



CEFTA 2006 – Joint Committee Meeting
Ohrid, 28 September 2007
Opening Remarks by Special Co-ordinator Erhard Busek

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Madam Chair, Your Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to attend this historic first meeting of the Joint Committee of CEFTA 2006 and to join the European Commission in congratulating all the CEFTA Parties. I am impressed by the hard work and dedication shown by all Parties in getting this valuable regional agreement ratified within several months of its signing.

The rapid pace at which all the Parties have negotiated, signed and now ratified this inclusive, modern and ambitious agreement demonstrates the enormous commitment of all governments to improving trade and investment policies in South Eastern Europe. Based on the keen interest in CEFTA that I have seen among international and regional business communities, I believe that your strong commitment is already benefiting the region.

Looking through the various decisions that you will adopt today, I commend you for your determination to ensure that the agreement will function efficiently and effectively. This is vital for the credibility of the agreement in the business community. The success of CEFTA will depend heavily on the perception by all that agreed procedures will be followed. Traders and foreign investors must have a secure and predictable framework for their business decisions.

I am very pleased to see that non-tariff barriers is one of the first areas that you will tackle. While the trade environment in the region has improved, there are still far too many technical and administrative barriers to trade. I have just come from a meeting of the Business Advisory Council for South Eastern Europe where regional and international investors listed a range of barriers ranging from Byzantine licensing procedures and delays at border crossings to different quality standards.

You must reduce and eliminate these barriers to prove that CEFTA 2006 is not only a good agreement in theory but will also work in practise. The structures and procedures you are adopting today will go a long way to guarantee that CEFTA 2006 is good for South Eastern Europe in practise as well as in theory. I will be very happy to report this to the next meeting of the Business Advisory Council and to SECIPRO which has been facilitating cross border trade.

I have also noted your firm intention to co-operate with the SEE Investment Committee that has been established with the assistance of our OECD managed Investment Compact. Trade and investment are two sides of the same economic development coin, so this should contribute to the development of more coherent and comprehensive economic policies in each of the CEFTA Parties.

May I also recommend that you look at the outcome of the workshop held in Skopje earlier this week that discussed the potential of the information and communication technology world to expedite improvements in the trade environment. An electronic customs service would certainly facilitate a more efficient running of CEFTA and I hope you will work actively to develop this area.



As you know, the Stability Pact is in the process of handing over its responsibilities to the newly created Regional Co-operation Council, which will formally start work at the end of February 2008. As you can see from his presence here today, the new Secretary General of the RCC, Hido Bišćević, is already preparing for his challenging new role. I am confident that he will make it a success.

Whereas in the Stability Pact much of the leadership and management came from the international community, in the RCC it is the countries and territories of the region that are in the lead. You now have the responsibility for monitoring, supporting and promoting regional co-operation processes.

We in the Stability Pact aim to foster regional leadership not only in the overall management of regional processes but also in each individual Stability Pact initiative. In this respect, I think CEFTA 2006 provides an excellent example of an initiative that was started and nurtured by the Stability Pact for which the region now assumes full ownership.

I would like to thank all of the CEFTA Parties for their participation in the Stability Pact's Trade Working Group. This is where the initial co-operation on regional trade issues started back in 2000 and where the concept for CEFTA 2006 was born and developed. I also take this opportunity to thank the international community for their support for the Trade Working Group. Donor countries such as Switzerland, the USA and the UK have been staunch supporters of the trade liberalisation process since 2000.

Of course, our main partner in this exercise over the years has been the European Commission and in particular DG Trade. I am very pleased to see that the EC's commitment to regional trade will continue. I think its intention to provide substantial funding under IPA for the new CEFTA Secretariat and for technical assistance is a clear signal of the importance placed by the EC on the smooth implementation of this agreement. I would like to echo Erwan Fouéré's reference to the importance of CEFTA as a "training ground" for EU membership.

While the management of sectoral initiatives such as CEFTA and the overall co-ordination of co-operation processes now moves firmly to the Parties of the region, it is clear that the international community will continue to support you in your challenging task of improving the economic, social and security climate in South Eastern Europe.

I congratulate you again on your substantial achievement in securing the rapid entry into force of CEFTA 2006. Your determination augurs well for the future.

I wish you every success in implementation of CEFTA 2006. I assure you that regardless of my changing roles I will continue to support and promote the region.

Thank you.