

**"The implementation of the March agreement and progress towards
the EU go hand in hand"**

by

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The Belgrade agreement of 14th March opens new perspectives for Serbia and Montenegro and for the entire region:

It brings Serbia and Montenegro an important step closer to the EU. It provides a new basis for practical cooperation between Belgrade and Podgorica. It contributes to regional stability. And it serves as an example for the right way of resolving difficult status issues in the region: namely, through dialogue rather than through confrontation and unilateral action.

Since 14 March important progress towards implementing the agreement has been achieved. The parliaments in Serbia and of Montenegro have with great majorities voted in support of the proposed new constitutional arrangements. In Montenegro, some political parties which had at first opposed the agreement decided to respect the parliamentary decision and to contribute faithfully to its implementation. Public opinion polls indicate broad popular support for the agreement.

Recently, however, I have become aware of the risk of a loss of momentum. The Federal Parliament has postponed its consideration of the agreement. The Montenegrin and the Serb parliament have yet to appoint the members of the Constitutional Commission. There have been tendencies to promote one-sided interpretations of the Agreement and to prejudge its implementation.

All this is delaying the beginning of work of the Constitutional Commission which has a vital task in transforming the Agreement into a legal instrument and in resolving the open issues. The last word will, of course, remain with the parliaments to which the draft Constitutional Charter will eventually be submitted. According to the Agreement this should happen by the end of June 2002. In the light of the recent delays it will be difficult to meet this target date.

I am concerned about these developments. It is understandable that both in Montenegro and in Serbia the political climate heats up in the run-up to important elections. However, it would be contrary to the interests of the people of both republics, if progress towards the new Constitutional Charter would fall victim to the rivalries between political factions.

The important benefits of the agreement for the citizens of Serbia and Montenegro, and in particular, the progress in moving closer to the European Union, can only be exploited, if the agreement is implemented soon and effectively. Setting up the

Constitutional Commission, drafting the new Charter, establishing the new institutions and launching the process of harmonising the economic systems will require a lot of effort and commitment. And all this must go hand in hand with a general intensification of political and economic reforms. Only thus can you achieve real progress towards Europe over the coming years. Neither Montenegro nor Serbia can afford to lose any more time.

I can assure you that the EU will remain fully engaged in this process and will do what it can to help turn the agreement into a success. But the EU on its own cannot do much. It is now up to the political leadership in Montenegro and Serbia to take the initiative. In March they have displayed wisdom and responsibility in overcoming longstanding differences and agreeing on a common way forward. I appeal to them now to carry out these commitments quickly and with determination.
