

Brussels, 4 December 2009

Conference on the Western Balkans to focus on regional integration and overcoming of the economic crisis

On 9 December, the European Commission's DG Enlargement and the Swedish Presidency of the EU are organizing a Conference on "The Western Balkans: Overcoming the economic crisis, from regional cooperation to EU membership". The conference will be attended by some 200 high level participants including ministers and senior officials from the Western Balkans' countries, as well as EU Member States, Turkey, USA, Russia, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and Moldova. Given the emphasis on the economic development of the region, representatives of major International Financial Institutions, such as the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the Council of Europe Development Bank and the World Bank, will also participate in the panels.

EU Commissioner for Enlargement, Olli Rehn, and Sweden's Foreign Minister Carl Bildt will be hosting the conference, in cooperation with the Regional Co-operation Council, represented by its Secretary General, Mr Bišćević.

After the opening session with keynote speeches by Foreign Minister Bildt, Commissioner Rehn, Spanish Foreign Minister Moratinos on behalf of the incoming Spanish Presidency, and Mr Bišćević, a press conference is scheduled at 10h30.

The venue for the Conference is at Hotel Sofitel Brussels Europe (Place Jourdan 1, Brussels). Access to the conference is by invitation only. EU accredited journalists who wish to attend should register by sending an e-mail to anna-kaisa.itkonen@ec.europa.eu or to amadeu.altafaj-tardio@ec.europa.eu.

At 14h30, a new Financing Facility, the "**Western Balkans Investment Framework**", will be signed by MM Bildt, Rehn as well as the representatives of the European Investment Bank, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development and the Council of Europe Development Bank. The Western Balkans Investment Framework (WBIF) provides a joint grant facility and a joint lending facility to finance priority projects in the Western Balkans.

Full programme of the Conference:

Panel 1: Overcoming the Economic Crisis – Financial Outlook (11h00-12h30)

Key-note speaker: Mr Marco Buti, Director General for ECFIN - EC

Moderator: Mr Alex Rondos, former Ambassador of Greece

Panel:

- Mr Božidar Djelić, Deputy Prime Minister of Serbia
- Mr Dario Scannapieco, Vice President of the EIB
- Mr Varel Freeman, First Vice President of the EBRD
- Ms Jane Armitage, Director South East Europe of the World Bank
- Mr Vladimir Gligorov, Vienna Institute for International Economic Studies

Panel 2: Overcoming the Economic Crisis - The Importance of Regional Cooperation (15h00-16h30)

Key-note speakers:

- Mr Pierre Mirel, Director DG ELARG - EC
- Ms Radmila Šekerinska, Chair of National Council for European Integration, fYRoM

Moderator: Ms Katinka Barysch, Deputy Director of the Centre for European Reform

Panel:

- Ms Vesna Pusić, Chair of Parliamentary EU Committee, Croatia
- Mr Ardian Fullani, Governor of the Bank of Albania
- Mr Imre Tarafás, Vice-Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank
- Mr Ivan Vejvoda, Executive Director of the Balkans Trust for Democracy, Serbia