

# Press Release

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### **PACE President urges countries in South-East Europe to continue reform, but says the EU must keep its promises too**

Dubrovnik, 10.07.2006 – Countries in South-Eastern Europe aspiring to EU membership must continue reform and respect their Council of Europe obligations, but the EU must also keep its promises, René van der Linden, President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), said today in an address to Balkan heads of state at an international conference in Dubrovnik, Croatia.

"If the EU does not stick to the promises it has made about the Western Balkans' long-term prospect of membership, Europe and the EU will lose their credibility," said Mr van der Linden. "But if Europe should stick to its promises, your countries also need to respect their obligations – to carry out wide-ranging, profound reforms in order to transform your societies into real democracies."

Addressing a summit meeting entitled *Completing Europe's southern dimension: the values that bind us*, the President added: "You have to be tougher on reform, uncompromising on corruption and the fight against organised crime, determined to prove that you are on the way to becoming genuine functioning democracies."

He pointed out that South-Eastern Europe was an important geo-strategic and geo-political region for the continent and that its stability and security directly affected Europe's political and security infrastructure. He recalled that recent history in the Balkans was a tragic reminder of the failure of Western European policy. "It underlines the need for a Common Foreign Policy of the European Union and a coherent approach to dealing with the countries in South-Eastern Europe," he said.

"It is of utmost importance that you fulfill and implement the Copenhagen criteria," Mr van der Linden added.

"For the past fifteen years PACE has walked alongside the countries of central, eastern and south-eastern Europe on their road to becoming democratic countries which respect the core values of the Council of Europe – human rights, democracy and the rule of law. [...] We in the Council of Europe will continue to provide you with a pan-European platform for building a Europe without dividing lines."

Mr van der Linden is due to hold bilateral meetings with Croatian President Stjepan Mesic, Prime Minister Dr Ivo Sanader and Foreign Minister Kolinda Grabar-Kitarovic, as well as the President of the Croatian Parliament Vladimir Seks, the Mayor of Dubrovnik Dubravka Suica and representatives of the Helsinki Committee in Dubrovnik.

Discussions are likely to focus on the situation in the region, the progress of reform in Croatia, in particular regarding the judiciary, implementation of the constitutional law on national minorities, the Sarajevo Declaration and issues related to refugees as well as co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

Earlier Mr van der Linden met President Saakashvili of Georgia and he is also due to meet Albanian Prime Minister Sali Berisha.

The Parliamentary Assembly brings together 315 members from the national parliaments of the 46 member states.

President: René van der Linden (Netherlands, EPP/CD); Secretary General of the Assembly: Mateo Sorinas.

Political Groups: SOC (Socialist Group); EPP/CD (Group of the European People's Party); ALDE (Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe); EDG (European Democratic Group); UEL (Group of the Unified European Left).