



**Chairman's Conclusions**  
Skopje Regional Table Meeting  
November 17-19, 2004  
**Working Table I**

The meeting of Working Table I focused on two topics, education, and local democracy and cross-border cooperation. The panel discussion on *Reforming Education to Raise Development Standards* reiterated the need for a systematic support for education reform in the context of European stabilisation and integration process. The Integrated Life-Long Learning Programme of the European Union to facilitate the mobility of students, workers, teachers and trainers, will start in 2007 and it will be extended to the Western Balkan countries based on the proven capacity of each country to manage and implement such complex actions. Preparations for building regional capacities need to start immediately. The importance of education and its effect on employment and entrepreneurship, in fighting the brain drain, and generally on improving the economies of the region was recognised. The role of national parliaments on education issues was emphasised.

It was noted that the transfer of the secretariat of the Education Reform Initiative of South Eastern Europe (ERI SEE) to the region, which is progressing well, will strengthen the regional ownership of the process. It is hoped that the Graz conference in January will present a comprehensive assessment of the work done within the Graz process in order to give guidance on how to proceed on the education reform whilst working in close coordination with other sectors of society.

Exchange of young people within the South Eastern European region for studies, work, sports, culture and other interests should be encouraged and the governments of the South Eastern European region are invited to look into opportunities to promote such exchanges.

The panel on *Building the Capacity for Local Democracy and Strengthening Cross-Border Networks* reconfirmed the importance of the political commitments adopted in the Memorandum of Understanding and the Final Declaration at the Ministerial Meeting in October. It emphasised the need to transfer relevant decision-making competencies to regional and local authorities and to strengthen the decentralisation process in general. National programmes are being finalised by governments to guide this process, and it is crucial that the finalisation and implementation of these programmes be

facilitated and monitored by the Council of Europe, where additional resources are required.

Inter-governmental agreements can facilitate cross-border activities and local actors should be kept informed of opportunities made available by such agreements. The European Commission programmes on local democracy and cross-border cooperation were presented at the meeting. Gender equality aspects need to be incorporated in cross-border activities by including, whenever possible, equally women and men, as participants and as beneficiaries in all activities. The promotion of Local Democracy and Cross-Border Cooperation remains a core objective for Working Table I.

Working Table I endorsed the adoption of Parliamentary Cooperation as a new core objective. A full Work Programme for 2005 that will reinforce inter-parliamentary cooperation within the South Eastern Europe has been prepared, based on identified needs of the parliaments of the region. The objective of the Programme is to increase the professionalism of the parliamentary approach by working with parliamentarians and parliamentary staff. The parliaments of the South Eastern European region are invited to take an active part in the activities, and further donor funding for this is welcomed.

The Media Task Force continues its work through national working groups to develop the independent national media environment, by, among other things, improving media standards and legislation and increasing professionalism of the media. The Task Force is invited to study the possibility of organising an international Media Conference, focusing on the responsibility of the media to balance the increased media freedom.

The Gender Task Force will keep working to advance women's political participation, but also to ensure that the national machineries and necessary legislation on gender equality are in place. The Gender Task Force aims to organise the first SEE Ministerial Conference on Equal Opportunities in 2005.

Working Table I co-organised with several partners a Regional Conference of the Ombudsman Institutions of the SEE this year. The need for follow up activities should be studied and recommendations made on it.

The guiding light for the work of the Working Table I should be the promotion of regional ownership and regional leadership of all its activities. Efficient coordination between all relevant partners, be they international organisations, NGOs and civil society actors, national governments or local and regional authorities, is necessary. Furthermore, a cross-table approach that helps the building and implementing of comprehensive activities is also necessary.

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