

Joint Conclusions of
the Ministerial Conference on Peace Consolidation and Economic
Development of the Western Balkans

1. We, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, the Minister for Development Cooperation and Human Rights of Ireland, representing the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Economy of the Western Balkan states, together with the representatives of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Kosovo, the High Representative for Bosnia and Herzegovina, the European Commission, the Special Coordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and major states and international organisations, met on April 5, 2004 in Tokyo in the framework of the Ministerial Conference on Peace Consolidation and Economic Development of the Western Balkans, co-chaired by Japan and the European Union and reached the following consensus:
2. The countries of the Western Balkans have made considerable progress towards the consolidation of peace and stability following a decade of conflict. Nevertheless, threats to political stability and human security remain, as was demonstrated by the recent violence in Kosovo. We are determined to consolidate peace throughout the region and to make the current positive trend definitively irreversible. Therefore, the Western Balkan countries, in partnership with the international community, will continue to work together to promote stability, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human and minority rights. The principles underpinning this cooperation include the inviolability of borders, peaceful resolution of conflicts and regional cooperation. The future stability of the Western Balkans will be promoted through their integration into European structures on the basis agreed at the EU-Western Balkans Summit in Thessaloniki in June 2003. We consider that the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Western Balkan countries is a strong vehicle for stability.
3. The countries of the Western Balkans will further strengthen regional cooperation in order to promote stability and enhance economic development. Regional cooperation is central to promoting trade liberalisation, the fight against transnational organised crime, effective border management and ethnic reconciliation. In this connection we highly appreciate the role being played by the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe. The countries of the region further commit themselves to enhancing regional ownership in the Western Balkans through regional initiatives such as the South East European Cooperation Process.

4. The penetration of organised crime in the countries of the region is a continuing threat to stability and democracy and an impediment to a sound business environment. It has acquired a transnational character through engagement in illegal trafficking of human beings, drugs and small arms. The fight against organised crime continues to be a priority for the establishment of the rule of law in this region. In this regard, we recognise the role of the Regional Centre of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative for Combating Transborder Crime. The Western Balkan countries are encouraged to speed up their implementation of the UN Convention against Transnational Organized Crime. They will continue to vigorously pursue the priorities identified at the 2002 London Conference on Organised Crime and at the JHA Ministerial meeting held in Brussels on 28 November 2003 in the framework of the EU-Western Balkans Forum. The international community will continue its assistance to the Western Balkans through various means including the training of law enforcement authorities.

5. The Western Balkan countries should take appropriate steps to meet the obligations of UN Security Council Resolution 1373 and other relevant UN resolutions, and ratify and implement the twelve UN counter-terrorism-related conventions.

6. There are still over one million refugees and IDPs in the region and the absence of a sustainable solution remains a challenge to human security. All the parties concerned in the region should further promote ethnic reconciliation which is essential to the return of the refugees and IDPs. They must make clear that all ethnic groups are welcome and will be treated equally before the law. They will also create the conditions for sustainable returns by speeding up the process of restitution of property and will ensure access to various rights for those who do not wish to return.

7. We underline that full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is an obligation on all the countries of the region in line with UN Security Council Resolution 1503. It is also a prerequisite for lasting peace and reconciliation in the region. The countries of the region are committed to acting on this pledge but there is more they could do. Of particular importance is the arrest and transfer to the ICTY of all indictees still at large.

8. We strongly condemn the recent violence in Kosovo which has claimed lives, damaged property and destroyed religious and cultural heritage and call on all political leaders to take responsibility for the situation and to ensure that ethnically-motivated violence and threats of violence end immediately. We express our support for SRSG Harri Holkeri and for UNMIK and KFOR in their strengthened efforts to stabilise the situation and to ensure the full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1244. The

publication of the Kosovo Standards Implementation Plan as a living document is a step forward in the standards process and we hope for its early endorsement by the UN Security Council. Standards before Status policy and the UNSC-endorsed Review Policy Framework remain the appropriate way forward to build a democratic multi-ethnic Kosovo for all its citizens.

9. We recognise the progress in the reform process made by Albania. We express our support for pursuing and implementing reforms, which would enable further progress in the negotiations for a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU.

10. We welcome progress achieved in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We support the continuing efforts of the High Representative, with the support of SFOR, the EU and other international players, for peace implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We recognise the progress in such areas as reforms of the defence and intelligence sectors and the re-integration of Mostar city. Bosnia and Herzegovina must assume responsibility for implementing reform if it is to become a fully self-sustaining state. This is a prerequisite if Bosnia and Herzegovina is to profit from its multi-ethnic identity and to move further towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

11. We recognise the commitment of the new Croatian Government to pursue the policy of integration into Euro-Atlantic structures. While welcoming progress in fulfilling the required criteria, we encourage the Government to continue its policies towards minorities and refugee return, and its active engagement in the promotion of bilateral relations with neighbouring countries.

12. We mourn the tragic death in February of President Boris Trajkovski, and pay tribute to his contribution to the irreversible process of ethnic reconciliation in his country. His loss has been deeply felt throughout the region. We welcome the entry into force of the SAA as the first in the region, and recognise that further progress in the Euro-Atlantic integration process will be made through the full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement.

13. We fully support the effective functioning and the stability of the state union of Serbia and Montenegro. We welcome the formation of the new Serbian Government and express our support for concrete action to implement political and economic reforms.

14. We recognise that the region has moved away from the reconstruction phase and is committed to ensuring sustainable economic development crucial for long-term stability. In many parts of the region, low levels of economic development are contributing to persistently high rates of unemployment, poverty and crime, all of which undermine

process towards consolidation of peace. We must address a situation which could contribute to disillusion with the reform process and the consolidation of democratic politics. We recognise that private sector development is a key to tackling this issue. Hence market reforms must continue, for which the Western Balkans countries are directly responsible.

15. Development of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and entrepreneurship are essential for job creation and the functioning of competitive market economies in the region. The Western Balkans countries will continue to build the necessary institutional framework for SME development. SME financing as well as training of entrepreneurs should be further explored.

16. In addition, in order to achieve sustainable economic development in the Western Balkans, investment including foreign direct investment must be further promoted. Relatively competitive sectors of the economies such as tourism can be selected as strategically important targets by the countries of the region. The Western Balkans countries will continue their efforts to create a better investment climate, especially by strengthening their legal framework. Their Government institutions including Investment Promotion Agencies, with the support of the international community, must have their capacities significantly enhanced in order to ensure further policy implementation.

17. We welcome the completion of a bilateral network of Free Trade Agreements between the countries of the region. As other signatories, the Western Balkans countries will work on fully implementing these FTAs in line with the Stability Pact Memorandum of Understanding on Trade Liberalisation and Facilitation and the WTO obligations. The countries should explore ways to harmonise their FTAs with a view to establishing a free trade area. In addition, the regulatory frameworks should be speedily established. They will enhance the ability of the region to attract much-needed foreign direct investment. This should be accompanied by freedom of movement across the region.

18. Infrastructure, including transport links and energy, enhances regional cooperation and connection with other regions. Recognising its significance, the countries of the region together with the international community will focus on strategically important projects. The signing of the MoU on the Core Transport Network and the MoU for the creation of a regional energy market in South Eastern Europe including the Western Balkan countries, and facilitated by the European Commission, provides an excellent framework for the development of an efficient regional infrastructure.