June 2000 confirmed that its objective remains the fullest possible integration of the Western Balkan countries into the political and economic mainstream of Europe and recognised that all the countries concerned are potential candidates for membership of the European Union.
- (2) The Zagreb Declaration of the Summit on 24 November 2000 between the heads of State or government of the European Union and the countries covered by the Stabilisation and Association process recognised that the prospect of accession is offered on the basis of fulfilment of the criteria defined at the Copenhagen European Council in June 1993 and the progress made in implementing the Stabilisation and Association Agreements, in particular those on regional co-operation.
- (3) The Thessaloniki European Council of 19 and 20 June 2003 confirmed its determination to fully and effectively support the European perspective of the countries of the Western Balkans. It endorsed the Council's conclusions of 16 June 2003, including the annex entitled "The Thessaloniki Agenda for the Western Balkans: moving towards European integration". The "Thessaloniki Agenda" identifies ways and means of intensifying the Stabilisation and Association process, including the drawing-up of European Partnerships.
- (4) Under the Thessaloniki Declaration of the EU-Western Balkans Summit of 21 June 2003, the "Thessaloniki Agenda" is considered to be a shared agenda between the European Union and the Western Balkan countries which they commit themselves to implement.

¹ OJ C , , p. .

² OJ C , , p. .

- (5) The European Partnerships for the Western Balkan countries will identify priorities for action in order to support efforts to move closer to the European Union while serving as a checklist against which to measure progress. They will be adapted to the countries' specific needs and respective stages of preparation, and to the specificities of the Stabilisation and Association process, including regional co-operation. The Stabilisation and Association process remains the general framework of approach for the Western Balkan countries until accession.
- (6) The European Partnerships, updated as necessary, are needed in order to assist the Western Balkan countries in preparing for membership within a coherent framework and in developing plans with timetables and details in terms of measures of how they intend to address the requirements for further integration into the European Union.
- (7) It would be appropriate for Community assistance to focus on the challenges to be defined within the framework of the European Partnerships, which will provide guidance for financial assistance, and which will observe defined principles, priorities, and conditions.
- (8) Community assistance under the Stabilisation and Association process to the Western Balkan countries will be provided by the relevant financial instruments, and in particular by Council Regulation (EC) No 2666/2000³; accordingly, this Regulation will have no financial implications.
- (9) The programming of the financial resources making up Community assistance should be based on the priorities of the European Partnerships and decided in accordance with the procedures set out in the relevant financial instruments.
- (10) Revisions of the European Partnerships priorities may have a significant political impact on relations with the Western Balkan countries. It is therefore appropriate for the Council to adopt the principles, priorities, and conditions applicable to each European Partnership.
- (11) The Annual Reports on the Stabilisation and Association process are central to ensuring the proper implementation and follow-up of these European Partnerships as is the role played by other mechanisms established under the Stabilisation and Association process.

HAS ADOPTED THIS REGULATION:

Article 1

European Partnerships shall be established to cover the Republic of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic of Croatia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro including Kosovo as defined by the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 of 10 June 1999, (hereinafter referred to as 'the Partners'). The European Partnerships shall provide a framework covering the priorities resulting from the analysis of Partners' different situations, on which preparations for further integration into the European Union must concentrate in the light of the criteria defined by the European Council, and the progress made in implementing the Stabilisation and Association process including

³ OJ L 306, 7.12.2000, p. 1.

Stabilisation and Association Agreements where appropriate, and in particular regional co-operation.

Article 2

The Council shall decide by qualified majority on a proposal from the Commission, the principles, priorities, and conditions to be contained in the European Partnerships, as well as any subsequent adjustments.

Article 3

This Regulation shall enter into force on the third day following that of its publication in the *Official Journal of the European Union*.

This Regulation shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.

Done at Brussels,

For the Council
The President