



# SPECIAL CO-ORDINATOR OF THE **STABILITY PACT** FOR SOUTH EASTERN EUROPE

## **Chair of Working Table I**

### **Working Table I Chairperson's Conclusions**

Work towards the development of sustainable democratic institutions and protection of human rights, including rights of national minorities, is at the core of all efforts of Working Table I. Moreover, protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including promoting women's active participation, must be mainstreamed in all activities of the Stability Pact. Enhancing democratic citizenship and the role of civil society is also an overriding objective of the Table.

Particular attention was focused on the two core objectives of WT I: media, and local democracy and cross border cooperation. Development of media environment along European standards will continue to be a core objective, with editorial independence of all media outlets being vital. Based on the success of this year, the Media Task Force will continue to focus on the development of quality domestic television programs, media legislation and strong local institutions which can lobby for media freedom.

The support for decentralization to strengthen the capacities of the local decision-making process will be on agenda for 2004. On issues of cross-border cooperation - such as border security, visa regimes, trafficking, economic development- cross-table cooperation and consultations when agendas are set is essential. Institutionalizing cross border cooperation through the support of regional networks, including associations and other contact between local authorities and emerging and existing Euroregions can bring tangible results on local level, as existing borders have cut some traditional trading or cultural links.

In addition to the two core objectives, the Working Table will continue focused efforts on other integral components of its work. The Gender Task Force will continue its targeted activities to increase women's role in decision-making at local and national levels, including helping them to run as candidates for elections and be part of the political processes. A specific target group will be Roma women who will be encouraged and empowered to take part in decision-making in and outside their communities.

Human rights and national minority activities from the former Human Rights and National Minorities Task Force have been integrated under the new Reconciling for the Future Initiative where work will focus on reconciliation efforts with and through

youth, culture, ombudsmen in the SEE region, Roma, and on Kosovo. The apologies, like those exchanged recently by Presidents from the region, were welcomed as necessary acts of symbolism to promote reconciliation and an atmosphere of tolerance.

Parliamentary cooperation will play an increasingly important role in promoting cross-table cooperation. Working Table I will work closer on strengthening the efficiency of the parliaments, by working with staff and specific parliamentary committees, and promoting bilateral and multilateral cooperation among parliaments in SEE.

Education is key to all development in the region, thus the right of all children to education and creating opportunities for future generations is of utmost importance. The implementation of educational reforms in the region along the EU's goals and principles must continue. WT I was pleased that Albania and Moldova signed the Memorandum of Understanding on Education in the framework of the Regional Table.

Working Table I will work to promote regional ownership. The initiative of the Albanian Co-Chair for facilitating an input from the SEE region to the WT I's work was endorsed. Regional ownership can be strengthened by capacity building and training. The experience of the incoming EU Member States will be valuable for SEE on its path to European integration.