



**SÜDOSTEUROPA-
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**“The EU and the Western Balkans: The Objectives of the
Slovenian EU Presidency – Implementation and Continuation”**

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The Slovene Presidency and the Western Balkans

Long before the launch of the Presidency, Slovenia gained the reputation of one of the few member states to boast a very good level of expertise on Western Balkans, supported by a broad and productive network of contacts throughout the region.

It could therefore be expected that Slovenia shall be willing to set WB as one of priority themes during its presidency, as well as to achieve meaningful results in the strengthening of the tangible aspects of European perspective for countries of this region.

This expectation was more than confirmed. During the run-up to 1 January 2008, including in the preparatory contacts with the Commission, Slovenia displayed a very ambitious approach, aiming to generate enough additional momentum in the European agenda of WB partners so as to reach next milestones in the relationship between the EU and practically all these partners.

Many would argue that this level of ambitions was set too high. However, setting your target high can sometimes produce a virtuous circle: looking at the reconfirmed Western Balkans priority driven by a Presidency knowing the WB well and known to be sympathetic to their cause, the reform-oriented decision-makers in the WB countries should gain enough motivation and additional resolve to accelerate their work and to rapidly achieve demonstrable progress, which in turn would give Brussels additional arguments in favour of reciprocating such progress by further upgrading of relations, always on the basis of individual merits.

Even if not each and every initial Slovene idea came fully to fruition, respectable progress has been made in many key areas and issues:

- the network of Stabilisation and Association Agreements was completed with the signing of SAA with Serbia in late April and with Bosnia and Hercegovina slightly later,
- visa dialogues under the roadmaps leading towards future liberalisation were launched with each of the WB partners having visa facilitation and readmission agreement with the EU,
- stability in Kosovo was maintained and security situation remained calm,

- the Regional Co-operation Council was formally launched at the end of February 2008,

- based on i.a. close consultation and substantive suggestions from the Slovene Presidency, the Commission in early March adopted the Communication on enhancing the European perspective of the Western Balkans, which became the main point on the menu of the informal meeting of EU Foreign Ministers in Brdo and, subsequently, its conclusions and recommendations were endorsed by the Council.

Looking back at the first semester 2008, the Commission believes that Slovenia's track record as Presidency on the WB issues is exemplary. Useful lesson can be drawn from that experience by other incoming Presidencies, especially those of the new member states.

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