

Emergency Resolution adopted at the EPP Congress, St. Julian's (Malta), 29 - 30 March 2017

Western Balkans

Bearing in mind that:

- a) **EU enlargement has been one of the most successful European policies** and has proven the attractiveness of the European model, such that it remains an important response to the challenges of consolidating Europe's global role and confirming its responsibility in stabilising the continent by engaging more with the Western Balkans region;
- b) **The EU should not get caught up in enlargement fatigue**, but should accelerate the integration process and keep alive a pro-EU spirit in Western Balkan countries by supporting their aspirations to join the Union, on the basis of the principle of conditionality, also taking into consideration these countries' fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria and commitment to maintaining good neighbourly relations as well as the Union's capacity to integrate new states;
- c) **Western Balkan countries are our closest partners, geographically, historically and economically**; that they are already inside the borders of the EU; that the European Union is not complete without them; and that the region is surrounded by EU Member States;
- d) **The European Union and the Western Balkan countries share a vision of a common future, and that the accession process needs to remain the key perspective for Western Balkan countries**;
- e) Western Balkan countries share a **common goal in joining the European Union** and that they equally seek to establish democratically functioning states and institutions for the benefit of their citizens; and that in this respect, the implementation of **rule of law** and **independent judicial systems** and the fight against **corruption** are key;
- f) It is in Europe's own interest to have stability in the region; that we welcome the **positive, responsible support which the countries of the Western Balkans offered during the peak of the migration crisis** — which cannot yet be considered as having ended — and that it is only together with strong and reliable partners that we can face these common challenges;
- g) **The EU's assistance and cooperation** regarding the region's path to the EU remains one of our key priorities; that we must **increase our financial support** and improve the visibility of EU-sponsored projects; and that initiatives such as the so-called "Berlin process", or any other initiatives by EU Member States in the neighbourhood of the Western Balkans, need to be strengthened and extended;
- h) Given the **increasing influence of third countries** — particularly as regards both political and financial aspects as well as disinformation campaigns, especially from countries from the east

and the south — our European solidarity, engagement and support are needed in order to counteract antidemocratic trends;

- i) The threat of **Islamic radicalisation, incomplete reconciliation processes** as well as **insufficient political dialogue** must be tackled by regional leaders;
- j) We support the constructive role of **civil society organisations** in the region based on a non-biased, independent approach;
- k) Supporting the countries of the Western Balkans and working together with them towards a common European future is first of all an objective and a responsibility of the EU, but that nonetheless we count on the United States and on NATO, as well as on other reliable international and multilateral partners, in supporting, by means of a balanced approach, peace, stability and prosperity in the region;
- l) Europe cannot impose its solutions on the region, but needs to be much more actively present, given the need for clearer perspectives and orientation and for translating rhetoric into action; and that it is only by being deemed credible that we can jointly advance;
- m) Peace, stability and prosperity in the Western Balkans will have a **long-term positive effect on security and stability throughout the whole European continent**;

Therefore, the European People's Party:

1. Being the driving force behind EU integration, **reiterates its unequivocal support for the European accession perspective of the Western Balkans** region and for the future of Western Balkan countries within the European Union;
2. Underlines that the **European integration process has been one of the most successful and powerful EU instruments** for consolidating democratic norms and principles, for establishing functioning market economies and for achieving peace and stability;
3. Recalls and stresses that the **European Union is a Union of values**, norms and principles and that by aspiring to join the European family, Western Balkan countries must adhere to and apply EU values;
4. Calls on all EU Member States, as well as on EU institutions, to **pay more focused attention to the Western Balkans region**, by drawing up a set of concrete steps and measures based on the commitments provided in the recent Sarajevo Declaration on the creation of a common market, while at the same time enacting a realistic, pragmatic approach which will enable swift forward progress; and calls for more effort in focussing on regional economic development, which in turn will decrease ethnic and cross-border tensions as well as decrease unemployment and poverty;

5. Underlines that the contribution of Western Balkan countries to the **protection of the EU's external borders** must continue to receive special attention;
6. Invites all EU Member States to counter by all possible means the **negative and disruptive role of external actors** in the region; and calls on the EU institutions and on all EU Member States to intensify their support for all European or national funds and projects in connection to the economic development of the Western Balkans region in order to curb the increasing economic and political influence of third countries;
7. **Encourages Western Balkan countries not to lose motivation and engagement** for the EU accession negotiation process, but to pursue necessary reforms, keeping in mind that the Western Balkan countries have a clear European perspective and can rely on strong EPP support; stresses that building genuine consensus on EU integration amongst political forces within these countries is a crucial element for adopting EU-accession-related reforms and ultimately for advancing towards the EU;
8. Underlines that **every country aspiring to EU membership must be judged on its own merits** in terms of fulfilling, implementing and complying with the same set of criteria, and that it is the quality of, and the dedication to, the necessary reforms which will determine the timetable for EU accession;
9. Insists on **refraining from ethnic provocations and condemns all provocative and aggressive behaviour**, which poses a threat to stability and peace, bearing in mind that peace can be neither built nor maintained based on nationalistic, populist and radical rhetoric; and stresses that bringing up controversies from the past will not help the countries of the region to move further down their European path, but rather that populism and nationalism will only distract them;
10. Urges Western Balkan countries **to actively support and facilitate reconciliation processes** in the region, while assuring the sustainability of these processes; and demands that all actors on the ground promote tolerance among the region's communities;
11. Underlines — given Europe's motto "unity in diversity" — the importance of **preserving the multi-ethnic character** of the region within a peaceful, fruitful and cooperative framework, recognising that **good neighbourly relations and regional cooperation** are key in this matter; underlines that any bilateral issues between countries in the region should not distract and block the progress of the enlargement process; and reiterates that the sovereignty and integrity of Western Balkan countries must be fully respected, such that any further attempt to **re-draw national borderlines** in the region is totally **unacceptable**;
12. Encourages all political forces to **take full part in the democratic processes and institutions** of their respective countries and to focus on the structural reforms which their economies urgently need;
13. Stresses the need and urgency in the Western Balkans to move forward with **judicial reform** and with **establishing rule of law and an independent and transparent judiciary**; Strongly

recommends that Western Balkan countries intensify their efforts in **fighting corruption** on all levels, including in politics and in society, applying a zero-tolerance policy;

14. Strongly supports the freedom and **independence of media** as one of the cornerstones of democratic societies; remains concerned about the state of media; and commits to fostering media pluralism and professionalism in the region;
15. Remains committed to increasing its presence and party activities in the Western Balkan countries through the network of its member parties; and encourages much stronger, and intensified, **EPP family cooperation** in the region;
16. Urges all parties to enhance **intra-party democracy** and good internal communications;
17. Acknowledges that the **Western Balkans region offers for EU Member States a wide range of long-term opportunities and advantages**, bearing in mind that the Western Balkan diaspora in the EU has contributed, and is contributing, to the EU's economy and well-being;
18. Encourages all efforts aimed at **improving the socio-economic situation** in the region, especially to tackle **unemployment**, which is regrettably high among the youth — bearing in mind that young people shape modern democratic societies and play a key role in promoting peaceful co-existence, tolerance and further stability; and acknowledging that only with economic growth and investment and through the establishment of stronger social market economies will young people have more perspective to contribute to the region.